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by Walter Crouch

*(one of the many hats he wore
was that of Director of Student
Employment--a role that gave
him many opportunities to be a
student defender)*

Ivan Dean Cates Student Defender

When Ruby Rogers, a freshman from Burns Flat, enrolled at Southwestern in the fall of 1947, she was employed as secretary to the new director of audio-visual education, extension, correspondence, and innumerable student-oriented programs. Her boss was Ivan Dean Cates.

Now Dr. Ruby Robertson, professor in the School of Business at Southwestern, she recalls that the office equipment consisted mainly of an antiquated mimeograph machine--the same kind she later found in her first year as a high-school business teacher.

"During my college career at Southwestern," Ruby remembers, "I worked every hour I wasn't in class and earned enough to finance all tuition, books, and living costs and in the process learned as much as from my college classes.

"Ivan Cates taught me responsibility, hard work, and the patience to overcome difficulties. By any standard, he was a great educator. I owe much of my personal professional success to his influence."

Ivan's empathy for students and his understanding of their problems led him often to the defense of those he thought were being mistreated by his faculty colleagues. More often than not, he won his little undeclared wars.

Like Dr. Robertson, there are other distinguished Southwestern State educators who had their indoctrination into Higher Education while employed by I. D. Cates. There was a young man from rural Custer County, a graduate of Stafford High School, who worked one year in the audio-visual-extension office. He majored in English and later succeeded Dr. Gladys Bellamy as chairman of the Language Arts Department at Southwestern. Dr. Eugene Hughes resigned his chairmanship four years ago because of a desire to return to fulltime classroom teaching. "I know it's a cliché," he explained, but I volun-

teered to teach remedial English classes because those students needed help most." Ivan Cates would have been proud of him.

Then there was another young farm boy, this one from Greer County; he came to Southwestern as an English and Business student. He stayed on to work for Cates and to earn a Bachelor's Degree in English and Business Education with a minor in Speech-Theater and then went on to OU and OSU for graduate study. Today he is Dr. Leroy Thomas, editor of WESTVIEW, distinguished English scholar, and author in his own right.

One of the last secretaries in the office was Bill Wilmeth, a

Thomas High School graduate, who worked for Ivan from 1958 to 1962. He remembers most the great patience his employer had for students: "He had a way of putting them at ease and giving them confidence." Wilmeth returned to Southwestern as registrar in 1972. His tenure in that office, second only to that of Millie Alexander Thomas, has tested that quality of patience his mentor taught him.

Ivan was born in 1912 on the family farm about two miles south and east of the Weatherford city limits but much less than that by the route young Cates followed across fields and over Little Deer Creek enroute to graduation from the city's public schools and from Southwestern State Teachers College.

He often related a story, undocumented but generally accepted by his friends, that his mother entered him and his twin sister, Vivian, in the baby beauty contest at the Custer County Fair in Clinton and they placed first and second. Vivian, he said, was second.

I began a long, very close friendship with Ivan when he was a bachelor teacher at the Arnett consolidated school in Harmon County when I was the county superin-

Ivan Dean Cates



tendent at Hollis. His superintendent was Henry A. Vaughan, now a retired State Department of Education official; and his roommate was Perry K. Jones, a retired Southwestern State physics professor. These men were all very young and enjoyed life to its fullest.

Ivan was employed to succeed me when I resigned as county superintendent in 1939 to join the Southwestern staff. In 1941, with his wife, the former Zola Kelly, and their infant daughter, Carol, he moved to Calumet, where he served five years as superintendent of schools before he resigned to accept the post of assistant to W. R. Fulton in the Audio-Visual Department. Shortly afterwards, he succeeded his boss when Fulton moved on to OU.

Dr. Harris chuckles today when he recalls how Ivan put him down when he was president at Southwestern. The president's daughter, Ruth, was enrolled in one of Ivan's Driver Education classes. Dr. Al was briefing her on what she should do when her instructor interrupted. "Dr. Harris," he said, "leave her alone. She's already a better driver than you are."

"I still miss him," the retired president said recently.

Ivan had little tolerance for people who were insensitive toward students, for the arrogant, and for the superegotists. He responded to them with his sometimes mild-and occasionally not so mild-chiding. To the professor from California who complained that Weatherford mechanics "had no respect for us doctors," the Cates quip was that "they don't have to. They make more money than you do."

For an aging, hypercritical professor who fed his own ego by nitpicking notices and bulletin board announcements by other faculty members, Ivan retaliated by redlining the self-appointed critic's creative efforts and mailing them back to him.

He never lost his love for fun and was a part of many now almost legendary practical jokes he shared with intimate companions.

Above everything else, Ivan was a devoted husband and father and during the final tragic years of his life remained the same patient, caring head of his household.

A son, David, born in 1954, suffered brain damage at birth. After weeks in an Oklahoma City hospital, attending physicians gave the parents no hope for the child's survival and for all practical purposes sent him home to die; but his father and mother pulled him through, and David outlived Ivan by a few years.

Ivan's health began to break down in 1955 when he was hospitalized by a severe attack of pancreatitis. That was followed by shingles, diabetes, and leukemia. Yet no one heard him complain, and only his family and a few close friends knew how much he was suffering. He remained cheerful, patient with his students, and always good for a laugh with his old cronies.

Late in May, 1964, Ivan Dean Cates taught his last class at Southwestern, lay down on a couch at his home, and lapsed into a coma. He was rushed to Saint Anthony Hospital in Oklahoma City. Bill Ward and I were there as we had always been before until our vigil ended. Ivan died surrounded by his peers from Southwestern while George Baker, his longtime friend and former pastor, consoled the family.

On Memorial Day he was laid to rest in Weatherford's Greenwood Cemetery. He was only 52 years old.

Perhaps Talbert Brown, Carol's grieving husband and a faculty member at Southwestern, said it best: "He was like a father to me. I couldn't have made it without him."



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