

# DEAN OF THE PRACTICE GATE

Everybody's fraternity brother, the inimitable Morris Tenenbaum, in his fifth decade at OU, is number one in the nation at his calling

By SUSAN WALTZ

The Oklahoma Daily

Hey, fraternity brother, want some sleeping pills?" The football player pauses as he leaves the practice field and holds out his hand. The small man with the wrinkled, sun-browned face digs into a pocket of a pair of magnificently baggy trousers and produces a piece of hard candy. He hands it to the player and growls in a rasping, heavily accented voice, "Now get on outta here."

This is Morris Tenenbaum, whose gruff, caustic manner fails to fool anyone. Underneath, Morris is an old softie, and everybody knows it, including the many coaches and players whom he has called "fraternity brothers" for the past four decades.

"Maurice," as the players call him, is the self-appointed gate watcher for OU football practices. Rain or shine he has assumed his station at the practice field for 40 years, and under his scrutinizing gaze only official pass bearers make their way to practice.

This has been a particularly satisfying year for Morris, for he finally has been provided an official stadium "residence." "Morris has been after an office for years," says Gomer Jones. "This year we quit using the old wooden ticket booths inside the stadium, and we fixed up one for him. He calls it his 'coach's office.'" (*Sooner Magazine*, Sept.)

Morris came to the United States from Russian Poland when he was "old enough to start dreaming about gettin' married." When he arrived in America, his only possessions were a Bible and an American penny. He no longer has the penny, but the Bible is still in his living room.

He enlisted in the Army and fought in World War I, and in the Second World War he served long hours without pay for the USO. He moved to Oklahoma City in 1913 and came to Norman in 1923. During the depression years Morris started a second-hand clothing business that made him well known among the students, particularly those in the fraternity and sorority houses. The Greeks, he found, would more readily sell him the clothes off their backs for extra spending money. "Morris used to stand at the gates to the University and walk from house to house buying clothes," recalls a student of that era. "He'd have three or four hats stacked high on his head and a bundle of old clothes in his arms. Just ask him how many student trips to Dallas he's financed. He could charm the trousers off some guy who needed money for the trip."

Morris took the clothes home, remade them, using the skills he had learned from his father, a tailor in the old country, and sold them. The years rolled by, and Morris continued to do business with the students, soon buying secondhand clothes from the sons and daughters of his earlier customers. ("Two bits for those white bucks, fraternity brother.") Morris has become as much a part of OU as the South Oval and Campus Corner. Hundreds of students have known

Morris, and he has touched the lives of many. More than a few have been helped along financially by the little man with the big accent. Morris' aid has always been performed quietly, which has led to persisting rumors. Morris is content to let the uncertainty and mystery prevail. He won't comment. About answering questions he says: "Think twice and keep your mouth shut."

Morris lives in a two-story stucco house on the northwest corner of Brooks and Classen. A look inside Morris' house is like looking inside of him. Pictures of the players he knows and the people he admires abound. In one room where he keeps his "odds and ends," one picture frame full of photographs contains some of his favorites. There's a picture of a former OU coach Tom Stidham, father of Tom Jr., OU's fine punter. Another photo is of Bud Wilkinson, and even a former OSU coach is displayed—Cliff Speegle, who was a fine end at OU in his college days. Among the photos is a yellowed newspaper clipping about *Morris' Yearbook*, a little book Morris wrote about his observations of college boys. "Not many people bought it," he says.

On one wall is a framed piece of fabric with the letters OU arranged carefully in buttons. Brightly colored curtains of nearly every possible design hang in his windows. "I made them out of women's secondhand skirts and dresses," he says of the artfully sewn articles. In his bedroom against one wall hangs a brilliantly colored quilt. "I like bright colors," says Morris. "Each square of that quilt I made with a different tie. I've made twelve of them, but no more. It hurts my eyes to sew much."

Morris' affinity for bright colors is carried over in his wardrobe, which can be most tactfully described as "distinctive." With a cigarette or cigar clamped in his teeth, Morris is a vivid sartorial presence. He often wears a red patterned tie and a vest he has fashioned from a woman's lined skirt. On the back of the vest he has stitched, "U.S., Morris Tenenbaum, Norman, Oklahoma, OU." His inclement weather wear includes a rain hat—a chef's cap pulled over the brim of an old felt hat with the words "Chicken Inspector" in red on the front. Without his cane, Morris isn't totally dressed. On its top are attached a pair of deer horns, and embedded on the sides are campaign buttons, one of the most prominent of which is John Kennedy's, a man whom Morris greatly admires. A large German silver coin with Prince Wilhem's likeness peers out from between the horns. Morris made the cane himself, and it's as much a part of him as the gum and candy he's never without.

In 1954 the athletes finally got around to making Morris a member of the O Club, the lettermen's organization. "They gave me a blanket. Made a letterman outta me," says Morris. He has a picture in his home

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Above, Morris looks over some merchandise with two fraternity brothers in the late 40's. Below, resting an arm on his omnipresent walking stick, Morris soaks up the sun as he observes a 1966 team scrimmage.



venient as possible, found financial aid for many, and wrote their parents about their progress. A letter from one of the handicapped students whom he counseled appeared in the *Daily* the day of Dean Couch's funeral:

It was my privilege to know Dean Couch as well or better than any student on this campus. I am a physically handicapped student who first met him when I came to OU five years ago as a freshman. My relationship with Dean Couch went beyond that of advisor and student. To put it succinctly, Dean Couch was my intellectual father.

Without knowing whether I would turn out to be a good student or not, he invested great time and energy in my educational process and in the personal difficulties that come with being a handicapped student on a college campus. His faith in me is the basis for the deepest personal grief I have ever felt. . .

