



# prologue.

## One Last Look

The temptation is great to use this, my last “Prologue” before retirement after 39 years, to expound on the issue that concerns me most for the future of higher education, especially in Oklahoma: the alarming rise in college costs causing crushing student debt, in many cases resulting in an inability to go to college at all, and the seeming inability of the state to assume its fair share of the costs at supposedly state-supported institutions. But this is such a large, complicated, ongoing issue, and with only one page available, I decided to use this space to tell a story I have long wanted to tell.

The central character in my story is a young Kansan named Charlie Robinson, 20 years old and four years out of high school, who, at the urging of his former wrestling coach, decided to attend the University of Oklahoma—in the early '30s at the depth of the Great Depression. Armed with a small freshman athletic scholarship, an equally small loan from a relative and a night job washing dishes at the Interurban cafe, Charlie gave it all he had, but it just wasn't enough.

After a year at OU, he married the girl back home, opened a Texaco filling station that subsequently failed, repaid all his debts, fathered two children, moved to Oklahoma and built a good life—but he never forgot the task he had left unfinished in Norman. His children, he determined, would have the opportunity to go to OU as the kind of student he had wanted to be. It took an occasional bank loan to make it happen, but they collected three degrees between them; his grandchildren earned five more; his eldest great-grandchild will add another one this spring, with two others of that generation waiting in the wings.

Charlie was my father. I'm sure that neither he nor my mother ever imagined that

I would buy into his dream so completely that I would spend my entire professional career selling it to others through *Sooner Magazine*. I'm also sure that they approved, just as they did when another transplanted Kansan joined our family with a personal dedication to the University that was even more sharply defined.

My husband, David Burr, also started his 37-year career at OU as editor of *Sooner Magazine*, but there the common thread is broken. By the time of his death in 1986, he had served as a senior administrator under five different presidents and three interims, and held three different vice presidencies. OU had become for us the family business.

*Sooner Magazine* was established in 1928 as a traditional magazine of an independent alumni association, complete with class notes, club news and news items. The publication fell victim to falling interest in supporting higher education during the turbulent civil unrest of the '70s as the alumni association went bankrupt.

It was Executive Director R. Boyd Gunning's idea to bring the magazine back under the auspices of the University of Oklahoma Foundation. His successor, Ron D. Burton, made it happen by bringing me back in 1980 from an at-home “sabbatical,” first to edit *The Sooner Story* and a year later a quarterly publication primarily for private donors and members of a revived alumni association. *Sooner Magazine's* mission was not to ask for money (leaving that task to others) but to keep our readers informed and committed to the University through features about its people and projects.

The Foundation's current chief executive, Guy L. Patton, has been equally committed to this goal, and there never has been a shortage of material with which to accomplish it. Faculty, staff, students and alumni—even OU presi-

dents—have welcomed us into their lives and allowed us to tell their stories. Readers have responded with their comments—and yes, their criticisms.

The magazine's full-time staff has never been more than two, but the far-ranging freelance and volunteer talents who have signed on have been exceptional. George T. Dotson, a remarkable graphics artist who has read every word of every issue since 1981 before applying his own creativity to its pages, has designed them all. Lynette Lobban, who will be *Sooner Magazine's* new editor, was our top freelance writer before becoming assistant, then associate editor nine years ago—and another former freelancer, Anne Barajas Harp, will take over as assistant editor.

So many writers have contributed to the publication in nearly four decades, too many to name, but one stands out as our man in the sports world, Jay C. Upchurch. And the magazine's pages would have been oppressively gray without the excellence of our photographers, in the beginning Gil Jain and for a very long time, Robert Taylor.

It's unusual for commercial printers to assume the active interest in content and quality that we have experienced with the Transcript Press of Norman since the first issue. Its staff, especially the pressmen, read the magazine, welcome us into the back shop, let us hang around the press runs, catch errors and make suggestions to improve the product.

What a gift it has been to have a job that makes coming to work every day a pleasure—well, maybe some more than others—but every day has brought something different and unfailingly interesting. Someone once told me that you can love the University but don't expect it to love you back. I'm afraid that Charlie and David and I would have to disagree.

—Carol J. Burr