



# LETTERS

## Samson & Bryce: A Love Story

Re: "Top Dog on Campus," *Sooner Magazine*, Summer 2011.

Samson's new life-long companion and friend is Bryce, our 14-year-old son who attends Santa Fe High School in Edmond in a regular classroom setting. (He makes As and Bs.) His disability is cerebral palsy caused by his premature birth and that of his twin brother, Chance, who has no disabilities. Bryce's damaged motor skills confine him to a wheelchair. This prevents him from doing a lot of things, but it doesn't stop him from trying. God didn't give him the gift of walking but gave him the gift of life and the gift of making people smile. Bryce has never met a stranger. He knows everyone, and most people know him.

Before the match was made, Bryce was interviewed by five knowledgeable [representatives of Therapeutic Service Dogs of Oklahoma and OU-Tulsa's College of Allied Health]—one being Mary Issacson. Samson and Bryce met June 2011 and spent two to three days a week of their summer vacation going to school together, learning about each other, one giving commands and the other obeying them. This was hard work that they still practice every day—and it is paying off.

When asked, Samson can retrieve just about anything, from picking up the phone to picking up laundry and putting it in a basket. He even puts the laundry in the front-load washing machine, opens and closes doors and drawers, and picks up pencils and pens—anything Bryce needs.

Bryce is a typical teenager and still has to be reminded to do certain things. It is a full-time responsibility to take care of his dog, including feeding, walking and toileting—just like any other boy with a dog. But he also has to remember all the commands, to give appropriate praise and to treat Samson like an assistant instead of a pet when the dog is on duty. Integrating into school life is an ongoing process. Staff and students don't always understand how different Samson is from a regular pet.

Adding Samson to our family has been fun and challenging. We have other dogs, and when Samson is off duty, he is much like the others, playing and running. But in other ways, he is more like one of the kids, completing tasks he is asked to do and looking for praise and reinforcement.

Having Samson has enabled Bryce to be more independent. He doesn't need someone to hand him things out of reach. Now he is able to be dropped off at the curb at school—like any other kid—without his mother having to walk him in every day. He has been able to reduce his need for an aide at school.



Samson and Bryce go to school.

We hope that by the time he gets to college, he won't need an aide anymore. Soon he even will be able to go to the mall, like any other kid—without his parents.

Having Samson in our lives is just a godsend, and it's like he has always been with us; we didn't have to get used to him or him to us, it's been just great. One thing is that Bryce feels like he can stay home by himself for a little while, while I run an errand or two. He just asks Samson to get the things he might need.

Having Samson has made Bryce be accountable for the things he has to do for Samson and himself. Watching Samson and Bryce together is like my favorite flowers starting out from seeds, adding some prayer and miracles and lots of love and care, and soon they grow and become a beautiful reflection.

We are very thankful to Mary Issacson at OU-Tulsa and Therapeutics Service Dogs of Oklahoma for giving us this gift. You all are changing the lives of so many people—giving them hope and courage to be able to do things on their own.

Ashley Wooten  
Edmond, Oklahoma

## Something for Everyone

I just received my copy of *Sooner Magazine* this morning, and I just wanted you to know that I think it is the most amazing issue. You always find a way to capture all kinds of things about OU, history, people, interesting human interest stories and events that put OU on the map. I share my *Sooner Magazines* by placing them in our foyer for others to read and enjoy. The front cover is always eye-catching and intriguing, and the final product is always amazingly professional in the grandest tradition of journalism and publication.

But there was something about this one: the cute little dog getting a degree and the play on "dogness" (and doggedness!) all the way through the article, the majesty of the new Gould Hall building, the commitment to save McCasland Field House, and all the rest. I almost forgot to mention that I thought the piece on the young Muslim man who became a country-western singer was amazing. So many of the folks over here are committed to seeing Muslims as people, as Oklahomans, not people defined by certain fundamentalist reactions. After all these years since 9/11, you managed to sum up in a single article a reality that people are increasingly coming to understand, if not embrace.

I particularly appreciated that your piece on athletics represented all of them, not just football and basketball. It is so

nice to hold a lovely, glossy magazine in my hand and actually read, not stare into a computer screen, but there are at least a couple of articles I plan to look up online at the Foundation website to send to my brother and sister.

