



# ALL LIFE HAS TO OFFER

**“There surely will come a time when I can’t climb the hill,” predicts Lloyd Powers. But until that moment arrives, he and Reva plan to make each new day an adventure.**

By MARY LYLE WEEKS

**L**loyd Powers grew up on a farm in Carter County near the little town of Milo. His first investment at the age of 9 was 10 cents for a 'possum skin which he sold for \$1.10. A few years later, he enrolled in the University of Oklahoma with a nickel and two pennies in his pocket and emerged with the expertise to build the largest oil industry survey service in North America.

The unsophisticated Oklahoma farm boy disappeared long ago. That boy's willingness to take a chance, however, and his eagerness to challenge life remain in the distinguished white-haired septuagenarian who today is equally at home in the Denver Petroleum Club or at the North Pole.

For the past 40 years, Powers' partner in his quest for all life has to offer has been his attractive, vivacious wife,

Reva. To date they have visited 126 independent countries and every continent except Antarctica; they have been around the world four times and have seen most of the world's major rivers and canals.

This summer alone, they spent May traveling to Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan and mainland China, adding a trip to Germany, Scandinavia and Iceland in July. In August Powers was off

again to Japan and on to the Aleutian Islands and Alaska.

"We want to do some more traveling," Powers says, "and we want to do it as quickly as possible. Because the sooner you do it, the longer you'll enjoy it."

"We like new things," Reva says. "We like the feeling that every day brings something different."

Certainly April 13, 1984, was such a day for Lloyd Powers, the culmination of a trip that few have ever made. At 1:23 a.m., he had a glass of champagne while standing at 90 degrees north latitude — the North Pole. Despite the early hour, the sun was bright although low on the horizon. The landscape was flat and white, broken only by pressure ridges of ice.

The polar ice pack beneath his feet was approximately 16 feet thick, and the water below about 13,400 feet deep. The temperature stood at -40 degrees Fahrenheit, but Powers insists that the lack of wind made the visit comfortable.

"There was no life of any kind," Powers recalls, remembering also that the landing of the ski-mounted Twin Otter plane was "not very smooth."

His certificate from Society Expeditions, the travel company that arranges the polar trips, reads in part: "I do hereby appoint by consent of the Polar Bears (may they rule in Peace) Lloyd Powers a member of the North Pole Explorers, an organization whose sole purpose is to pay honor to the brave Pioneer Arctic Expedition Leaders who traversed and explored the High Arctic and Polar Ice regions at the top of the world."

Powers developed a preference for the far northern regions during the time he was one of the elite international circle of big game hunters. He has hunted all over the world, most often to collect specimens for museums.

"I first shot a rifle when I was 6," Powers remembers. "Shot at a Prince Albert can and hit it. I was 8 before my father let me shoot a shotgun. I grew up hunting. We hunted rabbits and squirrels and bobwhite quail for food. Later I hunted 'possums and raccoons to sell their fur. That was one of the few ways for a poor country boy to get cash; that's how I bought my clothes."

**"The Eskimos threw a couple of caribou skins on the ice and said, 'Now you sleep like Eskimo.' The first night, I didn't sleep much. The next night I figured that since I didn't freeze the night before, I was going to make it."**

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A 1963 phone call from a friend, Aksel Nielsen of Denver, took Powers into the world of big game hunting.

"He asked if I'd like to go to Africa," Powers says. "I'd never thought about it. I thought only maharajahs and princes and rich oil men went to Africa." Powers asked for a couple of hours to think it over but Nielsen had already made the reservations for northern Tanzania. "He told me to see his doctor that afternoon for my first shot, and I would have time to get the last one the morning before we caught the plane."

Powers finally has given up hunting, but not before visiting Banks Island in the Canadian north to collect muskoxen for the Wildlife World Museum in Monument, Colorado.

"Two Eskimos and I went out as a hunting party — out on the ice. We found the muskoxen about 80 miles from Sachs Harbor, a village of 120 people, and collected two of them. One is a world record as the largest and the other is number 3 in the records."

Powers vividly recalls the nights on Banks Island, located about 300 miles northeast of the MacKenzie River, when nighttime temperatures dropped to -60 degrees Fahrenheit.

