



More Fun and Bigger Ulcers

That's the way University College Dean Glenn C. Couch sums up his compensation for being the middleman in freshman-University relations. Here are some of the experiences that go with his position.

By DEAN GLENN C. COUCH

I suppose my job provides a person with more fun and bigger ulcers than any other job on earth. Each fall a large number of students come to the University with high hopes of getting a degree. My job is to see that as many as possible turn those dreams into realities. I worry when there is trouble and rejoice when there is success. A sample of the kind of trouble and success that can happen should make my point and, since I deal primarily with freshmen, it is fitting that the story concerns a freshman boy.

Even nature seems to conspire against a freshman. About the time he starts to college the love bug bites him good and hard for the first time. I remember one Sunday afternoon years ago I was sitting quietly at home when the phone rang.

A bewildered voice on the other end said, "Mr. Couch, I was coming home from the movie and cut across the courthouse lawn a few minutes ago. A piece of white paper came floating down from the sky and for some reason I picked it up. On it was written: 'Please have Dean Couch come to the county jail.'"

I thanked this unknown intermediary and started for the court house. After prop-

er identification, I was permitted to visit the young, unhappy guest.

Here was his story:

He had gone to pay his girl friend a visit. She happened to be a local girl so he called at her home. Apparently the girl's mother was not impressed with her daughter's choice. At any rate she answered the

door bell and, after a few short remarks, closed the door and locked it. This rebuff so infuriated the young suitor that he decided to do something rather drastic. With his hands on the doorknob and his feet against the wall, he gave one awful jerk.

Much to his surprise the entire door and door casing came completely free. He then threw the door with its attached casing into the yard. The trouble was that it took the corner porch post on the way. This particular post was a significant one. It held up the roof. The roof fell in, knocking the boy into the house through the opening left by the removal of the door. As the plaster dust settled, the local constable led him away.

An estimate of the damages by a competent carpenter was made. Enough money to do the job was left with local authorities and another young lover was free again. I think that couple has one of the nicest families I ever saw. I sure hope they send them to O.U.

I remember as a grade school lad I used to think about the poor kids of the future who would have such a long list of United States presidents to remember. It was quite a long list even then. I usually dismissed it,



however, with the thought that: "Why should I worry; that would be *their* problem." Two things have occurred since then which have caused me not to dismiss that problem quite so quickly. One, not only history but all fields of knowledge have increased proportionately since that time; two, I find myself in a job, the success of which depends in a great measure on how well those "kids of the future" are able to cope with such information.

On the other side of the ledger, there is a much greater variety of students coming to the University than formerly. It used to be that the only ones who went to college were those who were highly motivated individuals with a great aptitude for things academic. Practically every one (four out of five who went to high school in those days also went to college. In order for the high schools to meet the needs of their students they needed only to give college preparatory courses. Greek, Latin, English, Mathematics, Sciences did the trick. Things are different now. All of the states have compulsory attendance laws which keep most youngsters in school until they have finished high school. This has increased the high school population over ninety times. Nearly four out of five high school graduates don't go to college. Attending college is far down on the list of "things most wanted to do" by many.

In order to contribute something to the lives of these youngsters who are kept in school by law, the high schools have had to broaden their curricula considerably. Greek, Latin, Mathematics, History and Sciences have had to give way in the small, poorly-financed high school to all sorts of "courses." The larger high schools have for the most part developed two types of curricula; the terminal type course and the college preparatory type. The trouble comes when the student from the small high school or the student in the terminal high school curriculum decides to go to college. I suppose the universities and colleges could refuse to admit such students. This would not quite be cricket, however, since the student from the small school has had no choice in the courses he took, and the fellow from the large school surely has the right to change his mind.

Now you see where I sit—right in the big middle. On the one hand our knowledge is becoming more complex. Society itself demands far more of a college graduate than it did a few years ago. On the other hand, a much greater variety of people come to our doors now than formerly. Every fall the scramble starts. Somehow we have to find out as much as we can about each student's background and aptitude, and hope we can find a niche

where he fits. It's only natural, of course, that the parents are interested and concerned, so it isn't uncommon for them to get in the middle of the fracas, too. Since they play such an important role in the matter, one has to do his best to find the proper niche for them, as well. If parents do get involved, they sometimes turn out to be more of a problem than the students. Because of their love and ambitions for their children they frequently get more concerned than they really should.

