

## REMINISCING IN OKLAHOMA

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**In reminiscing** of my time in Oklahoma, I will try to provide lighthearted items while refraining from a pack of lies. I feel like the guy in the TV ad who says he had a life that no one would want to read about.

When I showed up at the University of Oklahoma in 1962 I came in the first instance from the University of Texas, Austin. I had grown up in the Pacific Northwest, mainly Seattle. I spent three years at the University of London, propelled there by a wonderful history professor at the University of Washington. After a three year stint at Cornell (Ph.D. 1958) I got my first job in Texas in 1957 and then left for the University of Oklahoma in 1962.

In 1962 Oklahoma was badly malapportioned and segregated. Even getting a good drink of booze could be tough, although there were lots of helpful bootleggers on hand for those in dire need. As for malapportionment and segregation, federal courts struck these down, at least in law, in due course. But as anyone living in the state could testify, rural conservative interests remained quite pervasive.

Something else that persisted in the state in the 1960s was plenty of corruption. It became a major interest of mine. The corruption was so bad that, according to one story, a local county commissioner won office by promising that he would take no more than the usual 10 percent! The story may be apochryphal but in 1962 there were fertile grounds for suspicions. Thus, during this period of the 1960s the feds caught and convicted some 220 officials, mostly county commissioners, for taking kickbacks. My interest in corruption blossomed into a book (with Frank S. Myers), *Bad Times for Good Ol' Boys: The Oklahoma County Commissioner Scandal* (1993).

Federal officials cleaned up this mess. The pattern of federal intervention occurring to clean up Oklahoma corruption was to be repeated again and again. The most recent example worth citing is the Health Department, with the conviction of a Deputy Commissioner in 2000. As usual the FBI and federal courts are cited. Yet my experience in researching the dark side of Oklahoma politics did not lead me to the view that Oklahoma is uniquely corrupt. It is probably average, just as the state tends to be in the middle range in other respects.

Whatever the state's oddities, it has been enjoyable to live in. Among things that Oklahoma does not lack is lots of good people! Oddly enough, my old home town of Seattle, which used to be an obscure place off in a corner of the country, has come up in the ratings of good places to live. Even so, I don't think I could live there happily now. Apart from the weather, it has become crowded and is today one of the most congested places in the nation. And it is hellishly expensive! Seattle is a nice place to visit, but I wouldn't want to live there. All in all, I think I am quite well off in Oklahoma!