



# A Visit with Dr. Hollomon

OU's next president (left) talks about education, his family, young people, sailing

By Beth Resler

I cannot exist," says J. Herbert Hollomon, "without kids around." Till now, he's meant his own four children and their friends who continually keep the Hollomon home a full house.

Next fall, it will be 18,000 Oklahoma University students as Hollomon prepares to take over as OU president in 1968.

Hollomon, 48, direct and enthusiastic in informal conversation, asks something of those kids, though, whether they're family or students. "I expect them to be as adult as I am. I respect the fact that each person is an individual, and the only difference between people is a difference of experiences," he says.

"It seems to me you ought to talk to people with your eyes closed—not influenced by their age, whether they are white, green, purple, yellow, or black, or by how they appear. Don't ask the question whether they are young or old.

"Intelligence and wisdom are not necessarily found in age, though that helps some times; it is true that young people faced with the novelty of actually coping with life's problems are likely to be more confused than those who have faced them before. But there are people who are confused at 50 and those unconfused at 16. If you are immature, irrelevant, irresponsible—well, you can be that old as well as when you are young."

In his own family, says Hollomon, "I expect the kids to come out and say what is in their interest as well as mine. And," he adds with a laugh, "if they get *anything*, they get *too much* of a hearing."

Hollomon will probably be a university president with rolled-up sleeves, loosened tie, who answers his own phone, gets nine hours of work into an eight-hour day—when he has one that short—and is up on and interested in every section of campus. That seems to be the type of acting undersecretary of commerce he's been.

The main worry of the two secretaries who have been with him since shortly after he joined the Department of Commerce, one of them says, has been to keep his jammed schedule rolling. "He gets so involved talking to people, sometimes we have to prod him over the intercom," she says.

His day normally starts at 8:30. "But there have been days we've set up coffee appointments for him at eight, or breakfast at 7:30. He talks to a lot of people going to and from places, riding to the Hill. Then we have luncheon or dinner appointments or he just takes people home with him."

Hollomon was unfamiliar with the mechanics of government at first, she continues, "but it didn't take long for him to catch on. He's been a wonderfully easy person to work for, though we've had to work hard. And when things are bad, you go on a crying jag, and he'll throw up his hands and say, 'All right, we do it your way!'"

Hollomon's office in the gray, red-tile roofed Commerce Building puts him half-way between the White House and the Washington Monument, with a view of the President's Park Ellipse in between. Commerce is at the foot of the heavy architectural triangle of federal buildings stretching a dozen blocks east to the Capitol.

Light blue walls, dark blue furniture. And first, behind his desk, a portrait of his wife, Margaret, her blond hair in a coronet braid. "She still has hair like that, long and beautiful. I won't let her cut it."

The autographed pictures you find in every higher federal office of President Johnson, the swearing-in ceremony, the department chief are at the far end of the room on the far side of the heavy conference table, which is surrounded by a dozen blue-leather arm chairs.

Around Hollomon's desk are a sleek, moss-green stone statue of a cat, a model of praying hands, the two pictures of Eskimo carvings Margaret bought him as a surprise on their trip to Alaska. On a bookcase is one of those grade school clay ash tray/candy dish/cuff link holder Happy-Father's-Day creations, signed on the bottom "Elizabeth—6." Elizabeth is now 16.

Above, hanging on the wall, is a diploma—from the College of Experience. His staff gave it to him on his fourth anniversary with the department.

A master phone with some 50 buttons sits on the corner of his desk, and he catches calls on the first ring, stretching out the coiled cord so he can read papers and sign letters while he talks.

Mentioning that his three younger children and their

*He'll probably be a president with rolled-up sleeves and loosened tie, a man who answers his own phone, packs nine hours of work into eight.*

dates were out on Chesapeake Bay in the family's sailboat, he swung around, punched a button, and said, "Say, get me the latest marine forecast on the Bay, would you? The kids are out and due back in tonight. Want to see what they're running into."

Hollomon is certain to bring changes to OU. No, he doesn't plan to take in a new staff of his own, he says. What if he receives pro forma resignations from vice presidents and deans? "I don't know anything about vice presidents and deans," he says, dismissing the idea. But he has a philosophy: "Most organizational charts where creative people are involved are drawn upside down; you know, one at the top, working down. That's wrong. Turn it over. The president is the fellow who works for those who want to get things done. That doesn't mean he does everything they say. It does mean that the notions come largely from the large body of creative people."

A producer, he says, does not dictate to an actress how she must play her part. He makes it possible, instead, for her to do the most with her talents. As Hollomon sees the presidency, "the ability to help implement ideas and to create an atmosphere where ideas can come—that is his creative act."

