It is noontime on a bright, hot Thursday in Dallas. The streets are crowded with cars, most of them fast-moving. Bill D. Saxon maneuvers his black car through the traffic with the cheerful abandon that characterizes the drivers of Texas.

He turns into the driveway of the home which he and his wife, Wylodean Cornelison Saxon, are remodeling and redecorating. Within the stucco walls which mark the property's perimeter, pickups and cars of varying vintages are parked in every direction. Workmen are busy at a variety of jobs. A huge mound of sand here, a cement mixer there, and through all the activity, a young German Shepherd wanders happily.

Does Saxon feel as if they have been invaded?

"No," he replies in a drawl that would mark him anywhere as a Southwesterner. "Some of them have been here quite a while. They're almost friends now."

Inside the Spanish style house, built in the 1920s, Saxon steers his companions to a living room table. They begin looking through an old scrapbook, its ragged pages filled with pictures of his boyhood, his high school and college days. He picks up a picture of friends, posed with him in front of Norman High School, and identifies them.

Marianne Isom. Virginia Lindsey, called Gin. David Fritch. And Pud Jackson, who works for Saxon today. As he looks at the picture, it is apparent he recalls Norman, and those friends and those days, with love.

Obviously Bill Saxon has never forgotten his roots.

* * *

In the twilight of a rainy October day almost two weeks later, the Saxon Oil Company jet approaches the runway at the University of Oklahoma's Max Westheimer Field. The wheels touch, the pilot reverses the engines, the big red and white plane thunders to a stop. The waiting crowd, led by OU President William S. Banowsky and Oklahoma Governor George Nigh, surges forward to welcome Bill and Wylodean Saxon.

The Saxons walk into the terminal lobby, into a blaze of television lights and popping flashbulbs, to begin an historic press conference. Nigh makes the announcement.

Continued on Next Page

Wylodean and Bill Saxon meet with University President William Banowsky, left, to sign the historic agreement for their $30 million Energy Center gift.

THE SAXON STORY

By MARY LYLE WEEKS

The Saxons have given $30 million to OU, their alma mater.

It is the largest private gift in the entire history of the state, one of the largest in the history of higher education. The Saxons have designated the gift for the construction and endowment of the University's $65 million Energy Center.

When Saxon is introduced, he receives a standing ovation from those present — the media, OU faculty and staff, and Norman residents. He smiles, but he seems almost embarrassed as he faces the crowd, a number of whom are life-long friends.

This is the town where he grew up. This is the University where he earned his degree in 1951. But the little boy who once rode the quiet streets of Norman on a bike decorated with American flags, because it was wartime, has traveled a long, tough road since then.

From the modest $1,600 home on Cockrell where he lived, it is less than three miles to Westheimer. Three miles and years of hard work, learning and sacrifice. No one could have predicted that on this night there would be a standing ovation.

* * *

One of Saxon's friends describes him affectionately as "a good old boy." Perhaps he is, in the best sense of that description, as Southwesterners use the phrase. But it is an oversimplification.

Saxon is complex. Friends describe him with words that explain his success. Intelligent, positive, aggressive, proud, competitive, tough. But they use other words too. Considerate, understanding, sentimental, somewhat shy, charming, sense of humor, loyal friend.

The offices of his Saxon Oil Company are in the Diamond Shamrock Tower in downtown Dallas. A visitor first notices the bronze Saxon logotype behind the receptionist. Designed by Saxon, it gives quiet but elegant notice that this is a thriving business, a prosperous company.

Two large bronze sculptures, which Saxon chose, are focal points in the room. One shows a papoose with its Indian parents. The other, "Indian Stick Dance," is special to Saxon.

"I've named the two dancers," he says with a smile. "One is Quanah Parker and the other is Ten Bears."

The dancers are named for Saxon

Bill Saxon can watch another downtown Dallas skyscraper going up outside the window of his corner office in the Diamond Shamrock Tower as he recalls the long, tough road which led to affluence, influence and an opportunity to give.

Oil Company gas wells in the Fletcher Field in the deep Anadarko Basin in South Central Oklahoma. Quanah Parker No. 1, a significant gas discovery, was completed in June at 18,000 feet. Ten Bears No. 1 is being completed now, and the company is drilling five more wells. Purchase price for the company's initial leasehold interests in the Fletcher Field was approximately $40 million; additional leases have since been added.

