



# prologue.

## Charlie Long was a Sooner.

Time and distance had nothing to do with it.

Charles Franklin Long died April 14 in Wheaton, Illinois, but he was born and reared in Norman, Oklahoma. His dad was even mayor for a time. Charlie was one of those fellows whom the other fellows always wanted to be. Tall, dark-haired, good looking. An outstanding athlete at Norman High School, member of the 1955 state champion basketball team as a junior. He was also likable, charming and witty—an all-round good guy.

He went to the University of Oklahoma to become a sportswriter, detoured a bit from that goal but came out a journalist. He worked briefly on the *San Angelo* (Texas) *Standard-Times* and then *The Norman Transcript* before returning to OU in 1963 as associate editor of *Sooner Magazine* (which at that time was the alumni publication) and was sort of a special projects man for the executive director of the Alumni Association, R. Boyd Gunning.

One of the projects Gunning assigned to Charlie was to write an 80-page *Sooner Magazine* history of the University to commemorate its 75th anniversary. It was a daunting task and one that he did so well that it became the vehicle that soon would take him on to bigger and better things.

A historian given Charlie's assignment would have spent years delving into primary sources, writing and re-writing. Charlie was a journalist, and he had an eight-month deadline. Focusing on the people who created this institution on the prairie, he poured over back issues of *Sooner Magazine* from 1928 forward, OU yearbooks, archives in the Western History Collections, *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Harold Keith's *Oklahoma Kickoff*, Roy Gittinger's *The University of Oklahoma, 1892-1942*,

President George L. Cross's scrapbooks and Alumni Association microfilm. He taped interviews with a dozen early-day OU personalities. On a research trip to California, he became so fascinated with Joseph A. Brandt and collected so much material that he later wrote a book-sized manuscript on the controversial former OU president.

Charlie was long gone to Illinois when OU's 90th anniversary came along, but he contributed nonetheless. The University of Oklahoma Foundation Inc., publisher of *Sooner Magazine* since 1980, commissioned another writer, Carolyn Hart, to shake the dust off Charlie's history and add on the subsequent 15 years to create *The Sooner Story*, now out of print but still an institutional reference.

Publishers of *The Quill*, a national magazine for journalists based in Chicago, discovered Charlie in 1967. He packed up his family—wife Joan, his college sweetheart to whom he would be married for 46 years, and sons Chuck and David, and moved to Wheaton. He spent four years as news editor and nine as editor of *The Quill*, writing and speaking on professional topics throughout the country and serving as a magazine consultant. He later was head of the communications division at Bearrice Foods in Chicago, then director of corporate communications for Tellabs Inc. in Lisle, Illinois, retiring in 2000. He was inducted into the Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame in 1979.

A lifelong Methodist from his McFarlin Church days in Norman, Charlie was active in Gary United Methodist Church of Wheaton and involved with the restoration of the Wheaton Grand Theater. He served on the City of Wheaton Arts Commission and the board of Outreach Community

Ministries. His passion, however, was to coach and support his sons and their families.

The Longs' youngest son, Andy, was born with cerebral palsy. Charlie dealt with Andy's disability as he addressed other facets of his life; he jumped right in. He worked tirelessly on the board of directors of the Western DuPage Special Recreation Association and was honored with its Hall of Fame award for many years of service.

Although Charlie always had kept close ties with Norman, it was his son Chuck and his family who brought him back with great frequency after his retirement. Chuck Long, now head coach at San Diego State, was runner-up for the 1985 Heisman Trophy as a passing quarterback at the University of Iowa and later in the NFL. He came to OU just in time for the 2000 national championship year as Bob Stoops' passing game coordinator and quarterbacks coach and then offensive coordinator.

For Charlie, these more frequent visits must have inspired the memoir of growing up in Norman that he began writing for his children and grandchildren. Researching one's past, touching base with old comrades, especially for a journalist, often takes on a life of its own. At the time of his death, at the age of 70, Charlie's memoirs were a book in progress.

His funeral in Wheaton was followed by a well-attended memorial service in his boyhood church, where the crowd was both town and gown. He had been gone from Norman and OU for more than 40 years, living in the same place in Illinois all that time. Yet in the end, Charlie's family—Joan, Chuck, David and Andy—brought him back home where he belonged.

—CJB