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# LETTERS

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## IN TRIBUTE TO GEORGE LYNN CROSS

Among the most memorable and pleasurable years of my life were the 23 that I spent as a faculty member and administrator at the University of Oklahoma. Of those years (1948-1971), George Cross was president for 20.

My first significant contact with Dr. Cross was in the summer of 1949 when he spent the better part of a day on the research barge on Lake Texoma on which 10 graduate students and I, as an instructor in the Department of Zoology, studied the fish population of that lake. These students were receiving eight hours of graduate credit for their efforts, and Dr. Cross said, "As president, I need to know what students do while living on a barge for eight weeks that deserves eight hours of graduate credit." We soon learned that he already knew what we were doing and had deep interest in our methods. We were impressed with his breadth of knowledge, his ability to relax and communicate and his wonderful sense of humor.

During the next few years my contacts with Dr. Cross were frequent, and with each one my appreciation, respect and admiration for him increased. His calm and thorough manner in confronting University problems and his open, objective way of responding to differences of opinion consistently well-served the University and the community.

### Advocate for Academics

George Cross was a scholar. During his tenure as president, although athletics at OU, especially football and wrestling, achieved national prominence, he was tireless in his efforts to improve the University's academic programs. This was regardless of inadequate funding for higher education by the Oklahoma Legislature. He had great respect for productive faculty and for students, and regularly mingled with both as time permitted. He sought and carefully considered the opinions of others. I remember his statement that "it would be a foolish president who did not seek and venerate the opinions of the faculty who are so readily available." He administered

the University in a way that caused most faculty to feel that they played a significant role in its operation. His dignity, his wisdom, his effective communication and his ability to administer judiciously earned him the respect and admiration of many university presidents throughout our country, including some from the most prestigious private and public universities.

### The Laughter Factor

I mentioned his wonderful sense of humor. He used this appropriately on many occasions. One story on himself that he enjoyed telling concerned a problem that he faced shortly after becoming president. At that time, Oklahoma was a dry state, but as was the case with many Oklahomans, he and Mrs. Cross had a source of good liquor when needed. When they moved into the president's home, they had a partially consumed bottle of bourbon. When it was empty, Dr. Cross put it in the trash. Cleo saw him do it and said, "George, you can't do that. Our trash is picked up by University personnel, most of whom are Baptists. Word will get around that the president drinks whiskey." George saw the wisdom of this and later said, "Over the next few months I accumulated four empty bottles before I figured out a way to dispose of them without revealing a behavior pattern that later became legal. Every Friday or Saturday night one or more students would throw their empty bottles on the president's front lawn. That provided an ideal solution! Whenever I had an empty bottle I would, late at night, turn off the porch light and unobtrusively throw my bottle out with the others."

### Cross 1, Senator 0

On another occasion, the University gave a faculty member in Classics \$350 to buy appropriate artifacts during a sabbatical trip to the Middle East to enhance the teaching program of that department. While in Egypt, he was able to purchase a splendid brass brazier for \$35. He got a receipt that was deposited in the University financial office. Shortly thereafter, on a Friday night, Dr. Cross got a phone call from the state senator from Norman saying that an unfriendly

senator from Oklahoma City had found the receipt, copied it and was going to present it on the floor of the Senate on Monday morning as an example of how the University wasted taxpayers' money by paying \$35 for a brassiere.

On Monday morning, Dr. Cross was waiting outside the Senate chamber to explain the matter when he was approached by the press who asked if the senator was correct in stating that the University had spent \$35 for a brassiere. His response was, "He's making mountains out of molehills. I intend to make a clean breast of the whole thing." The unfriendly senator was not re-elected.

### Farewell with a Flair

At the last OU commencement at which Dr. Cross presided, he announced to the assembled audience of students, parents, spouses, friends and faculty that he and Mrs. Cross had done something during the past year that they had never done before—take a vacation during the academic year. He said, "We wanted to take a trip to the South Seas before it was too late." He then added, "We had only been gone three days before we discovered that it was too late." He got an immediate, spontaneous, standing ovation from his audience!

George Cross was indeed a fine man, a gentleman and a great university president. His contributions to the University of Oklahoma, to Oklahoma and to higher education were considerable and significant, and all three of these entities are fortunate that he was president of OU for 25 years.

Carl D. Riggs  
Tampa, Florida

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Carl Riggs left OU, where he was vice president for graduate studies and graduate dean, to become academic vice president at the University of South Florida. Over the next 25 years, he was acting president, headed the graduate student and research programs, was named an Eminent Scholar and retired in 1996 as director of the Center for Excellence in Mathematics, Science, Computers and Technology.