Saxon, who founded the company in 1968 and is chairman of the board, has a corner office with two window walls overlooking much of Dallas. On the bright, hot Thursday, he watches a crane at work on a skyscraper, and remembers his boyhood in the Norman of the 1930s and 1940s.

"I come from a small town," he says. "A perfect little town. I knew everyone, and everyone knew me." He smiles slightly. "My mother doesn't like for me to say we were poor, but we didn't have anything. No material things. It was a loving home, a Christian home that gave me moral and ethical standards."

Saxon's mother, now Mrs. Fred Dare, says that he was "always honest. There's no make-believe in him." She is pleased with Saxon's success, but admits "the publicity is not to my liking. But I knew that whatever he did, he would do it well."

When his father's bank in Paoli, Oklahoma, failed in 1929, the family moved to a farm near Weleetka, then when Saxon was 5, to Norman. His father first was employed as a WPA timekeeper, then went to work as a janitor at Norman's First National Bank.

"I'm sure that must have hurt

Saxon poses with grandmother and mother, sister Martha, brother Walter, family dog Bobby and "a cat."

"I come from a perfect little town . . . My mother doesn't like for me to say we were poor, but we didn't have anything. No material things. It was a loving home, a Christian home that gave me moral and ethical standards."

him," Saxon says, "because of what he had done in the past, and because he was an intelligent man. But there were no jobs. So he worked as a janitor, and sometimes as an assistant cashier."

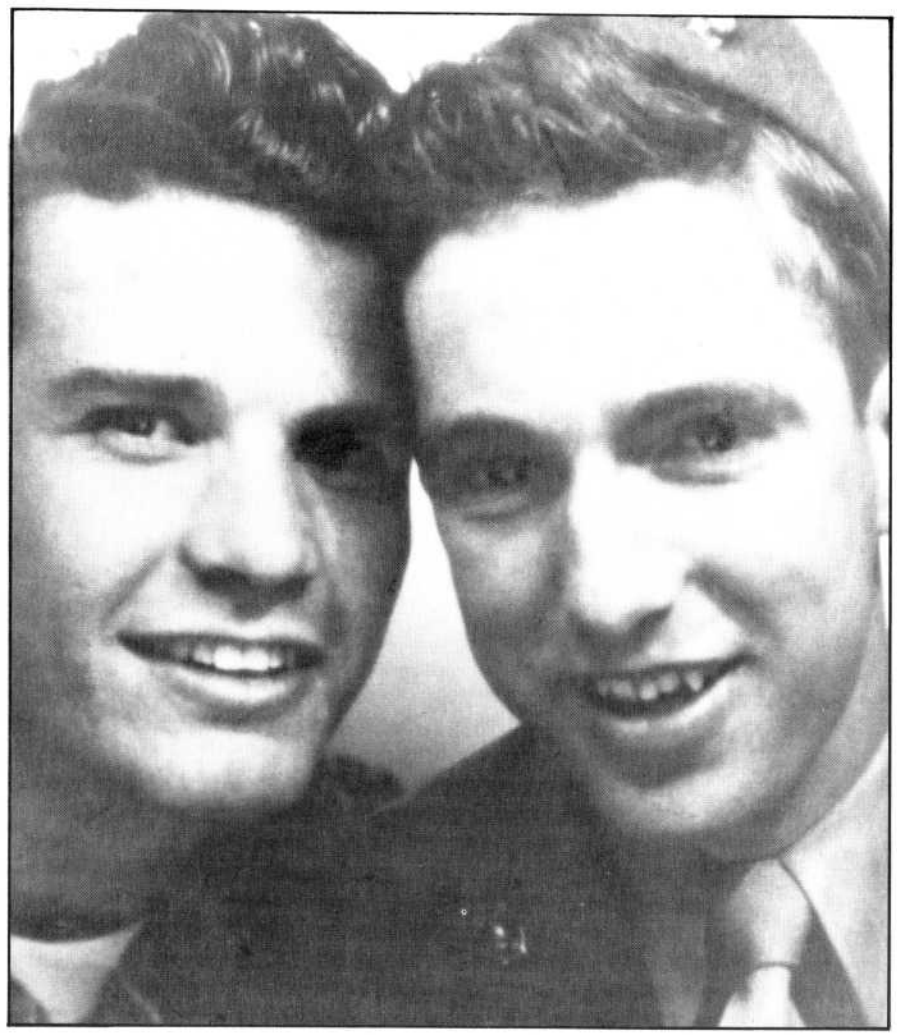
Saxon leans back in the leather chair and looks down at scattered papers on the low marble table that is his working space.

