

STRIKE BLOG

On September 3, 2009, after my first picketing session in support of the “withholding of services” by members of the OU AAUP as a consequence of the breakdown in contract negotiations with Oakland University, I began the strike diary that follows, posting it in four installments in public notes on Facebook. With most communications limited to what could be contained in a press release, a website announcement, or, in my case, a placard, the blog was prompted largely by my strong desire to communicate to those interested (i.e., FB “friends” who include administrators, staff, faculty, and students, and friends of friends) my own experience and perspective in a forum where I could speak for myself without being represented or misrepresented by anybody else and would not be mistaken as speaking for anyone but myself.

In preparing the blog for publication here, I’ve revised it only minimally, hoping that it will be read as an artifact from the first weeks of September rather than as a history of those weeks. For the most part, then, the diary continues to be neither cogent analysis nor a fastidiously fact-checked history but instead a recording of my changing perspectives and sentiments during the course of the strike.

Wednesday, September 2:

Union meeting. As soon as I see our attorney mingling with the union officers at the front of the room, I know we’ll be taking a strike vote. I love this guy—a sort of Rodney Dangerfield-like labor lawyer from back in the day—rumpled suit, open collar, tie jerked down—who will do his duty of reading to us each of the pertinent state laws regarding work actions. He’s an absolutely no BS guy, and I trust him absolutely.

The chief negotiator gives us the rundown on the lack of good-faith negotiations by the university, along with its demand for increased control of intellectual property generated by faculty and a more surprising demand about reducing the faculty’s voice in academic matters. This is, ultimately, what really rangles: university administrations increasingly consist of money-

raisers, money managers, attorneys, public relations people, and middle-managers. That's regrettable but acceptable as long as they don't try to control research and education, areas in which their expertise and experience rival that of an immature turnip. In their decision-making, education gets trumped by profit, and cheap trumps excellent; if they can increase enrollment by re-landscaping in front of the nursing building, they see no need to improve the nursing curriculum which would be a more expensive means to the only end in which they're interested. They need someone else to speak for education and academic quality and research excellence, and that's the role of the faculty.

When it finally comes time for discussion, feelings are running high. A couple of colleagues warn of the dangers of public misperception given the current economic climate in Michigan and are shouted down. Another colleague points out that this silencing of fellow members is "shameful," and I agree. Officers point out that we have excellent people who will handle media and public relations, and we move quickly to vote. The "ayes" are deafening. I hear two "nays." Subtracting two from my estimate of four hundred in attendance, I'll assume that are about 398 in favor of authorizing a job action. Nonetheless, I feel badly that more effort wasn't made to reassure the two people in opposition.

Thursday, September 3:

7:35 AM: I arrive late for picketing, having mistaken the west entrances of the campus for "West Oakland Drive" where I'm supposed to be but which is, inexplicably, on the north side of the campus. I'm glad—really glad, in fact—to see everyone else there, quite a few colleagues from the English department and a couple of artists, whom I've missed since English got booted from Wilson Hall.

7:45 AM: Police Lieutenant Mel Gilroy, a longtime smoking buddy with whom I've huddled in the exterior nooks and cran-

nies of all the buildings on campus over many winters, pulls his car officiously onto the shoulder by the picket line, gets out, walks slowly over to me, and extends his hand: “Got any donuts?”

“No, but we’ve got granola bars.”

Mel climbs back into the cruiser.

“They’ve got donuts over at the east campus entrance on Adams,” he shouts.

7:55 AM: A steady stream of traffic into the campus. Clerical workers have supportive signs on their cars; teamsters driving delivery trucks look dubious, and some decide not to cross the line; students look surprised and perplexed. Increasingly, I feel badly about the effect that we’re about to have on their day, but I smile and wave at them all, and I’m absolutely sincere about being glad to see them. I could get a job as a Meijer greeter, I’m thinking. Something to consider, if the higher education thing doesn’t work out.

When teachers strike, the outcry is always that they’re hurting the students. But this isn’t the whole truth: it’s true that the teachers call the walkout, and it’s the teachers who do the walking out, but the university or school district is usually capable of averting a strike by offering an acceptable contract, and when the university or school *does* offer an acceptable contract, the teachers are back in the classroom. The university’s failure to negotiate in good faith prior to the expiration of the old contract puts the teachers into a no-win situation: we either walk out or we accept the unacceptable. I hope that those who complain to me that teachers are hurting the students will also complain to the university that the university is hurting the students. Two . . . tango . . . etc.

