

fascinated by her job and the people she meets, the president's wife finds

No Time on Her Hands

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Mrs. Cross at the door of the President's home is a familiar sight to hundreds of O.U. guests.

LAST fall Dr. G. L. Cross invited the President's Leadership Class to his home to meet Mrs. Cross. With just a trace of husbandly pride, he assured the freshmen they would find his wife "very amiable." Dr. Cross is a master of understatement; it is difficult to imagine a more "amiable" hostess—or a busier one.

In the 18 years since her husband became President of the University of Oklahoma, Cleo Cross has entertained thousands of students, faculty, parents and alumni and a wide range of famous visitors—from Eleanor Roosevelt to Shelley Berman. During an average "slow" month, she will serve dinner—which she cooks herself—to 60 people, have more than 100 to lunch, greet 150 at open house, have 80 to tea and 25 to 10 a.m. breakfast.

Outside the stately, white-pillared President's home, Mrs. Cross attends official functions five nights a week, serves on dozens of committees, belongs to several women's clubs and manages to keep up with the activities of two married children, a teenage son, a pet hamster and a springer spaniel named Marcus Aurelius.

A lesser woman would have collapsed long ago—and Mrs. Cross admits that living this sort of life would be terrible if she didn't like it. Amazingly she does like it, every minute of it. "I've never dreaded any of these activities," she says. "People excite me."

One of her most valuable talents as a hostess is a phenomenal memory for names and faces, a skill she claims was scared into her on one of her first jobs at the University of Chicago where Dr. Cross was doing graduate work. Association is her key to the memory problem—usually something in the name with something in the person's face. But the method occasionally backfires such as the reception where a "Mr. Karo" became "Mr. Syrup."

"You have to be sure you have the name right the first time," she explains, "and you can't fake it. If you didn't understand when it was first mentioned, you just have to come right out and ask for it again."

Mrs. Cross has several other secrets for successful entertaining. She uses the house and its conversation-piece furnishings as ice-breakers on many occasions. She is especially interested in getting the reaction of foreign visitors to the various types of art in the house, from the abstract work of Bruce Goff and Emilio Amero to the western flavor of Dr. Oscar B. Jacobson; she is looking for a really extreme work of modern art to complete the range. Upstairs she has a collection of prints by her favorite Indian artist, Woody Crumbo, to be framed for her grandchildren and the law office of her son-in-law, Bill Paul, '52ba, '56Law.

Another picture, the possession of young Braden Cross, caused his mother an embarrassing moment during the 1958 visit of



The newest member of the Cross household gets special attention from Mrs. Cross and Braden.



The gardening enthusiasm of O.U.'s first lady had its beginning during her undergraduate days when she studied plant science to learn something of the work of her research botanist husband.

Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt. Mrs. Cross had already evicted her Republican relatives from the guest room to accommodate the former first lady, then had to commandeer Braden's room for the unexpected arrival of Mrs. Roosevelt's personal secretary. The principal decoration of the boy's room was a large portrait of President Eisenhower.

Mrs. Cross regards Mrs. Roosevelt's visit as one of the most memorable, along with that of Great Britain's Lord and Lady Halifax. But the biggest event was the Mother's Day reception a few years ago when 2,500 people were filing through the house just as a tornado struck Norman knocking out the power and communications. Many of the near-hysterical mothers waited out the storm until midnight.

A week with only one event scheduled for the President's home is not considered much of a week by the energetic Mrs. Cross. Annually she entertains the New Sooners (new faculty wives) and each fall holds a series of suppers for the new full-time faculty members. On football Saturdays she tries to "keep the guest list under 40."

Although she occasionally makes use of the Union catering service, Mrs. Cross does nearly all of the cooking for her dinners, making the dishes ahead and putting them in the deep freezer. "It's so much more flattering to a group of people if you do your own cooking," she contends. "Of course, if I didn't like to cook, I wouldn't."

She admits quite frankly that her cooking enthusiasm is heightened by the knowledge that she won't have to clean up the kitchen afterward and can use every pan in sight if the occasion calls for it.

The Crosses have a student houseboy each year, and several have been foreign students. This is not surprising to anyone knowing Mrs. Cross' intense interest in the activities of the International Institute of Education, which oversees foreign students in U. S. colleges.

"My husband got me into this foreign student work," Mrs. Cross explains. "Usually he tells me not to take on anything more, but this was something he wanted me to do." Sharing the President's concern for foreign student relations, Mrs. Cross gave up her work with the Camp Fire Girls (16 years on the National Board of Directors) to become local hospitality chairman for the International Institute.

"They're lonely," Mrs. Cross says of the visiting scholars, "and they go home without knowing anything about us—and it's important what they think of us." But being the official hostess for the growing number of O.U. foreign students—296 are enrolled this semester—is a time-consuming activity. "Actually," she smiles, "what this job needs is a wealthy widow with no other outside interests."