"One of the greatest pleasures success has brought to Wylodean and me is that we could make sure that my mother and her parents never have to worry about anything." He pauses, then adds softly, "One of my greatest regrets is that my father died before I could make life easier for him."

In those Depression days in Norman, Saxon became friends with another five-year-old boy from a poor home. His handsome friend, Jim Bumgarner, paid his dues in movie, stage, and television roles before he shot to stardom in the *Maverick* television series. Known now as James Garner, he has starred in dozens of movies, *The Rockford Files* on TV, and the critically acclaimed Polaroid commercials. He now is filming a new *Maverick* series.

The friendship endured through good times and bad, and they are still closest friends. Garner says the friendship continues because of their concerted efforts.

"Probably Bill made more effort than I did," Garner says. "I'd be play-



Saxon, right, joined the Marines after high school, then returned to attend the University of Oklahoma and marry Wylodean Cornelison. Home on leave, he and his buddy, Jim Bumgarner, invested a quarter in this penny arcade photograph.

ing in the Crosby (golf tournament) and look up, and there was Bill in the gallery, watching me. Bill values his friends."

Both men are gifted golfers and play on courses around the world and in numerous pro-ams. Another old friend of Saxon's, OU football great and long-time University of Texas coach Darrell Royal, now special assistant to the UT president, says Saxon and Garner "don't kid around" on the golf course.

"Listen, I've seen them yell and scream at each other," Royal says, with wonder in his voice. "They were *mad* at each other — it wasn't any put-on. Sometimes you just kind of move away and let them have at it. Of course when they walk off the course — it's all forgotten, and they're best friends again."

Garner admits to the rivalry with a laugh.

"Darrell's right. We've had some knock-down cuss fights. On the golf course, I'd a lot rather win $2 from Bill Saxon than a couple of hundred from anyone else!"

Garner says Saxon has "lots of self-assurance, a lot of guts, a willingness to gamble." Royal says Saxon is "extremely motivated, very competitive. He came from scratch, but he had this goal, this dream . . ."

* * *

In the beginning, it was only a dream. Saxon began work as a trainee for a subsidiary of Gulf Oil, and the company moved him and Wylodean frequently. A home in Ardmore was sold only 45 days after they bought it. In Duncan, it was a one-room apartment behind a garage. A transfer to Sapulpa meant Bill lived in a motel while Wylodean went back to her parents in Norman. Their first two children, Sandy and Steven, were born in Norman. A transfer to Oklahoma City brought a new opportunity.

"I thought it was time for me to get more drilling experience," Saxon says, "because that was what I wanted to do. Drill wells. So when this opportunity came, I quit the Gulf job and went to work selling drill bits in Southern Oklahoma."

In Saxon's office is a print, "Awakening." It depicts a sunrise, and suggests new beginnings, new opportunities, new successes. But while the drill bit job was a new beginning, the success was limited, and there were no riches.

Norman boys Saxon and Jim Garner don't kid around on the golf course.

"I was selling Brand X," he says with a laugh. "Hughes Tool Company was the major supplier of bits, and I was pushing Brand X. One driller told me, 'Sax, if I've got a Hughes bit in the hole, and we have any problem at all, I won't be criticized for the bit. But if I've got your bit in the hole when something goes wrong, the first criticism I'll get is the kind of bit I'm using.'" Saxon smiles ruefully. "I couldn't argue with him."