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## Regental Thoughts

Your recent edition of the *Sooner Magazine* is outstanding as always, but I especially enjoyed the "Prologue" article on George Lynn Cross. As an undergraduate student (1950-1954), I always recall his high visibility, mainly because he faithfully attended football practice, occasionally flew on the team plane, and he was a neighbor on University Boulevard when I resided at the Sigma Chi house. He was very soft-spoken and both as a student and later, you realized that he commanded great respect.

I always enjoyed Julian Rothbaum's stories about President Cross when he served his first tour on the Board of Regents. He indicated that things were always very laid back. They would gather in the president's office, he would make a report, and that was pretty much the extent of the official meetings. It certainly did not have the formality that Julian and I went through during my tour. . . .

When you finished the article with "Well done, dear friend," I realized you had paid him the highest tribute possible. As a retired Naval Captain, I will always recall that the highest accolade a commanding officer can give to Naval personnel for outstanding duty is to tell them that the job was "well done."

*John M. Imel, '54 B.S., '59 L.L.D.  
Tulsa, Oklahoma*

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** "Mickey" Imel was a regent from 1981-1988, Julian Rothbaum from 1959-1966 and 1979-1986.

## Cross in the Classroom

Your recent remembrance of Dr. George Cross brings back memories to me, as it must to many other former students. In the summer of 1939 (?), I enrolled in a two-hour botany course, taught by Dr. Cross. This was, as I recall, taught at 7 in the morning, before the blazing Oklahoma sun could convert the non-air-conditioned classroom into a cauldron. This was a little optional course for a self-supporting student trying desperately to get 124 hours in toward a degree before running out of money and spirit.

This "fill-in" course turned out to be

one of the most significant courses in the building blocks of my education. Certainly I absorbed more factual information than was common in a two-hour introductory course. More importantly, I was inspired by this quiet instructor, who knew how to plant basic questions in a person's mind that would guide the quests of a lifetime. Of course, we learned something about football in South Dakota—but in the context of the game of life.

Shortly afterwards, I was inducted into the 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and spent the next five years on three continents with that valiant organization. However, in September 1945, when I returned to the University seeking re-admission, it was gratifying to learn that my old professor, George Cross, now headed the institution.

*Kenneth D. Williamson  
'47 B.S., '48 M.S.  
St. Albans, West Virginia*

## Presidential Courtesies

Your most recent cover story about the passing and legacy of Dr. George L. Cross touched me deeply, and this letter will surely be one of many responses. As you have stated in your article, Dr. Cross received every imaginable honor the University could bestow, but my letter intends to add to the personal, warm, caring side of Dr. Cross. The picture of Dr. Cross in front of the Paul Moore statue shows a vital person of 91 years, and since my name is Paul Moore, I would like to share the stories of two other Paul Moores.

Paul Cory Moore, my father, came to Oklahoma as a boy of 10 in the year 1902, five years before Oklahoma statehood. Although he did not have the advantages of a formal education, his eight years of formal training must have been very good ones because his life was exemplary in many ways. . . .

Paul A. Moore, the only child of Paul C. and Hazel Moore, was born in 1931, graduated from Tonkawa High School in 1949 and attended Northern Oklahoma College in 1949-50. I had planned to come to the University of Oklahoma after two years, but my father informed himself about the ROTC program at the

University, and after some discussion, we decided to look into that program after just one year at Northern.

Unknown to me, my father made an appointment for us to review the ROTC and other academic programs there in Norman, and since he did not know the director of that program or any others, he called an made an appointment with . . . you guessed it, Dr. Cross. This was in no way a brash movement on the part of my father, and it is my feeling that he just wanted the best for me. We all would hope that there are still many in presidential positions who would accord the same treatment to those who would seek such an audience.

We had our appointment with Dr. Cross, and it was memorable. He welcomed us with all the grace and understanding one could imagine. He asked me what I thought I wanted to do for the next many years, and he counseled me to pursue the goals I had to be a college piano teacher. I enrolled at OU in the fall of 1950, pursuing the bachelor of music degree in piano. I became the pianist for the University choir under Chester Francis, accompanied in the voice studios of Dame Eva Turner and Professor Joseph Benton and had the good fortune of being a student of the beloved Lytle Powell. After graduating in 1954, I entered the Army as a 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant (because of the ROTC program), and then served in Europe from 1955-56. After returning to civilian life, I entered the University of Michigan for graduate study and received a master of music degree in piano. . . . Since 1960 I have been on the faculty of Emporia State University, and this is my third year of phased retirement from the University . . .

The advice given by Dr. Cross was truly appreciated because I have been able to be a performing musician and teacher for my entire career. . . .

Your article has prompted many fond memories. My wife and I hope to attend an organ recital on the Mildred Andrews Boggess organ next fall. The list of remembered faculty goes on and on.

