

Grit In My Gizzard: No. 12

College Life

For the remaining three years in college, the time and sequence of many things blur in my memory, so I will deal more with general memories. I can say emphatically that George and I were always glad to be in the school. We did not bemoan our having to work but considered it a blessing to be able to pay whatever it cost to attend, and we finished owing no college bills! Our gizzard stones of the farm prepared us for this.

If we had lost any of our crusty farm look in our year at college, we probably regained it in the summer back on the farm. Farm boys wore big straw hats, a shirt with sleeves, and even gloves whose tops met the shirt sleeves. Now men will work without shirt or hat and women want the tanned look and both wear faded and torn jeans and brogan shoes to look like they labor in the sun. Dermatologists will reap windfall profits in a few years by treating their cancers.

After we were back in ACC, we received urgent word to come back home. Dad had a field very “white unto harvest” (We from the cotton patch had our own understanding of Jesus’ terminology!). A hail storm had beaten it from the stalks. Dean Adams gave us leave to go home for a week to help. Our short time away from work had softened our muscles. For both of us, it was a most miserable week as every muscle screamed out in fiery pain.

When we did not work at the hotel, we did all sorts of jobs, some assigned by the college in payment for tuition and others we found or Dean Adams pointed us to. For a while Bud milked the Adams’ cow. I spaded their garden and even baby-sat with their young son. I did a full day of ironing for a family for \$1.50. I washed windows, passed out fliers, helped a surveyor terrace a farm, and kept the rest rooms in the Ad Building. Bud and I painted with calcimine rooms in Chambers Hall. Having no such help as a sanding machine or paint remover, Bud and I used shards of glass to scrape the many initials and carvings from the oak student desktops. During construction of a two-story home just south of the campus, we did many hours of detail work for less than ten cents per hour. In our senior year Bud and I kept the athletic equipment in the gymnasium.

Less time consuming jobs allowed Bud and me to enter into campus life more. Our participation in extra-curricular Evangelistic Forum and Mission Study broadened our perspectives and fed our zeal. The influence of those associations has spread among our churches in our country and around the world. The college never pretended to be an arm of the church, but it greatly benefited the church through those it trained and inspired. On numerous occasions I have been introduced to a congregation with such a brief statement as “He is from ACC.”

By the time of my college studies, the stance of our “mainline” churches had been fairly well established. In respecting those parameters, the Bible teachers confirmed what we already had been taught rather than injecting new doctrinal and theological challenges. We were the restoration of the true church basing our claims on the verbally inspired Scriptures argued from a legalistic viewpoint. We saw little hope for those of the religious world about us. Our intellectual inbreeding was hardly overpowered by those

more grace-oriented and accepting teachers, but over all, a student did receive a valuable, practical education in Biblical understanding.

I sat in more classes taught by Charles H. Roberson, the head of the department, than any other. He often observed that there was no institution of higher learning in the country that, after one hundred years, was teaching what it was founded to teach. Could that be true in ACU that is celebrating its hundredth anniversary this year? I am confident that change has been made for the better rather than for the worse. From my impressions now, the teaching is well-balanced putting Christ rather than doctrinal issues at the center, emphasizing grace instead of law, and stressing unity with less judgmental rejection of others due to peripheral distinctions. The strong sense of camaraderie and zeal to serve mankind is still instilled. Now, ten times larger, ACU rates highly among the universities in our nation.

Brother Roberson was a stately, dignified man who almost always had a rosebud or some such boutonniere in his lapel. I thought that was neat and followed his example most of my career.