"The Eskimos threw a couple of caribou skins on the ice and said, 'Now you sleep like Eskimo,'" he recounts. "The first night, I didn't sleep much. The next night I figured that since I didn't freeze the night before, I was going to make it. I got a good night's sleep that night."

On several safaris, including the first time he was accompanied by his son, Powers has collected the African Big Five — elephant, rhinoceros, cape buffalo, leopard and lion. On that particular trip, he doubled on two of the five. All are now in museums.

He explains that natives in Africa have a different attitude toward hunting than do some conservationists. "When you shoot a buffalo or rhino, or an elephant or hippo, the natives come from sometimes 20 miles away. They know you're in the area, and they

watch for the vultures to start circling. Every bit of meat is taken away by the natives and eaten."

A leopard or lion kill is cause for native rejoicing. "Sometimes leopards are known to run by a farm house or through a village, grab a child, and keep going. And the lions get the natives' livestock. When you kill one of the cats, the natives come and sing and snake dance through your camp, and you become a hero to them."

Powers also points out the difference between professional game hunters and poachers. "Poachers are the greatest threat to the various species. They kill young animals. Many times the game hunter is killing an old bull that's been pushed out by the herd, an animal that is eating food that the younger animals need."

The Sooner alumnus was one of the charter/life members of Game Conservation International, one of the world's largest conservation clubs. The organization's activities include such things as buying helicopters to aid game departments in combatting poachers.

Thoughts of life as a leader of the petroleum industry-turned world adventurer would never have occurred to Powers when he began his association with the University of Oklahoma — almost by accident — in 1933.

"I wanted to be a math professor," he explains. "When I was 21, I went to Southeastern in Durant, thinking that if I wanted to be a teacher, I should go to a teacher's college."

When he arrived in Durant, the first person he saw was his third grade teacher. While telling him how wonderful it was that a poor country boy had the ambition to go to college, she mentioned that as a teacher she still went to college every summer.

"I thought that if you have to go through all that," Powers says, "then maybe I was in the wrong place."

He returned home, later heading for Oklahoma City to get a job at a stockyards feed lot. On the way, he stopped in Norman to visit a former high school teacher who was attending OU as a

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pre-med student. The teacher urged him to enroll at the University.

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His next stop was at the office of Walter Kraft, head of the physical plant, to ask for a job.

"I knew I could cut the grass or scrub floors," Powers explains. However, Kraft told him he lacked the funds to hire anyone else. Powers asked who could provide additional funds, and

Kraft directed him to the office of Emil Kraettli, long-time secretary to the OU Board of Regents.

"I went over there with very little hope that I could even see Mr. Kraettli," Powers recalls. "I knew he was *somebody*."

The regents' secretary visited with the young man about his problem, then told Powers that if he would find a fishing hole for Kraettli and his friends, he could have a job.

"I'm your boy," Powers said. "I'll take care of that."

In truth, Powers, who wasn't a fisherman, had no idea where he would find such a fishing hole. Then he remembered that the manager of his home town baseball team owned a ranch where an oil company had stocked some ponds.

At Kraettli's bidding, Powers called the rancher who granted permission for an OU group to fish his ponds the following Sunday, provided Powers first pitched a baseball game for his team. Powers formed life-long friendships with members of that fishing party — Kraettli, registrar George Wadsack, basketball coach Bruce Drake, treasurer J. L. Lindsey, and English professor Dr. S. Roy Hadsell.

Powers got his job with the physical plant.

"I made \$20 a month," he recalls, "with 20 cents held out for insurance." He took a second job at the Norman fire station. "I got a place to sleep and \$10 a month out of that." After the first semester, he also worked



*Lloyd and Reva Powers find interesting people wherever they happen to be. In Denver they visit with Charlton Heston during the 1984 presidential campaign.*

at Newman Hall, then a Catholic dormitory, now converted to a privately owned apartment house called The Collegian.

"Many places, you worked three hours for two meals," Powers explains. "At Newman I worked two hours for three meals, so it was considered one of the best jobs on campus." He worked and took courses year round "because I was afraid somebody would get my job."

In addition, after completing his first semester at OU, Powers tutored other students in English and mathematics.

"Pretty soon I had several clients," he says. "The mathematics department let me use a classroom with a blackboard. Each student paid me 50 cents an hour, so if I could get five or ten together, I was doing all right."