This is a tough time of year. The servers go down because the new technology is eating up space and creating delays and extra work, less efficiency, in our attempts to serve students, not just because students are on it constantly; faculty members are begging for better classrooms and find they can't use their laptops and their summer efforts to produce stimulating visual material has gone for naught; and all my friends in Dale Hall Tower are down at the Jimmie Austin golf course while DAHT is undergoing construction, so I can't pop in and vent and find that others share the frustration, and I am not alone. We all strive to serve our students, and to that end serve our faculty, but the obstacles increase year after year.

But when I read my *Sooner Magazine*, I really get a reminder of all that is good, incredible, and awesome about OU and its people and reminds me of why I fell in love with the place so long ago. Keep up the good work.

*Lee Green-Hall  
Assistant to the Director  
Religious Studies Program  
University of Oklahoma*

### Teams in the Field House Pool

As proud Sooners and graduates in the class of '62, my wife Teresa and I shared more than our classes together while attending OU. We both used the pool annexed to the Field House. Teresa [Kalman Brown, '62 ed] was a member of the "Duck" Club, and I swam for the varsity swim team. But, alas, no mention of our swim team was noted on page 32. ["Postscript: The Historic Field House," Summer 2011]

We as a swim team produced a couple dozen Division 1 All Americans, including World and National record holders and Olympic gold medalists. We were coached for many years by Matt Mann, USA's Olympic swim coach in 1952!

In my last year we hosted the Big Eight championships and accumulated more points than all the other schools combined. We were usually in the top ten of colleges competing in the NCAA championships. A fellow swimmer just reminded me that it was the swim team which "was the only school sports team to win the Conference Championships" at OU in one year during the early '60s; and, as a result, while all other sophomore lettermen during that year were awarded a red sweater with the white "O," the swimmers proudly wore the white sweater with the red "O"!

Keep up doing your great job producing your great magazine—wish we could be there for a game!

*Douglas Bollman Brown, '62 english  
Naples, Florida*

### Field House Full of Memories

Just a short note about the best *Sooner Magazine* that I can remember. This summer edition topped them all in my opinion. The story about the old Field House brought back so many memories. My uncle, Harold Keith, had his office in the Field House for as long as I can remember. My late wife, Jorene, worked for the PE department that was housed in the Field House. She worked there until I graduated in 1951. Harold taught me to swim in the pool at the back. What wonderful memories.

I loved "The Top Dog on Campus" as my companion now is a smart Lab. My daughter-in-law, Debra, is a graduate of the PA school and practices in Nowata, Oklahoma. What a great story about PA student, Katrin Green.

What great work you are doing.

*Jim Keith, '51 bs ed.  
Oologah, Oklahoma*

### Don't Forget the Swim Teams

I enjoy each issue. The article on the work being done on McCasland Field House brought back many memories. While a student from January 1949 to January 1953, I was fortunate to see many exciting basketball games and wrestling matches. While the slide out seats weren't the most comfortable, the

atmosphere was electric.

As an aside, the swimming pool was also the home of the Varsity Swimming Team. This was the beginning of an era of domination by OU in the Big 7 Conference. The pool was also used for Intramural Swimming events.

Thanks for the memories.

*Richard Roberts, '53 bba  
Richardson, Texas*

### Friend, Confidant—and Hero

Thank you for the excellent "Prologue" in the Summer 2011 *Sooner Magazine*. The University of Oklahoma is a better place because of the things Melvin B. Tolson Jr. did. You were absolutely correct to point out that he was a superb teacher and an outstanding mentor and role model for countless students, faculty and staff. But he was much more than that to me. Melvin B., as I frequently referred to him, was my friend, colleague, confidant, and hero. When I told him those things, which was often, his response was predictable.

"I will settle for just being your friend, colleague and confidant," he would say, embarrassed by me using the adjective "hero" to describe him.

His excellence as a teacher is well known, but his civil rights accomplishments generally are not. A few of his contributions are mentioned in your "Prologue;" others are vividly described in my book, *Race and the University: A Memoir*. However, most of his civil rights activities are recounted orally in stories told by former OU students who also knew him in the 1960s, '70s and '80s, when the civil rights movement was flourishing at OU and throughout the United States.

Melvin's life was like a service of selflessness that I am proud to have been a part of. Our surnames (Henderson-Tolson) are not only etched on an OU campus building. They are forever etched in my heart. Even so, I miss seeing my hero.

*George Henderson  
Professor Emeritus  
University of Oklahoma  
Norman, Oklahoma*