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to end  
like this,  
but it  
did.’*





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# CONTENTS

**News** 6

TIME FOR THE TOWERS TO GO?

**Sports** 12

COURAGEOUS:  
THE MAGGIE NICHOLS STORY

**Community** 22

SENIOR LETTERS

**Editorial** 30

SO LONG, FAREWELL



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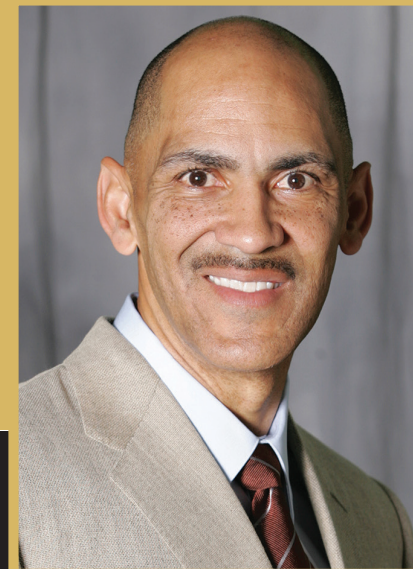
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News9's Amanda Taylor and  
invocation by Berry Trammel!



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## Tony Dungy truly needs no introduction.

Not only is he a legend in the world of football as a coach, player, and commentator, Tony is a proud dad! He and his wife have ten children, seven of whom are adopted!

Prior to his role as an analyst for NBC's *Football Night in America*, Tony spent 13 seasons as head coach of the Indianapolis Colts and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. Tony's teams averaged more wins in the regular season than any head coach in NFL history. He was also the first African-American coach to lead his team to a championship when his Colts defeated the Chicago Bears in Super Bowl XLI. Tony himself won his first Super Bowl as a member of the Pittsburgh Steelers. He is one of only three individuals to have won the Super Bowl as both a player and a head coach.

In 2016, Dungy was selected to join the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Known for a leadership style that emphasizes decency and respect, Tony's priorities of faith and family were always evident in his coaching and these values have been adopted by his crop of assistant coaches, many of whom have gone on to NFL head coaching positions.

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2020  
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13th Annual  
of Destiny



# TIME FOR THE TOWERS TO GO?

STORY BY BLAKE DOUGLAS

PHOTOS BY CAITLYN EPES

**Mold, flooding, aged walls and carpets. These issues have prompted freshman residents of Adams, Couch and Walker Centers to ask why OU has not made the switch to a newer on-campus housing option.**

In August 1967, OU alumnus Ian Butler, then a second-year student, stood in the shade of a newly constructed, titanic trio of towers. The New England native had traded milder summers for sweltering central Oklahoma heat, and that month, the highs consistently hovered well over 90 degrees most days.

Hefting his luggage from the ground and pressing onward, Butler headed toward his housing assignment, McCasland Tower in Adams Center, the first of the new residential buildings to be constructed.

"It was very nice, well appointed. It was also more expensive than just about everything else at the time," Butler said. "I didn't have a problem with it."

Unlike many future and current OU freshmen faced with mold and flooded hallways, Butler said the only surprises the tower had for him were culinary — including mildly perplexing Tex-Mex cuisine, which would occasionally be served in the cafeteria that formerly occupied Adams Center's bottom floor.

"What the — it's like something is wrapped in toilet paper," Butler recalled thinking when he was first offered a tamale in the cafeteria line. "What the hell is this?"

A year later in 1968, first-time resident Kathy Bass moved into Walker Center, just east of Adams. At the time, Bass said the move was a definitive upgrade from other dorms on campus, like Cate Center, which first welcomed freshmen as an all-women's dorm in 1949.

"My first impression of everything was really nice — the fixtures, the bed, the desk, all of it," Bass said. "It was nicer than Cate was at the time, with our own suite bathroom instead of one bathroom for the whole floor."

When the towers were constructed, they became the largest on-campus housing option available. Today, Adams has the capacity to house 908 students, with Couch sporting 1,396 available beds and Walker offering 1,404.

Bass said the towers had another major advantage over Cate at the time — air conditioning. When she returned to the towers over 40 years later, however, Bass said what had seemed like luxury compared to other on-campus housing had turned into mediocrity at best.

"I helped my nephew move out of the towers within the last few years, and I was surprised," Bass said. "Maybe back then it was just that my perception was better than it really was, but it wasn't as nice as I remember. ... The

carpets and the walls especially look really aged."

Bass is not unique among alumni who believe the towers are standing past their expiration date. Sheffra Stauder, who lived in Walker Center from the fall of 1981 to the spring of 1982, said she was surprised the towers had not been renovated more extensively when she returned to help her daughter move into Walker in 2010.

"When I moved my kids in," Stauder said, "all I could think was, 'Wow, I can't believe they haven't remodeled.' Really, I can't believe they haven't been totally torn down and rebuilt."

Love for the towers may be approaching an all-time low among current residents as well. Thanks to recent and extensive issues with mold and a full-blown flood, many first-year students are left scratching their heads as to why they are being excluded from one notably superior housing option, Cross Village.

Even among former residents who appreciated how "roughing it" in rooms lacking luxury made their college experiences more memorable, the same question is asked time and again — how much longer will the towers stand? As more freshmen are assigned to aging rooms, more come out with horror stories like the one pre-nursing freshman Natalie Berryhill punctuated with a sharp admonition:

"They really suck, I'll say that. I cannot wait to move out."

**'I knew it wasn't going to be a great experience.'**

On Feb. 10, 2020, Berryhill was busy preparing for a jam-packed week of classes — including four exams in five days. She was preparing to run a daunting gauntlet for a first-year student still transitioning to a college course load, managing the precious commodity that is study time.

Berryhill, a resident of Adams' McCasland Tower, was already familiar with OU's freshman housing — she stayed in the dorms in 2015 when she attended a cheer camp as a high school freshman, and both of her par-

ents had shared their own horror stories about living in the towers during the '90s. Her mother even lived in the same tower when she was a student.

"My mom walked in to move me into the cheer camp, and she was like, 'Oh my gosh' — they looked the exact same," Berryhill said. "Down to the upholstery on the bedding and tiles and sinks and toilets in the bathroom. ... I was blown away they hadn't changed in 25 years."

One dreadful tale her parents shared involved a mold infestation in their dorms, Berryhill said, a chapter that repeated itself just a year before Berryhill's arrival, when four different sickness-causing molds were found in Couch Center.

The issue of mold in aging college dorms is not unique to OU, however. A Facebook group titled "Break the 'Mold'" was formed in February 2019 to bring attention to the issue, and members — including many OU students and their parents — regularly post articles that have highlighted mold stories from universities like Florida State, North Texas and Florida Atlantic.

In her first semester, Berryhill said she fell victim to the same fungus that afflicted her parents years prior, when some of her shoes and clothing started to grow mold.

"When I found out I was going to be living in the towers and not the residential colleges, I was pretty bummed because I knew it wasn't going to be a great experience," Berryhill said. "I didn't really know what that entailed until now."

As Berryhill pored over her nutrition textbook on that seemingly uneventful February afternoon, she heard the resident in the room just above hers turn on their shower.

At least, that was what it sounded like — what struck her as strange was that, before then, she had never heard that noise.

With the steadily increasing severity of a biblical plague, just months after the mold, the newest member of the Berryhill clan to attend OU was the victim of a fresh catastrophe.

"Five minutes kind of go on after I hear it, and we start to hear a commotion in the hallway," Berryhill said. "We stepped outside, and our hallmates next door to us — their air conditioner had busted and ... there's just water





everywhere, blowing and spewing out of the air conditioner.”

The students on McCasland’s third floor leaped into action to prevent the rapidly advancing cascade from destroying textbooks, clothing, electronics and more. When the flood began, Berryhill said, the residents thought they might be able to turn off the water and stop the current. Unfortunately, the flood would continue until the hall was covered in at least an inch of dirty, hot water, which Berryhill estimated to be about 90 degrees.

“It was a depressing moment for a couple minutes,” Berryhill said, “because we realized that this week was going to be hell on earth.”

When the shock subsided, many of the students were left wondering what had caused the sudden swamping that displaced them — Berryhill herself was essentially homeless for two days.

The university said the age of the tower was to blame, with old plumbing exacerbated by the dramatically changing Oklahoma weather.

“Adams is an older building with aging infrastructure,” said ShaRhonda Maclin, assistant dean of students, in a February email. “When we experience rapid temperature changes like we did over the weekend, with temperatures in the 70s and the next day near freezing, it causes the pipes to expand and contract, which can cause older pipes to burst.”

### ‘Freshmen would pour in.’

The towers are certainly aged — Adams was the first to be built in 1964, with Walker and Couch following in 1966 — but they are not even in the top 10 oldest housing facilities among OU’s Big 12 peers. A majority of residence halls at the University of Texas predate Adams Center’s 1964 construction, and four of Iowa State University’s many housing options were originally built before 1930.

OU is home to two of the newest housing constructions in the conference, in fact, with the Headington and Dunham residential colleges opening in fall 2017 and the much-maligned Cross Village, branded as a luxury housing option for upperclassmen, opening a year later in fall 2018.