Still, as I stand on the picket line and greet these students, many of whom I know and like, I know that many of them

think I've betrayed them, that I am hurting them, that I'm using them as a pawn in a game to line my pocketbook. And I'm sorry that this is happening.

8:15 AM: Steady stream of traffic out of the university. Some students supportive, some not so much.

And a steady stream of honks and supportive hand gestures from street traffic.

Some occasional not-so-supportive hand gestures too. Also an occasional "Get a job!"

One motorist shrieks out something about "%\$#& liberals," and I look around to see that he's probably right. But no conservatives that I know would work for our wages. (If the right is really serious about getting more conservatives into university positions, they should see about doubling or tripling the salaries.)

10:15 AM: Word comes that the university has canceled classes indefinitely, which raises questions of semantics: if the classes that I would be teaching have been canceled by the university, is it possible for me to continue "withholding services"? can I now remain "in non-compliance" with the university only by *going to* the classroom and *teaching the classes* that the university has canceled? Can I, in short, still be said to be "on strike?"

I wonder if the UAW bumps up against questions like this.

8:00 PM: I surf the web for updates from the AAUP, messages from students and colleagues, news coverage etc. Excellent stuff from *The Oakland Post*. But somehow all the media seem to think that the issue is money (and health coverage). You can see how they've spliced the videos together so that what *seem* to be the first words out of any spokesperson's mouth are about salary and health coverage. I wonder what the first words out of the spokespersons mouths really are.

Lots of emails from confused and concerned students to respond to. My classes don't/wouldn't begin until tomorrow.

Friday, September 4

7:30 AM Picketing again. Today we have donuts, courtesy of the night maintenance workers. Grace, from the Starbucks on the corner, braves Walton Boulevard rush-hour traffic with two cartons of hot coffee. (Thank you, Grace!). We're sure to be police magnets now.

Not much traffic today, although apparently some students still haven't gotten the word. Around 10:00 traffic picks up—school buses and minivans with parents and kids—apparently a cross-country meet to be held on campus. We smile, wave, and welcome them all. Some pull over to ask directions, creating a minor safety/legal problem, since they have the potential to back up traffic on Walton and we've been warned that we'll be ticketed if that happens. An Auburn Hills police cruiser is parked outside the car wash across the street, an officer observing through darkened windows.

10:00 AM: A souped-up Corvette pulls in, rattling our ear drums. It's Stan, who did his B.A. and M.A. in English here in the early 90s. (He wrote a great Masters' project on Swift's *Tale of a Tub*.) He's been doing automotive tech writing for the last fifteen years, and last year, when he saw the automotive tech writing on the wall, so to speak, he applied to the doctoral program in Reading, which he began this past summer. He's planning to work specifically with disadvantaged kids. He's the kind of alumnus that makes me feel proud of what I do. Right now, though, he wants to give me a tour of the twin-carb monstrosity that is his engine. After that, he grabs a picket sign and some flyers, and we catch up for the last hour of my shift on the line. Thanks, Stan.

11:30 AM: Went home and wrote grad school recommendation letters for most of the afternoon. An unfortunate conse-

quence of a teacher/faculty strike is that it reinforces the misconception that all we do is teach. We say that we're "withholding services" but all we're really doing is staying away from the classroom for the six or so hours we'd normally be there each week. Out on the picket line, we're having informal meetings about curriculum, this past summer's courses, the future of the writing courses in the English department. Gladys the poet and Sally the artist are filling in Jeff, the new fiction writer, about a word-and-image project they've been working on and in which they'd like to include him. Scientists are darting back and forth between the picket line and their labs to record results or feed their mice. We're all rewriting our syllabi and developing new course materials in our heads,

At home, I check my email and find a query from the nursing program at the University of Washington about a small book I wrote twenty years ago, *Group Work and Collaborative Writing*, which they've been using but which has suddenly gone missing from the University of California server where it's been downloadable for the past decade. Phone calls and email to UC reveal that the booklet "failed to migrate" when they switched servers. While a lecturer at UC, still impoverished after my years of graduate study, I sold the copyright for the book to the UC system for two thousand pieces of silver. Since then, they've sold tens of thousands of copies to students. For the past ten years, they've made it available for free, which is fine with me. But now it's not available to anyone, and I have no control over its distribution: I either have to get them to put the booklet back on the server or see if I can recover the copyright so that I can distribute it myself. Minus the two thousand pieces of silver, this is, as I understand it, potentially the sort of control of intellectual property that Oakland is demanding from faculty in its current contract offer.

