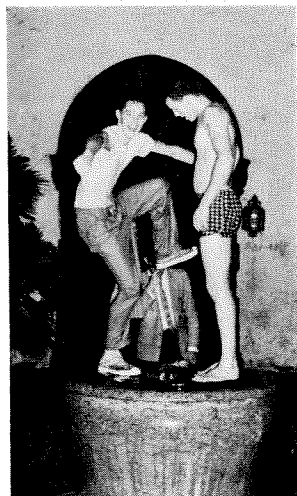


Frosh, Frenzy and Ferlinghetti



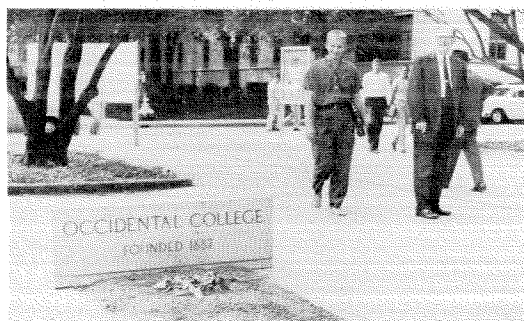
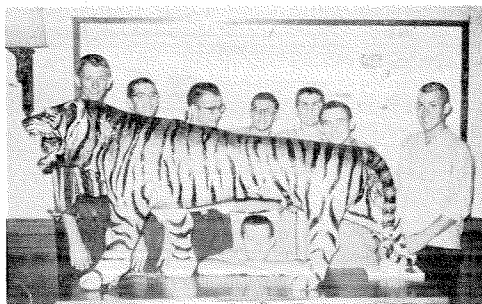
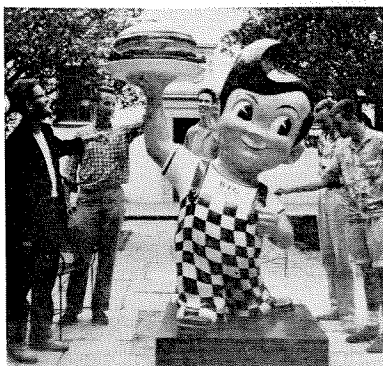
It's October again and life at the Institute begins with a bang. Rotation time — but I'm on the other side of the fence. I neglect to shave for a few days, put on my beret, take my copy of Pound's *Selected Poems* and sit in the lounge impressing frosh by discussing existential psychoanalysis. ("We're a well-rounded house, you know.") Duly convinced, the poor fellows wander back to their rooms and tell their friends about the weirdie who sits in Ricketts lounge discussing existential psychoanalysis, and who knows but *nothing* about vector relations in an n -dimensional space. ("They're not as well-rounded as they say they are.") Frustrated, I go back to *my* room and play solitaire.

This, however, is not the end of my efforts. I collect some new frosh and off to the Unicorn we go. Here we sit in the doorway discussing Ferlinghetti ("Like, what's Ferlinghetti, man? I don't follow you?") and making faces at the Sunset Boulevard Mafia. (Oxy men trying to look like touts, but too well-fed to create the illusion.) These are golden days and after the normal grind starts churning along its way I remember them with regret, apologizing for their evanescence.

Finally the end approaches; the freshmen commit. (My score: 90 percent missed. There will be other years.) It is Initiation time.

I can truly say that I enjoy Initiation. All one has to do is sit and laugh and occasionally pour water on the chair in which some poor frosh is about to sit. This year's crop have plenty of fun. They push an eight-foot push-ball all the way through downtown Pasadena and finally roll it off the top of Bullocks' three-story parking lot. They steal a gravestone inscribed: *Occidental College, Founded 1887*, and also various other articles of little intrinsic value such as a moth-eaten tiger and a statue of the Big Boy from Bob's Restaurant. (For the latter they demand a ransom of its weight in hamburgers.)

It is a gentle Initiation. The Caltech Student House Food Party plot is nipped in the bud by alert members of the Board of Control. The Ricketts frosh



create a little good will by helping out for an afternoon at an orphan's home. Finally, all the pledge-masters are soaked in the final act of Initiation. It is Over, and now I can have no reason for avoiding the textbooks. Alas! Poor Techman. I knew him well. A fellow with infinite leisure hours, put to no good use but the getting of dates from Los Angeles County Hospital, and the construction of a new and mightier water-balloon catapult which hurls a missile a quarter of a mile.

There are the usual complaints from the pledges: "Man, when my gang in New York had an initiation, we didn't mess around like this, we GAVE it to 'em. We beat 'em to a pulp."

"Gee, you guys are tough. You don't take nothin'. Hey, Efron, loan me ten bucks so I can go out with that girl friend of yours."

"I can't study! That's right. I tell you I can't study — Where're we going Friday night, honey?"

There are a whole new crop of intellectuals—quasi, pseudo, and otherwise:

"Who's Kerouac?"

"This Pound is SO STIMULATING!"

"What do you know about Rimbaud?"

"DuBridge? DuBridge? Oh, yeah! The Sanitary Engineer."

The receptions go on as usual. The proud vain men of science meet the blushing architects of the future:

"Hello, boys. My name is Linus Pauling. I'm a chemist."

The new class contains the usual ultra-conservatives:

"I tell you Edison didn't invent the light bulb! It was Straichnitoff. I read it in the *Daily Worker*."

"Gentlemen, I have called you here so that we might approach a common purpose, an end toward which we can bend our collective might. Let us resist initiation and rotation actively and passively. In doing so we will assure the intellectual future of coming generations of Caltech freshmen."

"Let's have a House *Ulysses*-reading party!"

But off I go to class, whistling happily, ready to do some serious thinking. In Physics I think of Jean (Stanford); in Geology, Maryanne (Scripps); and in History, Ophelia (Hamlet). I daydream my way through Vector Analysis, Sartre, elementary circuit theory, commutative rings, and quantum mechanics. Between visits to the school psychiatrist I indulge in deep introspection and deeper strawberry sundaes. I begin work on my new novel, "The Age of the Misanthrope," a psychological study of nuclear physics. The first paragraph is thrown away thirty-three times before I am satisfied. My volume of forty collected poems, of which three are finished and one is on the way, lies on my desk forgotten.

The end of Rotation and Initiation signals the start of Caltech social life. Once again I begin my fruitless quest for the Ideal Woman. (Five-foot-nine inches tall, red hair eleven-and-one-half inches long, a beautiful face, green eyes, perhaps blue—I'm not stuffy — measurements: 38-24-37, an intense interest in poetry, physics, philosophy, and existentialist literature.) Unfortunately it always turns out that the Ideal Woman does not go to high schools around and about or to Occidental, USC, Scripps, Pomona, Harvey Mudd, or UCLA. I'm saved for the time being, but still frustrated. College is merely the battleground on which one fights the problem of Woman. One has no possibility of winning. The end is merely marriage — either that or eternal melancholia; and Woman is the lesser of the evils, saith the Prophet.

Yes, here it is October once more, and in Dabney and Blacker and Throop and Fleming and Ricketts we sit and discuss our schemes for getting rich, finding women, unearthing the nature of the universe, remodeling the Institute; we write for the paper and do our homework in Physics 1, History 2, Math 108, English 7; we spend our time belaboring time, and all for a purpose unbeknownst to most: we will bring the mountain to Mohammed (or is it Millikan?) and we will do it with nuclear power.

—Joel Yellin, '61

