The Kingfish at OU

It is common practice among colleges and universities to claim as an alumnus every tuition-paying student who ever stood in an admissions line, especially if that student subsequently goes on to a place of prominence—and even a touch of notoriety doesn’t hurt. Such was the case in 1929 when the first Sooner Magazine editor, Joseph A. Brandt, was soliciting alumni articles for his fledgling publication. Imagine the former newspaperman’s excitement when he discovered that the colorful and controversial new governor of Louisiana had once—however briefly—been a Sooner.

Brandt wrote to Governor Huey P. Long asking for some career achievements and student reminiscences for the magazine. “The Kingfish” graciously replied, but by the time Brandt’s article appeared in May 1929, impeachment charges instigated by the political machine, the New Orleans Ring, had been brought against Long by the Louisiana House of Representatives. He was later acquitted by the Louisiana Senate.

A penniless farm boy whose college education consisted of a semester at the OU law school in 1912 and a similar brief stay at Tulane University, Long founded a political dynasty in Louisiana based on social reforms to benefit poor farmers and workers. In 1930, he was elected to the U.S. Senate but for two years refused to leave the governor’s office until a hand-picked successor was elected to carry out his program, using the slogan “Every Man a King.”

Long split with President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal and formed the Share-the-Wealth Society, which among other things sought a guaranteed annual family income. He challenged Roosevelt for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1935 but was shot on September 8 by a bitter political enemy and died two days later.

The Long family carried on. A younger brother, Earl, served three terms as governor of Louisiana and was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, as was an older brother, George. The Kingfish’s son, Russell, first was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1948 and became one of its most powerful members.

Huey Long’s letter to Joe Brandt, who later became president of the University of Oklahoma, resurfaced last year when the Brandt papers were given by his family to the OU archives. The letter is reproduced here, a “Sooner Memory” complete with type-overs and smudges, leading to the supposition that Long either had a very inept secretary or typed the reply himself.

Continued
Mr. Joseph A. Brandt, Editor, 
The Sooner Magazine, 
Norman, Oklahoma

Dear Mr. Brandt:

Please pardon my failure to answer your letter of March 5th.

I am, of course, appreciative of the compliment which your magazine undertakes to pay to me, and likewise desirous of rendering you any service that I can for your publication. If I were not so busy, I would put you into communication with someone who could better supply you with the kind of data that you desire on this more or less uneventful career of mine, Nevertheless, I will give you a few high spots, to-wit:

I walked to Norman from Oklahoma City, down the Santa Fe tracks, January 2, 1912, with the thermometer pretty well near the mark; of zero that night.

I had a position with the Dawson Produce Company of Oklahoma City to sell produce on a commission basis in the towns of Norman, Noble, Purcell and Lexington. I used to work the ftzr towns in one day before the automobile was in use very much, sometimes by walking from one town to the other. In this manner, I earned about $100.00 a month, and went to school until the end of the term of 1912.

I left the University and went with the Faultless Starch Company of Kansas City as a salesman, and later as a division salesmanager over some other salesmen, in the States of Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, Texas and Oklahoma. I filled this position from the summer of 1912 to the Fall of 1914, about two and one-half years, between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one, resigning d, the age of twenty-one to resume b7 studies of law, which I had taken up at the Oklahoma University, and which I completed at Tulane University in New Orleans during the early part of 1915, when I was admitted to the bar.
I began to practice law in my old home town of Winnfield, in the Spring of 1915, at the age of twenty-one, and at the same time began to organize against the New Orleans Ring, which had dominated the politics of Louisiana for twenty-five years prior to that time.

In the Fall of 1918 I was elected Railroad Commissioner of the northern half of Louisiana, by a majority of 636 votes over the opposition of all newspapers and political forces of the twenty-eight parishes of North Louisiana. They would be called counties in Oklahoma.

In the Fall of 1918 I led the fight in North Louisiana in a gubernatorial race against the New Orleans Ring. The anti-Ring candidate was elected. Upon this candidate retaining the officers and policies of the old system while governor, we soon parted political company.

In the meantime, as Railroad Commissioner, I won the right against the telephone company for lower rates in Louisiana, being then in the Federal Courts in New Orleans and Washington, I succeeded in making the pipe lines of the Standard Oil Company common carriers, and led a number of campaigns in the State until the Fall of 1923, when I ran for Governor at the age of thirty, and was defeated due to a heavy rain storm on election day, which kept some fifty thousand voters in the country away from the polls, by about seven thousand votes.

In the Fall of 1924, I supported Senator Joseph Ransdell for Senator, and ran for re-election to the Public Service Commission, Ransdell won by twenty thousand and I won by thirty-seven thousand.

In 1926 I supported Senator Edwin S. Broussard against the combined State and New Orleans political machines, Broussard was elected by thirty-four hundred votes.

In 1927 I again announced for Governor and on January 17th, 1928 was elected by a majority of 45,095 votes, beating both the State and New Orleans machines.

Under my administration as Governor, practically all the old satellites have been turned out of office, many big improvements are being made in the colleges and schools; school books have been supplied free of cost to the school children, in the State; the highways of the State are being paved; natural gas has been forced into New Orleans, where it should have been twenty years ago; jury lists have been reformed so as to secure reputable jurors to convict for crime; all schools are being amply financed, and the State of Louisiana is going forward with a program of im.
which bids fair to show more real progress in the
next four years than it has for the past thirty.
I am sorry to personally be giving you this informa-
tion, but I think the facts are conservatively reported to jus-
tify what I have said.
There was nothing eventful in my
varsity, The photograph which you request
Photos: Russell B. Long
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