These housing options have left some freshmen wondering why a majority of them continue to be relegated to the towers and their many maintenance issues. Berryhill said she felt many freshmen would jump at the opportunity to stay in Cross, which currently bars freshmen from its 1,200 available beds — about a third of the three towers’ combined maximum occupancy of 3,708, according to an OU spokesperson.

“I’ve heard Cross is very nice. And a lot of my friends, we don’t understand why nobody lives there,” Berryhill said. “I think (not allowing freshmen) is a huge factor in why Cross is failing.”

Berryhill is not the first to suggest that OU’s administration open Cross Village to freshmen to address the complex’s dismal occupancy rate, which has hovered around 30 percent since September 2018.

Steve Hicks is the president of Provident Oklahoma Education Resources, a subsidiary of Provident Resources Group, of which he is the CEO. Provident Oklahoma — which funded the construction of Cross — is currently locked in a legal clash with the university, alleging breach

of contract when OU declined to renew commercial and parking leases at Cross.

In a letter provided to The Daily, Hicks wrote that Cross had offered to open its doors to students who developed or are at risk of developing health issues due to mold in the towers. In the letter, Hicks wrote that Cross would honor the rate the students were already paying to live in the towers with no increased cost, and offered to assist students with moving in.

The university’s administration declined the offer, according to the letter.

“While the university’s leadership should be exploring all necessary near-term and long-term solutions, that does not appear to be the case,” Hicks wrote. “Students and parents paying big fees to the university should be appalled by the administration’s handling of this issue. It only makes matters worse that university officials have refused my offer to move at-risk freshmen to the Cross Village complex, which is up to health and safety standards.”

Despite the structures showing their age, a university spokesperson said OU does not plan to close the towers to new residents anytime soon.

“At the current time, the university plans to keep the towers operational,” said Kesha Keith, director of media relations. “OU administration is mindful of the aging infrastructure of the towers and continues to monitor them closely, just as all housing accommodations are.”

For now, students lamenting their time in the towers will be left to ponder potential solutions.

“I’ve always wondered, ‘Why doesn’t the university tear down a tower at a time and rebuild?’ And in that time, those students in that tower can stay at Cross,” Berryhill said. “Cross is such a nice complex, and I kind of think it’s a bit absurd that nobody is staying there.”

With Cross Village’s 1,200 available beds and low occupancy — and the similar maximum occupancy numbers for each of the towers — Berryhill’s idea seems plausible if explored by the university and Cross ownership. However, with both parties clashing in court and no plans to close the towers, cooperation may be difficult to secure.

“If they were to open it up, freshmen would pour in,” Berryhill said. “I don’t know a single freshman that I’ve come into contact with that’s like, ‘Yeah, I want to live in the towers.’ Nobody wants to live here.”

### ‘There’s a point where it’s going to start making a difference.’

Berryhill’s harsh refrain — that no one would ever choose to live in the towers — was not always the case. Like Bass and Butler two decades prior, Darren Alexander was originally assigned to live in the Cate dorms in 1985, still without air conditioning. Before he moved to campus from rural Kansas, he received a last-minute letter offering him a spot in the towers, which he accepted immediately.

“We didn’t have a lot of problems with any type of maintenance issues or anything,” Alexander said. “We didn’t have a lot of problems and had a real cool RA, and it sure beat the heck out of living in the Cate rooms.”

Alexander said the community formed on his floor not only helped create some of his fondest memories, but also

spurred his recollection of one impactful and historical event.

“I was in my room watching on ... this little 13-inch television when the space shuttle (Columbia) exploded that morning,” Alexander said.

Sooner basketball legend and three-time NBA champion Stacey King was a common sight on the floor, Alexander said. Since King’s girlfriend at the time lived one floor below in an all-women’s hall, King would often come to Alexander’s floor and watch TV in the lounge.

Other alumni have said the closeness and less-than-stellar quality of the dorms are endearing when looking back. Cameron Cox, who lived in Adams Center’s Tarman Tower in 2005, said the “crappiness” of the towers was a kind of motivation for residents to flex their creative muscles to entertain themselves and others.

“My roommate and I were and still are best friends, and we got our bean bag chairs ... and just sat in the elevator for hours and just talked to everyone in Tarman Tower,” Cox said. “And yeah, that’s super weird — I accept that — but at the time everyone loved it and were just like, ‘What are you doing here? Just meeting people? OK, cool.’”

Cox said a year in a potentially sub-par room serves as a stop-gap, giving students one last opportunity to “destroy stuff” and party in a way they might expect to be part of the college experience.

“It’s probably good that it is kind of crappy because it allows everyone just to get that out of their system,” Cox said. “If it’s crappy, then you’re more inclined to go get out there and learn, explore and probably sabotage. By the time I got to Traditions (Square Apartments) in my second year, we didn’t destroy anything. There were like two parties, and that’s it.”

Stauder agreed that sharing the experience of “roughing it” in freshman dorms was fun in retrospect, but she said eventually students will start to consider freshman housing options more seriously when looking at other universities.

“At Arkansas and OSU, they have the little apartment-styles with different big rooms, and you hear about how nice they are,” Stauder said. “If you picked based on where you’re living, you would pick Arkansas and OSU over OU any day. There’s a point where it’s going to start making a difference.”

Cox said the expectations of students attending college today — and paying much more to do so — also play a factor in the need for improved dorms.

“With how much tuition is nowadays, if you’re going to be going to OU or another prestigious university, you should kind of expect a little bit upfront that isn’t terrible,” Cox said. “And they are (terrible), they have to be — there’s no way they’ve improved them much since I’ve been there.”

Both current students and alumni seem to agree it is time for the towers to go, even those who were among their first residents. When that day comes and the towers are toppled — mold, rusting pipes and all — Butler said he hopes to be ready for the spectacle.

“I would definitely get my folding chair out if they decided to close the buildings,” Butler said. “Not necessarily from any animus, but I do love to see buildings come down.”



**Sunday Worship:**  
10:45am Livestream on  
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OU CAMPUS LIFE AWARD	
Natalie Bayer	Louisa Lee
Eduardo Campbell Bethancourt	Rachel Lobaugh
Robert Cascella	Delaney Mack
Akansha Chandrasekar	Lauren McGrath
Miguel Chavez	Peyton Nees
Hennessey Chism	Justin Norris
Alejandra Cruz	Ekene Nwakoby
Jema Esparza	Samuel Quick
Mareyba Fawad	Kevin Robb
McKenzie Gladney	Caden Shaw
Andres Gonzalez	Eva Sparks
Sarah Hobson	Read Streller
Richard Holt	Greer Thomas
Orin Imtiaz	Hailey Thomas
Colen James	James Thompson

CHRISTOPHER C. GIBBS COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE	
<b>Outstanding Academic Achievement</b>	
<b>Architecture</b>   Ben DeCuyper	
<b>Construction Science</b>   Drew Coker	
<b>Interior Design</b>   Casady Ball	
<b>Environmental Design</b>   Matthew Tillinghast	

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES	
<b>Outstanding Seniors</b>	
<b>Natural Sciences</b>   Isha Jhingan	
<b>Professional Programs</b>   Andrew Wilburn	
<b>Social Sciences</b>   Emily Mee	
<b>Humanities</b>   Leanne Ho	
<b>Carl Albert Award</b>   Miles Francisco	

COLLEGE OF ATMOSPHERIC AND GEOGRAPHIC SCIENCES	
<b>James Davis Early Scholar Award</b>   Savannah Lemmons	
<b>Gress Family Geography Scholarship</b>   Jenna Randall	
<b>School of Meteorology Academic Achievement Awards</b>	
<b>Juniors</b>   Isabelle Ariail, Mya Sears, Jacob Genuise	
<b>Seniors</b>   Matthew Bray, Kristine Chen	
<b>Outstanding Senior</b>   Annalisa Sanfilippo	

MEWBOURNE COLLEGE OF EARTH AND ENERGY	
<b>Charles N. Gould Award for Outstanding Senior in Geology</b>   John Joseph Nguyen	
<b>Alan Witten Award for Outstanding Senior in Geophysics</b>   Peter Reilly	
<b>David W. Stearns Award for Outstanding Achievement</b>   Bailey Abney	
<b>Estwing Hammer Award</b>   Connor Mears	
<b>Mewbourne School of Petroleum and Geological Engineering Outstanding Senior</b>   Austin Keys	
<b>Outstanding Junior</b>   Omar Al Suqri	

ANONA ADAIR GREEK AWARD OF EXCELLENCE	
Makayla Napier   Delta Sigma Theta	

FERN L. HOLLAND AWARD	
Nayifa Nihad	

JEANNINE RAINBOLT COLLEGE OF EDUCATION	
<b>Outstanding Seniors</b>	
<b>Early Childhood Education</b>   Molly Ingalsbe	
<b>Elementary Education</b>   Kimberly Mathis	
<b>English/Language Arts Education</b>   Madison Diring	
<b>Mathematics Education</b>   Taylor Herndon	
<b>Science Education</b>   Joseph Teter	
<b>Social Studies Education</b>   Andrew Kern	
<b>Special Education</b>   Brittany Anderson	

