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The Andy Smith Eulogy

I WAS WALKING SOUTH on Telegraph Avenue late one afternoon in November, 1948. It was the Friday before the Big Game and I had been watching the Big Game Parade. Presently a sound truck drove slowly down the avenue blaring the announcement: "Will Garff Wilson please report immediately to the parade judges' stand inside Sather Gate." I stopped, stunned. The announcement was repeated. I thought, "What in the world does this mean? Who could want ME?" My puzzlement was entirely logical. I was an obscure Instructor in the Speech Department who had taught at Berkeley only one year, 1941-42, then served almost four years in the Army of the United States. I had returned to my teaching at Berkeley only two years before I heard the sound truck paging me. I obeyed the voice.

When I reached the parade judges' stand, just inside Sather Gate, I found a small group of worried student leaders, some of them members of the Rally Committee. I don't recall who all the students were except that the group included Lou (Louise) White and Bud (George) Hobbs—students I had met recently when I helped in the staging of the President's Reception for New Students. They said, "Garff, we're desperate. You gotta help us." They then explained that

the Big Game Rally was scheduled to begin in three hours and they had no one to present the Andy Smith Eulogy.* Worse, they didn't have a copy of the Eulogy. The radio announcer, Mel Venter, who had presented the tribute for the past couple of years had suddenly declined to attend the rally and, moreover, refused to lend them a copy of the tribute. Then came their staggering proposal: Would I, please, write a substitute Eulogy—based on material they would supply me—then would I coach Bud Hobbs in how to read it, and do all this within the next three hours! I was stunned, but the very audacity of the proposal appealed to me—and so did the challenge to make sure that the show would go on. I went to work.

By the time the rally started, the substitute Eulogy was written and Bud was coached and ready to read it. His presentation was the climax of the evening and was received with tremendous approval. The huge crowd was unaware of the crisis which had been surmounted in the preceding three hours. The Rally Committee was elated—and so was I—because we had pulled it off successfully.

*See the Appendix for a brief sketch of the life of Andy Smith.

The next day the Big Game was played, and Cal won.

The next year, 1949, the Big Game Rally was staged and Bud Hobbs, now a Senior, again presented the Eulogy—this time in a version I had revised and polished.

Another year rolled by and the Big Game Week of 1950 arrived.

A week before the rally, a harried group from the Rally Committee invaded my office. Like the 1948 group, this one was acutely worried. Bud Hobbs had been graduated, had left the area, and the Rally Committee could not locate him. Neither were they able to find a copy of the Eulogy he had used. Could I help them? Did I know anyone who might have a copy? "Of course," I replied, "I have several copies." There was surprise and disbelief. I explained that I had written the current version of the Eulogy three years earlier and had trained Bud Hobbs to read it. I offered to train another student of their choice to do the job. The group left, relieved and happy. Three days later the chairman returned to claim that the committee could not find a suitable student to do the reading and to plead that I do it myself. I demurred. He argued. Finally I agreed reluctantly. That evening, in November, 1950, I took the stage and presented the Eulogy for my first time. I continued to present it for a total of 35 years, with one exception. In 1983, I was ill and Dick Hafner effectively substituted for me.

The 1950's and early 1960's were the years of greatest success and appreciation. The Eulogy provided a stirring emotional end to the rally. Students knew the name of Andy Smith and the fame of his unbeaten Wonder Teams. They listened to the tribute with rapt attention and seemed to enjoy the emotional experience. During these years, the Eulogy was staged with elaborate ritual. The Glee Club, directed by Bob Commanday, sang a medley of Cal songs imme-