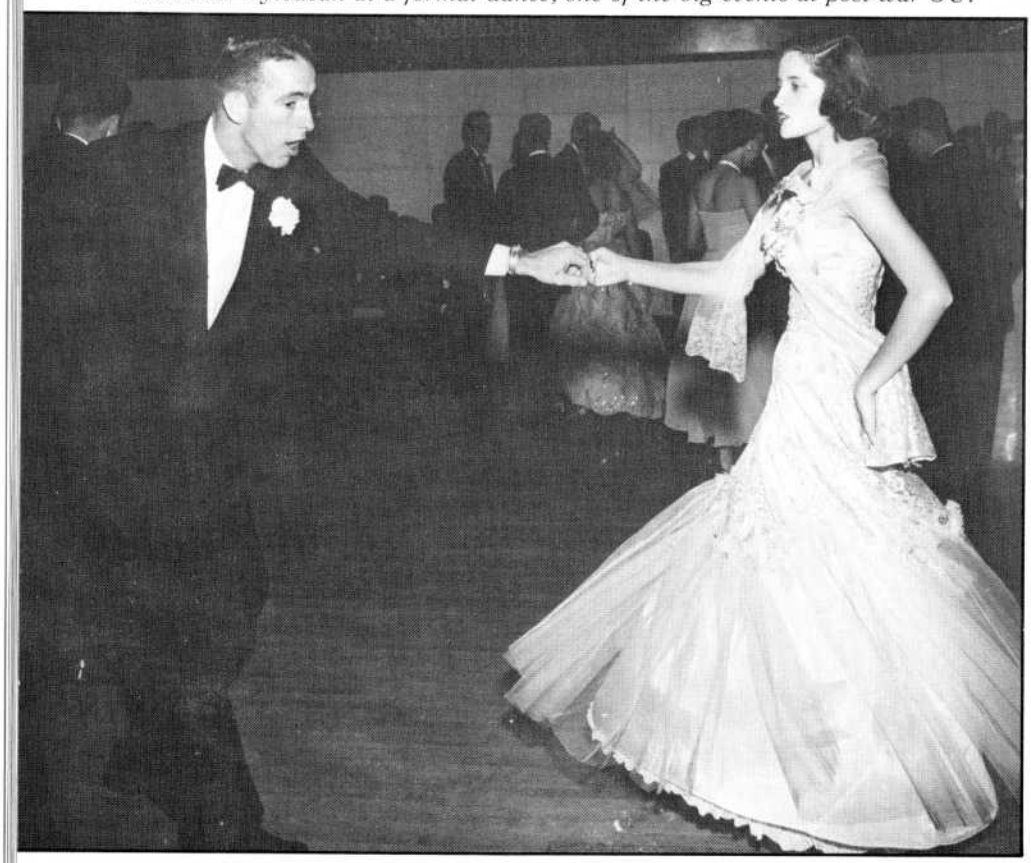
It was a hard job. Saxon handled the bits himself, and spent hours on the rigs. A transfer to Liberal, Kansas, gave him a new territory: Northwestern Oklahoma, Southwestern Kansas, and the Texas panhandle.

Saxon, a tall, trim man, props one foot on the low table and remembers that year based in Liberal.

"It was extremely hard," he says in a matter-of-fact tone. "I was driving 500 miles a day — 15,000 miles a month. There was so much land, and the rigs were so far apart. I wore out two cars."

In 1957, he was transferred to Abilene. The oil business was in the doldrums. Companies could pump only seven days a month, and oil sold for only $3 a barrel. A glut of overseas

Bill and Wylodean at a formal dance, one of the big events at post-war OU.



oil sold for less — $1.25 a barrel. (OPEC's base price is $34 a barrel.) Saxon continued selling Brand X bits, gaining field experience. At last he left the drill bit company to work for a small oil company and then, in 1959, began working for George Thomas, who owned a drilling rig.

"We owed more than we could take in," Saxon says. "It was always an uphill battle. In the two years I was with him, we worked up to five rigs. I would go to Houston or Dallas or San Antonio and get a contract for us to drill. Then I would go back to the field to look after the rigs."

Saxon worked long, grueling hours. Frequently he slept in the back of his car or in the "doghouse," a small storage-work area attached to a drilling rig.

"I was young and ambitious," he says seriously. "I felt I was bettering myself all the time. Not financially, because Wylodean and I still didn't have any money, but I was learning all the time."

With Saxon, his word or handshake meant the deal was firm, long before the paperwork was complete.

Learning — and worrying himself into an ulcer.

"I was in good physical shape from hauling drill bits and throwing so much steel around on the rigs. But I wasn't feeling very well, and I went to the doctor. He said he could cure the ulcer, but the only permanent solution was to find out why I was worrying."