When Dr. Cross first became President, Mrs. Cross tried to belong to everything,

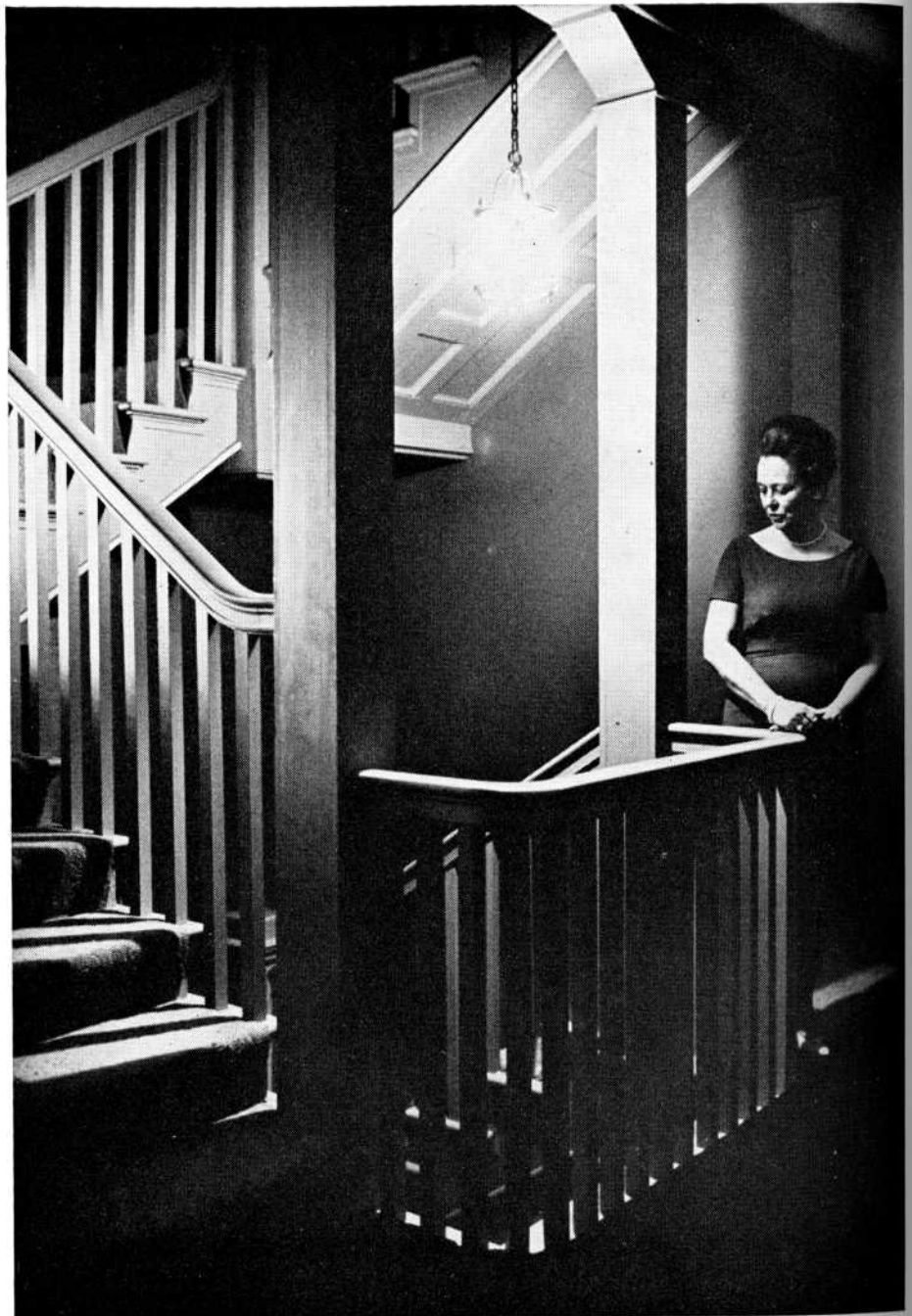


Mrs. Cross' mastery of the millinery art is the result of her well-known flair for originality.

but soon saw the error in this policy. Hundreds of invitations pour in every year and keeping a night at home is a problem. Travel is also difficult. Frequently Dr. and Mrs. Cross must make several separate trips to Oklahoma City in a single day to attend various official functions. The decision to accept or decline invitations is based primarily on interest to the University, with both Dr. and Mrs. Cross favoring those events involving students. The

continued

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Mrs. Cross pauses on the first floor landing at the end of a busy day—with a busy evening still to come. The Crosses average five nights a week away from home attending various official functions.

balance of the schedule is filled first-come-first-served. Mrs. Cross has overcome an early tendency to look too far ahead on her crowded calendar and blots out everything but the day ahead. Every plan she makes must be cross-checked with the President's calendar, and she explains that "Ada (Ada Arnold, the President's secretary) and I have a little system." They trip up occasionally, but not often.

Mrs. Cross admits the obvious—that their private social life is practically nil, and this is her only real regret about her husband's job. The Crosses had made many friends in the 10 years in Norman before Dr. Cross became the University's eighth

President. Now they keep in touch mostly by telephone to exchange vital statistics, but dropping by for the evening is impossible.

That is not to say that Mrs. Cross has no spare-time interests—quite the contrary. As she explains, "I never find any time on my hands—and if I do, I sew." Her latest sewing venture was cross-stitched quilts for sons Bill and Braden. This ambitious project caused a bit of a problem in transporting the big quilting frame up the stairs to the attic each time the Crosses entertained. She already has an order for a third quilt from daughter Mary-Lynn Paul, '55fa.

Another of her hobbies has made her known to many complete strangers as "the

lady in the magnificent hat," and Mrs. Cross' hats are indeed masterpieces of the millinery art. Last summer her green and yellow ribbon hat was immortalized in United Press International dispatches from Europe by Charles Engleman, '33ba, as the beacon which led the members of the O.U. Alumni Tour safely aboard the correct tourist bus. Mrs. Cross started making her own hats about five years ago and is quite proud of the fact that her husband, unlike most, encourages her to come up with creations that "express her individuality." The President needn't worry; with or without the hats, Mrs. Cross' individuality, hospitality or "amiability" has never been in question.