



By Dick Smith, '53bba



ULTIMATELY the word will get out so it might as well be now: there is something bigger and better for Sooners than the Dallas weekend. It's true.

Dallas is kaput. The dawn of Big G is upon us.

The big G is for little Guatemala—the first country south of Mexico. Except don't travel through Mexico to get there. Travel over it in a plane provided free by the Guatemalan government for students who wish to attend summer school at the University of San Carlos in Guatemala City. This six-week summer school which specializes in Spanish and anthropology is the new heir to that two-day October affair I previously admired. Complete with a bougainvillea-planted patio, chic Latin *professoras*, and volcanoes (now dormant), the San Carlos summer school is—how shall I say—down under and upstate. But before I go any further, I must first introduce a Hungarian . . .

*Senoras* and *Senores*, may I present Dr. Stephan F. Borhegyi, curator of O.U.'s Stovall Museum, assistant professor of anthropology, and a dapper, polylingual, moustached, world authority on meso-

american civilizations, three-pronged incense burners, and cha cha chas. It is Borhegyi who is replacing the D of Big D with a G.

Borhegyi, as you might guess, is no ordinary museum director. An old world



product in an old world field (a PhD in archaeology and anthropology from Budapest's Peter Pazmany University), Borhegyi is a man whose American-like imagination and persuasive powers are so close to a *Fortune* magazine ideal that businessmen who are normally suspicious of museums and their normally dry directors find themselves beguiled and endowing despite themselves when Borhegyi talks. The Stovall Museum, spectacularly rejuvenated since Borhegyi's arrival at O.U., is a testimonial to his abilities. (A typical Borhegyi touch is the announcement to 60,000 non-museum goers nearly every Saturday afternoon in the fall that they should relax and wait out the traffic between Norman and Oklahoma City with a visit to the Stovall Museum. Now they get caught in traffic between the stadium and the museum.)

Because of these qualities and his renown in the field of Mayan culture, Borhegyi has been invited to teach during the summers at San Carlos for the past several years. With the invitation go 12 or so travel fellowships from the Guatemalan government

Dr. Stephan Borhegyi, noted archeologist, museum curator, and cha cha cha dancer, inspects a three-pronged incense burner which his skin divers fished out of Lake Amatitlan.



via San Carlos for students at O.U. who are interested in studying at San Carlos.

These travel fellowships (free flights from New Orleans to Guatemala City and back) are half of an admirable barter. Like most countries rich in archeological material, Guatemala lays claim to all archeological discoveries. And Borhegyi and his students provide that unique combination of brawn and brain needed to unearth and analyze Guatemala's still largely unexcavated ruins.

And now we come to the exotic part . . .

While assisting the Instituto de Antropologia in 1957 with some spadework in the ruins of Kaminaljuyu (pronounced somewhat like *camaraderie yoo-hoo*. Not much, but somewhat), Borhegyi received word of unusual discoveries being made by some Lake Amatitlan skin divers who had been searching for new fishing grounds.

What those divers brought from Amatitlan's lava-covered depths was disappointing for the *senoras* ready back home with the corn meal and catchup, but it was enough to make an archeologist rub his tummy. Nearly 400 artifacts (old—very old—pots and pans, etc.) had been discovered. Most of them were completely intact. There were the usual pot sherds which never seem to interest anyone except archeologists as dedicated as Borhegyi; but there were also many of Borhegyi's specialty, the three-pronged incense burner—spectacular pottery cylinders of three-and-a-half to four feet in length surmounted by three legs (supposedly used as supports for incense bowls) and skillfully decorated with helmeted and feather-bedecked lords. There were plate-sized, ashtray-like bowls with odd looking needles protruding from their sides; and there were intricately molded jar covers standing a foot-and-a-half high—some surmounted with a one-eyed periscope tube, others with fantastic monkey or jaguar-headed creatures, still others with a sort of old-time gramophone horn.

These finds signaled O.U.'s tootleloo to Kaminaljuyu. Borhegyi immediately set about mapping the lake and convincing the divers they should plot their discoveries. A scientific exploration of the lake was impossible, however, that late in the summer, and the casual dives were difficult to coordinate. But there was next summer . . . the summer of '58.

With a completely new opinion of who should be acceptable as a fellowship grantee (there are actually no college major restrictions. Good grades and an interest in either Spanish or anthropology are minimums), Borhegyi spread the rumor: Skindivers Wanted for Free Trip to Guatemala.

It was the most exciting call on campus since the '52 panty-raid.

To explain why, let me first tell you a little about skin diving. It's a great deal like playing Buck Rogers underwater. On land—with an hour's supply of air compressed in a heavy tank strapped to your back, with four feet extended uselessly by long rubber fins, and with your face covered with an eye-nose mask and a rubber air tube leading from the tank—you look and feel about as awkward as a dog zooted up for Sputnik. But underwater . . .

Underwater you glide as gracefully as a fish through such a dreamlike experience that some divers—at great depths—are

stricken with "rapture of the deep," an overwhelming, will-crushing desire to stay forever in the gravity-less, exotic world of a limited air supply.

So first of all, skin diving itself was lure enough. Then add to this the fact that the diving was to take place in one of the most beautiful lakes of the world—Lake Amatitlan.

Those thoughtful Mayans. Imagine their foresight in throwing all those pots and pans and incense burners and coke bottles (Borhegyi has not finished analyzing all our finds quite yet) into what would one day be a resort lake fringed with the modern chalets of very gracious and hospitable



Guatemala City!—Paris of Central America and home of cabaret Gallito's magnificent marimba.



waterskiers, cha cha cha dancers, and eight-point beer drinkers.