Powers' professional career began when he worked a summer job in the oil fields.

"It was a job I knew nothing about," he claims, "but I made twice as much

**"I wanted to learn to fly because I intended to go back to Alaska. I was going to be a professional hunter and bush pilot." It was not meant to be. On the day he was to leave, he walked into a coffee shop and saw Reva.**

money as I could have if I had started teaching. So I left the University to see if I really liked working in the oil fields."

He worked as a surveyor's assistant for Laughlin-Simmons & Co. and says he "got along pretty well" even with no knowledge of surveying.

"After a year or two, I thought, gee, if I knew anything about this — if I could talk about it on a technical level — this would be a good field." He returned to OU and studied civil engineering, then returned to work for Laughlin-Simmons.

During World War II, Powers worked in Alaska with the Army Engineers, then for Douglas Aircraft Company in Midwest City, supervising a project concerned with the resistance welding

of non-ferrous metals for airplanes. He set up the project, secured the equipment, wrote a training manual and trained 142 operators. He returned to San Antonio to Laughlin-Simmons, but his ambition had taken a new twist.

"I wanted to learn to fly because I intended to go back to Alaska," he explains. "I was going to be a professional hunter and bush pilot. I earned my certificate in taxidermy. (Powers later had his own taxidermy firm in Denver.) My idea was to work as a guide for people like the Fords and the Rockefellers, take them on hunts, then mount their trophies."

Powers learned to fly, and on a particular Wednesday in 1945, he had his footlocker packed, his tickets purchased and was scheduled to leave the following Monday for Alaska.

It was not meant to be.

On that day, he walked into a coffee shop and saw Reva.

"I told the guy with me, 'I'd marry that girl right now and never even ask her name.'"

On Friday he asked her for a date, a day-long excursion on Sunday that included lunch, dinner and visiting the old missions around San Antonio. When he walked Reva to the door, she turned to him and asked, "Well, are we officially engaged?"

"Not officially," he replied, "because there's a ring involved in that, and I'll get one tomorrow. Tomorrow night we'll make it official. But I am engaged."

"I am too," she said.

More than 40 years later, the love which came at first sight is still very much in evidence. For a recent anniversary, Powers gave Reva what is surely one of the most spectacular cars in Denver. It could almost be called a "Boomer Sooner" car — a bright red 1981 Zimmer (see back cover) manufactured by the Zimmer Motor Company of Pompano Beach, Florida.

"We only drive it two places," Reva explains, "where it can be watched.



*Valley of the Kings, Easter Island, the Mayan ruins, Machu Picchu. Photographs lining a hallway in their home remind Lloyd and Reva of their favorite places.*

One is the Fairmont Hotel, where the doorman is a friend of Lloyd's. The other is the Cherry Hills Country Club."

But in 1948, after 11 years with the same company, a new car was just one of the things Powers needed to meet his responsibilities as a husband and father.

"I borrowed a little from my brother to catch up," he says. "Then I had to figure a way to make more money."

He went to farmers in southern Illinois with a proposition.

"I said to them, 'Give me your lease for a dollar and I'll drill you a well in 90 days,' " he recalls. "I had no money and no way to drill a well, but this was a case of 'cross the bridge when you get to it.' First things first. First get the leases."

He acquired 1,800 acres, then located a man — "kind of a poor boy" — who had a rig.

"Joe," Powers told him, "I'll give you 300 acres for nothing if you'll drill a well — 3,600 feet — and I want a 1/16th override." Joe agreed, and 89 1/2 days after Powers secured the leases, drilling began. The first well was dry.

"I still had 1,500 acres, and I told Joe, 'Don't despair. We'll drill another one!'" The next one was a good well — 480 barrels a day. Then Powers began selling his acreage "because the next well might have been another dry one."

He had made enough money to buy a new home and car, with enough left

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over for equipment if he decided to start his own business.

Powers repeated the process all over again with 2,000 acres in another location. "We hit on the first well there," he says. "That meant we had hit the jackpot twice, and it was time to quit. I'd made more money in 120 days than I ever dreamed of making. To me it was an awful lot of money."

Powers now went to the head of Laughlin-Simmons with a plan. He proposed starting a new company for the firm in the Rocky Mountain region. He asked for a \$1,000-a-month raise (he was making \$400 at the time) and made a promise.

