Was the Town Tavern Counterman for Real?

My Social Security card is dated June 9, 1937, and identifies my employer as the Town Tavern, Norman, Oklahoma. At the time that I applied for a job there, Ralph and Helena Geist were in the process of moving the Town Tavern from a small operation on Buchanan Street to the most prominent location on the Campus Corner. (As I recall, the previous tenant at that location had been a clothing store. In those days folks weren't buying a lot of clothes, but Theta Specials were something else.) I gave you this little piece of background for a reason.

The Sooner Magazine is one periodical that doesn't sit around in our house waiting to get read. We—my wife, Lydia Spencer Evans, Arts and Sciences '43, and I—get to it as soon as it arrives. For us old Normanites it is wonderful to keep up with the present, get a look at the future and enjoy the nostalgia of the past of the University and Norman. Consequently, I was more than a little interested to read the excerpts from Sooner Century, 100 Glorious Years of Oklahoma Football and find that the kick-off of the article was a recount of the auction of the Town Tavern furnishings and, more importantly, the reminiscences of "an old Town Tavern counterman." Was there really such a person there or was he an invention of Mr. Clark, a little editorial license to give the story some personality?

As a fifteen-year-old curb-hop I was knocking down a starting salary of $0.15/hour. (The good news is that I got a 2 or 3 cent an hour raise when I moved inside to wait tables, wash dishes, draw beer and work the soda fountain or make deliveries from the white model-A delivery coupe.) Obviously I wasn't getting paid to remember names, and it has been more than a few years, but I would surely like to know who that old counterman from the thirties was. I still remember a few by name and quite a few more by character, and there were plenty of those.

My OU football appreciation days go back to the late twenties and early thirties when I would go to the games with young Billy Cross and sometimes sit on the bench with the team. (His dad was a wheel in the sports department and an early-day football star.) At that time there were a minimum concrete West bleacher section and a wooden East bleacher section. The East bleachers were later moved to the baseball diamond to provide seating there. I still live and die with the Sooners in all sports. As recently as two nights ago, I died hard as my TV took me to Still (ugh) water to catch a basketball game.

So now I will order the book. Maybe it will name the counterman. I know that it will bring back memories of important days in my life and the life of the Sooners.

Robert R. Evans, '43 B.S. Lawrence, Kansas

Editor's Note: Author J. Brent Clark patterned the old counterman after J. B. Benton, who held that job at the Town Tavern for many years. When Benton died of old age in his apartment near the campus, Clark attended his funeral and was amazed at the number of OU faculty, staff and former athletes among the mourners, there to express their affection and respect for the old man. Benton's eulogy was delivered by Bette Maffucci, the Tavern's last owner and former city council member.

About "Paying Forward"

I have just finished reading your most recent "Prologue" in the latest Sooner Magazine, and I felt compelled to sit down and write to you.

First and foremost I want to thank you for mentioning Dad (the late University College Dean Glenn C. Couch) in the article—that meant a great deal to me personally. But also I appreciate your bringing to people's awareness what has made the University great—that idea of paying forward. It is so valuable to the University to hear someone like you who not only remembers what made it great but also has the courage and the forum to write about it.

I enjoy your "Prologues" so much—please keep up the good work!

Joseph B. Couch, '71 B.A., '77 Ph.D. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

An OU Update:

Did You Know...?

- OU's Master of Business Administration Program for the second year has been ranked in the top quartile of all accredited MBA programs in the nation. U.S. News & World Report listed the OU program 63rd of 292 in its annual survey of "America's Best Graduate Schools."
- The OU Doctoral Program in Communications, the largest such program in the country, has been ranked in the top quartile—15th of 66—by the national Speech Communication Association.
- OUHSC heart surgeons Ronald Elkins and Warren Jackman have been named the nation's best in that specialty in a Good Housekeeping magazine survey. Elkins is a professor of surgery and chief of the section of thoracic and cardiovascular surgery at the Health Sciences Center, while Jackman is a professor of cardiology and a George Lynn Cross Research Professor.
- Robyn Potts, a December 1995 graduate in biochemistry and German, has been awarded a Fulbright grant to attend the University of Wuerzburg in Germany and to participate in Parkinson's Disease research. She plans to attend medical school and practice family medicine.
- The University Choir, directed by Steven C. Curtis, was selected to perform at the 1996 American Choral Directors Association Convention in Dallas.
- Two OU honors students, Christopher Thomas of McAlester and De A. Vu of Oklahoma City, are 1996 recipients of the prestigious Goldwater Scholarships on the basis of their potential and intent to pursue careers in mathematics, natural sciences or engineering.
- Tom Boyd, Kingfisher College Professor of Religion and Ethics at OU, has received the 1996 Oklahoma Medal of Excellence in Teaching at the College and University Level. Boyd is the sixth OU professor in the past 10 years to earn this award from the Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence. Others were Tom Hill, Larry Toothaker, Stewart Ryan, Norman Crockett and Leon Unger.