

Miss Oklahoma reflects on her

12 Months in the Limelight

IN THE SUMMER of 1962, Miss Billi Kaye Smith, a University of Oklahoma student from Stroud, was named Miss Oklahoma at the annual pageant in Oklahoma City. For the next 12 months, she represented the state at many functions, including the Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City. In the following interview, Billi Kaye, an honor student at O.U. and president of the Panhellenic Council, talks about her year in the limelight.

Under all the pomp and glitter that is a part of being Miss Oklahoma, there must have been some privations in respect to your personal life. If so, what were some of them?

First, the substantial amount of time that is demanded of a Miss Oklahoma was a problem, although often a very pleasant sort of problem. I had to be gone from the campus practically every weekend to attend shows, fairs, meetings, benefits and such. There were times during the week, too, when I had to be away. One of the most hectic weeks I spent was during the gubernatorial inauguration. It took place right in the middle of finals. I had three final exams scheduled the day after the inauguration. Thanks to my professors, who were always very cooperative and understanding, I had two of them postponed until later in the week. Still, I remember having to study for my French final in an office in the Capitol building while the governor was inaugurated. I even studied in the car going to and from the Inaugural Ball.

Second, something I hadn't foreseen was the way that my being Miss Oklahoma would affect others. I think it's particularly hard on your friends at first in that they are not sure how to act toward you. They are uncertain and uneasy initially. They think maybe you aren't the same person you were before, that you've changed. One friend admitted that she was a little afraid of me after I returned from Atlantic City. "I waited to see if you had changed," she later told me. This effect on your close friends is startling and disturbing.

Did you find it difficult to become accustomed to being constantly in the public eye?

Yes, it was not easy to get used to people whispering and staring at you when you entered a restaurant or walked to class. Your personal appearance is always open to criticism. People actually seemed to be looking for faults. If you put on five pounds, people will say, "How in the world did she get to be Miss Oklahoma?" I think it's a fine thing to be concerned about how you look and to be as well groomed as you can, but it's still not easy to be in a showcase continually. And this being well dressed is a financial thing, too. I was given \$500 for a wardrobe when I became Miss Oklahoma, but a ball gown took a lot of it. And so my family had to dig deeper to pay for the clothes required. With all the functions you must attend, it takes a lot of them. You can't wear the same thing. And



it's hard to say no to all the requests. As Miss Oklahoma, I had an obligation to appear as much as I could. I loved doing it most of the time. But the constancy was very telling. I'm not normally a nervous person, but last spring, just before the inauguration, I woke up one morning and found it hard to swallow. I had to be admitted to a hospital for treatment of a muscle spasm in my neck. The doctor said it was a case of nerves, exhaustion from the continual grind. So I ended up writing a 60-page research paper for a history course from my hospital bed. I suppose the pressure is all a part of the title, but this doesn't make it any easier.

What did you enjoy most about being Miss Oklahoma?

This sounds trite, I know, but it's also true. The friendships I made were the most valuable dividends from being Miss Oklahoma. And the chance to meet so many people and see so many things that, of course, I would never have seen otherwise. The trip to Atlantic City for the Miss America pageant was particularly enjoyable because my mother accompanied me. On the way we stopped for a few days in Washington, D.C., and New York City. The Oklahoma congressional delegation were wonderful hosts, and I was thrilled to get to meet them all. They arranged a tour of the White House for us—we even got to see a redecorated room before Mrs. Kennedy, who was away, had seen it. And while we were in the cabinet room, a tall man in a dark, pin-striped suit entered and introduced himself as "Jack Kennedy." We had a nice visit, mostly about O.U. football. I later had lunch with the Oklahoma congressmen at the Capitol. The bean soup, by the way, is excellent there. I brought the recipe home with me. In New York City we went to a Broadway show and toured the city. But the week in Atlantic City was the climax. It was very exciting although it's a madhouse.

Has being Miss Oklahoma changed you?

I'm a different person in some ways. My values haven't changed, but I believe I have been matured by the experience. My maturation was speeded up, at any rate. Having been Miss Oklahoma has made me certain of one thing. I now violently reject any kind of life forced on me that would require my being in the public eye. If a person chooses such a career, fine. But I wouldn't care to have it thrust upon me and have to live that way day after day.