

The Great Years

One of the University's most provocative writers views the past four years.

He remembers sights and impressions and sounds. He remembers The Great Years.

By BILL SAMPSON, '54

How did we come here? On August 6, 1892, a man stepped off a train in Norman and looked to the southwest. There was not a tree or shrub or building. All he could see was the monotonous stillness of the prairie grass. And for the next 16 years he devoted his life to creating something out of that prairie. Something to alter the lives of thousands. Something to be remembered forever, through wars and loves and success and failure. Something that has not only become part of us, but more important, we have become part of it—the big STATE U.

Some of us came here the same way the first president did, on the Santa Fe. Some came through the darkness and roar and sudden light of the Oklahoma City underpass on the bus. Some came in automobiles, a few by airliners and a few came hitchhiking. But we came—and we stayed.

And now we leave. We are through and we leave.

But in the silence of the night, walking the campus alone, we realize that we are leaving a trace of ourselves here. Each of us has added something and the big State U. is made from all of us and a small part of the big State U. moves in and becomes part of us, forever.

We remember those early days. The September heat, lines, orientation, lines, photos, tests, lines, and perhaps most of all, loneliness. To meet someone from the same side of the state our hometown was in was something, and a familiar face!—old homeweeek!

There was no parking lot south of the Geology Building back then. There was no Geology Building! Then we had classes in the south wing while the north wing was still under construction, reflecting the surging, throbbing growth and the need for space.

We remember when there were no walks on the south oval, no statue of Bizzell staring at his library with stone eyes, no bust of Gittinger staring at his building with blank eyes, no traffic lights at Jenkins and Lindsay, blinking at the night with red-amber-green eyes. No parking meters. We saw it grow and we saw it

change. And we grew with it and we changed with it.

One evening, late in our sophomore year, as we finished our evening meals, there was a murmur. To the south there was a rumble and suddenly the cry—"Panty Raid." Tear gas, cops, fire hose, laughing. Fame? Infamy? Someone ran an underthing up on the north oval flagpole. Let it be called what it may, it was also a burst of an intangible thing called "spirit," in this case "school spirit," a binding thing that is dependent, like religion, more on faith than rationality.

We lived in fraternities and sororities. Closer friendships, closer ties, parties, dances, house singing, study hall, breakfast with the *Oklahoma Daily* and an understanding house mother. Gripe at the food and the pledges and the environment and love all of it.

We lived in dorms. Noise in the halls, television in the lounge, pinups, showers, beer smuggled into the room, good night kisses, study lamps, cigarettes, wastebaskets, counselors. Someone was always stealing the newspapers. Late at night a voice in the hall—"Sandwiches, milk and orange drink."

We lived in the pre-fabs. Windy caverns in the winter, Turkish baths in the summer. We made love and studied and cooked and kept black puppies and cats and watched our pets die sometimes and watched our kids grow sometimes.

We commuted. Oklahoma's morning landscape through a windshield. Hustle, hustle all day. Oklahoma's evening landscape through a windshield.

But we were here. And we stayed.

We faced the eight o'clocks. Sometimes we caught breakfast, sometimes we didn't. Cold. Fog. Sunrise. The light hurt our eyes on the way to the cursed eight o'clocks. Our books were heavy. How can the prof be so witty, so wide awake, so full of information and pop quizzes so early in the morning? Damn! Doze.

The nine o'clock drags and we drag with it.

Coffee break! 10 a.m. A stampede for the Union. Coffee up, whaddaya say, coffee up. And there they sit.

It takes all kinds to make a coffee break.

The engineers come swaggering in with slide rules swinging from their hips and immediately begin to talk in algebraic instead of English.

The intellectuals stare moodily through their horn rims into the black abyss of the brew and ponder deep thoughts.

The sophisticates yawn and smoke and look bored.

The hustlers and politicians make the rounds glad-handing and back slapping.

Journalism students buzz around after some story or poll or something.

Everyone reads the *Daily* and swears, but everyone reads the *Daily*.

Professors huddle in cliques and drink their coffee hurriedly and with suspicious eyes, as though expecting an open revolt any moment.

And every once in awhile someone can be seen studying.

It takes all kinds to make a coffee break.

It seems, however, that each of us found a prof who was more than just another prof. A prof who was a buddy, a rarity, a professor who was human amidst the mass of ogres and Snarfs.

Term papers were a pain. "What good's this going to do me?" Research. Sweat. "I can't write." And some sonofagun always went around bragging about how he finished his by the first eight weeks.

Eight-week quizzes. Assignments. ROTC drill. Reading lists. Reports. Oral exams. "I was up until 3 o'clock getting the darned thing."

Work and work and study and then just before the lid flips someone remembers that parties make the world go 'round. Whoop! Live it up! Cool! Crazy! Dig that! Party, party, party.

Jazz bands. We're juniors and Woody Herman is here. And there's a happy beat and we go. Red's and Ed's. Tumble Inn and stagger out. In the City we find music "with that honky-tonk swang" and the sox rock. Cats. Dances. Go, man, go. Week-end parties. Convertibles. Beer and bootleg liquor. Movies. Coke dates. Kissing crowds at the quads at curfew.

The partying catches up with us and everyone crams for finals. No-Doze pills.

Coffee. Loud radios. Open books. Typewriters. Notebooks carefully scrutinized. "What did I mean when I wrote that?" Dorm lights burn at sunrise. A's and F's and we're out for the summer.

Where does everyone go? Traveling, roughnecking, harvesting, truck driving, swimming, baseballing, fishing, laboring, debutanting, cowboying, working, playing. Everyone is real gone in the summer.

