

WHEN OZNOT WAS NOT

By E. Alden Dunham '53
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In the Spring of 1964

Joseph David Oznot was mailed his admission notice to the Class of 1968 early in the morning of April 16, 1964. Later in the day a list of the admitted class was posted in the Admissions Office, and we began to relax for the first time since the hectic admissions season began several months before.

It was a beautiful spring day, everything in bloom, just perfect for the annual trustees' spring dinner at the Princeton Inn. About 4 p.m. I put together some notes about the newly admitted class in preparation for my usual after-dinner report to the trustees. This was always a satisfying moment, full of superlatives each year about the best class ever admitted to Princeton. The Class of 1968 was no exception; and the trustees, after good food and lots of wine and cigars, would surely react, as they always did, with a warm glow of approval, especially when told of the number of football captains admitted. At such a time nostalgia for the best old place of all overcame the perennial concerns about Princeton sons, prep-school admits, active recruitment of minorities and well-rounded boys versus a well-rounded class. At that time the admission of women was just a pipe dream.

Just as I was leaving for the Princeton Inn, Jim Wickenden said that some kid out in the hall says we admitted a guy who does not exist! Come on, Jim, I said — you've got to be kidding! Get out the folder.

A quick review revealed nothing out of the ordinary. Application, school report, interview record, test results — all were in order. But to play it safe we decided to call the school. Our mouths fell open when the principal of East Lansing High School in Michigan told us that Joseph David Oznot was not.

What to do? What about the trustees? The Princetonian? The press in general? What should be our attitude? We quickly decided to give full credit for a terrific hoax. I notified Nassau Hall, and, I must say, the trustees reacted that evening even more warmly to Joe Oznot than to the number of jocks in the Class of 1968. Perhaps that was because some of the old-timers remembered Ephriam Di Kahble, a similar personage from the Class of 1939 who turned out to be Joe's uncle. Indeed Joe's great-uncle was Bert Hormone of the Class of 1917, another illustrious if non-existent Princetonian. Rumors of some sort of relationship between Joe and a dog who went through Princeton and graduated with high honors have never been substantiated.

For some reason the press went wild with the Joe Oznot story. I suspect Princeton got more publicity from Joe than from any event in recent history. The national press played it up big, and the story appeared around the world. I was certainly the buffoon and deserved it! I think the whole episode was refreshing and

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cleansing in a way. It brought some much needed humor to the highly charged and overly serious admissions business.

The hoax was pulled off by six sophomores, four from Princeton and one each from Columbia and Michigan State. Joe's application gave as his address a Michigan State fraternity house. Two of the Princetonians took the SATs and Achievement Tests and scored in the 700s. The Columbia student came to Princeton for the interview, which incidentally did not go all that well. The school report was filled out credibly. Joe was a top student who wanted to major in the classics. He was a concert pianist, lacrosse player and class treasurer. But there certainly were some peculiarities: his birthday on April 1, his father's occupation as a private detective.

All in all, a fine admit. It's a shame Joe didn't show up — or did he? it is certainly not true that during his senior year he roomed with me at West College. Also, he is not an Ivy admissions director despite rumors to the contrary. Reliable sources tell me that the Clinton administration has appointed him to a high post in the CIA. The real question is whether he will show up for his 25th reunion.

I personally have no doubt that Joe will be there!



The story of Joe Oznot is the best tiger tale of all!

THE UNINDICTED CO-CONSPIRATORS

Their memories have dimmed with time, say the four original wizards of Oznot — members all of the Class of 1966. After all, they can't even agree on just what dorm they were in when the Oznot Caper began to brew — over much brew.

But Tom Reid, Art Davidsen, Steve Reich and Fred Talcott still remember more than enough to sketch out an admissions system ripe for a gotcha.

"It was one of those fall-of-sophomore years beer parties in our room," recalled Davidsen over the phone from Baltimore, where he is now a professor in the Center for Astrophysical Sciences at Johns Hopkins University. "I don't know what prompted it." In the flurry of press coverage that spring of 1964, *Time* magazine said Oznot was a protest by several students against the increasingly rigorous demands of the college application process. What suckers. "We told them that later," said Reid in a call from Tokyo, where he is bureau chief for *The Washington Post* and presumably more objective these days. "Really, it was just one of those things that seemed smart to a sophomore. We certainly never thought the guy would be an alumnus 29 years later."

And none are sorry about Znot's endurance. "I'm glad he's alive after all these years," said Reich during a call to Waltham, Mass., where he is a senior vice president of medical affairs with Parexel International. "My kids are getting ready to apply to colleges, and they're asking about him."

As the caper developed, clues were everywhere — but no one raised even an eyebrow. Not at the Educational Testing Service, which registered Michigan resident Oznot to take the College Boards in Princeton. Not at the testing site in the fall of '63, when there truly was a two-faced Oznot. Davidsen came in the morning to take the SATs — scoring an 800 in math, better than he did on his own — then gave the same clothes to Reid, who took the achievements in the afternoon and really wanted to get an 800 in Latin.

Not in the admissions office, where, as Alden Dunham relates on the preceding page, no one thought anything of J.D.'s birthday being being April 1, or his father, William H. Oznot, having the initials W.H.O. and being a private detective.

Not about that strange name, shortened from "Joseph Does Not Exist" to simply "Joseph D. Oznot."

And not when a Columbia student who was a friend of Reid's came down to do the campus interview.

With such a secure system it might have seemed a snap to have Znot accept and matriculate. "Actually," said Davidsen, "we thought of trying to put him through the whole four years, but that would have taken a scholarship. But we did talk about getting his girlfriend into Vassar the next year."

Once the new members of the Class of '68 were posted outside West College on April 16, 1964, everybody noticed, from *The New York Times* to *Time* magazine to the television show *To Tell the Truth*.

And now, 29 years later, the world is noticing again. He's back!