GALLOGLY COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING	
<b>Outstanding Seniors</b>	
<b>Aerospace Engineering</b>   William Fossett	
<b>Architectural Engineering</b>   Kaitlyn Faust	
<b>Biomedical Engineering</b>   Alex Gregory Hamilton	
<b>Chemical, Biological and Materials Engineering</b>   Jacob Klenke	
<b>Civil Engineering</b>   Eric Wu	
<b>Computer Engineering</b>   Justin Kleiber	
<b>Computer Science</b>   Virginia Kathryn Felkner	
<b>Electrical Engineering</b>   Rachel Jarvis	
<b>Engineering Physics</b>   Elijah Reagan Robertson	
<b>Environmental Engineering</b>   Duncan Wright	
<b>Environmental Science</b>   Kevyn Johnson	
<b>Industrial &amp; Systems Engineering</b>   Christopher M. Bourgeois	
<b>Mechanical Engineering</b>   Riley Barnes	

WEITZENHOFFER FAMILY COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS	
<b>Weitzenhoffer Family College of Fine Arts Outstanding Senior</b> Hannah Dillenbeck	
<b>F. Donald Clark Award for Excellence in the Arts</b> Joseph Campbell	
<b>Elmer Capshaw Award - School of Visual Arts</b> Julia Harth	
<b>Dance Partners Outstanding Senior Award - School of Dance</b> Elena Damiani	
<b>Weitzenhoffer Award - Peggy Dow Helmerich School of Drama</b> Grayson Merchant	
<b>Van Hefflin Award - Peggy Dow Helmerich School of Drama</b> Benjamin Burton	
<b>Outstanding Senior Award - School of Music</b> Eli Breon	

The University of Oklahoma	
CAMPUS AWARDS	
2020 RECIPIENTS	

GAYLORD COLLEGE OF JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATION	
<b>Outstanding Seniors</b>	
<b>Advertising</b>   Mason Marshall	
<b>Creative Media Production</b>   Christopher Oven	
<b>Journalism</b>   Addison Kliewer	
<b>Professional Writing</b>   Sidney Hallak	
<b>Public Relations</b>   Janki Patel	
<b>Overall Outstanding Senior</b>   Meredith Rasnac	

COLLEGE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES	
<b>Admiral William J Crowe, Jr. Award</b>   Emma Albrecht	
<b>William W. Talley, II Award</b>   Nayifa Nihad	

MICHAEL F. PRICE COLLEGE OF BUSINESS	
<b>Outstanding Seniors</b>	
<b>Division of Accounting</b>   Rob Jennings	
<b>Division of Economics</b>   Anna Goulding Hayes	
<b>Division of Energy Management</b>   Sam Quick	
<b>Division of Entrepreneurship</b>   Alyssa Cleveland	
<b>Division of Finance</b>   Joseph Albert	
<b>Division of International Business</b>   Eva Sparks	
<b>Division of Management</b>   Samantha Siemer	
<b>Division of Management Information Systems</b>   Karma Choedak	
<b>Division of Marketing</b>   Brandee Champagne	
<b>Division of Supply Chain Management</b>   Eva Sparks	

THE PRESIDENT’S AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING VOLUNTEERS	
Christopher Loerke Isha Jhingan Read Streller	

MELVIN C. HALL Leadership-Scholarship Award	
Mareyba Fawad	

J.R. MORRIS CAMPUS LIFE AWARD	
Emma DeAngeli Jema Esparza Dalton Gau Andres Gonzales Marc LeManque Melissa Maxey Makayla Napier Justin Norris Addison Paxton Adelle Sturgell	
PAUL SHANOR MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP	
Greer Thomas	
JOE C. AND CAROLE KERR MCCLENDON HONORS COLLEGE	
<b>Dean’s Award for Honors College Leadership</b> Matthew Bray	
<b>Dean’s Leadership Award for Reading Group Moderators</b> Katy Yut Erica Nadolski	

LETZEISER HONOR LIST AND MEDALISTS	
<i>The Letzeiser Awards are presented annually in memory of the late Alexander Letzeiser as a stimulus of good citizenship and achievement. These are the highest awards presented during the Spring Campus Awards Program. The selections are made each year by a student/faculty/staff committee and</i>	
Muhammad Ata Natalie Bayer Christopher Bourgeois Matthew Bray Eduardo Campbell Bethancourt Miguel Chavez Hennessey Chism Alejandra Cruz Thomas Deppong Destinee Dickson Jema Esparza Mareyba Fawad Virginia Felkner	Julia Harth Maya Henderson Leanne Ho Isha Jhingan Lucy Kates Marc LaManque Ekene Nwakoby Chika Nwanebu Meredith Rasnac Ronnie Rhodes Adelle Sturgell Noelle Zhanía Vargas Victoria White

<i>Three medals — bronze, silver and gold — are presented to three students who are selected as the most outstanding.</i>	
<b>BRONZE MEDALIST</b>   Leanne Ho	
<b>SILVER MEDALIST</b>   Virgina Felkner	
<b>GOLD MEDALIST</b>   Adelle Sturgell	

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UNIVERSITY COLLEGE PACE Award	
<i>Top 1% of the freshman class recognized for participation, academic achievement, community service and excellence.</i>	
Chiamaka Amechi Camilo Aponte Duque Ishan Bhanot Angelora Castellano Maya Ferrell Jayke Flaggert Guilherme Fonseca Kenneth Halstied Ashlyn Heritage Rickey Hewitt Jeanette Hoang Mandy Huo Blakeley Huskey Kayla Jenkins Yadin Joseph Elizabeth Joyce Adriana Landry Francesca Losh Zamakhosi Magagula Mikayla Martin Erica Miller Joy Nath Mercy Ndagire Aryn Neuschaefer Amanda Nork Rachael Owens Johnna Pavlick Hamida Petrovic Aaron Reid Grace Rogers Joseph Rotondo Mona Salem Katherine Schoeffler Peyton Schow Grace Shoop Erin Sullivan Megan Szymanski Samantha Taylor Mackenzie Thompson Malayna Unkel Karen Valdivia Matthew Varela Courtney Witte	
PE-ET Top 10 Senior Honor Society	
Carson Ball Natalie Bayer Pranoy Behera Miguel Chavez Chase Gaddis Mckenzie Gladney Rachel Lobaugh Brian Phillips Victoria White Te’a Williams	

OUTSTANDING GREEK SENIORS	
Abraham Arredondo   <b>Omega Delta Phi</b>	
Virginia Felkner   <b>Alpha Sigma Kappa</b>	
Kennemur Mays   <b>Delta Delta Delta</b>	
Lindsay Ross   <b>Gamma Delta Pi</b>	
Andres Solis   <b>Sigma Lambda Beta</b>	
Hailey Thomas   <b>Delta Gamma</b>	

PRESIDENT’S AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING TRANSFER STUDENTS	
<i>Recognizing excellence in the areas of scholarship, character, leadership and service to the university community. This award is the highest honor bestowed to transfer students by the university community.</i>	
Tara Meeker Antonio Ruiz Rasoha Savani Artavia Walker	

PRESIDENT’S AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING FRESHMEN	
<i>Recognizing excellence in the areas of scholarship, character, leadership and service to the university community. This award is the highest honor bestowed to freshmen by the university community.</i>	
Rabica Abo Taha Chiamaka Amechi Paige Clark Angel Karloh Brayden Love Enrique Meza Soto Emily Miller Joy Nath Grace Rogers Joseph Rotondo Mona Salem Yamillet Samaniego Megan Szymanski Mackenzie Thompson Mathw Varela	

PRESIDENT’S AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING SOPHOMORES	
<i>Recognizing excellence in the areas of scholarship, character, leadership and service to the university community. This award is the highest honor bestowed to sophomores by the university community.</i>	
Emily Bagwell Haden Bollenbach Devin Brown Taylor Carmen Ismael Carmona Casado Javier Chaves Camargo Paola Figueroa Amber Garcia Liliana Macias Ryleigh Mills Katera Morales Christian Newkirk Rachel Penner Parker Primrose Cole Walker	

REGENTS’ AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING JUNIORS	
<i>Recognizing excellence in the areas of scholarship, character, leadership and service to the university community. This award is the highest honor bestowed to juniors by the university community.</i>	
Carson Ball Natalie Bayer Pranoy Behera Chase Gaddis Riley Mainord Peyton Ness Lindsey Randall Caden Shaw Read Streller Te’a Williams Emma Bickford - HSC	
GEORGE HENDERSON JR. AWARD	
Carlos Rubio Regalado	



# COURAGEOUS

## *The Maggie Nichols story*

BY GEORGE STOIA

Her gymnastics career came to an abrupt and heartbreaking end March 12 as the NCAA canceled winter and spring sports, but as Maggie Nichols walks away, she leaves a legacy that endures far beyond her years competing in Norman, Oklahoma. Her story is about more than being one of the greatest college gymnasts ever — it is one of courage and resilience. The Daily's enterprise editor George Stoia met with Nichols for six interviews throughout the spring and interviewed her family multiple times, including sitting with them for a meet, to tell her in-depth story.