September again and we're the big dogs, the real cogs, the wheels, the greatest, the coolest, the Seniors! Notre Dame is here this year. Whoop! Rally-rally, all night long. Go you, OU. Bonfires, bands, parades, yells, singing, stomping, hell raising, shouting, rioting, cheering. Go Big Red. 59,461 watch as we lose, 28-21.

Who can study with Notre Dame and Dallas only two weeks apart? Besides, there's lots of time.

Big D. Jam the streets. Cheerleaders on the balconies. Cops fight to get the street cars through. Paper cups and glass bottles filled with Texas liquids. A night of screaming, hysteria, yelling, drinking and dancing. Youth is a passion for trivia. Little sleep. The parade. The Cotton Bowl. 75,504. Big Red—19, Texas—14. Hi Rickety, Whoop Tee Do, Boomer-Sooner, O.K.U! Sooners on the loose. Oklahoma takes over Big D and Big D loves it.

SFO-21. The Sauter-Finegan dissonance. Ray Anthony, young man with a horn. We rock to the music and dance to the rhythm of the beat.

Christmas and the Orange Bowl rolled in one. Sooners go for Miami and the sun. Those that don't stare hopefully at the TV set. Two soul-stirring goal line stands and Larry Grigg goes 25 for the touchdown as O.U. wins over No. 1 Maryland,

7-0. SOONERS—sittin' on top of the world.

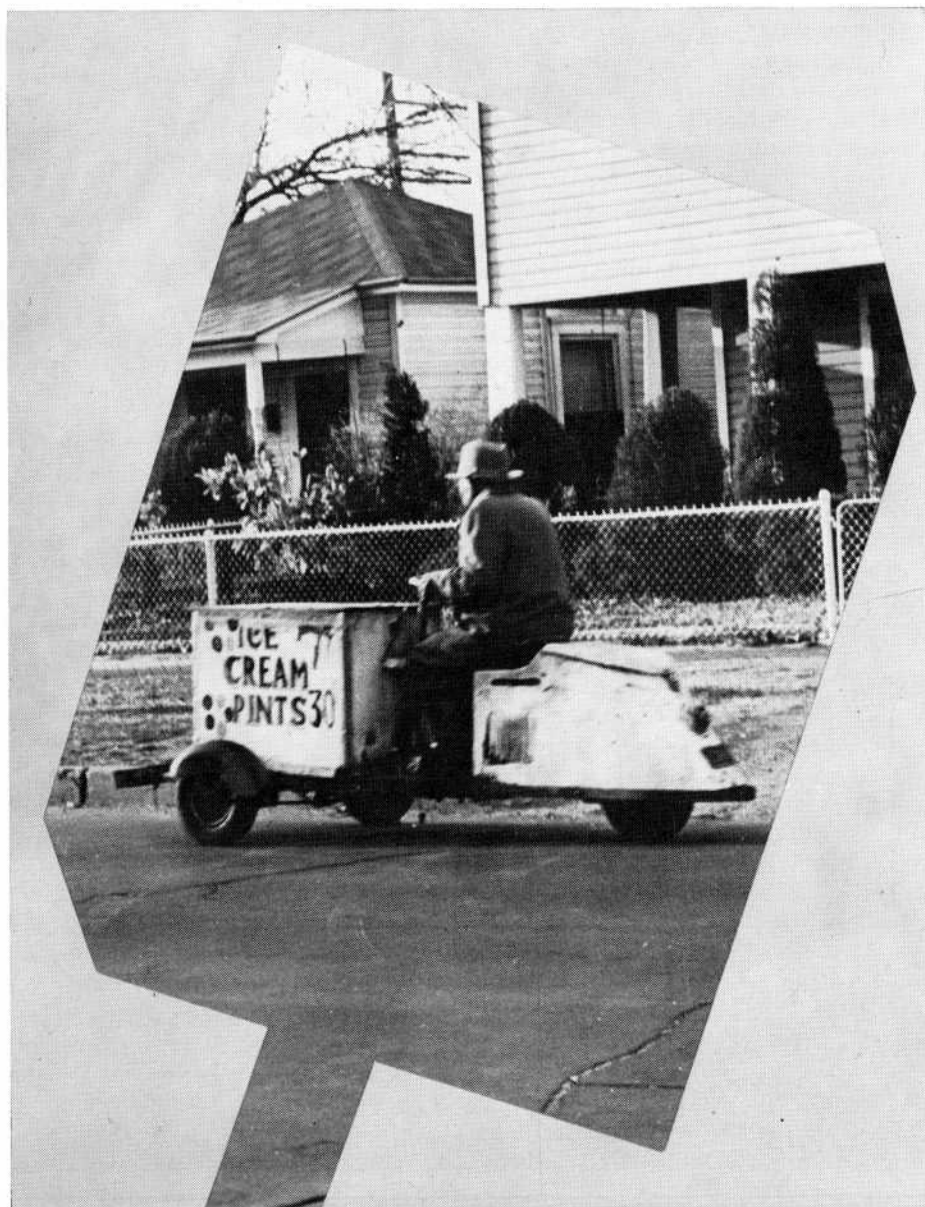
A tough basketball season but we beat the Aggies in Stillwater so all is well. Finals. Ugh!

Spring. Parties. "Take it away, Leon." Frontier weekend and the Seniors let their hair down as they realize time is growing short.

We look forward to graduation. Caps. Gowns. My word, what's this, A DIPLOMA!!

We are anxious to be on our way, to see what can be created from the monotonous stillness of the prairie grass world, for we are fire and youth and ambition and hope and faith. We are the future. We are anxious to be on our way.

The great years are gone.



OKLAHOMA DAILY—University of Oklahoma's Athletic Business Office today announced that it would start operating concessions at O.U. sports events. Officials stated that from now on, the sales of refreshments would be handled in "a modern, efficient manner."