Lake Amatitlan is a paradise today, and it must have been one in Mayan times when it was evidently the site for lavish religious ceremonies. Bordered by green volcanic hills which barely allow room for the chalets huddling at the base of their steep sides, the lake is a postcard come alive.

Some of the postcard details which must have awed the Mayans in proportion to the delight they offer modern visitors are floating rocks (pumice stone), floating islands (large, drifting clusters of water tulips), and angry water gods (steam rising from hot springs, and geysers of sulphuric water). (I should like to mention parenthetically at this time that Amatitlan's hot springs make diving very pleasant. Depths of 35 to 50 feet at Amatitlan are not much different from a Saturday night bath, temperature-wise. I shall not mention parenthetically or otherwise the opinions of those divers who accidentally stuck their feet in those springs.)

Finally, in addition to all this exoticism, Borhegyi was asking his divers not to look for a rusty flashlight lost somewhere in slime, but to dive on one of the most intriguing assignments ever handed a skin diver: Find artifacts.

Like many of Borhegyi's ideas this assignment was a "first" for the western hemisphere. Diving for artifacts began by accident at the beginning of the century when a sponge diver came across the arm of an ancient statue in the Mediterranean south of Greece. Underwater archeology became a fad in the Mediterranean after the perfection of the aqualung (near the end of the Second World War); but other than some dredging in the sacrificial cenote of Chichen Itza by Harvard's Peabody Museum, no archeologically inspired skin diving had taken place in this part of the world. Enter Borhegyi . . .

Needless to say, Borhegyi got his divers—and wrecked forever the chances of Big D in comparison with Big G.

But now let's go back to Big G City and the patio-planned colleges of San Carlos University where the use-it-while-you-learn-it aspects of the summer school's other specialty, Spanish, complement the discover-it-while-you-study-it aspects of Borhegyi's experiments in skin diving.

Like most foreign cities, Guatemala City (pop. 300,000) is much like a comparatively-sized city in the United States—with the one formidable exception: they don't speak da English. Consequently, asking for something as ordinary as a pack of cigarettes might initiate an exasperating game of cha-

rades unless the student takes his lessons a little more seriously than he might in the States. Spanish comes fast in Guatemala: it has to.

Students have their choice of every type of Spanish class—from the *como-esta-usted* bit to the esthetic bone-picking of Guatemalan poems. The students of Spanish in Guatemala also have the advantage of studying under Guatemalan teachers and of studying with Guatemalan students. This latter aspect brings us to tropical nights, the Good Life—and, once again, to the cha cha cha.

It is not true (as I have told my friends) that all Guatemalan girls are ravishing beauties who speak five languages (English usually, happily, included), dance divinely, and converse and water ski intelligently;



Mary Funk, Norman, was the best diver to go from O.U.—if you dismiss her amazing inability to tell which way was up underwater. We worried quite a bit about "Bubbles La Funk."

but the percentage is so high I do not think I should have to endure having my hand called.

And with or without such delightful partners, Guatemala is all and more than its drum beaters ever claimed for it.

The even-temperated highlands (70 to 75 degrees year-round) are a girdle of lush plateaus and Fujiyama-like volcanos. The lowlands are also even-temperated (360 to 850 degrees year-round, plus 98 percent humidity), and the scenery is much too much like the scenery in a Tarzan movie to appeal to me (bananas, coconuts, tarantulas, all that, and in that order—except when the tarantulas get restless).

Scattered across these two climate belts are the thousands of Mayan pot sherds and ceremonial centers which lure archeologists like the scent of my sweet skin lures a low-

land mosquito. In between, on top of, and all around these centers are the romantic buildings of the Spanish colonists and the starkly modern buildings of today's Guatemalans.

Only the colorfully-dressed Guatemalan Indian seems to exist imperturbably in this country of erratic geysers, volcanos, and civilizations. Behind Guatemala City's old plaza cathedral and between the modern office buildings is the Indian market, where remnants of the Mayan language are still used. And these esoteric remnants are used, I suspect, by old Indians telling new Indians—like old tourists tell new tourists—that the price of their wares is never what's stated, because the tourist will insist on haggling. Some day tourist and Indian will finally speak da same language—probably—and then all that haggling over the price will be unnecessary. Maybe.

Regardless of how well they can haggle, Borhegyi advises his fellows to take about \$300 for the summer term (usually July 3 to August 20). This includes \$60 for tuition, approximately \$70 a month for room and board in a *pension* (a boarding house with a patio: they've all got patios), and about \$5 for textbooks. The rest is cigarette, cleaning and live-it-up money.

And there's ample opportunity for living-it-up. Guatemala City itself is a Paris of sorts (they even have a neon-girded Eiffel tower); and if Big G City is not enough, the school arranges weekend trips to Lake Atitlan (sister lake to Amatitlan and unquestionably *the* most beautiful lake in the world), to Chichicastenango (an Indian village where the Indians argue with God in a picturesque cathedral and then go to the top of a nearby mountain to make an offering to a Mayan deity in case God wasn't too impressed with the weight of their argument), and to Antiqua (the old Spanish colonial capital which was toppled into romantic ruins by an earthquake just in time for the Great American Tourist).

Also the United Fruit Company generously invites the students to a weekend at one of its plush oceanside (Pacific) plantations. And thanks to another free ride on a Guatemalan Air Force plane, the students can spend a day at Tikal in the barely accessible jungles of northern Guatemala, where United Fruit is helping finance the excavation of the most spectacular Mayan ruins in Guatemala.

I must stop. All this is making me nostalgic. For a Sooner who has sworn to be a Sooner born-bred-dead, this will never do. But remember: you read it first in the SOONER MAGAZINE. Big D is strictly old hat.