

A Gentle Report on Gentle Thursday

By Nicola Pintozi
from *The Oklahoma Daily*

More than 250 OU students—with several hundred more passers-by looking on—had a ball Thursday, April 6, on the South Oval. They talked, sang, picnicked, played hopscotch, shot marbles, and blew bubbles on Gentle Thursday—the largest demonstration of human tranquility in OU's history. Sponsored by the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), Gentle Thursday, promoted as a day for student fun and friendship, began with four SDS members greeting the sunrise and ended with 75 students braving overcast skies and a light drizzle before dispersing at 6:30 p.m., following a clean-up of the oval.

Students who participated in the gentle happenings began grouping on the oval at 9 a.m. For more than an hour, little more than talking took place. At about 10:30 a scattered group of some 80 students spread blankets, blew balloons, flew kites, and played marbles. Five students took a dip in the fountain near the business building. One student climbed a tree to release a kite tangled in the branches, and two students skipped around the Bizzell statue. The general atmosphere was one of harmless fun and relaxation. An OU law professor, Martin Lobel, brought his class outdoors for a discussion. Lobel said, "I've held classes outside before, but it's often too noisy. However, I think the idea of Gentle Thursday is good. I would like to see more students become aware of one another and their responsibilities as people in a real world." Student Senate president Paul Petersen joined the gentle crowd and told the Daily, "I think Gentle Thursday is a good idea. Right now I'm just enjoying myself." During the noon-hour, participants enjoyed lunch picnic-style. In a gesture of friendship in honor of Gentle Thursday, two SDS coeds were treated to lunch by members of Beta Theta Pi fraternity. (In publicizing Gentle Thursday, SDS recommended that sororities and fraternities "take a beatnik to lunch." The organization also suggested that students decorate the Armory—and even ROTC cadets—with flowers. The purpose of the day, members explained, was simply to forget the differences among people and enjoy the similarities, remembering that people ought to, after all, think of each other as fellow human beings.) Said one of the coeds, "We had weiners with bacon, cottage cheese—the works. It was very good. I'm grateful to the Beta's." Said her companion, "It was fun. I think it was a very charming luncheon and a marvelous experience."

Non-students soon began joining the Gentle Thursday crowd in

the afternoon. First to appear was a monkey named Scott. He was followed by a Dachshund puppy, a white kitten named Siddhartha, a Russian wolfhound named Dimitri, and a rabbit whose favorite foods were cupcakes and apples, not to mention the South Oval grass. A small boy named Johnny was brought by another coed. The youngster was joined by another boy, and the two passed balloons and candy and romped on the grass.

During the noon break, a sorority girl approached SDS member John Ratliff and asked, "Are you in SDS?" Ratliff, long-haired and bearded, nodded affirmatively. The coed looked up at him, smiled, and said, "I love you." This sentiment was not only vocalized, it could also be read on some buttons. Among the slogans were "If It Moves, Fondle It," "People Power," "Unbutton," and "Let's Love One Another." After eating lunch, some participants decided to exercise. Six formed a human pyramid. Three appeared with skateboards, and an informal hopscotch tournament was begun. Among the other gentle happenings were guitar, harmonica, and zither music, clay putty modeling, jacks, and water pistol squirting. One student dressed in an Explorer Scout uniform completed two paintings while seated near the center of the action. Another said he was writing a letter to his parents, and a third said he was studying the effects of arteriosclerosis. At 2:30 p.m. two candy booths were opened. Banana marshmallows were given away to the crowd. ("Have you ever heard of a marshmallow hurting anyone?") There were also free lollipops, gum drops, jelly beans, Tootsie Rolls, and candy rabbits. Later in the afternoon students took up a collection to rent an amplifier for a dance band to play by Gittinger Hall. It was then the day's only sour note occurred when a group of seven young men disrupted the afternoon briefly. (The protesters, one of whom wore a plastic replica of a German helmet with swastika decals and Nazi markings on his Levi jacket, began calling the SDS members "Scum balls," "Yellow bellies," "Cowards afraid to fight in Vietnam." One said, "I wish I could die and return to this world in the person of Jesus. In fact, I wish I were God. I'd wipe out all you scared bums." The religious patriots were carrying an American flag and a Nazi flag.) When asked to comment on Gentle Thursday one coed said, "I think it's been a beautiful day—sort of like it should be when it's Sunday. It was friendly and relaxed." Another said, "I think it's a great idea. It really makes you think. You don't realize how far away people have become." A male student disagreed. "Stinks," he said. "It's nothing more than a few people sitting around and acting silly." END

Gentle Thursday

Balloons, marshmallows, hopscotch, white rabbits and gentleness

