
PROLOGUE

No Matter What You May Have Read, It's Business as Usual at OU

EDITOR'S NOTE: In December, the University of Oklahoma football program was placed on NCAA probation for recruiting and financial assistance violations. In subsequent weeks, three unrelated incidents involving alleged assault with intent to injure, rape and sale of narcotics resulted in charges being filed against five members of the football team. The gravity of these incidents and the nationwide publicity which ensued has been received with shock, disbelief, embarrassment and not a little anger by the approximately 25,000 students and 1,500 faculty and staff who go about their business in an appropriate manner 365 days a year.

One afternoon a couple of weeks ago, I decided that it was about time to get out of the office and take a stroll through the campus. I had read, watched and listened to the media coverage of a series of regrettable incidents involving the OU football program. My desk was littered with clippings from newspapers, although happily none from *Sports Illustrated*. (I still have some standards.) The picture being painted was not of the University of Oklahoma I knew, the institution I have been writing about for the past 30 years.

So I went for a walk.

Amazingly, nothing had changed. Camera crews had been replaced by landscape crews cleaning away the last traces of winter from the flower beds. Tidal waves of backpack-toting students still swept across Lindsey Street from the dorms on their way to class. If they had any cause for concern, it was for the outbreak of mumps which had followed them back from spring break.

In New Cate Center, now home to the honors program, one of an ongoing series of public seminars with the campus' leading thinkers was being readied for the evening. In attendance would be some of the 45 freshman National Merit Scholars whose enrollment

placed OU first in the Big Eight, 13th nationally among public institutions, 31st among 3,400 public and private schools.

Up the South Oval in Nielsen Hall, a physics professor had just been announced the winner of the outstanding college teacher award from the Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence, the third such prize to be given, won all three times by an OU faculty member. No one was particularly surprised. The local newspaper carries notices of distinctions accorded the faculty with great regularity.

I resisted the temptation to take a side trip into the library, to wonder at the computerization which links OU to the nation's great research libraries, or to detour upstairs to the special collections where I could actually hold (with special permission) Galileo's personal copy of his major work. Likewise I saved for another day a visit to the offices of *World Literature Today* and its erudite editor.

In the vicinity of Elm and Boyd, a steady procession of remarkably fine concerts, recitals, plays and guest artists were scheduled for the stages of Rupel Jones Theater, Holmberg Hall and in the new Catlett Music Center, with more to come when the next phases of Catlett are built. Meanwhile, an imaginative director has turned the OU Museum of Art into one of the most exciting facilities of its kind in this region.

Due east along Boyd loomed the soon-to-be completed tower phase of the new Energy Center. The engineers and geoscientists already in residence in the center are involved in millions of dollars' worth of research and exciting teaching programs. And while waiting to move into their new quarters there, the OU meteorologists have fashioned a Weather Center consortium with several governmental agencies which will make Norman the *only* place to be for weather forecasting research.

Inevitably my walk took me down Jenkins, past the sign proclaiming the coming University Centennial, to the athletic dorms on one side of the street, the stadium on the other. How ironic that a program that has brought so much enjoyment and pride to all Oklahomans should bring a maelstrom of criticism, overshadowing for a time 100 years of academic achievement.

But universities are wonderful animals. They are at their very best in times of crisis; they are designed for dissent. A university is an unruly family, each member expecting to be challenged, to be forced to defend his position, to seek out a truer truth, find a better way. A university is hundreds of highly educated specialists struggling to impart their finely honed intellectual enthusiasms to thousands of post-adolescents still experimenting with doing their own laundry. Occasionally these efforts go awry.

It is the nature of universities to move slowly, and in times of crisis, this can be a maddening trait. But the proclamation has gone forth: the problems leading to NCAA sanctions against the football program will be fixed; violation of University regulations or the laws of the land by *any* student will not be tolerated.

There is so much good news about the University of Oklahoma, and you deserve to know it all. There are so many fine young men and women in our student body and on our athletic teams, and you deserve to know about them. This is the same University you knew before the winter of our unwelcome notoriety, a little older and wiser, perhaps, but doing business as usual. The fabric woven of a hundred years of effort and sacrifice is not about to unravel now. In the words one of our former presidents, "We are here for the ages."

And if you don't believe it, drop by the next time you're in town, and we'll take a little walk.

—CJB