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*“What did you do today that your future self will be proud of?”*

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- Maggie Nichols

Maggie Nichols stares down the 82-foot runway at the springboard that is waiting to vault her high into the air. Across the Lloyd Noble Center, her mom, Gina, sits on the edge of her seat. She is two rows off the arena floor, her back hunched and her fingers tightly interlocked as her left foot nervously taps the cement.

Nichols explodes toward and onto the springboard. She does a roundoff back handspring onto the table and flips into mid-air. In this moment, Gina's foot freezes, her fingers squeeze tighter and her back straightens.

She's not thinking about Larry Nassar or her daughter being labeled “Athlete A” or being considered perhaps the greatest college gymnast of all time. All this mother is thinking about is her daughter

coming down, being OK, sticking the landing.

As she has throughout her life on and off the mat, Nichols delivers.

Nichols lands perfectly, her arms shooting toward the ceiling as a smile emerges across the 22-year-old's face. Simultaneously, her mom's arms also shoot into the air when she jumps out of her seat. Gina turns and says with a laugh, “I think that was pretty good, don't you?”

What she, and everyone else, didn't realize on that Saturday in late February was it would be one of Nichols' last times to perform. Twelve days later, her career came to an abrupt end after the NCAA canceled all winter and spring sports due to the rapid global spread of COVID-19. Nichols, along with her team, was informed in the middle of practice. They



PHOTO BY CAITLYN EPES

were readying for what would be a homecoming meet for Nichols in Minnesota ahead of a postseason championship push.

Nichols, her teammates and the program were all devastated.

“I'm done,” Nichols somberly said over the phone to her mom that afternoon. “My career is over.”

By Saturday, she had posted her farewell to competition, saying she'd change nothing and do it all again if she could, and challenging other athletes to savor the struggle, success and failure. In a moment, the senior was already focused on the future.

Why?

Because that's what she's always done.

“She was ready to take it to the end and do it all,” Gina said of Nichols' missed opportunity to win a third

team national title and all-around title. “And I'm sure she would have. But she knows how to handle this because she's handled things like this her entire life.”

Nichols' legacy will not be forgotten — not at OU, not in gymnastics, not in American sports.

She has overcome a host of obstacles during her life — from sexual abuse and missing the Olympics, to injuries and having her senior season cut short. Through it all, she's become more than “Athlete A” — the first victim to report the sexual abuse of former USA Gymnastics doctor Larry Nassar — for which she was awarded the 2019 NCAA Inspiration Award for her courage to come forward. She's become more than arguably the greatest college gymnast ever, helping Oklahoma to two national titles and winning six individual titles, along with taking home the 2019



Honda Sport Award given to the best woman in college athletics.

She's become an inspiration.

But she will also, in lesser-known ways, be remembered as a role model to little girls, an advocate for other survivors and more down-to-earth than many superstars.

"When you layer in one of the worst scandals in the history of Olympic sports and then you consider her success in college, all of it together makes her impact maybe one of the most impactful collegiate gymnasts in the history of the sport," said Bart Conner, a former OU star, a two-time Olympic gold medalist and ESPN gymnastics commentator. "She just seems like she's so mentally strong and emotionally strong that she is bound and determined to use that as a stepping stone to further her greatness."

She's beauty and grace, historic and inspiring, fearless and captivating, resilient and courageous.

The kid nicknamed "Swaggy Maggie" is also, in the words of her father, John, "my idol."

"She's just amazing," said John, a doctor. "I'd be out there breaking kneecaps, and she just takes it and says, 'God's got a different path for me to go.' And she hits it full speed and doesn't carry any of the baggage along with it."

"Every time you're with her, every time you see her ... she inspires you."

Or as Nichols herself often says, "What did you do today that your future self will be proud of?"

### 'Is Larry Nassar doing this to you?'

Nichols sat on a boat in the middle of the Mississippi River, just south of her hometown of Little Canada, Minnesota. It was Aug. 11, 2019, and she was home for a few days before her senior year started at OU.

It was a father-daughter catfishing trip, one of Nichols' favorite activities outside of gymnastics. As Nichols, her father and their guide waited for a bite, she pulled out her phone. Her friend and former Team USA teammate, Simone Biles, was on the verge of winning the U.S. Gymnastics Championships. Nichols wasn't going to miss it.

"Our guide didn't know much about gymnastics, so Maggie explained it to him as we sat there," John said. "It was pretty funny. He was getting a lesson from one of the best."

Biles took home gold, her sixth national championship. Nichols took home a 20-pound catfish.

It wasn't long ago Nichols seemed on a path similar to Biles'. At the 2015 World Championships, the two

were teammates, with Biles winning the all-around title and Nichols helping clinch the team final as the only gymnast to compete in all four events. They were expected to be on the Olympic team together in 2016 and the faces of USA Gymnastics for years to come.

This was no surprise to Nichols' family. She was a star from the first time she walked into Roseville Gymnastics Center in Minnesota at 3 years old. Her older brother, Danny, had to be pulled out of the class for fighting with Nichols, a distraction to the little girl who even then showed intense focus in the gym.

"She excelled immediately. She was a natural. Natural strength. Natural flexibility. Natural everything," said Gina, who was a gymnast in high school and is now a surgical nurse. "When she was 6 years old, she was already through levels four, five, six. She was ready to compete at level seven, which is basically unheard of at that age. She was on course to be an Olympic-level athlete. A level 10 gymnast is likely getting a Division I scholarship. ... Maggie was a level 10 at 9 years old."

Nichols' career took off from there. At 13, she joined Team USA and began training once a week at Karolyi Ranch, the Olympic training site near Huntsville, Texas. Nichols didn't have a typical high school experience, committing instead to her dream of competing in the Olympics. And she was well on her way, with the 2016 games being her target.

In 2013, she placed fifth at the U.S. national championships. In 2014, she placed third.

But in June 2015, during a practice ahead of the world championships in October, Nichols' personal coach, Sarah Jantzi, overheard a conversation between Nichols and another gymnast.

"Is Larry Nassar doing this to you?" Nichols asked another gymnast as she explained where the doctor's hands went during treatment that no other's did.

Jantzi pulled Nichols aside and asked what Nassar had done to her. After hearing Nichols describe Nassar's treatments, Jantzi immediately contacted Gina and reported it to USA Gymnastics.

"She was just a little girl," Gina said. "We expected our country, Team USA, to protect her when she flew down there once a month. I just never thought that would happen in a million years. It was inexcusable negligence. ... She was the first person who verbally told someone, 'I am being molested.' And she knew it. She had a lot of injuries throughout her career, and there was never one doctor who ever molested her, examined her the way Larry Nassar did."

Nassar's abuse subsequently became well-documented, with more than 300 girls and women coming forward, detailing 15 years of victims of the former USA Gymnastics doctor. He has since been

sentenced to life in prison. Nichols, the first athlete to report him, has been labeled "Athlete A" — a title that will never leave her. A Netflix documentary with that title is set to premiere June 24, following her story.

But Nichols has never let that title define her, either.

After reporting the abuse, Nichols kept training during the investigation. Much like her 3-year-old self, she was relentlessly focused in her pursuit of her Olympic dream.

In July, she finished third in the all-around at the U.S. Classic. In August, she finished second in the all-around at the national championships. And in October, she helped lead Team USA to gold at the world championships. All those years, from her first gymnastics practice at 3, to joining Team USA at 13, to helping her team to first place at worlds, Nichols was primed to be on the Olympic team that summer in Rio de Janeiro.

But in April 2016, Nichols tore the meniscus in her right knee during practice. She needed surgery just three months before the Olympic trials.

Nichols remembers practically living in the gym those three months. She trained tirelessly to stay in shape in a last-ditch effort to return, hoping she could still be one of the five gymnasts or three alternates selected for the team. She wasn't at her best, she admits, but Nichols was still her elegant self as she executed all four events beautifully and finished sixth in the all-around, all on a still-healing knee.

It wasn't enough. Biles, Gabby Douglas, Aly Raisman, Laurie Hernandez and Madison Kocian would represent Team USA. MyKayla Skinner, Ashton Locklear and now-OU gymnast Ragan Smith were the alternates.

"I think she should have been placed on that Olympic team," Conner said. "There were a lot of us that just felt like she got a raw deal. ... We felt like she got kicked to the side of the road, and it was unfair."

Nichols' injury is the excuse most point to for why she didn't make the team. Gina believes it was much bigger than that.

"They never wanted Maggie to be a part of the Olympics because they didn't want someone at the Olympics who is telling people she is being molested by the Olympic staff," Gina said. "We were completely abused by USA Gymnastics. They tried to keep her and everybody quiet because they couldn't let that get out, that one of their top athletes was being molested by their doctor before going to the 2016 Olympics. It was all a part of a cover-up."

"It was terrible for us. ... She and our family were treated horribly because she reported abuse, and they didn't like that."

Three days after missing the Olympics, Nichols

retired from elite gymnastics.

It was time for a new journey.

### 'It almost freed her.'

Nichols moved into OU's Headington Hall while her former teammates competed in Rio.

She was 817 miles from home, a 13-hour flight from her dreams and at a point few college freshmen could fathom.

"I guess I've always loved gymnastics, but there were so many challenges that I've had to go through during and after my Olympic trials. I think that was just a low point for me," Nichols said. "Coming in here, I just really learned to love the sport of gymnastics again. I kind of had to fall back in love with the sport. ... Coming here just really opened my eyes again."

