

# Meet Paula Ann Ivaska Robbins- April 2010

By Stuart English

*Recently, we talked to Paula Robbins, hike leader and for several years the scheduler for the Half-Day hikes. In many ways Paula epitomizes the type of people that are drawn to Carolina Mountain Club and the Asheville area.*

## **Tell us about yourself before Asheville and CMC.**

I was born on December 13, 1935 and grew up in suburban Teaneck, New Jersey. I married Michael Robbins in 1956. We had two sons: Jeffery and Matthew.



After graduation from Vassar College with a B.A. in English, I worked as a medical secretary and later became Director of Student Employment at Radcliffe College. After earning a M.Ed. in Counseling from Boston University in 1970, I became Director of Career Counseling at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. I then held administrative positions at the Hartford Graduate Center and at Fitchburg State College, where I established a program to train software technical writers. I spent a year and a half as Manager of Software Technical Writing at Computervision Corporation.

## **You are a published author; tell us about your books and**

### **what led you to writing them.**

In 1977, I was awarded the Ph.D. in Professional Higher Education Administration from the University of Connecticut. My doctoral dissertation was the basis for a book, *Successful Midlife Career Change* (AMACOM, 1978), which was published in both hard- and paperback editions.

My parents were born in Finland, and Finnish was my first language. In 1982, I received a grant from the Finnish Academy and spent a semester teaching adult education at the University of Helsinki. Interest in my Finnish background led me to write two historical novels based on the life of my family.

*Nights of Summer, Nights of Autumn* describes the life of my grandmother in Finland from the 1890s through World War I and the fight for Finland's independence. *Below Rollstone Hill* is about the Finnish immigrant communities in

Fitchburg, Massachusetts and in New York City during the early part of the 20th century. You can see [Paula's books](#) on the web.

For seven years I served as Assistant Dean of the Graduate School at the University of Massachusetts at Lowell. As a result of the recession of the early 1990s in Massachusetts, I was forced to take early retirement. While job-hunting, I led a walking tour of historic Concord, Massachusetts, where I had lived at two different times for a total of 22 years. That experience resulted in my book, *The Royal Family of Concord: Samuel, Elizabeth and Rockwood Hoar and Their Friendship with Ralph Waldo Emerson*.

Unable to find a job in the Boston area, I finally was forced to move from Massachusetts to North Carolina in 1993, to take a job at Queens College in Charlotte, which lasted only a year. For the next five years I was a medical editor in orthopedics at Carolinas Medical Center and earned my certification as an Editor in the Life Sciences. I retired from the hospital to move to West Asheville and live in the Westwood Cohousing Community, which I had helped to plan. For several years, I worked as a freelance medical editor for *The American Journal of Sports Medicine* and other orthopaedic publications.

Although I've officially retired twice, in 1990 and in 1999, I can't seem to stay retired! I received a grant from the Finlandia Foundation to do research for my fifth book in Sweden, Finland and England. *The Travels of Peter Kalm, Finnish-Swedish Naturalist Through Colonial North America 1748-1750*, was published in 2007 by Purple Mountain Press. In 2009, they also published *Jane Colden: America's First Woman Botanist*.

Since 2004, I have been co-publisher of a bed and breakfast directory for Unitarian Universalists ([www.uurehome.com](http://www.uurehome.com)) with my neighbors, Jean and Vance Reese, who are now taking over the part-time business so I can again retire.

### **What brought you to Asheville and CMC?**

I joined CMC soon after moving to North Carolina, although I mostly hiked with the Sierra Club before moving here from Charlotte. I had been an active member of the Appalachian Mountain Club for years, especially when my sons were growing up. I led cross-country ski, canoe and bicycle trips as well as hikes for both the Connecticut and Boston chapters. I was soon urged to lead hikes for CMC and began to do so after Sherman Stambaugh showed me the trail to Mount Pisgah.

### **You were the Half Day Hike Scheduler for several years. Tell us about this job.**

After I became familiar with most of the easier hikes in this area, I took on the job of half-day hike scheduler, which I held for a number of years. I enjoyed scheduling hikes that were appropriate for the seasons of the year, for example, catching the Carolina lilies in bloom on the MTS. I also liked orienting new folks to CMC and steering them to hikes that matched their abilities.

I often suggested that a newcomer hike the Owl Ridge Loop at the Arboretum; if they could do it in a little over an hour, they were fit enough for half-day hikes. The worst part of the job was making phone calls; I tried to nab possible hike leaders on the trail or at CMC events instead. My favorite hikes are those along which our beautiful native wild flowers grow: Frying Pan Tower and the MST

from the Mills River Overlook, Craven Gap and Greybeard Overlook.

**What are you doing these days?**

My sons, alas, are far away, in Portland, Oregon, and in New Orleans, the latter with my four grandchildren. I'm planning to move soon to Givens Estates.

I have served on boards of non-profit organizations in both Concord and Asheville, primarily supporting Democratic candidates and environmental causes. I was an appointed member of the Asheville Greenway Commission for seven years. I've also been a volunteer guide at the North Carolina Arboretum since 1997, and an active member of the Western Carolina Botanical Club and the Asheville Unitarian Universalist Church.