



postscript. The Students' Regent

Walter Neustadt Jr., scion of an Ardmore family distinguished for its service to the University of Oklahoma, died January 5 at his home in Dallas; he was 90. He had been an OU Regent, a University of Oklahoma Foundation trustee and chairman, a philanthropist of major proportion, the recipient of a basketful of honors and awards.

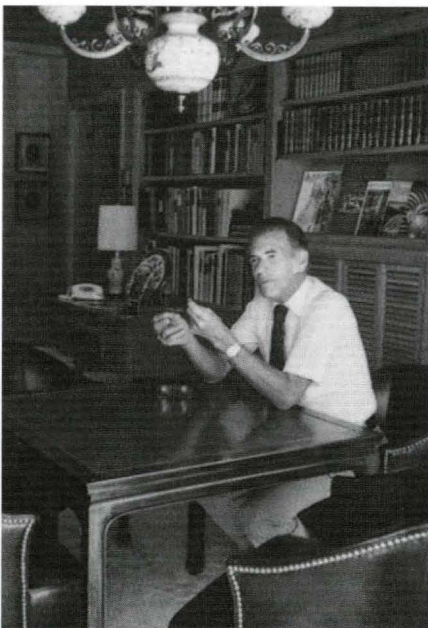
Yet given all that personal recognition, his ongoing connection to the University was defined by the facet of his character he could not escape: Walter Neustadt liked students. He found them interesting—even if their actions were sometimes infuriating—but full of promise and hope. When Governor Dewey Bartlett appointed him to a seven-year term on the University of Oklahoma's Board of Regents in the spring of 1969, Neustadt found himself with a whole campus full of these fascinating young people whose lives he was in a position to influence.

Those were stormy times at the nation's colleges and universities. The so-called "student unrest" was gathering steam; anti-Vietnam war demonstrations were common and disturbing. Extremist groups were establishing a presence on campuses, with some incidents of protest escalating into violence. While OU escaped the worst of these uprisings, its students were far from passive and seemed determined to test the tolerance of a more conservative public and the mettle of administrators and a governing board scrambling to keep up.

Neustadt walked in on the last year of the controversial J. Herbert Hollomon's two years as OU's president. Two years of Hollomon was enough for Governor Bartlett, who pressured the regents to fire this East Coast liberal. The board was not to be stampeded, however. By a close vote, the regents rejected the governor's interference, but Hollomon abruptly resigned at the next meeting. Enter the calming influence of President Paul F. Sharp, to whom Neustadt became a close

confident and supporter through the trying times ahead.

The regents in this period formed several three-person committees, and Neustadt's assignment was student affairs. OU had "a fledgling, reborn student government," as veteran administrator J.R. Morris recalls, and Neustadt concentrated much of his energy in understanding student behavior, enhancing student



Walter Neustadt Jr.

life and backing student leadership.

The students needed his support when their Speakers Bureau invited to campus the radical activist Angela Davis. A sizable portion of the public, including a few regents, wanted the invitation rescinded. Neustadt stood firm that the students should be allowed to bring whomever they wanted to hear. His stance on that and other issues caused the students to regard the regent from Ardmore as their friend.

In 1976, as his term drew to a close, the University of Oklahoma Student Association created the Walter Neustadt Award, to be given to an advocate for students, and named the honoree as its first recipient. A year later Neustadt received

the Distinguished Service Citation, at that time the University's highest honor, and in 2005 an honorary doctor of humane letters.

As Neustadt laid down his regental responsibilities, he turned his attention to the University of Oklahoma Foundation, where he had served as a trustee since 1965, beginning 10 years as chairman of the board, a period of unprecedented growth in private support to the institution. He retired as a trustee in 1996.

Neustadt came from a long line of philanthropists that first gave funds for Max Westheimer Field, the airport that eventually resulted in post-WWII land acquisitions ensuring OU's future development. He led his family to fund expansion of Bizzell Memorial Library with the Doris W. Neustadt Wing named for his mother and to endow OU's Neustadt Prize in International Literature, second only to the Nobel Prize in global importance.

While he enjoyed the prestige of the Neustadt Prize and its sponsoring publication, *World Literature Today*, in the world of letters, even there he insisted that there must be something in it for OU's students. He and his wife Dottie endowed a professorship for the *WLT* editor and encouraged its holder, R. C. Davis-Undiano, to develop an enhanced academic mission.

Neustadt must have felt that he had successfully passed the family's torch to his three daughters, Nancy Barcelo, Susan Neustadt Schwartz and Kathy Neustadt, when they established a companion NSK Neustadt Prize in Children's Literature, and then a *WLT* student scholarship fund in honor of their parents.

To the end, he retained his lively intelligence, gentle sense of humor, generosity of spirit, belief in the basic goodness of people and above all a keen interest in the students he had helped, taking particular joy in the stacks of thank-you notes they sent him.

Walter Neustadt was a class act.

—CJB