diately preceding it and remained in place on the stage. Then all the lights in the amphitheatre were turned off, leaving only the glowing embers of the bonfire. The students rose and each lighted a candle. I was announced, the Glee Club started to sing HAIL TO CALIFORNIA vigorously and strongly. When I reached the microphone, the singing died down to a muted tone and I began. "On the eve of another Big Game, let us pause to pay tribute to the memory of a man who has become an ideal and a legend . . ." As I went on, the Glee Club continued with Cal songs sung softly and reverently. When I reached the last paragraph of the tribute, the singers switched back to HAIL TO CALIFORNIA and timed it so that when I spoke the last words of the Eulogy, "to our absent brother, Andy Smith," the Glee Club had reached the last phrase of the song and swelled to a great crescendo with the words, CALIFORNIA, ALMA MATER, HAIL, HAIL, HAIL. A moment of complete silence followed. Then from the hillside back of the theatre, a bugler sounded taps. The effect in the 1950's was spine tingling. A real spell was created and continued through the singing of ALL HAIL, BLUE & GOLD. Then the lights went up, the original rally mood returned, and the audience began to stream out of the theatre with the band blaring ONE MORE RIVER TO CROSS.

The memory of Andy Smith and his Wonder Teams faded with each generation of Cal undergraduates. As the years went by, the students who attended the Big Game Rally became restless and impatient with the sentimentality of the Eulogy.

Before the restlessness became a serious problem, an astonishing bit of history came to light. Recall that the reason I was asked to compose a substitute Eulogy to Andy Smith in 1948 was the refusal of the radio announcer, Mel Venter, to participate in the rally of that year. Let me emphasize that I did not know Mr. Venter, had

never met him, had never heard his performance of the Eulogy which everyone assumed that he had written. My version was composed entirely from material found in two large scrap books owned by the Sigma Alpha Epsilon Fraternity, which was Andy's own. Unexpectedly in March 1978, I learned that the Eulogy used by Venter was not his at all but had been written in 1936 by a Cal alumnus named Tom Moriarty of the Class Ex-1925. This revelation came in a letter from Moriarty to the President of the California Alumni Association, then Forrest A. Plant, who forwarded it to me. Moriarty's letter, dated March 28, 1978, began by stating: "This is a letter about The Andy Smith Eulogy, which I had the pleasure to write, more than 40 years ago." Then Moriarty records that the piece was delivered for the first time on San Francisco radio station KPO, November 9, 1936, by a good friend of Moriarty's named Dean Maddox. It was used at a football party in 1940, was published in two San Francisco weeklies, in a Beverly Hills magazine, and was used by Mel Venter of radio station KFRC. Moriarty goes on to say that he had recently been "told of the brilliant delivery of the Eulogy by Dr. Garff Wilson." He reminded the California Alumni Association that his piece was copyrighted—it had been used several times without his permission—but if the Cal authorities had any need of it, he was happy to grant permission.

As soon as I learned this fascinating and little known bit of history, I wrote Moriarty a long letter carefully explaining how I came to write a substitute Eulogy in 1948, a piece which I officially call a "Tribute". I assured him that I had never read or seen his Eulogy and had believed it was the work of Mel Venter. I offered to send Moriarty a copy of my "Tribute" and did so. He replied immediately with a friendly and generous letter praising my piece and urging me to copyright the script without delay, so I would

not get "the old run-around" which he said he had received from Venter. Moriarty also sent me a copy of his original Eulogy. A comparison of his piece and my Tribute reveals that they are so completely different in style and content as to exclude any possibility of plagiarism or collusion. Here is the first paragraph of Moriarty's original Eulogy:

High above the walls of California Memorial Stadium the west wind sings tonight of a great and lonely leader whose heart and mind and body fused into the supreme inspiration for eleven fighting gentlemen in gold-ringed arms of blue. He was rail-thin and he was tall and his grim eyes of sea blue sparked out over the high cheekbones of his lean, hungry Nordic face.

The script continues with anecdotes about Andy Smith, with lavish praise of his character and courage, with a summary of his amazing success, and it ends with a description of his funeral and the scattering of his ashes over the turf of the California Memorial Stadium. The final lines are:

Andy Smith, great spirit, great gentleman, has come home.

And that is the beautiful song of the west wind tonight . . . high above the walls of the California Memorial Stadium. *

I freely and gladly salute Tom Moriarty, still alive in his late eighties, as the author of the original Andy Smith Eulogy, and I thank him for establishing a tradition which I inherited and enjoyed for so many years.

