

An Alumna Takes a Sidelong Glance at the 1954 Senior

Perhaps no one could have caught the Commencement mood, 1954, better than Mrs. Moore. Her defense of the sober seniors is an eloquent contrasting of today and yesterday. Alumni will remember her excellent "My Dear Daughter . . ." letter in the November *Sooner*.

By LOUISE BEARD MOORE, '27ba

At the risk of alienating the opinions of other old grads, who may also retrospectively regard their heyday with inordinate fondness and gild memory with a wide, free brush, this is a word for young men and women whose college commencement this spring is any sheepskin processional in America in the mid-20th century.

It is a bow of esteem in the direction of young men in mortar boards who will so shortly file their fresh new diplomas with *Sooner* yearbooks and perhaps a few favorite texts deemed too salient to sell at the end of the last final examination, in order to don the blue or brown of military service.

It is a nod of respect to young senior women, many of whom will have to wait years, or forever, before they can close the door of a home of their own at twilight to serve supper to a husband they have loved since college days.

A good many adults, chronological if not psychological, are prone to deplore today's youth. Hindsight has a way of reading only the sweet, plaintive notes written for faraway flutes. Fuzzy memory and the span of years blur the estimate many old grads have of their own verdant era. We glorify our own collegiate period, erasing unconsciously the flaws and foibles we may once have recognized in ourselves and our 20-odd-year-old contemporaries, and end up in our late 40s or 50s pretty grim about our sons and daughters.

In defense of the graduate in the hydrogen bomb year of our Lord, 1954, may an alum make a case for the sober senior, who would be the last to ask any vindication?

It is perhaps his built-in certitude which characterizes today's senior most of all. He seems to know where he is headed, and why, more decisively than his counterpart a generation ago.

It takes courage to see college through to graduation day now. More is expected of young people and the competitive modern market for talent and know-how has everything keyed pretty high. Term papers have got longer and requirements along the line to a diploma are more strict. Sufficiency is insufficient. The challenges flung at collegians these days are more puissant. Most frontiers have been leveled and tomorrow's bedtime stories for the progeny of today's graduates will include super-sonic sequences.

The academic march is longer than it looks from the stands in Owen Field. In the line of two-by-twos filing past are the shadows of others, in a sense receiving their diplomas too, vicariously. A father or mother, wife, son or daughter, who, each in his own way "stood in" during the long haul toward the commencement rite. Sometime we'd like to see them try a graduates' processional which includes the encouragers, the faith-providers and sacrifice-makers who lift their heads in pride when that year's senior class stands for the congratulatory address.

None in this year's class, it seems to us, nor any in the past few years since the world got so wide, have been as gay as we were in the '20s. The undertone is stronger, the outward demonstration of youth in college is perceptibly quieter stuff.

Even as they "live it up," they make less noise about it."

There is a hint of sadness about seeing them grow up so soon and so fast, an adulthood forced into quicker being than a generation ago by the irrefutably sober age of now. They would be the last to know what they have missed, in those other years when college men and women were noisier and coonskin coats antedated suede jackets.

It was fun, and a good many learned, in

the good old days, enough at college to make their mark in the world. Hundreds and hundreds of old grads have distinguished themselves in professions for which their generation-ago university training fitted them ably.

But today's senior, we counter, is both psychologically and academically more mature, in an era which may demand of each one of them the ultimate in maturity, either immediately or subsequently.

Where stands, perhaps, in the class of 1954 a young man who will be a supreme court justice? What young woman, self-conscious and remote in her academic black, may return in 20 years as a distinguished alumna to deliver the first O.U. commencement address by a woman? Which one will thank God for sacrifice of parents who saw her through the university so she might some day resume or enter a career in order to raise their children upon death of her husband?

Is that tall, quiet one in the middle row, looking straight ahead with a singularly withdrawn expression, the one who will find the cure for cancer at long last? The freckled engineer near the end, his slide rule missing for the first time in five years, will he design a dam to end middlewestern droughts?

