



# LETTERS

## Remembering Marcus

On several occasions, I had the opportunity to write for *Sooner Magazine* about the Cortez A.M. Ewing Foundation, a scholarship program set up in 1971, enabling students such as myself the opportunity to participate in a 10-week summer internship in Washington, D.C. The fellowship was originally established by Marcus Cohn, a prominent Washington attorney, to honor the late Political Science Professor Ewing, who had a profound effect on students, among whom were Cohn himself and the Honorable Carl Albert, former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. Both men are recently deceased.

I, like many students, benefited greatly from this program, without which I would *definitely* not have been able to afford a trip to Washington in 1985. And because of the Ewing Foundation, a knowledge and respect for public service was gained, and doors were opened that might not have been otherwise.

I had the great pleasure of knowing Marcus Cohn on a personal level. Indeed, he was a living tribute to Professor Ewing. Marcus never mentioned Ewing's name without getting all teary-eyed (the only other person he spoke about with such passion was his wife of 55 years). In establishing the scholarship, he hoped that recipients would be exposed to new ideas, "not to reject new ideas because they were new, but to think about them." He believed that all ideas in turn should be questioned (questioning was one of Ewing's greatest attributes, too), which ultimately forced one to think. And he believed in the political process and thought that everyone should understand, not only how it works, but that it does work, with "great nobility."

Marcus grew up in Tulsa in humble surroundings. He never revealed much about his background, but he did say that Ewing recognized talent, and at some point while he was at OU, the professor put him on a train headed for the University of Chicago. In 1938, Marcus graduated *cum laude* from Chicago's law school. And in 1940, he went on to receive a

master's degree from Harvard's law school. Finally, he ended up in Washington with his own law firm, becoming one of the top communications lawyers of his time.

Marcus' achievements were numerous. He was involved with landmark communications cases, and he was a staunch supporter of the arts and humanities. He was chairman of American University's Institute for Learning in Retirement, a big believer in helping the elderly to continue to think.

Marcus was a true intellect in every sense of the word. But he was also human and could relate to those of us who weren't quite on his intellectual level. True, he might poignantly throw you a good question about anarchy (he loved the subject of anarchism). But he was really just interested in what you thought.

I remember one time in particular during the Ewing luncheon in 1985, when he went around that big intimidating conference room table and asked what single impression Washington had on us, after having been there only a month. It seemed like everyone had a notable answer. Mine had something to do with the rush of adrenaline that came from jogging down the mall and around the Potomac basin. Marcus knew I was "green," but he made me feel that my answer was every bit as good as the guy next to me.

Recently, I came across a stack of letters from Marcus. All were thought provoking, full of wit and character, and written with such zest for life. In one of them, I'd obviously asked for his advice concerning my professional career. What he wrote to me, I shall never forget: "Continue being a charming person, who never loses sense of formalities, but, at the same time, is able to innovate and explore."

Sadly, *The Washington Post's* obituary barely mentioned the University of Oklahoma. And sadder still, it didn't even touch on the Cortez A.M. Ewing scholarship. I speak for many former interns, not just in remembering the program, but also honoring Marcus Cohn. To so many young men and women, he was an inspiration and a mentor. To me, he was also a good friend. We shall all miss him.

*Lynn Grigsby Frieda, '86 ba journ  
Singapore*

## Tribute to the Sharps

Carol Burr's "Prologue" on Paul and Rose Sharp (Winter 2001) was informative, appreciative and well deserved. The legacy of the Sharps transcends the calming, forward-looking, confident environment which they instituted and fostered at the University. Although their accomplishments are substantial, the most important contributions of the Sharps is their instilling of a love of life-long learning in students which will live on through the descendants of those students. All of us who learned from the Sharps are in their debt forever.

*Graydon Dean Luthey Jr.  
'76 ba letters, '79 jd*

## "Coach" Thrailkill Retires

It is difficult to think of the Pride of Oklahoma without Gene Thrailkill at the helm. For so many of us, he IS the Pride of Oklahoma.

My first encounter with Coach came while playing for a small scholarship during my senior year of high school. I could barely muster enough spit to wet my mouthpiece. Later that fall as a freshman in the Pride, I remember Coach calling my name over the PA system from the practice field tower. It was like hearing the voice of God. He's always had that kind of impact and presence.

The next fall as a gangly sophomore from Watonga, Coach took a chance on me, and I was chosen to serve as drum major of the Pride. Like so many others before me and to follow, Coach gave me my first real shot at leadership. That vote of confidence has served me well beyond my years in the Pride.

In the end, my Pride years were replete with achievements and memories—three years as drum major, three Orange Bowls, one national championship, and one Sudler Trophy. Yet none of those experiences compared to the self-confidence I developed, the life-long friendships I forged, and the PRIDE I developed for OUR University and OUR band.

I am extremely thankful the University of Oklahoma had the wisdom and insight to hire Gene Thrailkill 30 years ago. More importantly, I am thankful for my association with Coach and for the opportunity to have been a part of

a tradition that makes OU a unique and special place.

You're the greatest, Coach, and you've given much more than you have ever asked for in return. You epitomize the core values of teaching and public service that are so vital to a public university.

