

Lest We Forget...

BY DAVID W. LEVY

Cortez A. M. Ewing: He liked to teach

In 1928, the Government Department (it would not be called Political Science until 1965) hired Cortez Arthur Milton Ewing, a specialist in political theory. He was thirty-two years old, had earned a Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin, and had spent a year at Penn State before coming to Norman. The University of Oklahoma secured his services for \$2,600 a year. He was immediately recognized as a remarkable teacher, and bright students—particularly those interested in politics—flocked to his classes.

One of them was a young sophomore from Bug Tussle, Oklahoma. To prepare himself for a debate, Carl Albert decided to get Professor Ewing's advice. "I had that day a long session with the greatest teacher I yet had met, a man at once knowledgeable, articulate, and warm," Albert wrote. "And Ewing became my teacher, my mentor and my friend."

The professor's office became Albert's intellectual headquarters, and he, along with other students, spent many evenings at the professor's home. Ewing's course in ancient political theory, Albert wrote, "opened up the ancient world to me," and he enrolled in Ewing's other courses. More than half a century later, the former Speaker of the House of Representatives wrote, "I still can think of no better preparation for a career in public service."

Albert was far from being alone in idolizing Cortez Ewing. John Fischer, another excellent student (he later rose to become the editor-in-chief of *Harper's Weekly*), remembered that Ewing "never schemed to become a college president or even a dean. His only discernible ambition was shockingly unfashionable: he liked to teach. And odder yet, he liked students."

Ewing's special talent was an ability to engage students in serious discussion. He threw out his own opinions and expected students to challenge him. He constantly raised ethical questions about politics and demanded that students grapple with them. He liked to find a vacant table in the union, get a cup of coffee, and hold court. With his steel-rimmed glasses and blue beret, that quizzical eye and serious demeanor, the earnestness and the eloquence, lighting one cigarette after another, he was a familiar and revered figure, and students crowded around him like the devoted disciples that they were.

He did not neglect his scholarship, writing dozens of



Cortez A.M. Ewing

books and articles on everything from "The British Labor Party to 1918" to "Lobbying in Nebraska's Legislature," from "Recent Trends in State Taxation" to "Cooperatives in Nova Scotia." He co-authored two textbooks on American and Oklahoma politics. He was also a tirelessly engaged citizen of the University community. He was active in the American Association of University Professors, the Bureau of Government Research, and an avid participant in the discussion group that centered around the School of Religion. He was in large part responsible for the plan that became the University Senate in 1942 and was one of the most vocal and courageous opponents of racial segregation. Ewing was always one of the usual suspects whenever the state legislature decided to go hunting for reds at the University of Oklahoma.

But despite that impressive body of scholarship and exemplary work as a citizen of the University, Cortez Ewing would be best remembered for his teaching. At his death, friends and admirers created a foundation in his memory. The moving spirit was Marcus Cohn, a student from Tulsa who fell under Ewing's influence in the early 1930s and went on to become a prominent Washington, D.C., attorney. The Cortez Ewing Foundation was originally intended to fund a lecture series (the first lecture was given by Speaker Albert), but in 1970 an undergraduate, Joe Brent Clark, persuaded the foundation's governors to instead sponsor undergraduate summer internships in Washington. Since then, more than 250 exceptional OU undergraduates have been Cortez A. M. Ewing Public Service Fellows.

When he was in his eighties Cohn still remembered the teacher who had so inspired him and whom he called his guardian angel. His campus and his classroom, Cohn wrote, "were wherever you met him: in the coffee shop, on the sidewalk between buildings, or in his home."

Cortez A. M. Ewing died on March 5, 1962, at sixty-five.

In this column, David W. Levy, Professor Emeritus of the OU History Department, recalls a person from the past whose contributions to the University deserve to be remembered. He has chosen to celebrate those who have not been already memorialized with their names on buildings or other features on the campus, but those instead who, in more modest but in no less admirable ways, helped make this place what it is.