



# Postscript

## Inimitable Carol J. Burr

**H**ow does one honor the career of a lifelong journalist? If she were an All-American basketball player, we'd raise her jersey to the rafters of the Lloyd Noble Center. If she had won the Heisman Trophy, a statue in her likeness would be erected on Jenkins Ave. Carol J. Burr was neither, but she wrote about both and much more in her 39 years at the helm of *Sooner Magazine*. What Carol loved best was sharing the stories of others' accomplishments.

Carol Jean Robinson landed her first newspaper job at the *Blackwell-Journal-Tribune* when she was a teenager. She wrote obits, transcribed community correspondence and learned to read hot type upside down and backward—a skill she covertly applies to this day. As class valedictorian, she survived a tornado that destroyed her home the day before high school graduation. Longtime friend and fellow OU alumnus Bill Rodgers says Carol was a leader even then. "Carol was not only very bright, she was also fun to be with," says Rodgers. "People respected her."

Carol has said that she came to OU to finish a dream for her father, but she grabbed it with both hands. She pledged Alpha Gamma Delta, joined the Pride of Oklahoma marching band, and offered her services to the *Oklahoma Daily*. As editor of the *Daily* her senior year, she spent more time in Copeland Hall than she did in class and still graduated Phi Beta Kappa, as well as being named to the Letzeiser List, Mortar Board and many other honors. The summer after graduation, she was offered the job as editor of *Sooner Magazine*. A former editor, now in university administration, would oversee the 22-year-old until she found her stride. Her mentor's name was David Burr.

Throughout their courtship and early years of marriage, the Burrs had little money, but many friends. Cleo Cross, wife of President George Lynn Cross, would invite the newlyweds over for chili. Bridge games with colleagues lasted late into the night. Vegas had no sharper dealers than OU's own.

Eventually, the couple traded their convertible for a station wagon and Carol shifted gears into life as a stay-at-home mom to Michael, Kathleen and Thad. She whipped up deserts, made curtains for David's office and created costumes for school plays—sometimes the night before curtain call. One can imagine her pressing the seams of a Viking outfit with the same integrity that she applied to her writing.

Rose Sharp, first lady to OU President Paul Sharp, said that she counted on the vice presidents' wives when it came to entertaining during her husband's 1971-1977 tenure. "Whenever I asked for help, Carol would always say, 'I can.' She was always there; she was the efficient one."

More important, Sharp noted, was that Carol, who returned as editor of *Sooner Magazine* in 1980, always reported on OU in a positive way. "She had the greatest love for OU of anyone I knew. She always found these wonderful stories

for the magazine. It's hard to find someone who knows more people than Carol."

The *Sooner Magazine* editor was unflappable interviewing presidents, artists and professors, with one exception. "One time James Garner came to a reception at the president's house after a football game," says Rose Sharp. "Jim shook hands with me, then he shook hands with Carol and kissed her hand. She said she wasn't going to wash her hand for a month."

Over the years, David became an integral part of OU's senior administration, serving five OU presidents and three interim presidents. Carol edited *The Sooner Story*, a history of OU's first 90 years, continued to write and edit *Sooner Magazine* and was also author and editor of *Centennial: A Portrait of the University of Oklahoma*.

In addition to their three biological children, Carol and David were surrogate parents to scores of freshmen in the President's Leadership Class, a group David founded in 1961 to bring Oklahoma's best and brightest high school students to OU with the goal of keeping them in state to work after graduation. The plan worked. State business and civic leadership, along with present OU administration, is peppered with PLC alumni.

"Carol befriended us, guided us and was honest with us when we needed it," says J.P. Audas, former PLC member and OU associate vice president of alumni and development. "Her contributions to the university have been innumerable and invaluable."

So invaluable in fact, the university is not willing to let her go. PLC adviser Nanette Hathaway says she is working with Carol to create a publication for that group's alumni. "She has developed a really special relationship with the Burr Scholars, who mentor each incoming PLC class.

"The Burr Scholars became huge fans of this dessert—a warm fudgy chocolate cobbler served with ice cream. Because they always wanted it at their meetings with Carol, they named it the Carol Burr-bler," says Hathaway. "It was even on the menu at Couch Restaurants."

The "Burr-bler" may not be a park, as was the legacy of her late husband, but for Carol, a warm chocolate dessert that delivers a rich and comforting connection with OU, seems fitting.

This spring, Carol was one of five individuals designated to receive the 2015 Honorary Degree for extraordinary achievement and outstanding contributions to the university. Once again tornados blew away her big night when Commencement was canceled. Earlier that day, she had entertained the audience at the honorees' luncheon with her wit and deadpan delivery. Listening to Carol, one senses that the great loves of her life are her family, the University of Oklahoma and *Sooner Magazine*. I would never ask her to put them in order.

—Lynette Lobban