Saxon knew why. It was the rigs. Calls in the middle of the night and three hour drives to the drilling site to solve a mechanical problem or a problem down hole. Too much doghouse coffee and lack of sleep and making barely enough money to stay afloat.

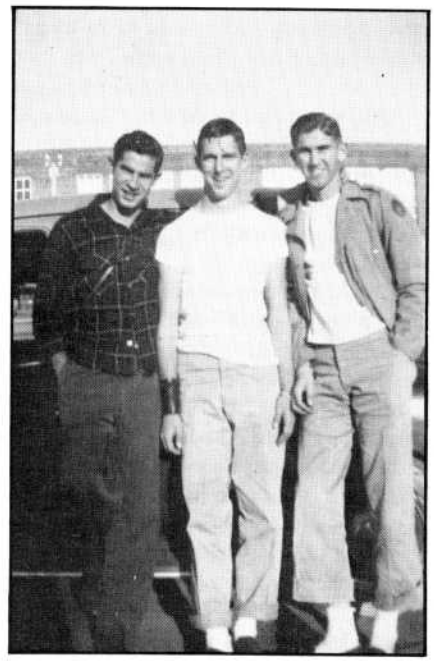
The turning point, the moment that started him on the road which brought him to the corner office in a Dallas skyscraper, seemed like rock bottom at the time.

"I was out on a rig," he says, with a faraway look in his eyes, seeing it all again. "Finally we finished this well about 5:30 in the morning and knew it was dry. Our company had a little interest in it, and we desperately needed that well."

As the sun started to rise, Saxon headed away from the drilling site.

"I was really hurting," he says slowly. "I was too old to cry, and too young to accept it philosophically, like I could today. So I headed away from the well for a rock, a place to sit and think. I almost fell as I got there — it was dark — just daybreak — I drove a cactus splinter into my hand when I caught myself. I sat there, hurting, trying to get the cactus splinter out, too old to cry."

Perhaps it was this moment he recalled when selecting "Awakening."



No, this group from the "Happy Days" is not Richie, Potsy and Ralph, but David Fritch, Saxon, Pud Jackson.

"I decided to get out of the drilling rig business. You can't predict what equipment will or won't do. I suppose you could say that was the beginning of my start upward."

During the 1960s, Saxon joint-ventured the drilling of wells with companies and individuals. People learned to have confidence in him, learned that, as Royal says, "He is totally honest." With Saxon, his word or handshake meant the deal was firm, long before the paperwork was complete. He established the reputation for ethical dealings for which he is known today.

In the late 1960s, a retired schoolteacher approached Saxon and encouraged him to drill on her land in Nolan County, Texas, an area of rolling plains and hills and canyons where the Brazos and Colorado Rivers run.

"The field had 17 wells, but she thought it was bigger than that because her royalty checks never dropped — just stayed the same over the years." Saxon laughs. "Everyone out there thinks there is oil on their land, but she was right. The field wasn't exhausted. We drilled 80 more wells, and that gave me the push I needed." That joint venture led to the formation of Saxon Oil Company.

In Saxon's office is a picture of that schoolteacher, Elizabeth Jaggers Bruce, affectionately inscribed to her friend, Bill Saxon.

* * *

In 1980, Saxon Oil offered its common stock to the public. Saxon himself retains 80 per cent, and 20 per cent was sold. At the time, the company was estimated to be worth in excess of $250 million.

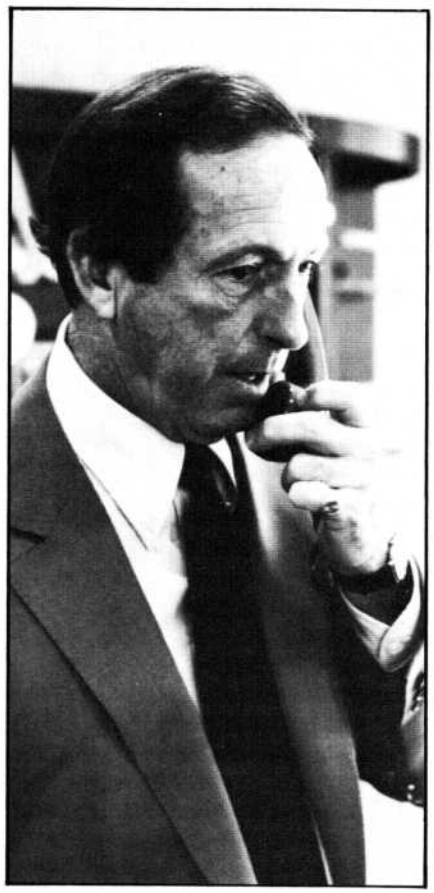
"That caught the public eye," Saxon says, a trifle regretfully. For the eight years previous, Saxon and his family had lived in Winter Park, Florida, where he moved the company offices so that his children — now including a third child, Sheri — could get a better education. "I commuted between Florida and Texas and had a fairly low profile. I was some guy in Florida that had operations in West Texas, and I didn't attract much attention. It was okay, but—" Saxon pauses, and says, remembering, "I missed this part of the country. I was homesick. I wanted to come back to the place of my roots."

