

Portrait of a Sooner

Who makes laughs

PUBLIC speaking is merely the art of making deep sounds from the chest sound like important messages from the brain."

So says Stewart Harral, '36ma, young University faculty member whose rising popularity as a humorist keeps him traveling over the state with increasing frequency.

Not since Josh Lee rose to top rank as a speaking attraction in the state has a Sooner faculty member caught the public fancy so quickly for his ability to amuse a crowd and also to administer some sugar-coated pills of wisdom.

An incurable optimist, Harral has linked his hobbies of public speaking and study of the psychology of humor by giving programs on subjects which he cautiously states are of "an alleged humorous nature."

He honestly believes that humor plays an important part in life, and judging from the flock of new speaking engagements he is offered every time he gives a talk out over the state, he must be right about it.

"A sense of humor," he declares, "acts as a set of springs and takes many of the jolts from the bumps we all receive along the road. Folks may poke fun at the jovial fellow, but he gets more dividends from life than the humorless soul.

"Laughter, like sun and air, is one of our best medicines. A good-natured laugh at an unfortunate situation changes one's attitude toward it, and it seems to be not so bad, after all. A laugh makes a hard task lighter."

In his study of humor, Mr. Harral has cataloged mentally thousands of jokes and anecdotes. He knows stories on scores of subjects and situations, and has them alphabetized in his mind—from Adam to zylophone.

(Yes, this writer wondered about the zylophone story, but Harral wouldn't tell it.)

As his reputation as a story-teller has become widely known, he is forever being accosted by someone who says, "By the way, have you heard the one about . . .?"

Even if it is old to him, he usually listens politely, because, as he explains, audiences are very charitable to him in listening to his wisecracks—some of which he knows have whiskers on them.



Stewart Harral

"There is no possible way in which to predict the manner in which an audience will react to a joke," Mr. Harral says. "I find a story I think is very good, but may find when I use it that it is a dud. And again, some story that has little appeal to me may lay them in the aisles, as the stage comedians say."

It's not always easy to drive a hundred miles from Norman in the evening to make a speech, get home and to bed about 1 a.m., and then get up in time to teach an 8 o'clock class. But there are frequently new and strange experiences to add a touch of refreshing novelty.

At one place where he spoke, a kind old lady came up at the conclusion of the program and looked admiringly at the speaker.

"Young feller," she said, "If I was as smart as you, I'd go somewhere and start a grocery store."

Educated at the University of Iowa, Southeastern Teachers college and the University of Oklahoma, Mr. Harral has had varied experience in journalism, working on the staffs of four newspapers and teaching the subjects in two institutions of higher journalism. His present position is that of instructor in journalism and director of the University news service.

In 1925 he was chosen as one of the five best all-around developed DeMolay members in the world, the contest being based on mental, spiritual, social and physical development.

His articles and sketches have appeared in eighteen magazines and in scores of newspapers.

Known as a genial philosopher, he appears on programs out over the state almost every week and frequently several times a week, presenting talks and lectures before civic clubs, convention groups, college and high school assemblies, church congregations, women's clubs, and is at his best in the role of after-dinner speaker.

He has presented programs in Iowa, Colorado, Missouri, Arkansas, Texas and Oklahoma.

Some of his program subjects are How To Be Happy Though Human, Adventures in Service, Fun Marches On, The Price of the Best, New Paths to Civic Progress, The Conquest of Happiness, Secrets of Victorious Living, Fashions in Happiness, Behind the Front Page, and Bouncing the Blues.

Newspaper comments on his appearances show that he is gaining a reputation as laugh maker both in Oklahoma and surrounding states. A few of them are:

Rocky Mountain News, Denver, Colo.—"Those who missed Stewart Harral missed a delightful treat."

Clarksville Times, Clarksville, Texas—"Mr. Harral's jovial philosophy is a real tonic for the blues."

Southwestern American, Fort Smith, Ark.—"Stewart Harral, as Babe Ruth would say, 'Has something on the ball.' He is always interesting, entertaining, inspiring."

Oklahoma News, Oklahoma City—Mr. Harral combines the wholesome philosophy of life with apt illustrations and sparkling wit and humor which he presents with a challenging clarity and genuine human interest."

Daily Ardmoreite—Ardmore folks last night discovered a new star on the public horizon. He is Stewart Harral, one of the most entertaining after dinner speakers ever heard here."

Cushing Daily Citizen—Stewart Harral's talk was a series of sharp anecdotes and funny stories which kept his audience recovering from one laugh only to begin another."

And so on: "has a rare charm as a speaker and humorist" . . . "proved himself to be an entertainer of the first magnitude" . . . "after dinner speaker de luxe" . . . "triumphed in his speech" . . . "wit and humor thoroughly enjoyed in his sparkling address."

Newspaper reporters generally deal very plainly with public programs, and they have heard so many speaking programs that it takes something really good to win adjectives like those quoted above.

People like to laugh, and Harral's the one who can make them do it.