Because of many external pressures, the student who finds himself in a course he does not like or understand is apt to use most any means in order to pass. An experience I once had illustrates this point. During an examination I was giving, I remember hearing someone clear his throat in an otherwise very quiet room. I looked up and much to my surprise saw a hand, using the alphabet system used by mutes, slowly spelling out "question number twelve." It just so happens that I grew up with a mute and am able to talk on my hands, too. That fellow was so awkward in his motions that I knew he had only recently learned this technique for quietly communicating with his fellow students. Before an answer could be relayed back I too cleared my throat. The only ones to look up were the two whose consciences were troubling them. Slowly and silently I spelled back, "Please don't do that." As far as I know, no one else in the class ever knew about it unless the beet-red blush on their faces gave them away at the end of the hour.

Students have on occasion scared the lights out of me. One Saturday afternoon a young lady's voice on the phone informed me that a critical matter would have to be discussed immediately. Hurriedly I met her at my office. I could tell by the tone of her voice that this was no simple problem. She listed all the courses in which she was enrolled including zoology. In the zoology laboratory she had met a young man who sat across the table from her. He was a fine-looking, personable chap whom she believed she loved. A most terrible thing had happened! She had gone to the laboratory that morning to catch up with her work. She had not been there long before Mr. "Good Looking" had drifted in. "Right out of the blue" he had asked her for a date. Here was the problem: she already had a date. If she told him so, he might not ask her again. If she said yes, she would have to stir up some falsehood to tell the date she had already. "What is a person to do?" This was indeed a critical time, and it required the best that was in us to meet it. I was so relieved of course to find nothing really serious was involved

that I had trouble taking my responsibilities as seriously as the occasion demanded. I finally suggested that, if this boy was as fine as he seemed to be, he would not want her to go back on her word with the other fellow and a "rain check" might be in order. It must have worked out all right because they are both practicing medicine, and I notice their phone number is the same.

It is fun for me, of course, to see any student graduate, but I think I enjoy most seeing those who have had to finance themselves walk across the stage and get that coveted diploma. I suppose the list of ideas used by students to gather in a few shekels is almost endless. I remember one clever fellow, who had been getting along on practically nothing, showed up in my office one day with a hat full of money. I didn't want to seem nosy, but I felt I should know how he came about so much cash. It was really very simple. He had read in the paper about the inaugural ball for the governor. The traffic situation would be bad. Surely he could find some vacant lot near the capitol, the title of which belonged to some absentee landowner. Fortunately a quick survey a day or two before had produced such a place. A cheap sign, "Parking 25¢," had brought marvelous results. I asked him if the police or anyone else had bothered him. Not a word had been asked and he had made no special effort to find the owner. I know he was glad to get off hamburgers and chili and to have something besides a roll and a cup of coffee for breakfast. I am sure the unknown owner of that land would not complain if he knew that that same ingenuity somehow got him through the death march on Bataan. He was battered but alive.

The students who get the biggest hand at the graduating exercises are the physically handicapped ones. While the audience is applauding, I am busy swallowing a lump which has suddenly appeared in my throat. Everyone who ever started college, no doubt, had some qualms about undertaking such a project. This is true a hundred times over for the student in the wheel chair, on crutches, or being led by a seeing-eye dog. As far as I know we have never had one fail academically. My job, as I see it, is to convince such students of this as quickly as possible. Those are brave young hearts I talk to. There is a kind of satisfaction that comes to them on graduation day that none of the rest of us will ever quite understand. On this campus they have a little club all of their own. The older ones are the counselors for the beginners. It is people with souls like these that make my job so much fun. If you know of some young

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would have been just full of possibilities," the Jones with a cause stood in sight of the president's windows. He had sentimentally chosen the '09 stone to be his base of operations and spoke to the first student who passed.

The first student said:

"I just adore interviews, and I love you for asking me. Now let's see, darling, you've asked me how the alums and we may perhaps become—I think the word was—*chums*. Is that not what you asked me? But yes. Well, let me think. I'm all for it, you understand. I really am. I just adore alums. I guess it's this beastly burden of my superior intellect that causes me ennui in the presence—Hello! Huntley darling—of the boys here in college. And they are *boys*, you know. Yes, just boys. But older men—alums—are so much more suave and debonair and, as Marilyn Monroe said, ". . . so much more mellow," that—but of course Marilyn Monroe is an abominable actress. Yes, I'm in the Drama School. I adore it. I *crave* the stage. I really do.

"But back to your interesting question. I think I shall say that the way for the alumni and the students to become, ah—oh yes, thank you—*chums* is for them to really and truly understand each other. Yes! put that down—for them to really and truly understand each other. And now if there are no further questions I shall be off to my. . . What will I try to do for the University as an alum? My dear man I've done enough just enduring this place at sixty-six dollars a semester without pouring my fortune into it during my career in the East. Nonsense! What else can an alum do for a university but give it money? Yes, I'm leaving for the bright lights of Broadway immediately upon my graduation. I have friends there you know. We write constantly. I adore them all.

