



REMINISCENCES OF OU

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My introduction to MSUO as it then was came through two of my students at Kingswood School, Cranbrook, whose mothers were on the Meadow Brook Conference Board. The girls came to me to ask if I would like to get back into university teaching. I assented at once. These students went to their mothers, who then put the arm on Woody. He was not pleased. But he told me to come for an interview, and I rose from the bed to which I had been consigned with a slipped disc and foot drop, and Bill and I managed to find Squirrel Road, then a dirt track. Woody's greeting was, "You have powerful friends." But he was a gentleman, then and always. He told me some of the plans and hopes for a new university, showed me what there was to see—North Foundation and Oakland Center and South Foundation being built, and we agreed it was exciting to get in on the ground floor of a new enterprise. He offered me a nine-month contract at, I think, \$4000, and I didn't hesitate. I would have come on any terms to return to university teaching.

Bob Hoopes returned to campus after a brief absence, thinking his faculty complete, and found a cuckoo in the nest. He was not pleased, either. But he too was a gentleman and treated me from the outset like all the other members of the English faculty. Some time during the Fall he came to me. "I've been looking up the records of the faculty," he said, and your qualifications are as good as anyone's. How come you're on a

nine-month contract when everyone else is on a three year?" I explained the circumstances: married woman, living in the vicinity, absent from university teaching for children and child care, and my friends on the Meadowbrook Conference Board. "Well," he said, "I'm making your contract three years, retroactive to September. That will put you on the same footing as everyone else." And he did.

A year or so later Bob retired from the chairmanship of the English group (we were not as yet departments), and I was made Coordinator of English Studies. Bill Schwab and Tom Fitzsimmons, my colleagues, accepted this change with equanimity, but Justus Pearson raised hell. He and I had been buddies, sitting together in his office, the door shut against interruption, and deep into such matters as Donne's Holy Sonnets, when a timid knock announced the arrival of a woman of indeterminate age, a student of Justus' who adored him. "Oh, excuse me!" she fluted, with a look that announced that All Was Discovered. On my appointment she indignantly rallied a group of other women, admirers of Justus, and for a short time matters looked serious. But it came to nothing. In short order Justus left for another university, Bill got a Fulbright Fellowship to Korea, Bob resumed the chairmanship, and I took a leave of absence and departed for the Orient.

When I returned in 1964 I found the campus had changed. Among the changes was a language lab. I was elated. Now I could send my Chaucer students to hear disks of the original language read by experts. What better way to appreciate a great poet whose Middle English was largely inaccessible to modern students. But a tall, grim-faced man blocked the narrow way like Horatious at the bridge. "The language lab is for students of foreign languages." Don Lodice had come from Yale to teach French and run the lab. He was having his own problems and did not propose to encumber himself with us. "But Middle English is a foreign language," I protested. We growled at each other and I withdrew. Later we came to an accommodation, when we had both cooled off. For forty years

Don has been my close friend and in computer matters my guru.

The early years were precarious, and there was even talk of folding the noble experiment of an Athens of the Middle West. There were clashes between a highly qualified faculty and students unprepared for their demands. There were black students from nearby Pontiac now, where Woody had once fretted to me, "How can we get blacks on this campus?" And the Student Conduct Committee was formed to adjudicate such problems as plagiarism and cheating on exams. When I returned from a Visiting Professorship at University of Massachusetts, Boston, in 1972, they laid it on me to be chairman of this committee, alleging they wanted someone who stood for traditional values and someone with guts. It was the worst two years of my life at OU.

Grimly, sometimes unwillingly, but as in duty bound, faculty members would haul before the committee students who had the dimmest notion of what plagiarism is, or saw no reason why they shouldn't look over someone's shoulder when they were seated so closely together it was difficult not to look. I sometimes felt a faculty member should have been on trial. And one of my colleagues, whom I otherwise liked and admired, invoked a sort of Calvinistic sin and punishment dialectic which side-tracked the particular issue involved, and made me squirm. At the end of the two years I resigned the chairmanship, wrote a nine page memo on the subject and happily returned to the precincts of Wilson Hall.

Another problem, short-lived but extraordinarily troublesome while it lasted, arose in the 70s. My first intimation of it came when Norm Susskind was literally driven from his lecture room when a group of students, mainly black, made it impossible for him to teach by a series of questions and comments which permitted no answer. The administration assigned a group of faculty to take his lectures in turn, and I well remember my trepidation when I stood before this class. I had not realized on what a delicate balance the teaching/learning process rests. Then Arlene Jackson, the youngest member of

the English Department, appealed to me to sit in on her literature class. Myra Wilson, a particularly aggressive young black woman, was subjecting her to the same techniques that had succeeded with Norm.

“How come you make us read this book?” Arlene patiently explained that *The Tin Drum* was a masterpiece. “Why can’t we choose our own books? I want to read about the black experience.” Arlene replied that this was a class in English Literature. And so it went, time wasting and the majority of the class growing increasingly impatient. I finally sent for Earl Gray, a splendid black man who was in charge of police matters. But the experience had shaken Arlene, who left us for Notre Dame and small blame to her.

Myra popped up some time later in one of my English II classes. My heart sank when I saw her. “You must have passed English,” I told the students, “or copped out by exam. Please be sure the Registrar has this on his records.”

“You mean just because you’re the teacher you can tell us whether we can take the course?” Myra demanded.

“That is indeed the case,” I said.

Myra looked about her, saw scant sympathy, and realized the jig was up. She gathered her notebooks, kicked over her chair, and stood up. “F—k you!” she screamed at me and dashed for the door. We could hear her all the way down the corridor screaming “F—k” you! I shut the door and grinned at my class. “Let’s begin.”

Myra flunked out some time later.

Then there was the advent of the Writing Center adjacent to the English Department on the fifth floor of Wilson Hall. It was meant to give aid and comfort to students in trouble with the written language of papers and tests. No sooner had I heard of it than I was on the phone to Joan Rosen, my former colleague at Kingswood and a recent graduate of Vassar. “There’s a job here, Joan. Just up your alley. Get on your horse and get over here.” Joan came, got the job, and she and Rosalie Ficker ran the lab to everyone’s satisfaction. As everyone knows, Joan went on to become Chairman of the English

Department for several years, and now in retirement she and her husband Bob have endowed a classy Writing Center ensconced in the library. So much to live through and remember, so little to write! My 22 years at **OU** were the best of my life. Many other of my colleagues and students would say the same.