

Banker built relationships, treasured 50-cent piece

WILSON — Banking was different in small-town North Carolina in Doug Tabb's day. Folks put as much stock in a solid reputation then as they put in a credit score or a portfolio now.

Debra DeCamillis says that's one of the reasons her father loved what he did during his heyday as a banker with BB&T in Wilson. He built relationships and he got to help people. Tabb died last month at the age of 92.

That bank loans depended in part on personal relationships during the 1950s and '60s made the process of getting a loan easier for some. For others, it could be a hindrance. Ed Mitchell, who today co-owns The Pit barbecue restaurant in downtown Raleigh, grew up in Wilson. He recalls his father working with Tabb on loan arrangements, especially around



Tabb in the Liberator, which he flew in World War II.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DEBRA DECAMILLIS

Christmastime. Mitchell says his father spoke highly of Tabb because the banker was respectful. "Banking relations weren't as easy to establish for a lot of people, especially blacks, during

those days," Mitchell says. "The fact that he treated my father like a man made him a hero in my mind. He talked to him and not down to him. My dad was a very proud man, and he would go in there and tell him what he wanted, and Mr. Tabb would make the financial arrangements."

It was a small thing that made a huge difference, Mitchell says. DeCamillis says her father was gratified when Mitchell had a chance to tell him that shortly before his death.

Tabb grew up with a keen understanding of the value of hard work. When he was young, his father was disabled by a stroke, so his mother went to work cooking and running dining rooms in Wilmington. It may have been from his mother that Tabb acquired his culinary acumen.

When DeCamillis was growing up, her father made pancakes

SEE TABB, PAGE 4B

TABB

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1B

three mornings a week, always adding a special ingredient such as applesauce or cottage cheese. During the holidays, he whipped up homemade eggnog, stirring the raw ingredients by hand to create a concoction with heavenly smoothness. His catfish also were always a hit.

Up from popsicles

Tabb left home for the University of Richmond when he was 15, and he later quit school to take a job making popsicles for Sealtest. He then took a position as a clerk in a Richmond bank, eventually working his way up to vice president of the installment loan department in Wilson, where he oversaw small loans.

DeCamillis says her father had a great sense of humor but a serious dedication to his passions, including Rotary Club, where he was honored for more than 40 years of perfect attendance. She recalls one day when her parents found out her brother needed an emergency appendectomy.

Her father asked the doctor, "It's Monday — can it wait until after Rotary?"

Tabb golfed three or four times a week until he was 91, forgoing a cart until he was in his late 80s.

After he retired from banking, Tabb went to work on the sales floor at the Belk department store in Wilson.

DeCamillis says recently a woman she had never met approached her when she was in her hometown.

"I know you don't know me," the stranger said, "but I need to hug you because I loved your daddy."

The woman had worked at Belk with Tabb, and she wanted to share with DeCamillis how much he had brightened her days there, always stopping by to share a laugh.

50 cents

DeCamillis says her dad taught her valuable lessons by the way he led his life. He wasn't prone to sentimental gestures, but those he made carried great meaning.

On her 16th birthday, she opened a box from her father to find a 50-cent piece inside. Before DeCamillis was born, Tabb had bet his wife 50 cents that she was pregnant. That was the 50-cent piece her mother had paid him when she found out she was carrying their only daughter.

DeCamillis had it made into a necklace. Years later, her father asked her what had become of it, not realizing how much she had valued it.

DeCamillis says that was his way. He simply did what he thought he should, never realizing what a difference he made to those around him.

amber@amberwrites.com

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Douglas Tabb

Douglas Cowles Tabb, 92, died Monday, March 9, 2009.

He was born in Newport News, Va., and spent his earlier years in the Richmond area. There, he was president of the Richmond chapter of the American Institute of Banking. He moved to Wilson in the early 50s and was associated with BB&T as a loan officer and vice president, until his retirement.

In World War II, he served in the Army Air Corps as a pilot on a B-24 bomber.

Active in the community, he was a past president of the Wilson Rotary Club where he was named a Paul Harris Fellow for service to club and community. The Silver Beaver Award was earned thorough his work in scouting and he was a past president of the Wilson Chamber of Commerce.

Funeral, Saturday, 11 a.m., First Baptist Church.

Surviving is his wife of 54 years, Eleanor Johnson Tabb; daughter, Debra DeCamillis (Clayton), of Raleigh; sons, Douglas "Rusty" Tabb Jr. (Pam) of Wilson and Bruce Tabb of Eugene, Ore.; four grandchildren, Rachel and Erin Tabb and Tabb and Emily DeCamillis.

The family will be at Wilson Memorial Service, 2811 Fieldstream Drive, Friday, 6:30-8 p.m.

Memorials are suggested to the First Baptist Church, P.O. Box 1467, Wilson, N.C., 27894, or Hayes Barton Baptist Church, TV Ministry, 1800 Glenwood Ave., Raleigh N.C., 27609.

Wilson Memorial Service, 237-7171, www.wilsonmemorialservice.com.