Bill and Wylodean Saxon left their home on the Florida lake — the green oasis where grapefruit grew on trees in their yard, and water skiing was as close as the back door. They returned to the Southwest, to Dallas, where successful oilmen are highly visible.

The public stock sale, followed by media coverage given their $30 million gift to OU, has made Bill and Wylodean Saxon two of the most publicized individuals in the Southwest.

They handle it with grace and style. Both are articulate. Both speak from the heart.

"I don't want a lot of thanks," Saxon said at the press conference. "The pleasure of our gift is



Drilling at such depths is like "drilling into a bomb, as if you blow up a balloon, prick it with a pin, then try to control the flow of air out of the balloon."

Wylodean's pleasure and mine. The reward is all ours."

The day following the press conference, more than 500 faculty, staff and students came to a reception to honor the Saxons. Many of them stood in line to shake hands and express thanks. The Saxons stood and greeted every single person.

"Not many people would do that," said a professor. "The nicest thing about this gift is that it comes from real, down-to-earth people."

Gay Banowsky who, with the President, has hosted the Saxons several times since the gift was announced, paid similar tribute.

"They are such wonderful people," she says, "it's a joy to be around them."

* * *

One thing Saxon does not discuss in specifics is the year he spent in Korea as a young Army officer. Rather, he talks about what the Korean War meant in terms of his life and his goals.

"I told Wylodean before I left that I was going to survive it, and I was not going to let it change me," Saxon says. He refers to "horrible days in combat" and "the loss of friends." Primarily he talks of the confidence it gave him. "I found out I did have the ability to lead and influence people. I could keep going when times were tough. I discovered I had faith in myself and that I do believe in God."

Saxon's friend, Norman businessman Charles Hooper, is married to Wylodean's sister, Claudette. He describes Saxon as a man of "great integrity" who has "always been optimistic, always succeeded." Hooper adds that Saxon was decorated for his Korean service; he doesn't know exactly why because Saxon never discusses his combat experience.

Norman attorney Robert "Buddy" Pendarvis, long-time friend of Saxon's, was in Korea at the same time.

"We both spent Christmas of 1952 near Heartbreak Ridge," Pendarvis says. "I was with a 105 Howitzer outfit with the 40th Infantry Division, and Bill was with a 155 Howitzer Artillery battalion. Early in 1953, Bill's battalion moved away from us in the vicinity of Hill 854."

Saxon was a forward observer, one of the most dangerous jobs in an artillery unit. The forward observer is located in front of his own lines, in sight of the enemy, so that he may direct the fire of his unit at the enemy.

"We were trying to maintain the 38th parallel," Pendarvis says, "so every night there would be skirmishes and battles. On this particular night, Bill's unit was directed to retake Hill 854. As forward observer, he directed the fire from a dangerous position, and gathered the troops to retake the Hill."

For his service on that winter night in Korea, Saxon was awarded the Silver Star for gallantry in action.

* * *

Last year after his company went public, Saxon was invited to speak at brokerage firms in London, Scotland, Amsterdam, Switzerland, and other places.

Flying home on the company plane, exhausted, Saxon and his party relaxed with music on the stereo system and some 70-proof vodka.

"Coming west from Europe, you're flying with the sun," Saxon says. "Moving at 550-600 miles an hour, time almost stands still. You look out the window and see only clouds or ocean. I don't think anyone on that plane has ever had the kind of feeling we did then — I know I never have. Being with friends — having time stand still. Someone said we should all write a poem. We should write down what we were thinking."