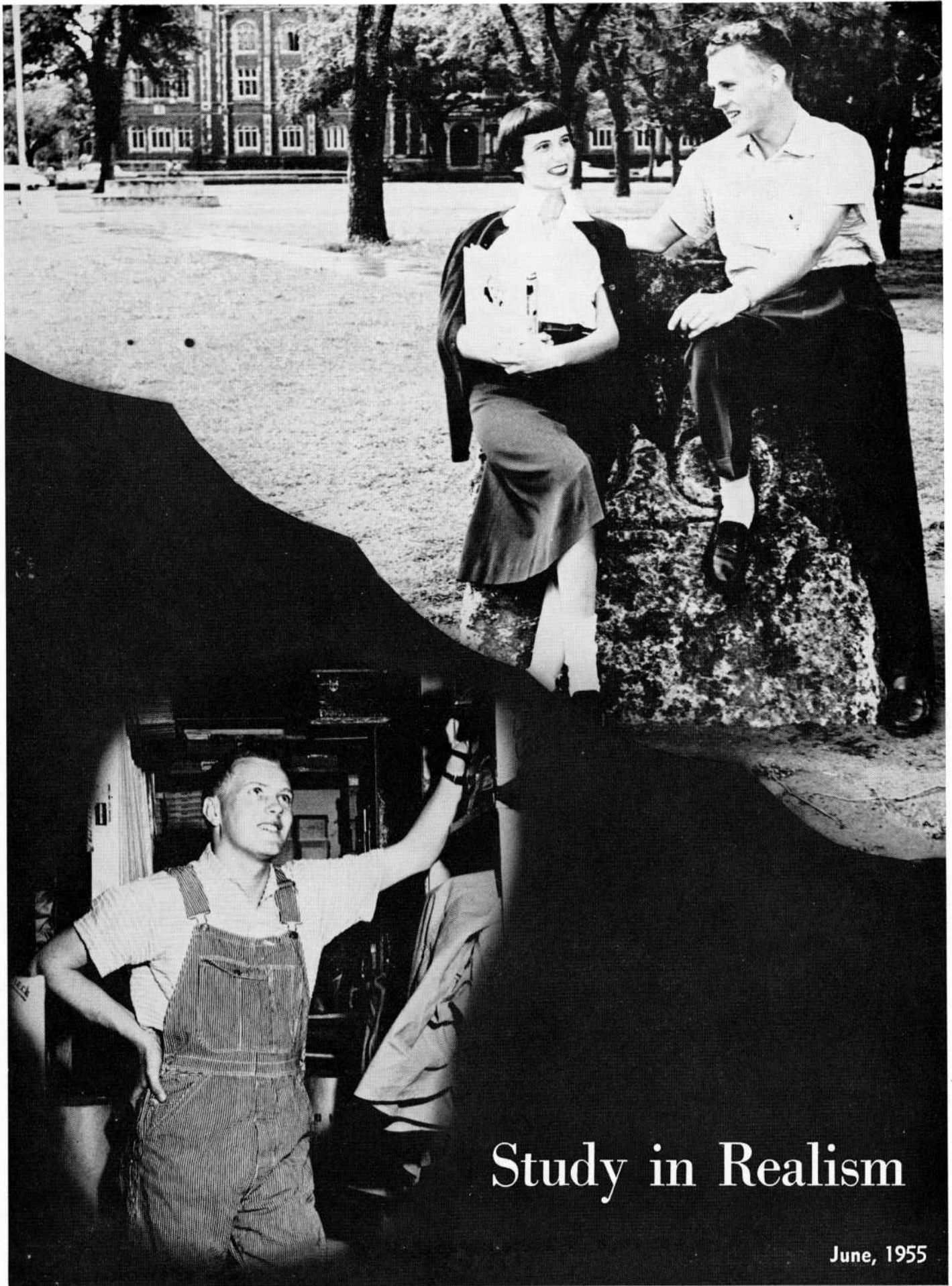
Can that confident, tall blond boy, absurdly pompous in his gown with the white tassel dangling his hopes of a bright future in writing, be the projection of a shy freshman who once lacked the poise to sit easily in the front row of freshman English?

In a homogenized era, the cream still comes to the top. Seniors at the University of Oklahoma graduating in the spring of 1954, we tip OUR dusty old mortar boards to YOU.



Study in Realism . . .

June, 1954



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