He deflects specific questions on campus issues: housing regulations, finances, etc. "I'm sorry, but I don't feel I know enough about these yet. Before I go one way or the other, I want to talk to the people involved, to find out a lot more."

But on education in general he says:

- The first responsibility of a student is to question, with tolerance, the society around him. In fact, this is the reason for the university, because the future of society itself is founded on the campus. To question: the faculty in a scholarly way, the graduate students in a research way, and the undergraduate in a learning way.

- Students are young adults. They should have the opportunity to say what they want while what they do is not to the stage that the consequences of their actions would wreck their business, ruin their careers. Now they can try their wings, argue questions. Here I can't afford the luxuries of trying different ideas, of taking issue just for the sheer experience. A speech I make is taken to be policy of this department or of the whole administration.

- Everyone knows that the faculty has academic freedom, because that is the heritage of the university. Academic freedom also includes students.

- On the other hand, the university is a community, with important objectives. If those who would question do so in such a way that it disturbs the community or denies the basic reason for the university for the rest, then questioning is being done without tolerance. That restriction must always be considered. You strike, as best you can, the balance between freedom and order.

"And," says Hollomon, "it is not the responsibility of the university, even a state university, to assure that everyone gets four years of college work and a diploma. It is the responsibility of the state to see that everyone has the opportunity to some kind of higher education. That may mean two years of vocational training, or a college degree, or excellent advanced work. But that is *not* the responsibility of each individual institution.

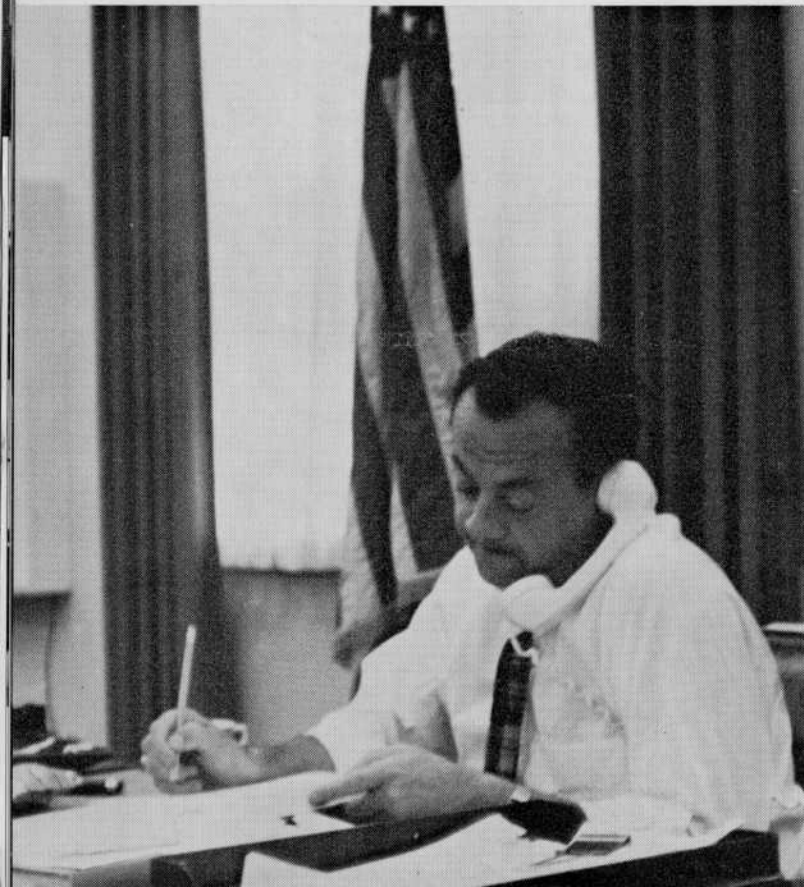
"It is ridiculous to think that everyone should go to college. We should attach more prestige to the person who has good training in a vocational area. I think it is equally ridiculous to say that four years means you are educated in other fields." He sees as more sensible a system of pre-professional curricula. He favors a liberal arts education, with emphasis in one area, that could be sufficient at the end of four or five years but that would be designed to lead to further study. "I think there is far too much specialization in the undergraduate years, but professionals in each field seem to want immediately to begin packing in the skills of their trade. In education, they teach just how to teach; in journalism, how to write. An electrical engineer needs to know more than circuits and equations. We need to prepare students to become what they will, to give them a chance to decide, not to take them out of high school and make them student engineers, student doctors, student teachers."

