

TRIBUTE

Alice Denham '50 (MA): A Charismatic Fixture of Literary New York

"I remembered when the UNC English Department helped me get a graduate scholarship at the University of Rochester," Alice Denham '50 (MA) wrote in her 2006 autobiography, *Sleeping with Bad Boys*. "Why not here at Chapel Hill?" she asked her favorite professor. "Because this college discriminates against women," he allegedly replied.

Denham, who died in January at the age of 89, fulfilled many roles during her career. She's best known as a writer and a model who frequented the literary salons as well as the bedrooms of New York's literary elite throughout the 1950s.

She was also a gifted student of literature, both at North Carolina, where she graduated Phi Beta Kappa, and at Rochester, where she completed a master's thesis—a copy of which sits in the stacks of Rush Rhees Library—entitled "T. S. Eliot: His Theory and Practice of Poetic Drama."

Denham recalled that she never had a woman professor at Chapel Hill. There weren't many in the 1940s. At Rochester, she took courses with Bernard Schilling, George Curtiss, Wilbur Dunkel, and Kathrine Koller—not just a woman professor, but the chair of the English department.

Among the courses Denham completed were The History of Ideas (taught by Schilling); The English Novel (taught by Curtiss); and a course in 18th-century literature, also taught by Schilling, which she would have attended along with undergraduates in the honors program. She was granted her master's degree on June 12, 1950, at the University's Centennial Commencement.

Unlike prominent writers Galway Kinnell '49 (MA) and Shirley Jackson (who was enrolled as an undergraduate from 1934 to 1936, but did not complete her degree), Denham does not appear to have had any writing published in the student literary journals. Her alumna file is slim. It includes an Alumni Office questionnaire in which she reports her August 1950 marriage to Samuel Lee Kutz '50, and their subsequent divorce, granted 16 months later.

In January 1955, Denham wrote to *Rochester Review* with an item to be included in Class



MODEL & WRITER: Denham had a dual career, noting in one instance that "sexy pictures" earned her more money than her feature stories.

Notes: her short story "The Deal" had been published in *Discovery* #5. It was the same story that would be reprinted in the July 1956 issue of *Playboy*, in which she was also the centerfold. A newspaper clipping describes her *Playboy* appearance—"... Alice got a package deal for her pictures and her story"—and includes her comment: "The fact that they would pay more for some sexy pictures than for their featured story just about sets the tone of the magazine."

She concluded her letter to *Review* by noting, "The REVIEW is becoming more interesting all the time!"

To an alumna who would go on to publish poetry and novels, and to serve as a founding

member of the National Organization of Women, it seems fitting to return the compliment: throughout her long life, Alice Denham became more interesting all the time. ☺

—MELISSA MEAD

Mead is the John M. and Barbara Keil University Archivist and Rochester Collections Librarian.

Richard H. Arfman '56, '62S (MS),
January 2016

Pauline Hughes Blossom '56, '57N,
December 2015

Walter D. Conway '56 (PhD),
September 2015

Irwin Wagman '56,
November 2015

Robert W. Tolf '57 (PhD),
December 2015

R. Patrick McCarty '58E (PhD),
November 2015

Martin L. Suter '59,
January 2016

Richard J. Windgassen '59 (PhD),
October 2015

Bruce D. Wolfanger '59, '71S (MBA),
January 2016

John F. Hasenauer '60S,
January 2016

Janet Moyer Hilliard '61N,
January 2015

Russell O. Glauser '62D,
March 2014

David W. Bentley '63M (MD),
January 2016

Irene Wegman Mossey '63W (MA),
December 2015

Stuart A. Babcock '64M (MD),
December 2015

Alexander L. Johnson '64 (PhD),
November 2015

Jay B. Wells '64M (PhD),
December 2015

Richard C. Sowa '65S,
December 2015

Lynne Zeglob Check '66,
January 2015

Richard G. Packard '66,
January 2016

Nancy Rhodes Rehner '66N (MS),
December 2015

Barbara Gibson Smullen '66N, '69N
(MS), '83W (EdD), December 2015

Carleton C. Stewart '67M (PhD),
August 2015

David G. Dickover '68,
January 2016

Allan H. Smith '68S,
December 2015

Robert O. Crapo '69M (MD),
December 2015

Charles F. Stamm '69W (Mas),
December 2015

Robert M. Hartong '70,
December 2015

John F. Irwin '70M (PhD),
December 2015

Leslie M. Finder '71,
December 2015

Lawrence I. Liebmann '71,
December 2015

John P. Tischio '71M (PhD),
January 2016

Michael D. Samuels '72, '79 (MS),
November 2015

George A. Schutt '72, '88S (MBA),
January 2016

Margaret Bengtson Woestehoff
'72W (MA), December 2015

Robert D. Posner '73,
January 2016

Nancy Salzer '73 (MA),
January 2016

Magdy Sifain '73 (MS),
December 2015

Calvin Steinmetz '74,
December 2015

Dell H. Warnick '74,
December 2015

Phyllis Jenkins '75W (Mas),
December 2015

John K. Maine '75,
December 2015

Thomas M. McCarthy '76, '88 (MA),
December 2015

Nathaniel O. Wilson '78, '83 (MS),
January 2016

Selcuk Cihangir '81 (PhD),
December 2015

Charles T. Carlstrom '86 (MA), '89
(PhD), January 2016

Patricia Palmer '87W (EdD),
December 2015

JoAnne Petronio '89W (MS),
January 2016

Alice Mees '93,
October 2015

Philippe Von Ehrenberg '01S
(MBA), August 2015

Alexander J. Conn '04,
January 2016

John R. McCarthy '08W (EdD),
December 2015