Though twenty-seven descendants and spouses of Sol and Deanie Hook attended ACC sixty miles away, Dad and Mom only saw the campus once and they never attended a function there. Those of the family attending include Fay and Emily (Hook) Wilson; Kay Wilson, Marlin Wilson, Jim Wilson; George and Margarete (Gardner) Hook, Thomas and Pam (Case) Hook, Kurt and Jeri (Lane) Hook, David and Robin Hook, Tom and Beth Ann (Hook) Baker; Clay Tidwell; Marion Gardner; Cecil Hook, Sol and Linda (Williamson) Hook, Paul and Mira (Hook) Prince; Owen and Elda (Hook) Aikin, Linda Aikin; Herman E. "Tiny" and Lois (Hook) Charles. Several have received advanced degrees. There have been teachers, preachers, missionaries, and devout disciples among us, all greatly influenced by the college.

In our second year we shared a tiny rental house close to the campus with Emily and Fay, while Bud and I worked at the Hilton again. We occupied our room mostly to sleep; otherwise we were in classes, in the library, or at work where we ate our meals. A football player from New Mexico worked at the Wooten Hotel and only needed a place to sleep. So we rented our bed to him! We had two cotton mattresses, one of which we put on the floor, leaving the bedstead with springs and mattress for him. Because the room was so small, there was little floor space left.

Not much of the food for employees at the hotel was appetizing, so I found that larger portions of food left on the plates of customers was preferable. I know how you would feel about that, but you eat raw food handled by others. Half of a good steak returned was too good to go into the garbage which was collected for a hog raiser. I took food like that back for Emily to reuse for their meals also.

One day the maitre d' came scurrying around in the large room in which we worked. He cleared a place and set up a small table in nice fashion. Then he ushered in and seated two men dressed in nice suits. They were of a deep complexion that I had never seen before -- business men from India! I am sure they must have been impressed with Texas hospitality! I was embarrassed for them. Yet, they might have seen themselves on the receiving end of what they practiced in their own caste system in India. Our great country has never cornered the market on denigrating and unjust discrimination.

Although beer was illegal in Abilene, it was served at a few banquets in the hotel. Glasses of it were brought with the dishes returned for us to wash. I had never drunk any but always wondered what magic feeling it afforded for it was denounced in such appealing ways. I drank a few swallows of it and waited for some ecstatic feeling. It did not come. I continued to sip and consumed more than a glass full with no evident effect; so that fanciful bubble was burst – and who could possibly like the taste of it?

In preparing chicken for banquets, the butcher ordered live chickens. He would grab a chicken, jerk its head off by hand, douse it in a vat of scalding water, suspend it with a few others while it cooled, pick the feathers with both hands, and then toss it into a container before it quit kicking. By the time he had processed thirty or fifty, he looked like the maniac of a horror movie. He also butchered live bull frogs there. My introduction to shrimp was no more appealing either, as he would dump shrimp in a vat for boiling. I could not imagine anyone eating shrimp cocktail after smelling such a nauseating odor. A ten gallon pot sat on the floor by the cooks' work table. As they prepared food they would toss all scraps into it – vegetable trimmings, meat scraps, bones, egg shells, or whatever. It looked like our farm kitchen slop that we fed to the hogs. After several gallons of accumulation, it was simmered on the grill for a long time and then we strained it through a dish towel. How about a nice bowl of consume`, anyone? In evening cleanup, one new boy thought an uncooked pot of it was garbage and disposed of it instead of putting it in the ice box!

Each guest setting required about eight or ten pieces to be washed. Multiply that by a busy dinner evening plus a banquet and you have hundreds of pounds of dishes and silverware. One of us filled the trays and fed them through the dishwasher and the other inspected, dried, and stacked them. Since detergents had not been invented, a constant problem was in making the dishes look sparkling clean. And being before the time of Teflon and scrub pads, with much difficulty, cook pots had to be scraped and cleaned by hand. The last operation each evening was the scouring of all floors with hot lye water – which was not prescribed for one's shoes or feet. It did deter the hordes of cockroaches for a few minutes. I had never seen a cockroach before! As the people left and the constant noise of the day faded, a strange silence made the huge area seem eerie and spooky. I just thought you might like to know about our exotic, high tech kitchen education in the Hilton. So we will close up and walk back to the hill.

(Cecil Hook: April 2006)