Nichols soon felt at home in Norman. It helped that she'd wanted to be at OU since she was 10.

Nichols had first visited in summer 2008 with two teammates to attend a Sooners gymnastics camp. That's where she met K.J. Kindler, then in her third year as head coach.

"She was fearless," Kindler recalled of a 10-year-old Nichols. "(She) would do anything you asked, would go for and try anything that was put in front of her ... very responsive, very coachable, and very excited and passionate about the sport."

Afterward, Nichols told her parents OU was where she would go to college. Five years later, Nichols committed to Kindler, who said "(Nichols) felt like she was at home and comfortable, and I think she wanted a place that felt safe to her."

When Nichols arrived, 38 days after missing the Olympics and 15 months after reporting Nassar, she had to re-learn how to trust those around her. Kindler helped Nichols navigate an uncharted situation, giving her support but also the space to do it her own way.

"I stayed very neutral about it because I felt like — listen, I've never been through anything like that. I can't tell her how to navigate her healing," Kindler said. "It was





important she worked through it herself. She's an adult now, she's on her own, she's independent, she's by herself here, she's had huge family involvement in her entire life. Now it's like you're on your own, and I think it's really important to make some of those decisions yourself and find your way yourself, and not always be pulled or pushed in a certain direction.

"I felt like that was the best thing I could do, and as time went on, as they say, 'Time heals all wounds.' You could see her kind of working through it, coming out a little bit more every single meet, kind of feeling a little bit better about what had happened. She still doesn't feel good about it, but I think she's come to terms with how it all transpired."

Soon, Nichols was thriving.

In the gym, she recorded her first gym slam — scoring a 10 on all four events in one season — and recorded a season-long all-around score of 39.925, marking the highest of her career and a program record. She was a first-team All-American on vault, bars and floor, scored seven perfect 10s and led OU to its second consecutive national title.

Outside the gym, Nichols grew close with teammate Bre Showers, who she had met on their official visit at the OU-Iowa State football game. They became inseparable.

"At first, I was super scared of her because she had so much fame and notoriety with her name. She was intimidating. But she was so sweet and really shy. I was kind of surprised by that. I figured being an international star, she would be really boisterous and have a really big personality. But she was quiet," Showers said. "Freshman year we did everything together, aside from living together. We were so close that we didn't want to leave each other at the end of the night, so we brought her mattress into my dorm living room."

That freshman year allowed Nichols to regain her confidence and find her voice amid all the distractions in her life.

It all led her to Jan. 9, 2018, six days before the first meet of her sophomore year, when Nichols released an 898-word statement detailing Nassar's abuse and publicly identifying herself as "Athlete A." Kindler helped Nichols write the statement, calling the two weeks spent trying to find the right words to describe the pain Nichols had been through one of the hardest things she's done in 28 years of coaching.

"I would like to let everyone know that I am doing OK," Nichols wrote. "My strong faith has helped me endure. It is a work in progress. I will strive to ensure the safety of young athletes who have big dreams just like mine and I will encourage them to stand up and speak if something doesn't seem right."

Afterward, hundreds of gymnasts came forward

with their stories of Nassar's abuse. She had, at age 20, given a voice to the voiceless.

"I chose to come forward just for myself. It was needed for me," Nichols said. "But I knew coming forward, it would help so many others. Even if I could help just one person, I knew that was the right decision to come forward."

In the 26 months that have followed, Nichols has, in a way, become a new person, say those who know her well. She has become more than a great gymnast. She has become more than "Athlete A." She has become, courageously, her fuller self.

"It almost freed her," Conner said. "She's addressed it. She's moving on. And she's rising above it. To me, that's a very powerful place to be. She is speaking to justice, but she will never be a victim, and to me, that is a very powerful position. That's what, I think, people connect with..."

"You go, girl. You had some trauma in your life, you got stepped on, you got kicked to the side and yet you are thriving."

### **'It's hard to hold a candle to her.'**

As her college career has progressed, Nichols often finds herself spending her free time at the Walmart Neighborhood Market on Classen Boulevard.

She, Showers and teammate Olivia Trautman have an odd fascination with the always busy grocery store just down the street from their apartment. It's a place to get away and be themselves as normal college students.

"We talk and we just go through every single aisle to, I don't know, spend time together?" Nichols said with a laugh. "We're weird, I guess."

Finding the joy in everyday life, even wandering the local grocery store, has helped Nichols block out the noise and put the past behind her.

Nichols' decision to speak her truth springboarded the rest of her historic career, helping Oklahoma win another national title in 2019 and what would've probably been a third this April if the season had not been curtailed by the coronavirus. She was the Sooners' anchor all four years.

What makes Nichols so great?

It's a combination of the coaching she receives, the difficulty in her routines and the elegance with which she performs.

"Part of it is just a fabulous coaching staff at OU. They can customize a program that helps Maggie be at her best. They have great confidence in her," Conner said. "She's your Michael Jordan at the end of the game when you're down by a basket. If you need a .995 on beam,

there's nobody else to call. She's your gymnast. She's of that caliber. She's not just like a technician, she's also mentally so darn strong."

Nichols captivates crowds like few others. She dials in before performing, often separating herself from her team as if she's in her own world.

Her athleticism erupts on vault. Her strength ripples on bars. Her poise intensifies on beam. And her confident personality radiates on floor.

"She was gifted with God-given talents. You obviously see that if you watch her in person," Showers said. "You hear about it, but it's not until you see her in person when you realize it's magnetizing. You can't keep your eyes off her."

In her four years at Oklahoma, she scored 22 perfect 10s (fourth all-time), is a six-time individual national champion and became just the sixth gymnast in NCAA history to win consecutive all-around national titles (2018, 2019). In her shortened senior season, Nichols scored five perfect 10s and was on pace to win her third-straight all-around title, leading the country with an average score of 39.796.

How much greater she would have been in the final meets of her career, we'll never know.

"She stands among the best in the sport ever," Kindler said. "For those people I would name, Jenny Hansen from the University of Kentucky ... Courtney Kupets from the University of Georgia, Maggie Nichols from the University of Oklahoma. There's not many that stand on top of the podium the way Maggie does. She's definitely one of the best that our sport has ever seen."

Nichols isn't just OU's best gymnast — she's one of the best athletes to ever don the crimson and cream.

Her popularity is on par with college softball icons Lauren Chamberlain and Keilani Ricketts, women's basketball legends Courtney and Ashley Paris, NBA stars Trae Young and Buddy Hield, and Heisman Trophy winners Baker Mayfield and Kyler Murray.

"We've had some really great athletes come through our doors and people who were very captivating, there's no doubt about it," Kindler said. "But Maggie, it's hard to hold a candle to her, especially on the female side. I don't know that there's been many female athletes that have gone through Oklahoma athletics that have the kind of effect that she's had on people, period. People on campus, people everywhere all over the world. She's a world champion, she's an NCAA champion, 16 times over, individual and team, and has had this other impact on the side."

"It's pretty incredible."

But while Nichols' accomplishments in the gym will live on in Sooner and gymnastics lore, it's her impact as a person by using her voice as an athlete that will etch her name in history.

"I've seen a lot of great college gymnasts over the years, and Maggie will surely go down as one of the great collegiate gymnasts of all time," Conner said. "I think the one thing that allows her success is more than just the stats. I do believe it's the grace, the elegance and the empowerment that she exudes, considering what she's been through. That puts her in a whole other league. In a way, it almost transcends her sports accomplishments."

### **'She's way more than a survivor.'**

Sitting directly in front of Gina that Saturday in late February was Sherline Romph.

The resident of Jefferson City, Missouri, had driven six-and-a-half hours and 440 miles to sit in a section otherwise reserved for athletes' families. She made the trip to honor her daughter, Margaret, who had a special connection with Nichols.

Margaret was in a car accident that left her with traumatic brain injuries and paralyzed at age 5. From a distance, Margaret saw Nichols overcome her own setbacks, inspiring her to do the same. She finally got to meet her in 2019 before the Sooners' meet against then-No. 2 Florida.

Afterward, Nichols gave Margaret her phone number. Romph said Nichols texted her every week and the two forged a strong bond.

"For her, it was a dream come true," Romph said. "For me, as her mother, we were so touched. Maggie knew (how much she meant to my daughter). She had only 90 days left on earth after that. ... It was the best thing that ever happened to her. It was a brightness in her life when all these other things were happening to her."

Before Margaret died last May, Romph promised her she'd still attend as many OU meets as she could.

"I go to honor her and because I know she loved Maggie Nichols," Romph said. "I am forever grateful for her kindness to my daughter."

Romph's story is the quintessential Nichols story.

"The way Maggie is handling it, with such grace and such power, that to me is a lesson," Conner said. "If you've gotten a raw deal somewhere, figure out a way to turn it into a positive for you and thrive and rise above it. She's doing that as an athlete. She's doing that as an advocate. But without a sense of anger and bitterness. She's just using all of that to thrive, and that to me is very inspiring."

Nichols tries to impact those around her not only in person, but through social media — where she has nearly 250,000 combined followers on Twitter and Instagram. She does so through positive messages and quotes, saying things like, "If you're reading this right



now, I hope something amazing happens to you today.”