*Paul A. Moore, '54 B.Mus.  
Emporia, Kansas*

**FROM THE EDITOR:** *In the year since the death of OU's revered sports information director emeritus Harold Keith, readers have offered remembrances verbally and in writing and sent columns from other publications paying homage to this fine man. Three examples are reprinted below for his many friends.*

## An OU Legend

Harold Keith: great Sooner and a fine Norman citizen.

Harold Keith came to Norman about 1928 to run some foot races for the teachers' college up at Alva. He came back in a year or so to get a degree in history and star on the OU track team, and he was an important part of the Norman community until he died February 24, 1998, a couple of months short of his 95<sup>th</sup> birthday.

He did stray briefly after graduation. He was a reporter in Hutchinson, Kansas, where he met a talented artist named Virginia Livingston. They were married in 1931 and were one of the town's most popular couples until her death in 1991.

Keith returned to Norman when Coach Bennie Owen wanted him to take on a new-fangled sports publicity job. It was a position made for Mr. Keith with his photographic memory, his literary ability and his passion for sports.

He was the best in the world at it, and he could probably have had any college sports information job in the country, but he remained faithful to OU.

He found time—usually between football seasons—to sell fiction and articles to top national magazines. His Sooner football books, *Oklahoma Kickoff* and *Forty-seven Straight*, are treasured by Oklahomans everywhere.

His novels began receiving serious national attention with the publication of *Rifles for Watie*, winner of the coveted Newbery award for fiction for children in 1957. That didn't change anything.

In spite of his difficult job, his writing and extensive research the writing demanded, he would find time to appear

with his barbershop quartet at your club meeting. He was always there to usher at St. John's Episcopal Church. He would discuss his writing techniques for your would-be writers' club or present a history lesson that your third-grade home room students could understand.

He was at every OU sporting event until very recently. Molly Griffis, his local publisher, says as late as three days before his death he enjoyed OU's basketball victory as seen on his hospital TV screen.

Keith stopped running only when he got a leg fracture at the age of 91. He had sold his house next to the OU track field when traffic in the area got too heavy and bought one in the early days of Hall Park when there was plenty of open space for running.

He set national records for distance runners in the older age groups, and he never lost his famous sense of humor.

"I can run the mile in Monday morning flat," he quipped along toward the end of his running career.

Harold Keith's presence and his sense of humor will be missed by many.

*Ed Montgomery  
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The Norman Transcript  
Norman, Oklahoma*

## A Harold Keith Story

The time was a couple of games after Bud Wilkinson became head football coach. I was in my OU studio/editing room editing the day's football film that we'd just shot. Harold Keith came through the door located behind me, and he said: "I have an idea how we can serve TV stations across the country and get the words and pictures out about our players, so every one will know about them and they'll be picked 'All Americans.' You know, Ned, really use TV.

"If I pick out the plays and give you the quarter, the number and description of those plays, can you pick out those plays—say no more than six or seven—reproduce them and put them all on one small reel? We'll need 100 or more of those small reels. Is that number OK? Johnny (Johnny Shannon of WKY-TV) said he'd make

the prints after he had processed the complete game film.

"Now, we'll have to work all Saturday night—pick them up from Johnny's lab, get them back down here, put them in a packet with a script, address all 100 reels and have them in the mail before noon Sunday. Some TV stations will have Oklahoma football for Sunday night's broadcast and for sure all stations will have Oklahoma football for their Monday's late afternoon sports broadcast and their 10 p.m. sports broadcast. What do you think? We can do it, can't we?"

My answer was, "Sure we can do it! That's a great idea, Harold!" So it went all through the Wilkinson time on up to Coach Gibbs. After that everything changed to video, and now such an operation is done with TV electronics. But the point is: Harold Keith did it first!

OU began to get great reactions from television sports broadcasters across the nation. Harold was real proud that "his athletes" were getting great attention. True "his athletes" were great on their own, but his work got them attention and made their names known across the world.

*C. Ned Hockman, '49 B.S.  
Norman, Oklahoma*

## Eight Was Not Enough

Harold Keith walked into my office and my life eight years ago and slipped out of both my life and his tattered old cover of a body on the evening of February 24, 1998. While he was ready to finish his final race, I was not quite ready for that last starting gun to be fired.

I had met Mr. Keith in the '60s and '70s when I took books to his home for him to autograph for my two children. He was a good friend of our dear friends "Red" Reid and Port Robertson, who were both associated with the athletic department at the University of Oklahoma during Mr. Keith's tenure as sports information director, so we were with him and his wife Vi from time to time socially.

I was starting the third year of my publishing house, which operated out of my Pendleton blanket store in Norman, when Red suggested that I approach

Mr. Keith about reprinting some of his children's books, most of which were out of print. "I'll soften him up for you," Red promised.