From the beginning of my connection with the Eulogy, I was aware of the sentimentality of the piece. In the proper era and setting, the sentiment was part of the appeal. It is also the reason that I resisted almost every request to pre-

*Both excerpts are printed here with the permission of Tom Moriarty.

sent the Eulogy in other settings than the Big Game Rally. Every year I had a flood of invitations from service clubs, class reunions, alumni groups, living groups, etc., etc. It seemed that sooner or later when Big Game time approached every campus and Bay Area organization would get the idea: Why not build a program around the popular Andy Smith Eulogy? And so the invitations would roll in. They were always a compliment to receive, and they were always difficult to refuse. Usually my refusals went something like this: "Thank you sincerely, but I long ago promised the campus Rally Committee that the Eulogy would be its exclusive property, and would be presented only once a year at the Big Game Rally." Sometimes I explained further that the effectiveness of the presentation was largely dependent on the setting. "The piece itself," I would say, "is old fashioned and sentimental. But on the night before the game itself when emotions have run high all week, when the rally has reached its climax around a dying bonfire, when the arena is in darkness except for 8,000 students holding lighted candles, and when the Glee Club is singing softly in the background—given this setting, the Tribute to Andy Smith can be deeply moving. But take away the time, the place, the stage effects, the Eulogy becomes only a quaint piece of sentiment."

I maintained this policy for thirty-five years—with two exceptions. One was when Coach Ray Willsey asked me to read the Eulogy to his football team the day before the Big Game. I hesitated and gave him the reasons outlined above. But Ray was wiser than I. He pointed out that the setting he had in mind could be equally emotional and effective. The football team always had a light, last practice in the Memorial Stadium on the Friday afternoon before the game. Ray said: "At the end of the final practice, I'll gather the team around the Andy Smith Me-

morial Bench on the east side of the stadium. The Seniors, who will be playing their last game for Cal, will sit on the bench. The rest of us will sit on the grass. You will be alone in front of us with the November sunset behind you." Who could resist such a proposal? I accepted, and the occasion turned out to be so deeply moving that even I almost choked up. This occasion was repeated two more times, a second time for Willsey and once, in 1982, for Joe Kapp.

As the acceptance of the Eulogy declined, the Rally Committee, which is a proud preserver of campus traditions, tried many devices to keep it alive and attractive. I helped in every way I could. The piece was shortened and the language was changed to omit overly sentimental words and phrases. The sounding of Taps at the end was eliminated. We also experimented with shifting the Eulogy's place on the program. We tried it at the beginning of the rally, in the middle, and finally put it back at the end. But the old magic was gone. Of course, the Free Speech Movement and the ensuing era of protest and demonstration altered the attitude and responses of many students. The era of the Wonder Teams was forgotten, and a tribute to past football glory failed to stir much interest. Clearly the time for change had come. I realized this forcibly during Big Game Week of 1984. The *Daily Cal* sent a young reporter to interview me for a story about the Eulogy which was scheduled to be presented that year. The reporter was bright and eager, but his first question shocked me. He asked, "Who was Andy Smith?" I suddenly realized the gulf which had opened between students of today and those of the 1920's. For many years after his death, the memory of Andy Smith was cherished, the pride in his Wonder Teams was kept alive. A modicum of these feelings persisted into the 1950's and 1960's. Then they faded and were replaced by so many other memories and concerns

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that, by 1984, a bright reporter from the *Daily Cal* needed to ask, "Who was Andy Smith?" Later in the week, I read my version of the Eulogy for the last time, then wrote to the Rally Committee, sorrowfully, terminating the tradition and expressing the hope that they would develop a replacement for the Eulogy which would have appeal and meaning for the current generation.

And so: rest in peace, Andy Smith Eulogy. As a Cal tradition you enjoyed a long and noble life. May you live in the memory of thousands of Old Blues who were willing, once a year, to surrender to the nostalgia of a bygone era.

A copy of my eulogy or tribute is included as Appendix B. It is printed here for the pleasure of sentimental Old Blues.