"Adieu to the State U. is what I'm currently saying. Yes, I've heard of the drama clubs in the City; I'm sure they're quite quaint. But to stay here after I graduate—ah! How cloddish! My dear man, have you never heard of the East! It's where all the brilliant and witty people live—*millions* of them! Well no, but as I say, I shall be off immediately upon my graduation. Form an alum club in New York! It would be nothing but a tourist register. Really, I have a class to make."

And the next student he stopped said:

"Now let me get this straight: You want to know how alums can be *chums* with the students, huh? And why do you want to know? You're gonna what? What's your name? Where you from? Has this

been announced yet? Huzza! Huzza! A real live scoop. Just what's the gist of your speech—I don't dig this "Your Chum the Alum" at a commencement. That's right. We don't become anything else but. However, I'd like to think of myself as becoming a 'graduate' not an alum—*Gee!* Well, because, I figure when you get through with something you're through with something—right!? My relations with the big State U. are through on June 8th, 1953! I've got big things to do—*big* things to do—and I can't be doing 'em around here. Here! Here in our dried up, little, middle western state—that's where.

"What am I gonna do? Well—well, I'm gonna do big things. I'm editor of the school paper here, you know. Yeah. Job like that keeps you on your toes. You gotta know everything. You gotta be smart, *plenty* smart. And when I get out of here I'll go East somewhere, I guess, and start on a good newspaper—start at the bottom, you know, and work my way up fast. Might even get in with the *New Yorker*. There's a slick crowd. Witty and all that. I've got a buddy in New York that knows a lot of those *New Yorker* people. He told me to come on up any time. Great guy. In the City? Naw, I wouldn't even think about it. I've already got a job with them: "College Correspondent." The way they color the news, though! And you haven't got a chance to rise up anyplace. If you had the pull, you could be editor tomorrow. No sir, I'm going East where you're got a chance to get places—fast. I've got to get this story on the front page. See yah."

The third student said:

"I think the alums should come down all the time and meet us and talk with us in lots 'n lots of seminars and stuff like that, you know what I mean. Well, I mean that—well, like in that old Latin saying, *Caveat Emptor!*: It's not *what* you know, it's *who* you know!—you know? Now over in the Business School they teach yah a lot of detail junk that nobody in his right mind would study, and nobody with any kind of mind could remember. The way I figger it—what'cha need is kind of a broad idea of what's going on—get me?—and then when you get your job landed why you can settle down and learn all the junk you need to know in that particular business—right! Yes sir, if I had my way, the Business School would be a kind of a big buddy-buddy get-together where alums and students could chit-chat informal-like about how things really are—you know?"

"Me? Oh, I guess I'll get a job in the Stock Exchange after I serve my hitch in artillery. That's the only way to get in the big dough, you know. Start in on the ground floor—learn the racket, *learn it!*—

and then in a couple of years work your way on up to the top. I know, I know. But the big dough's back East. No opportunities out here. No opportunities."

Mr. Jones didn't stop any more students. He went to the president's office and left a note with the secretary. Then he walked slowly around the oval toward his car. As he was getting in he noticed the letters DDMC crudely printed in the sidewalk. He looked at them a long time before he started the ignition and drove out the gate.

Reader, let us look behind and see the moral of our tale: *To the student it would be:* Your lawn is big and your grass is green and in most instances taller than you are. Stay here and mow it. *And to the Alums:* You're the hero of the tale. No matter how much we laugh at you second childhoods who sit on the shady west side, there's a school spirit you've got that we admire and envy and somehow never inherit quite as handsomely.

Fun and Ulcers . . .

handicapped person who has been thinking about going to college but hasn't quite got the nerve, please ask them to write to me. I will put them in touch with the offices of the club. Believe-you-me they will get the "ole one-two" by return mail.

I have probably left you with the impression that all my adventures with students turn out successfully. I am sorry to say this isn't the way it is. I am like the freshman whom I asked why he had failed his Government I course. He said he hadn't really failed it, but had just made too low a grade. It may be I don't fail, but there are a good many who, no doubt, would give me a very low grade. I hope there are graduates reading these lines who will be kind enough to let me know how I could have done a better job with them. In the meantime if life gets dull for you, just drop around to my office and see what is on tap for the day. You can bet your life it will be something new, different, and lots of fun.

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