**H**is daughter Elizabeth graduates from high school next year and wants to go into some area of medicine. "I won't let her go to a nursing school. She will go to a good liberal arts school, and after four years, either take a nursing or pre-medical degree."

Elizabeth is the youngest in the Hollomon family. The oldest, J. Bradford, 22, is in Venezuela with the Peace Corps, "living in a six-room apartment with vermin, a kerosene lamp, and running water, and loving it." He is a graduate in economics from Harvard, speaks Spanish and German fluently. "It's my guess that when he comes back after another year," says Hollomon, "he'll either go into some aspect of international affairs, perhaps the in-depth

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*Mentioning that three of his children and dates were sailing in Chesapeake Bay, he picked up the phone and dialed a marine forecast.*





On his first official visit to the University of Oklahoma campus, Hollomon had an opportunity to meet and talk with future constituents.

study of some area of the world, or will take law. But that's a year away."

James, 20, will be a junior at Harvard and is spending the summer in Washington, working in radio and television. He worked 20 hours a week during school for WEEI in Boston and took a year off between high school and college to work full-time in the field. "I think he's pretty well settled on it," Hollomon says.

Also home for at least part of the summer is Duncan, 18, who just finished his freshman year in political science at Swarthmore College. "He may go out to study the South Dakota Indians like he did two years ago," says his father, "but he's due a rest first."

Elizabeth and her parents had to decide if she would leave Cathedral School for girls in Washington and move to Norman with them next September, finishing her last year of high school in Oklahoma. "We felt, however, this was simply not the time to break the educational line," Hollomon says, "so she'll board at Cathedral this year, then come to Oklahoma and take a year off. It will give her a chance to meet everyone, and she'll do some traveling during the year, too."

The Hollomons expect to look at several houses the University is locating when they go to Oklahoma in July, after an 11-day swing through Europe on a study of the "technology gap" for Commerce. The house they choose will do during the year that Hollomon's and Dr. Cross's terms overlap. Hollomon understands that construction of a new President's Home will probably be started during 1967-68.

They bought the big house they have now in northwest Washington six months after moving to the city. It has five bedrooms "and one in a pinch," all with double beds. "We can sleep 11 easily, and the sleeping bags come out when necessary."

Hospitality is a family tradition. "This summer, for example, we have six or seven people staying with us, friends of the kids, who are working here and so on. The normal number at or near dinner averages between 8 and 16. Take tonight for dinner. We have those friends of Elizabeth's coming, and the kids will be back from sailing, and there will be their dates, and then the boy who's driving down from Pennsylvania, though we really don't know when to expect him. . . ."

The one requirement the Hollomons put on a house is

that it have space to entertain, both formally and informally. "I want the type of place where the faculty and the students and I will feel comfortable in sport shirts, where we can sit around and talk. Then, of course, every president has to have a place where he can do the kind of formal entertaining that's expected.

"The President can't be one of the boys, but he's not going to be able to do much if he doesn't know what's going on with people," says Hollomon.

Hollomon himself taught at Harvard and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, after graduating from August Military Academy in 1936, receiving his bachelor of science in engineering from Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1940 and his PhD from MIT in 1946. During World War II, he served in Army Ordnance, eventually becoming a major.

When he joined the government in 1962, he was general manager of the general engineering laboratory at General Electric in Schenectady, N.Y., and was one of the National Jaycees' Ten Outstanding Young Men of 1954.

Mrs. Hollomon, who will bring back to the OU campus the crowning braid that meant "Dorothy Truex" for years before Dean Truex "bobbed" her hair, is a Wellesley graduate who was born in Oregon and raised in California.

She, Hollomon, and all the children share a passion for sailing. The weekend before, the Hollomons took their 35-foot yawl *Niskayuna* on the Chesapeake. But the boat's probably going to have to go. "We're postponing the decision till the end of the summer," says Hollomon. "I suspect we'll sell it. I will break my oldest boy's heart."

Instead, the family will have two boats, one for Oklahoma lakes, the other probably at Martha's Vineyard.

The *Niskayuna* played a part when the Hollomons moved to Washington; the decision was made on a week's cruise to the Virgin Islands. And it's not hard to imagine Hollomon hashing out University worries on a long tack down Lake Thunderbird.

He talks about getting to know the students, and the entertaining at the President's Home includes students—"definitely!"—when he talks about it. "I cannot exist without young people around, but," said Hollomon, with an amused expression, "that doesn't mean all 18,000 students are going to run in and out of the house. I think there's a limit here somewhere."

*Beth Resler is a writer with The Washington Post, a graduate of OU, and a former editor of The Oklahoma Daily.*