“For me, when someone says, ‘I hope you have a good day,’ or says something kind, it just kind of makes my whole day. It kind of changes my whole mood,” Nichols said. “I hope by tweeting (positive messages) will change their whole mood around because you never know what someone is going through. Having them read that or hear that can change someone’s whole day and can change my whole mood, too, if I help someone else out ... so I hope I impact people just a little bit.”

Gina doesn’t know where Nichols gets her courage and resilience. She says Nichols has stayed focused and driven on her own. She has found her voice from within, not because someone told her to or because she wanted to.

Rather, her mother says, it’s perhaps because she had to.

“It’s hard to explain. Some of the worst things have happened to her that aren’t fair. For some reason she looks at it and says, ‘I’m going to make this better,’ and never gives up,” Gina said. “She has never complained about any of it ... all she has done is move forward. It’s more than I can understand because I’m not that strong. I complain. Sometimes I find it hard to move forward. Somehow she uses the negatives and turns them into positives.

“She just keeps moving forward. That’s just who she is, and that’s something she’s learned on her own.”

Nichols will graduate in December with her bachelor’s in communications and a minor in business. She’ll stick around for one more gymnastics season as a student coach, while pursuing a master’s in broadcast journalism in hopes of working for ESPN one day.

While she’ll still be on campus and in the gym, Nichols the athlete will be missed. But Nichols the person will be felt forever.

Because she’s more than “Athlete A.” More than the gymnast who tore her meniscus on the eve of the Olympic trials. More than the greatest college gymnast who will never finish her senior season.

“Her ability to bounce back in all her different situations that she’s had to handle,” Kindler said, “she’s way more than a survivor.”

And her story is still being written.

“Well,” her father told her when she called with the news of a career cut short, “you got another couple chapters for your book.”



PHOTO BY  
CAITLYN EPES



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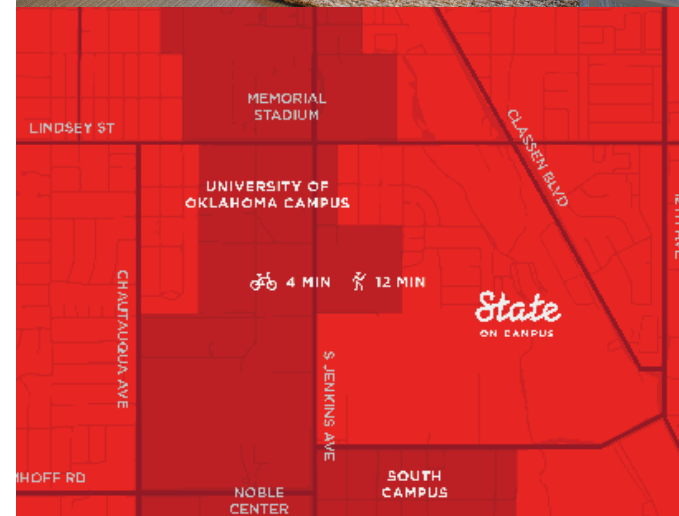
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# Senior Letters

COVID-19 cut their senior year short and left them without the opportunity to say goodbye to friends, professors and the university that helped shape their lives. We asked seven seniors, each with different experiences and each with a lasting impact at the university, to share their personal goodbyes to OU and the class of 2020.

CARLOS RUBIO

CHIKA NWANEBU

CHRIS OVEN

DESTINEE DICKSON

LEANNE HO

MILES FRANCISCO

MUNEEB ATA

PHOTOS BY CAITLYN EPES

*Editor's note: All of these seniors' photos were taken via Zoom. Their letters have been edited for clarity, length and style.*



# CARLOS RUBIO

*If I close my eyes, I can imagine an OU flag gleaming and fluttering in the wind...*

The vibrant crimson coupled with the cream letters pops against the canvas of campus. Students, faculty and staff walk under the flag and paint a picture of a beautiful spring day. I can hear them talk about the intricacies of their lives as they fill the space and bring the canvas to life. The emotions of four years in Norman are woven in the painting. Nights in the Tarman basement and afternoons in the Union define the colors. Cheese fries at the Mont, gatherings at “the shack,” High School Leadership Conference meetings on Tuesday nights and everything in between that reinforced creativity. The atmosphere on a Saturday in the fall and the incredibly fast pace the spring semester brings — the flag still gleaming bright through all of it.

Today, I open my eyes and no conversations fill the canvas. No walks down the South Oval or through the Bizz to paint the beautiful spring day. No pit stop in the Union for lunch before work, normally an abrupt halt to the pace of a spring semester. The crimson and cream of the flag grows dim. To be clear, there have been moments where the flag’s colors weren’t as bright. I would be remiss not to mention when the canvas that was painted made my peers and people of color feel oppressed and devalued. Never could I imagine, however, that I would open my eyes and come to this harsh reality at OU — the harsh reality that March 13 was the last brushstroke of many students’ journeys at the University of Oklahoma. I didn’t get the chance to say goodbye. My parents won’t have the chance to see their son walk across the stage. A nerve-wracking, formative and empowering part of my life has suddenly come to an end.

I can’t help but hope to see that flag fly once more.

*Carlos Rubio*





# CHIIKA NWANEBU

## Dear OU,

Remember that time I didn't want to come here?

Then, remember that time I finally stepped on campus? You made me realize this was going to be my future home. You made me realize this was going to be the start of finding out who I am. You made me realize I was going to make the best friends I ever could have imagined.

I remember the first day walking on the South Oval as an official OU student and being in awe of everything I saw. From the sounds, to the buildings, to constantly seeing different smiling faces — it was like I was in a dream. Sadly, I had to wake up from that dream of being at OU far too soon. It's an ending that I, and many others, never could have imagined.

Even though my time here was cut short, the memories that I've made will last a lifetime.

I will always cherish the many laughs, the many walks, the many hugs and the many "I love you's." OU has been a constant support system for me. I've been surrounded by people who are always willing to pick me up — or, when I'm already excited about life, are there to enjoy it with me. I will miss making new friends while walking to class or roaming the Union. I will miss the free food on the South Oval. I will miss asking random people in the President's Leadership Class and Lead & Volunteer office if they want to go outside and play. I will miss going into a professor's office hours just to introduce myself and say hello, always learning something new when I leave. I will miss the time I walked around campus pretending I was Mrs. Claus and handing out candy and school supplies. And I will just miss you.

However, I do not want you all to think this is goodbye forever. There is no such thing as saying goodbye to OU. For me, this parting is not real because you will always be in my heart, and I know I will always be in yours. I am bringing you wherever I go! So, this is not a goodbye, but it is merely a FaceTime you later.

With love,



# CHRIS OVEN

## *It wasn't supposed to end like this.*

On Thursday, March 12, I walked into my capstone class two minutes late (don't worry, Mom — I still beat the professor). During my hurried walk from the Duck Pond lot to Gaylord, I wondered if this was the last time I'd be attending a college class. But I was late, so the thought faded quickly.

Class ended, and I met a friend in front of Bizzell and headed to the Union for Graduation Gear-Up. After buying our caps and gowns, I walked to work in the football stadium, where I've spent the last two years interning in OU's Athletics Communications department. It was around 11 a.m.

For the next three hours, a group of us — interns and full-timers alike — sat in the office as the entire sports world came to a screeching halt. The NBA suspended its season the night before and nearly every league and conference followed suit on Thursday. Unprecedented. For a group of us whose lives — and livelihoods — revolve around sports, the news was stunning. What do we do now?

The thought returned. *Maybe that actually was my final class of college.* There was no more work to be done that day, so two other interns and I packed up and left. We realized we'd better say goodbye for who knew how long. Someone joked, "See you in the fall!"

It wasn't supposed to end like this, but it did.

Just 48 hours earlier, it would've been an unimaginable scenario. You always picture those final moments of college — walking out of class the final time, spending those last late nights with friends and walking across that stage — but you certainly never picture those moments being stolen by a global pandemic.

To the Class of COVID-19, er, 2020, you probably feel like you've had those moments stolen from you. You're right, and it's okay to be disappointed. The decision had to be made, and it was the right one to protect the greater good. And it's disappointing. Both can be true.

The older you get in college, the more you say you're ready

to be done, but the less you accept that it's almost time to go. We find ourselves wishing for just one more of what are seemingly routine moments — one more morning class, one more lunch on campus, one more trip down the South Oval. We took those things for granted, even if we tried not to.

But now, there's nothing we can do but move forward. When I start to think about the moments taken from us, I decide to think about the last four years instead. I feel grateful.

Thank you to every professor and mentor for all you do — not just for me, but for every student at this university.

Thank you to my HSLC fam, for the Tuesday nights, the friendships and that red Sooner Legends carpet.

Thank you to the Ath Comm crew, for the stocked coolers, inside jokes and so much knowledge and experience.

Thank you to Camp Crimson, to my Gaylord people, to my closest friends and to my family.

Thank you to the University of Oklahoma for the best four years and a lifetime of memories and friendships.

