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
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.


Since 2004, I have been co-publisher of a bed and breakfast directory for Unitarian Universalists (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.