Recalling a moment that was meaningful to him, Saxon pauses and clears his throat, then goes on slowly.

"The name of my poem was *I Like.* I wrote down lots of things — clouds, family, comradeship, our cat. But the first thing I put down was — *"I Like – Norman, Oklahoma.* I have no idea why I wrote that first except—" He stops again and takes a deep breath. "I believe my brain and my heart were telling me that your roots come first. The next thing I wrote was — *"I Like–Charlie Hooper.* I've never had a friend like him. All those years Wylodean and I didn't have much — whenever or however we came back to Norman, Charlie was always there. He always picked us up. He was always supportive."

On the airplane when time stood still, Saxon knew any project he decided to support would have to be related to his roots.

Not long after, President William S. Banowsky wrote Saxon, inviting him to a September 12 meeting on the OU campus. Saxon came, and heard the plans for the Energy Center, which then had a total goal of $30 million, $20 million from the private sector and $10 million from the state.

"It made sense," he says simply. "I could not believe someone had not thought of this concept before. The Energy Center will train the people who then, in private industry, will solve the energy problems for future. They will solve our technological problems."

Saxon can speak with authority about technological problems. Drilling in the deep Anadarko Basin, pressures build to 18,000 to 20,000 pounds per square inch. Temperatures can reach 350 to 450 degrees. No one is certain how to treat pipe to prevent quick corrosion at such depths. It is, Saxon says, like drilling into a bomb.

"It is," he explains, "as if you blow up a balloon, prick it with a pin, then try to control the flow of air out of the balloon."

After the Energy Center meeting, the Saxons attended Banowsky's luncheon, then the OU-Wyoming football game. In the stadium, they were seated by Dr. Gerald Turner, vice president for executive affairs, who works in the office next to Banowsky.

Following discussions of football strategies and Saxon's company, Saxon asked Turner to explain the Energy Center and its funding. After Turner explained the concept of 100 Founders at $100,000 each to provide private funds, Saxon asked:

"Would the University mind if one guy did it?"

Turner, unsure of Saxon's intent, questioned him.

"I mean the whole $20 million," Saxon said.

Turner explained that the $20 million in private funds was a minimum figure and that more funds would be needed to endow the programs, provide the best equipment, and attract the finest faculty.

"Well," Saxon said, "I would be interested in doing the $20 million."

On Monday, Saxon confirmed to President Banowsky that he intended to give OU a total of $30 million for both construction and endowment. Those who knew — the President's staff and the fund raising staff — were in a state of delighted shock. By the following Saturday, after Banowsky and Saxon met with Nigh and higher education Chancellor E. T. Dunlap, the Energy Center goal was raised to $65 million.

Less than three weeks later, on the rainy October evening, Bill Saxon faced the microphones in the terminal lobby.

"Norman and the University of Oklahoma have always been one and the same to Wylodean and me. This will always be home to us." He speaks of the oil business and his success, and of his desire to put something back into his industry. He talks about his roots and his country.

"The real reason for this gift is to say how proud we are to be Oklahomans. And to say that America gives you the opportunity to achieve and acquire — and to give."

* * *

It is nighttime at Westheimer field. The press conference is over. The Saxons have left for dinner with friends. Those who gave the standing ovation, some with tears in their eyes, realizing what the gift means to the University of Oklahoma, have gone home.

Television film is being edited for the 10 p.m. news. Newspaper reporters are writing their stories. The airport lobby is deserted.

Somewhere southwest of the airport, lights glitter against the night sky as the Saxon Oil Company rigs work in the deep Anadarko Basin. Further south in Nolan County, Texas, there are night shadows in the "exhausted" field where those all-important 80 wells were drilled.

To the south, the lights of Norman glow against low clouds. The city is much bigger now than when Bill Saxon and Jim Bumgarner "played any game that didn't call for equipment, because we couldn't afford to buy it." Cockrell Street is less than three miles away.

He had this goal, this dream . . .

Now the big jet waits on the silent runway to return the Saxons to Dallas. Now, with the hard, tough times behind them, Bill and Wylodean Saxon enjoy success.

The pleasure is ours. The reward is all ours.

The roots are here. And no standing ovation was ever more deserved.

"The real reason for this gift is to say how proud we are to be Oklahomans, to say that America gives you the opportunity to achieve and acquire — and to give."