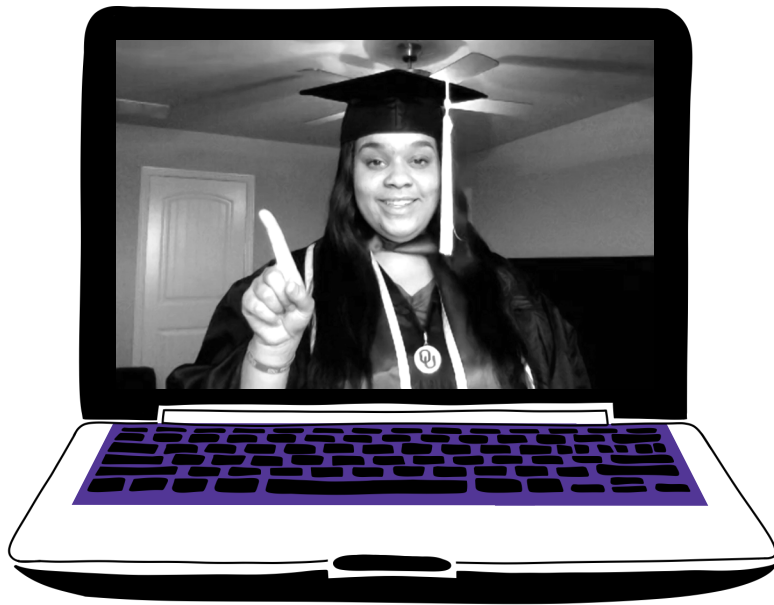
I hope the Class of 2020 takes the time to express their own gratitude to each and every person who helped make the last four years what they were. I know we all have the time.

Although we'll be finishing our college careers in Zoom classes — many of us at home with our families and without the traditional commencement celebrations — the Class of 2020 should be proud of its sacrifices. We'll always be the class that left too soon, but we'll also always be the class that saved lives by staying at home. This is bigger than OU. This is bigger than graduation. This is bigger than all of us.

Be proud of what you've accomplished. Be proud of how far we've come. Be proud of the impact we've left. Be proud of the sacrifices we've made. We'll get through this together apart. And it'll be a hell of a story to tell.

Boomer Sooner and Live On, University.





# DESTINEE DICKSON

***Jacobson Hall, Bizzell Memorial Library, Evans Hall, the South Oval, Jim Thorpe Multicultural Center, Dale Hall, Headington College and the Union.***

These are not just physical buildings and spaces that I spent hours of time in at the University of Oklahoma, but places filled with memories of friendship, late-night studying, fighting for inclusivity and laughing with my fellow peers. It's difficult ending my senior year at the University of Oklahoma knowing that I cannot formally close this chapter in my life. My grandmother always reminded me of the importance of saying thank you. So, I write this letter to thank OU and close this chapter in my life correctly.

**Jacobson Hall:** The welcome center and my second home on campus as a tour guide and Diversity Enrichment Programs intern. Thank you for allowing me to connect with prospective students and tell them why I love OU.

**Bizzell Memorial Library:** A place I've spent many hours studying, crying and bothering friends as they completed assignments. Thank you for giving me a space to focus on my studies, quick vanilla latte coffee runs and the ability to laugh with my friends even on the most hectic nights. I am missing you the most right now.

**Evans Hall:** We have a love-hate relationship, but it's a historical part of my OU story. Thank you for reminding me of the importance of always standing up for what I believe in. The fight is never over.

**South Oval:** The best place to take pictures of campus while strolling to my next class. Even on the most stressful days, thank you for allowing me to smile as I saw my friends. OU's large campus had a small-town feeling

because of the Oval.

**Jim Thorpe Multicultural Center:** The mecca of attending meetings and events from the High School Leadership Conference to the Black Student Association. Thank you for always filling my bucket by bringing my friends together through momentous events.

**Dale Hall:** The first building that reminded me why I came to college — for an education. Thank you for challenging my mind and expanding my knowledge on subject matters like logic, political science and even geography.

**Headington College:** No, I am not talking about Headington Hall, the student-athlete residence across the street, but the new residential college — thank you for providing me a stable job, a place to rest my head at night and the ability to chat with residents from all walks of life.

**The Union:** My favorite place to grab a bite to eat, while most likely getting a quick signature or pep talk. Thank you for always filling my stomach, letting me bother Student Life staffers (you know who you are) and kicking it with my friends.

Even though I will never receive a proper graduation or senior festivities, these buildings were essential to my development as a young adult because of the experiences that happened in them. So, thank you, the University of Oklahoma, for providing me incredible opportunities, an excellent education and forever friendships. The ending of this chapter isn't ideal, but this pandemic allowed me to appreciate and reflect on my college experiences for the last 3.76 years.

Live On, University.

*Destinee*



# LEANNE HO

***When love has an expiration date, is it better to love deeply and painfully or safely and shallowly?***

If we've had a personal conversation in the last few months, you know I've been grappling with this dilemma for a while now.

Going into my final semester, I knew that I'd be moving overseas when I graduated. I knew that my days were numbered, my time precious. There's a "Wait But Why" essay about how most of us are in the tail end of our relationships with the people we love. For the last four years, I've seen most of my college friends two or three times a week. In the coming decades, I'll be lucky to see them two or three times a year. Our friendships are in their final chapters. Even before our year was cut short by a catastrophic global pandemic, we were already in the tail end.

Last August, I was diagnosed with cancer. While I was hospitalized, I missed the first two weeks of senior year, and I worried that things would fall apart without me. Who was going to fill this leadership role? Who was going to finish that project?

And then other people stepped up. The work got done. Even after I recovered and returned to OU, I found comfort in the knowledge that anyone else could present "Step In, Speak Out" or chair the LGBTQ+ Program Advisory Board. If I hadn't done it, I'm sure that someone else would've precipitated the first gender-neutral campus awards and homecoming court. Even when I think about my future as a Rhodes Scholar, doctor and advocate for marginalized communities, I understand that

anyone can do the work I do. If that's true, why am I here?

I think it's because no one else can love my people the way I do. No one else knows how. Who else knows exactly what to say when my sister cries? Who else plans dinner to accommodate my best friend's allergy to sesame seeds but not sesame oil? Who else can cherish the memories of that sunrise breakfast on the roof of the Union, that spring break road trip through the red-orange desert of the American Southwest, that conversation so captivating that we pulled an all-nighter and still went hiking the next morning? No one but me. Nothing matters but this. When I look back on my time at OU, no test I took and no paper I wrote was as worthwhile as the moments I spent with the people I loved.

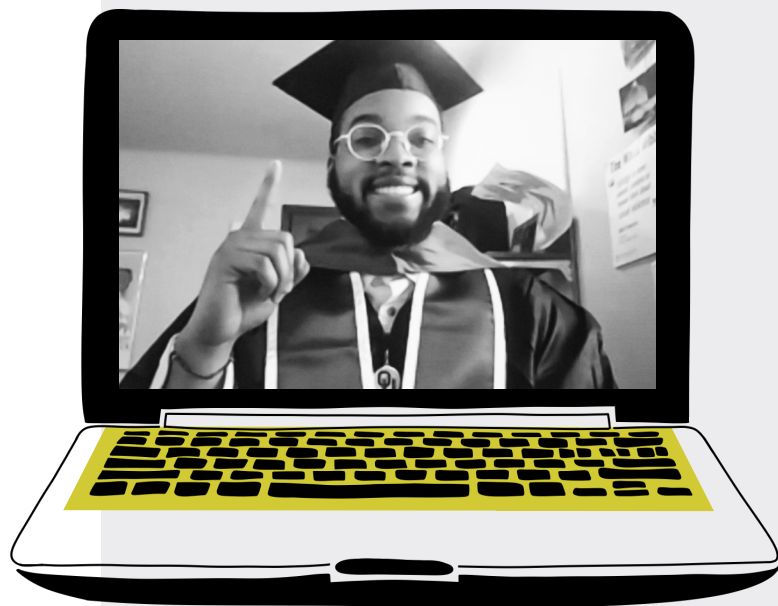
In the memoir "When Breath Becomes Air," doctor and terminal cancer patient Paul Kalanithi is asked by his wife, "Don't you think saying goodbye to your child will make your death more painful?" to which he responds, "Wouldn't it be great if it did?"

Knowing that it would make my life more painful, I chose to love deeply anyway, treating each day as if it could be my last. I had no idea that one day in March, it would be.

Class of 2020 (and the folks we'll be leaving behind): it was so great to love you. Here's to the rock-climbing blisters and impulsive undercuts and crepe restaurants that close early and Saturday morning pancake breakfasts and student activists coming together in solidarity. Here's to the love. So much love. Deep and painful and worth it.

*Leanne*





# MILES FRANCISCO

## *We're in a liminal space now, and it feels quite odd.*

It's odd that we likely won't see our friends on campus again. Odd that we won't sit in a campus classroom again or plan another event, or pass by Evans Hall knowing that we did some good there just weeks ago. I'm truly not sure what to make of it or how long this will last. I don't have any revealing thoughts on what all of this will mean in the long term — right now, I'm just existing. But what is clear to me since COVID-19 came swooping in and ended our last months on campus is this: we are all we got. We're here on this Earth for a finite amount of time. We try to make the most of it while we're here, we mess up, and we try again. As seniors we looked forward to our last month at OU, carrying out all of our "lasts" as undergrad students. But we don't get that luxury. What we do have is each other, even if it's virtually for a bit.