While I am, with every member of the University, grieving the loss of Dean Couch, I ask you to join me in celebrating the privilege of having known such a man. I know he has aided and influenced many students and in his years of service has done much to build the University of Oklahoma and the cause of higher education in this state. I ask you to think of what this university and what you and I would be if there had never been a Dean Couch. I ask you to give thanks for his life and his service to us all. Sincerely, Guy Eslinger.

Dean Couch was no less devoted to the "average" student. As dean he expanded the University's guidance and counseling services. "Our first interest," he said, "is to help the student make an adjustment to college life. Education is essentially and wholly an individual process. Guidance is valuable because it deals with choices, with adjustments, and with interpretations."

His friends and colleagues will miss his warmth, his humor, his ability, his insight. The University will miss his dedication, his foresight, his leadership. The students will simply miss Dean Couch.

He is survived by his wife of 33 years, the former Ida Marguerite Le-Crone; a son, Joseph Barton, and a daughter, Mrs. Wolfgang Stoerchle, both of Norman.

Contributions in his memory may be made to the Glenn Couch Memorial Fund or to the Marco Fund for Handicapped Students, in care of the OU Foundation, Union Bldg., Norman.

## Dean of the Practice Gate

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commemorating the award. It shows Morris grinning at the camera, the blanket bearing the large white "O" draped around him. Morris attends all the annual O Club banquets, and at one not many years ago he startled his fellow lettermen. Dr. Cross had finished making a brief talk, and Bud Wilkinson in the course of his remarks pointed to Morris and asked for applause in recognition of his service. Morris acknowledged the applause and then walked straight to the speaker's table to make his own speech. In front of his boys and the audience Morris apologized for his inability to speak in public like Dr. Cross and "Bud Wilkinson" but he had "never had an opportunity to have a formal education." He expressed his gratitude to the school and to the athletic department, then reached into a pocket. Instead of pulling out the traditional candy or gum, Morris produced a check for \$500. "I want to give this to the O Club," he said, then sat down.

Morris is devoted to his football players, though he isn't a fan of the game itself. "I don't care about football," he says. "I just come out and give the boys gum every day. I like them, and they like me. Otherwise, I wouldn't come." Bantering with his boys is a favorite pastime. Tom Stidham runs by Morris on the way to the practice field. "There goes Tommy Stidham," yells Morris. "Can't punt the ball. Too busy

thinkin' about getting married." Stidham grins and growls back. Ben Hart rates high on Morris' list. He gets Wild Cherry gum, a brand reserved for the best players. "I love him," says Ben.

Morris is not reluctant to share some insights with a listener. About college players he says: "It's not football that hurts these boys. It's college girls. They dream about them all night." About Coach Mackenzie: "A prince." About the Notre Dame game: "You look at history. All those kings and queens who thought they'd never fall. And then came the guillotine. Nothing's impossible." (Morris is not infallible.) Concerning cosmology: "This planet's not moving—only the people on it."

Though his devotion to his boys hasn't faltered, Morris admits that he himself is slowing down: "I'm getting like an old dog. I just want to lie down. I even get tired of talkin' to people." But he always seems to have enough energy to put a rookie at ease or to cheer up an older boy after a disappointing game. You can see him at each home game sitting in his favored positions on the sideline or scurrying to fill Coach Mackenzie's paper cup with ice water when the coach yells, "Morris!" And of course during the week, Morris is at the practice field gate. And fraternity brother or no fraternity brother, you'd better have a pass if you want to get in. END

## Backstage with the Brains

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Ed popped his knuckles as he listened to his answers.

Ralph's room didn't seem different from that of any other college boy. Two Playmates were pasted on a closet door, and different colored plaid bedspreads added a bright, if not harmonious, look.

After the tape ended, the meeting became more of a gab session than a strategy conference. They talked about the mail they were receiving, which included a telegram from Carl Albert saying that he had watched the show each week from his bed at Bethesda Naval Hospital where he was recovering from a heart attack. Ed said a girl from New York had written him, and Dr. Morris told of card signed, "Your OSU fans."

Throughout the evening I noticed that Steve Wilson was the quiet one, seldom talking, which seems to be his nature. He reads Hemingway, Mailer, Salinger, and Updike, doesn't watch much TV, but enjoys old movies. In his free time he likes to read and attend plays. He digs rock-and-roll as well as classical music, and has a single room in a rooming and boarding house.

Ed is the youngest of the group, and like Ralph, is much the extrovert. He continually joked and bantered with his girl friend Kathi Hayes, who was present for part of the meeting, and his coach and teammates.

Ed and Kathi have been "dropped" since August. "We met three months ago," said Kathi, "when my tennis ball rolled onto his court. That was the last time we played tennis."

Ralph is probably the most self-assured of the group, the acknowledged team leader. His quick, sharp comments spilled into every conversation. The others seemed so accustomed to his *bon mots* that they largely ignored them. Or maybe just tolerated them.

All four chose not to join fraternities. "It's just that I'm a social misfit," said Ralph. What about girls? "Going to New York every weekend has cut us down," said Ralph, "but I still have time for three or four dates a week."

The boys found their classmates' attitudes toward them had changed. "They all speak to me," said Ralph. "They're very friendly and interested. And I am enjoying it. It's nice to be known." But they play down their abilities. "We don't have any more knowledge than anyone else," said Ralph. "What we've done is what anyone could have done had they been coached as we have."

Dr. Morris disagreed. "Not everyone can do it. There are probably many on campus who have the knowledge you have but who don't have the quick recall or ready access to the information you do."

"You have to have certain academic talents, Ralph," said Ed. "There are lots of