March on.

*Dondi Cupp, '90 ba journ  
Seattle, Washington*

## A Deep, Dark Mystery

My family and I were glancing through my grandfather's University of Oklahoma yearbook (Class of 1918—Sergio Esmilla—he was one of two students from the Philippines), and my brother came across a disturbing "club" photo. The group of unidentified students under the heading of "D.D.M.C." was wearing white pointed hoods. It was a shock to all of us to see the group featured in the student yearbook, but I surmise it was a reflection of the times.

Would anyone there know the significance of "D.D.M.C."? I am just curious. Also, I was interested in finding out what "Athenian" would mean. This word was listed under my grandfather's photo.

We are all proud of our grandfather for having been a law school graduate of the University of Oklahoma and will continue to laud the open-mindedness of this school. To have been a "brown Philippine Islander" studying in the South must have been, in many ways, a daunting experience for my grandfather, but all the stories I've heard paint his years there as ones he would cherish.

My grandfather went on to become a judge in the Philippines. He also managed to raise eight children. Of the grandchildren, alas, none of us made it to his alma mater. The closest we came to that was my education at Trinity University in San Antonio and my brother's at UT-Austin.

*Bernadette Esmilla Hilario  
Santa Barbara, CA*

*EDITOR'S NOTE: I can imagine what you must have thought seeing a group of hooded students in that early-day yearbook, but the nature of the D.D.M.C. does not appear to have been as sinister as it might seem.*

*The initials stood for Deep Dark Mystery Club, formed in 1907 by a group of prominent men students to wake up school spirits.*

*Actually their purpose was to amuse themselves by pulling pranks and engaging in what later would be called "hazing" of students who did not show proper respect toward Sooner traditions. They kept their membership secret, but it was well known that virtually all the top men students belonged. The black mask or hood (later reported to be red) was their symbol. They met at the stroke of midnight in a designated grove of trees to plan their next prank, hoping that each would be more outrageous than its predecessor. Ads in the yearbook—which may be what you saw—pictured the hooded group administering "discipline" to an offender and offered a free yearbook to anyone identifying all the secret members.*

*Once they dug up the '06 Rock (a huge boulder installed on the Commons as a gift from the Class of 1906) and buried it in a grave. They broke into the student newspaper print shop, held the staff and print crew at bay and stamped their symbol on each issue of that day's newspaper. In 1914 they emblazoned "DDMC '14" high on the heating plant smokestack*

*A softening happens, the group's pranks got out of hand, evoking unfavorable publicity and even litigation. The organization was disbanded in the 1920s.*

*The "Athenaeon Literary Society" was one of several early organizations with outlandish classical names.*

## Faerie Queene Lane

While I am thrilled by the success of Sooner athletics, and yes, I confess I sent three kids to OU with cars, I am saddened to learn that Faerie Queene Lane, Miss Wurtzbaugh's street, will be bulldozed into a parking lot. Miss Jewel Wurtzbaugh (we never called her Dr. Wurtzbaugh) was my teacher for freshman honors English in the fall of 1964. The first day of class this little old lady in a hat came into the room and made us vacate the first three rows. She said that she had one lung and a bad liver, she wanted to live a lot longer, and she did not want us breathing our germs on her. I thought this was terrifically funny and included a description of her in my first letter home. I promptly received an injunction from my mother to behave myself and not make fun of Miss Wurtzbaugh because she was an important person on campus and, furthermore, had been one

of my mother's teachers. This, of course, only confirmed my impression that Miss Wurtzbaugh was as old as Methuselah. My mother, a 1941 graduate, later admitted that she had thought the same thing when she was a student.

Miss Wurtzbaugh always dressed warmly. I stayed for summer school later and saw her walking across campus on the hottest days in a hat and heavy wool black overcoat. She carried a long black umbrella, which she used as a cane. Despite her concern about germs, Miss Wurtzbaugh taught my class from the third row much of the time. I remember her as being kindly and benevolent, if somewhat erratic, in class.

However, she was feared on campus. It was said that if you rode too close to her on a bicycle she would stick her umbrella between the spokes. I never saw this occur. I never knew anyone who had actually seen this occur themselves. As the story was told, it was always, "I know someone who knows someone who knows someone who really saw it." Nevertheless, the myth persisted. Two of my children went to England on a university study tour in the summer of 1998. One of the participants, an OU graduate of my era, began to tell about this really eccentric teacher she had had. My children knew immediately whom she was talking about. "Wait," they said. "Did she have an umbrella?"

So I have to face the fact that I too have helped perpetuate the myth. I doubt that Miss Wurtzbaugh would much mind being remembered for her eccentricities. I think she would mind having the street paved over and forgotten. She named Faerie Queene Lane to honor Edmund Spenser, on whom she was an authority. These days it seems everything on campus is being named to honor some donor. She did not name a street after herself, but in honoring Spenser she left a tangible memorial to her life's work. Now that memorial will be gone. I hope the university will consider some other visible remembrance, a monument, fountain, or something, to honor her by continuing to honor Edmund Spenser. Otherwise we will lose an important part of our legacy.

*Elaina Heath Ellis, '68 bs home ec  
Grand Rapids, Michigan*