Where our government has failed us, we have shown up in droves to fill these voids. For many of us, we have seen the intrinsic failures of American systems all our lives — for others, this is their first look into the injustices that so many marginalized people face daily. I think this is telling of who we are as a people. As human beings.

I was asked to write about my time at OU and what lessons I'll bring from my time there. This is such a difficult time to sum up all of my experiences. Much like what many of us are experiencing right now in the middle of this pandemic, what I got out of OU was not so much a result of the institution but rather in spite of the institution. I love OU, but not because it was so

great to me. I love OU because I found my home, found my people, found who I was through all of it.

Through the myriad of racist incidents, I learned that a community that continually was belittled and harmed would come out of every instance stronger and more tight-knit. We had a community, and that was all we needed. The student community at OU is an immensely courageous one, and one that I am proud to be a part of. This courage came to the forefront during our occupation of Evans Hall earlier this semester. What I saw as I walked through the floors of one of the oldest buildings at OU was a dream of mine. I saw Black students finding joy in an unjust time. I saw students from all across the world who had been subject to their own share of injustices at OU show up in support as if it were their own fight. Because it was. I saw staff members and professors risking their positions to do all they could to support us. I saw a beauty in our differences as we came together and fought for one another. We are what we need, we are who we need.

As I think back on my time at the University of Oklahoma and this abrupt end, I will always remember the beautiful people who made the most of a place not built for their survival. I have great appreciation for the love and solidarity that always showed up when needed. OU as an institution has a lot of work to do. We've known this. But it is the people of OU — those of us who care for one another and advocate for the whole of us — who I will cherish forever.

*A. Mintz*



# MUNEEB ATA

## *The rain from this morning continues to drizzle as I haul the last box out of my car.*

My socks are drenched from the puddle on the porch steps, and my backpack is a hue darker than normal. Inside, the oak bookcase is hopelessly scattered with literature from middle school, some misplaced papers and a couple of odd yearbooks. On the left wall, there's a pinned Sam Bradford autograph, scribbled on the back of my sister's Arabic homework. I take a moment to sit down on my bed and stare into the barren closet. My childhood bedroom is exactly how I left it. I had been eager to return to Tulsa, but not like this.

My first vivid memory of Norman is my eldest sister's convocation. That day was dominated by black gowns, endless smiles and long hugs. When she walked across that stage, she became the first person in our family to graduate on American soil. I remember seeing my parents brush away their tears. Though the heat was brutal, after the ceremonies we walked to the main campus because my sister insisted on taking pictures in front of every building. Needless to say, my 14-year-old self was not only bored, but also perplexed. What was so special about these damn bricks?

I hear a creak on the stairs, followed by my mother's voice. "Muneeb, come down," she says. "I made biryani." A loose folder, dangling from the bookcase, catches my eye, and I empty its contents on the bed. Phrases like "I am pleased to" and "I regret" litter the mattress and send me back into the headspace of the high school senior who hesitantly committed to following in his sister's footsteps. In the months to follow, I would room with my co- "best bros" superlative winner, choose to pursue two

completely unrelated degrees and join every organization that brought me a semblance of excitement.

Every following year brought forth another version of life, with more friends, adventures and rigor. Suddenly, we began referring to locations on campus as "where we first met" or "our spot" instead of just the Carnegie Building or Cate Restaurants. There were late-night study groups in the Bizz where we got absolutely nothing done together, that afternoon tabling on the South Oval to convince a few more folks to go out and vote, and those evening meetings in the Union. The walks past the yellow fountain where we would throw pennies in and ask each other about our wishes. And those phone calls from bed in the middle of the night when you knew your friend needed you. Norman, Oklahoma, became the first home of our adult lives — and these damn bricks, they found their way into our stories.

I wanted so desperately to leave this magical place in a proper fashion, to hug my faithful friends tightly, to take pictures with them at our favorite spots on campus and to reassure them we would stay in touch. Though I never imagined this abrupt ending, I am still grateful for the generous time that I did have as a part of this community. And as I look more deeply into the years past, I see before me people of outstanding merit and character who bring me much hope for the decades to come. I cannot believe how lucky I was to not only meet them, but to know them as my friends. Thank you, and stay safe.

"I suppose in the end, the whole of life becomes an act of letting go, but what always hurts the most is not taking a moment to say goodbye." —Yann Martel

*M. Ata*



# So long, farewell.

NICK HAZELRIGG, OU DAILY EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

*Each semester at the OU Daily begins, without fail, with the same thing: goals.*

When we all come back from summer or winter break to begin our planning for another semester of work, our newsroom is brimming with students writing on white boards and talking through all the ambitious things we want to accomplish.

The same was true for The Daily’s graduating seniors as they returned to the newsroom in January. From the Norman Music Festival to the OU spring game to coverage of an interim presidency, our newsroom planned and brainstormed how we could best cover the spring semester for our audience.

But after March 12, our newsroom — like the rest of campus soon would — lay silent, dark and empty.

As it would for so many seniors around the country, the spread of COVID-19 cut short our time at OU and at The Daily. We lost half of our last semester, and with it we lost many of our ideas and plans that we had hoped to execute.

The sadness we feel is hard to describe. It’s hard to accept that, as students, we’ll never again pile into The Daily’s conference room for another 4:30 editorial board meeting or plop down in the wooden chair in our adviser Seth’s office. We’ll never again hear the familiar sound of the newsroom’s metal door clinking shut.

Even in this time of grief, we must not lose sight of all the goals we’ve already accomplished.

Our seniors on the news desk have covered years of university history — three presidents, community upheaval over racism, dramatic shifts in OU’s financial situation and now the impact of COVID-19 on our community. Our seniors on the culture desk have spent years invested in Norman’s artistic scene and have written extensive features on underrepresented members of our communities, both at OU and across Oklahoma.

We have seniors who have covered — in words, photos and videos — OU’s football team for three seasons or more as well as the professionals do. Those seniors have followed OU athletes to Heisman Trophy ceremonies and the College Football Playoff and, along the way, they have presented some of the best sports journalism in college media.

But our seniors have not only invested in their own work — they have changed our organization for the better. Seniors on our copy desk have spent countless hours fact-checking and editing to ensure our work is accurate and easy to read on every platform and at any hour, while our designers have worked diligently to reinvent the way our work is presented.

Above all, this class of graduating seniors has had one goal in mind: maintaining and building upon the trust that those who came before us built with our audience.

It’s hard to leave unfinished some of the goals we set for ourselves, but we can leave knowing we did what we could to make The Daily a better place for those who will remain and for our community.

Departing from undergraduate life is difficult enough, and it’s even harder when that departure comes sooner than we expected. We have much more work to do, with a university and world forever changed by the effects of COVID-19 — and there’s much more left to document. But we must do that work in a fundamentally different way as our newsroom is now beyond our grasp.

More than the professional accomplishments we will leave behind earlier than expected, we grieve for the friendships and relationships we weren’t ready to say goodbye to.

Yet here we are, and for our seniors, the end of our time at OU will be much like the beginning of each semester at The Daily: a time for us to set goals. This time, though, our goals will focus on our careers, our futures and what we want our lives to look like after The Daily. Not one of us plans to let this difficult time stop us from reaching as high as we can when we set those goals.

Still, we couldn’t have gotten here without one another and without our community, large and small. It’s for this reason that our seniors’ work will continue until the end — because that’s what our readers deserve.

Our seniors spent much of the semester counting the days until graduation, planning each moment and reminding ourselves how much time we had left together, until that time was cut short.

What we’ve learned — at The Daily, at OU and around the world — is every single second we have is priceless and deserving of our full attention.

**THANK YOU.**



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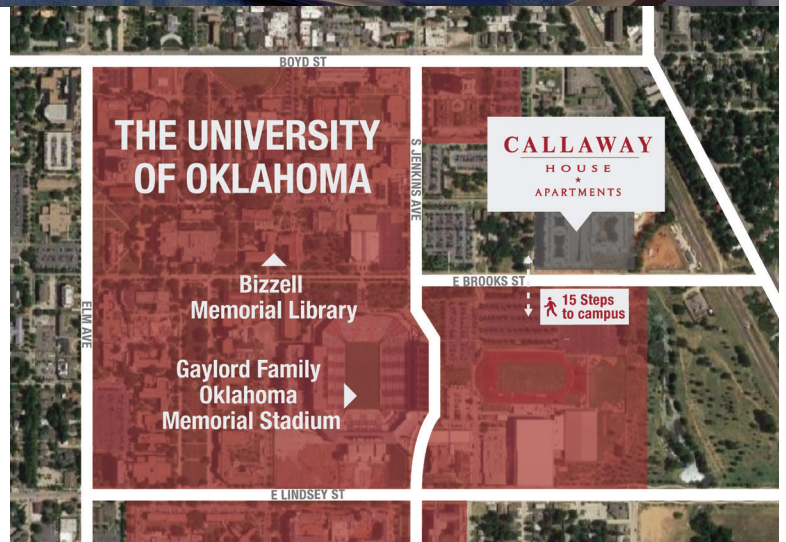


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