"I told Mr. Laughlin, 'I'll do it for 90 days, and if I don't show a profit each month, I'll do it for nothing, and we'll forget it.'"

The response was negative.

Powers decided to tackle the project on his own.

Thus in 1948 in Casper, Wyoming, the Powers Elevation Company was born. It grew to be the largest oil industry survey service in the United States and Canada. In the beginning, however, the entire staff consisted of Lloyd, Reva and one field helper.

"I usually stayed in the field all

week," Powers recalls, "working from daylight to dark. I did my driving and made out my notes and reports at night. Reva read correspondence to me over the phone, and I dictated replies. She did the typing and the duplicating and mailed all the reports. It was that way for about six months."

The word "elevation" in the company title refers to the elevation above sea level of oil and gas wells.

"To do logging and regional subsurface mapping, you have to know exactly where they started vertically — the elevation," Powers explains. "When we started, everybody had different information. They didn't know if the elevations were correct or not. So I thought it would be a good idea if everybody had the same information."

Powers set out to sell this idea to the geological staffs of the major oil companies. In the beginning, he had four clients who put him on retainer. By year's end, he had 22.

His initial objective was to determine the elevation of about 100,000 old wells drilled throughout the Rocky Mountains. As the company and its list of clients grew, Powers opened offices in Calgary and Edmonton. The company expanded its operations to include well staking and surveying for boundaries, pipelines and roads.

In the years immediately before he sold the company in 1978, Powers added two new departments to the company: environmental services and archaeological services.

"The government brought in a few conservation laws," he says. "Before you can disturb the federal lands, you have to have an archaeological report and an environmental impact report. In the beginning, the only people making these reports were college professors — Ph.Ds. So I figured that if the professors were going to do it, I'd just get my own professors."

He began hiring master's and doctoral graduates, capping the process when he hired the Colorado state archaeologist.



On safari in northeast India's Assam state, Lloyd Powers (in hat atop the lead elephant) utilizes local transportation to travel through Kanchenjunga Park.

"I hired him and his assistants," Powers says with a broad grin, "right out of the state building here in Denver. I wanted him to head the archaeological services for the Rocky Mountain region. The headlines in the paper the next day said, 'The Brain Drain Continues.'"

Powers is unabashedly open with his affection for the University of Oklahoma.

"I owe the school more than I can ever repay," he says. "It helped me when I needed help — when I had no where else to go."

Powers and his wife are Founders of OU's Energy Center and have given the University cash and mineral interests totaling over half a million dollars. He believes the Energy Center was the right project at the right time for him.

"It's ideal for us," Powers says. "We invested the money from the sale of the company in mineral rights in the Anadarko Basin. The investments were successful, enabling us to help the University.

"My only regret is that Mr. Kraettli and Mr. Wadsack aren't alive to see

what's happening." His words are full of emotion. "When I think of those people—and what they did for me—I could never do enough for them and for the University."

Powers surveys the magnificent grounds of his Denver home and, with a chuckle, tells his visitor he gave the landscape people some special instructions.

"I told them when they built the gazebo to make the bridge wide enough for a wheelchair. I know there will surely come a time when I can't climb the hill anymore. And I won't try. When that time comes, I won't travel so much."

He speaks of spending future winters in Marbella, Spain, on the Costa del Sol, or in the Canary Islands.


"A couple of months there maybe. That's about all I could take if I had nothing to do but lie in the sun. I'll go fishing some. I like deep sea fishing — and fishing in northern Canada for Arctic char and lake trout."

Moments later he and Reva are discussing the upcoming trip to Iceland. Framed pictures in the adjacent hallway illustrate some of their favorite



*At home in Denver Powers demonstrates the harpooning techniques he observed while hunting with Eskimos in Alaska.*

places — the Valley of the Kings in Egypt, Easter Island, New Zealand, London, Mayan ruins in Yucatan, Machu Picchu in the Peruvian Andes. They have explored the world and have loved doing it.

For Lloyd and Reva Powers, life has remained an adventure. 



*When the grounds of the Powers' Denver home was being landscaped, Lloyd instructed the designer to build the bridge to the gazebo wide enough for a wheelchair — for that time when he can't climb the hill. For now, there is more traveling to do.*