



Ms. Lillie Lee Perry Atwater

Ms. Lillie Lee Perry Atwater has always been a people person—one to “just jump in wherever help was needed”, and she still is! Lillie was born in Chapel Hill on July 15th, 1940 the second of six children, and has lived in Chapel Hill and Carrboro ever since. Her father worked for American Tobacco in Durham, and because he didn’t own a car, he would catch a ride into Durham with the milkman very early in the morning. Always a good student, and VP of her senior class, Lillie graduated from Lincoln High, and went on to get her nurses’ training at Duke Hospital. She began working at the former North Carolina Memorial Hospital in 1967 and remained at UNC Hospitals until her retirement in 1996. She started work on the old 3W nursing unit, and for many years worked in the Nursing Recruitment Office, where she was responsible for the orientation of new nursing hires to hospital departments and nursing units.

Lillie married Cleavon Atwater in 1961, while he was in the U.S. Marine Corps. He passed away in 2009. They had two daughters, Jo Ann Atwater, who got a Master’s degree in Public Administration from UNC, and Donna Atwater Farrow who has a MBA from Shorter University,

and lives in Jonesboro, Georgia. Lillie has one grandson, Joseph Kameron Farrow, who has a Masters of Education from Albany State University, and is the “apple of her eye”. He is an advanced biology high school teacher in Mariette, Georgia.

Lillie has had the multiple misfortunes of battling breast cancer twice, and losing her oldest daughter Jo Ann to breast cancer at age 41. Because of this Lillie has been active with the UNC Lineberger Cancer Center, looking at ways to bring cancer information to the community. She talks to incoming medical freshman classes about dealing with the difficulties of breast cancer treatment, surgery and recovery. She has been very active in bringing much needed cancer awareness to the African American community, in the form of brochures and videos. While working at UNCH she belonged to the former Breast Center Advisory Board, a women’s group that would visit women in the hospital, who had just had breast cancer surgery, to share experiences and to offer them hope & encouragement.

Lillie was the chair of the Carrboro Human Services Committee from 1990 to 1996. This is an advisory committee for the towns of Carrboro, Chapel Hill, and Orange County on funding requests from non-profit organizations that support community services, like the Inter-Faith Council, among many others. She has been a member of the NAACP and the Board of Elections. She is the Trustee of her church, Cathedral of Hope, and has been involved in church committees at both the First Baptist and Second Baptist churches.

Lillie has fond memories of a slower, more community minded town, where everyone knew their neighbors, and looked out for each other. She recalls when folks would walk or ride bikes for miles to get to where they were going, day or night, without much worry about being safe. She would like to see Chapel Hill / Carrboro to be more of a community for ALL its citizens. She would also like to see Northside stay in the community, with the people who take great pride in the neighborhood they built.