In retrospect, I realize that Mr. Keith needed more than a bit of "softening up" as his impressions of me as a publisher were that I was a girl, quite young, and had no idea what I was doing.

He was right on all counts. I was a female in the male dominated world of publishing. I was 50 and he was 85; young depends on the quarter you are playing in. I had published eight books winging my way along on chutzpah and "blatant exhibitionism," as my husband once told a reporter covering the "gala" release of one of my books.

Harold Keith was number one in knowing how to generate publicity, how to draw a crowd, how to get lots of ink, but an exhibitionist he was not, blatant or otherwise.

It took him a while to get used to me.

When I visited him that last time in the hospital, I looked at that frail little body huddled in that big white bed and said, "Mr. Keith, are you warm enough? I started to bring you a Pendleton. They are mighty warm."

"You never quit, do you?" he grinned.

We fit, he and I. We just fit.

And we had almost eight fine years together.

But to paraphrase the title of an old TV sitcom, eight was not enough.

*Molly Levite Griffis, '60 B.A.  
Norman, Oklahoma*

## A Labor of Love

Arrival of every issue of *Sooner Magazine* is a day of fascination and excitement at our home, although the latest one delivers the message of Dr. Cross' death, an event of sorrow for so many.

One other item in the Winter 1999 issue was of great interest to me for the following reason: On its page 29 ("Treasures from the Archives: Fredrik Holmberg Departs") is published a letter dated January 5, 1938, to Mrs. Fredrik Holmberg, from the University's president, W. B. Bizzell, concerning the bronze plaque to be

made, designating the Fine Arts Building as Holmberg Hall. As is obvious in other published letters, neither the University nor anybody else had readily available money for plaques in 1938, but the plaque was made.

In 1938 my father, Bennie Shultz (1896-1963), Class of '18, was in charge of the University's power plant and its associated shops. Part of the shops complex was a small foundry for casting metal parts to keep the power plant running. (Even in 1938, keeping the electricity generators generating, the water pumps pumping and the steam heat system heating all winter long were important activities of the University.) In the foundry, my father melted enough bronze to cast the two plaques, fearing that at least one would be defective. Both looked fine to me (I was six years old), but my father wasn't satisfied with either of them. One evening I watched him spend hours with a bright light, hammer and small chisel perfecting the shapes of the letters on the better one of the two plaques.

Prior to its dedication, the plaque was photographed in sunlight on the front steps of the 1938 Shultz home at 719 Monnett Avenue (in Norman). Find the photograph enclosed. I hereby offer it to the University for permanent retention, either in the personnel file of Dean Fredrik Holmberg or in the Western History Collection. Enclosed snapshot is, to the best of my knowledge, the only copy in existence. If the University accepts it, please mail to me the location, index number, etc., so that I can come look at it again sometime.

*Bennie Shultz Jr., '53 B.S., '56 M.S.  
Huntsville, Alabama*

## Brightening the Spirits

I have enjoyed the (Fall 1998) issue of the *Sooner Magazine* with a great deal of satisfaction both intellectually and visually. The contents of this wonderful magazine continue to brighten my spirits each time that it arrives. It is a moment of refreshing history and current knowledge that is produced in a very agreeable and lovely manner.

I thank you and your staff for the outstanding work of the recent Fall

issue, which I finally had time to read over the holidays.

Please continue to reach for even higher standards in the future issues. We will all look forward to enjoying each one as it comes.

*Denver J. Klaassen  
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma*

## Oops!

One minor correction to an otherwise fine magazine. In the Winter 1999 issue, in the article "The Price of Excellence," it states that Mr. Price is from Roslyn, New Jersey. In fact, Roslyn is in New York and is currently my home, as it has been for the last 35 years. So Mr. Price and I share some commonality. Thanks again.

*Burton Stern, '52 B.S.  
Roslyn, New York*

## The Boggess Organ

The Winter copy of the magazine is a true work of art! Each article and picture is a treasure for all of us who cherish our days at the University. . . . I have a very special interest in the Catlett Center because Mildred Andrews Boggess was my beloved friend and teacher. . . . And I should mention that the segments from the Archives have been inspiring and informative.

*Mary Ruth McCulley  
'50M.Mus.ed, '52 B.Mus.  
Amarillo, Texas*

## Fall Schedule Pending

The article "The Halls of Music" in your winter publication was most impressive. We are eager to hear an organ recital in this majestic hall. Where can I write to obtain a schedule of organ recitals? We are in Oklahoma several times a year and definitely will plan a stop in Norman.

*Beverly T. Harrell  
Palestine, Texas*

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** An ongoing series of dedicatory events for the Mildred Andrews Boggess Organ is being planned for fall 1999 through spring 2000. To receive mailings concerning these performances, send name and address to Dr. Clark Kelly, OU School of Music, 500 West Boyd Street, Norman, OK 73019.