

The Decline

E. B. Jones accepted the invitation to speak at Commencement with dispatch and his working title, "Your Chum the Alum," was a dandy, but he didn't have all the facts.

By DICK SMITH

By mistake the invitation to give the commencement address had been mailed to E. B. Jones of the City instead of E. E. Jones of the City, and E. B. Jones immediately sent by air mail his enthusiastic acceptance. The acceptance, after a lengthy paragraph of unworthiness and another of appreciation, contained the title to his speech. He flamboyantly declared it had just come to him "out of the blue."

Surprised by selection of title and distrusting "The Blue," the president phoned E. E. Jones for a little elaboration. E. E. Jones was just as surprised as the president that he had agreed to speak on "Your Chum the Alum" at commencement, and chatted with the president about the mystery for a dollar and five minutes, station-to-station.

On the same day E. "Bill" Jones had gotten out of his twin bed at 6:30 a. m.—thirty minutes before the alarm. "Your Chum the Alum" was the alarm that had bounced his imagination into the sky and his feet into the bathroom. Since he had received the president's letter he had thought of nothing but that wonderful title and the uncanny way the president had of knowing who was really supporting the old State U. in the Alum Association.

Showered and shaved, he dressed quickly and asked his wife once more what she thought of the title. And she said, "I think it's just real fine, honey."

He ate breakfast like an efficiency expert. Before his wife could get back in bed, he had seated himself at the writing desk upon which were undusted bric-a-brac, a complete set of the *Natural History of the World*, and a singular tablet of clean, white paper. "Your Chum the Alum" was neatly lettered on the top sheet.

Mr. Jones believed that the first sentence is always the hardest and that the rest comes easily if you can just get started. At 10:00 a. m. he was still patiently waiting for the first words. He rearranged the bric-a-brac and thumbed through most of the more interesting illustrations in the *Natural Histories*. Crumbled sheets from

the tablet lay like popcorn balls around the waste paper basket.

He started cleaning out his wallet. There fate gave him a push in the form of a clipping pasted on the back of his Alum card: "Lord give me the wisdom to always keep young people around me, but never to try to keep up with them!"

The particular message of the clipping for Mr. Jones, it seemed to Mr. Jones, was

to know about your subject before you write. And he woke his wife to tell her that he was leaving immediately for the State U. to "really see firsthand and from the students themselves how we alums can be chums."

By the time the president had traced the mistake and had had to agree with Mrs. E. B. Jones station-to-station that "'Your Chum the Alum' was kinda rhyummy and



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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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To help determine the value of the special student issue of The Sooner Magazine, alumni and students are requested to let the editor know their opinions of this issue. A postcard addressed to David Burr, The Sooner Magazine, University of Oklahoma, Norman, will help us determine the desirability of such a publication for future May magazines.—The Ed.