This reminds me that I got an email about a month ago warning that many of my own materials which I've put on the web for public and academic use, as well as for reference for my

own students, will disappear from cyberspace unless I myself manually “migrate” them to another server. (No support will be provided, and the email from IT “support” seemed to discourage anyone from actually trying to do this.) I’ll have to get on that. I imagine that those who think the faculty don’t work except while in the classroom must assume that “support services” handle all of the online services provided by the university. Ha.

In the meantime, though, I’ve got graduate school recommendations to write, emails from this years Rhodes and Marshall scholarship applicants to respond to, correspondence with my coordinators in Dublin regarding a planned student trip to Ireland in February, reports to complete on this summer’s Oxford program, books to read, books to write, faculty reviews to prepare for, curriculum committees to organize, and a 459-page doctoral dissertation to read before I serve as outside examiner. Walking the picket line for four hours daily, as it turns out, increases my work hours per week.

Paranoid fantasy #1: I hope the university doesn’t try to seize the books I’ve got checked out from the library.

Saturday, September 5

8:00 AM: I check the AAUP for updates (some progress, no contract yet). Otherwise, it’s hard to tell I’m on strike. I don’t usually teach Saturdays (although many of us do), and even if I did, my classes would be canceled. (Again, the semantic question about “on strike”! Can I be “on strike” on a holiday weekend? Or is it a nine-to-five weekday thing? Is being “on strike” simply an existential position? And if so, could I not continue to be “on strike” even after the “strike”? Maybe I’ve been “on strike” for decades without knowing it?)

I do some work on an essay on satire in contemporary popular culture, putter around the house with some final pre-winter fixups (stop the front door from slamming, patch some dry-

wall, touch up some exterior paint on the second floor), play some Super Mario Brawl with Brendan, begin re-reading *Pamela* for my imminent senior seminar, run some errands, and prep the grill for a three-day barbecue marathon. Maybe I'll get in a couple of long runs on Paint Creek Trail.

In other words, the lavish lifestyle I've developed on the taxpayer's dime and student tuition continues unabated.

Happy Labor Day weekend.

Monday, September 7, Labor Day

9:00 AM: Sporadic emails from the union indicating that there may be a tentative agreement—I'm to pencil in a meeting at 4:00 in case there is. A number of issues have apparently been settled. I'm hopeful.

3:00 PM: No meeting, no tentative agreement, but maybe by tomorrow. I'm supposed to stay tuned.

Tuesday September 8

5:45 AM: I need to check to find out whether or not I'm still on strike. I've got my calendar divided into Plan A (On Strike) and Plan B (Not On Strike) and need to know what to do next. Email from the AAUP advises me on what to do "*if* we are still on strike" but does not give a definitive answer to the question of whether or not we *are* on strike. A quick trip to the University's website, however, tells me that apparently I *am* still on strike. Curious that the University knew about this before the union did. . . . Here's the welcome page from the university website:

Classes are cancelled at OU for Tuesday, Sept. 8

Classes are cancelled for today, Tuesday, Sept. 8. Because Oakland University students, their parents and the general public will continue to be injured by the professors'

illegal actions, the university will today be asking an Oakland County Circuit Judge to order the professors back to work.

All extracurricular campus activities will take place as scheduled.

Well, rats. And the university seems to be revving up its rhetoricians in the p.r. department. A quick tour of Facebook shows that students too are struck by the bit about “students, parents, and the general public” being “injured.” Visions of massacred citizens, limbs missing, piling up around the campus. “Stay away, stay away! The faculty is loose!!”

Oh wait! it’s a **FIGURE OF SPEECH!**. None too deftly deployed, I’m afraid. Someone should tell whoever wrote that announcement on the website that with poetry comes responsibility.

Gotta get the kids off to school and then rejoin the picket line. Hi ho, hi ho . . .

7:30 AM: Lots of pickets, lots of donuts, lots of umbrellas. Those who left their homes later than I did, share an email from the union telling us that negotiations had proceeded fitfully but steadily until OU refused to budge on taking faculty governance out of the contract. OK, now I know why I’m still picketing.

9:30 AM: We get a community broadcast from the secure bunker in Wilson Hall: “Bad faculty! For shame!”

The email from OU ADMIN, including the press release, is a rhetoric teacher’s dream, and I hope it’ll be taught in first-year composition, business writing, and public relations courses at universities everywhere for years to come. I remember when I taught business writing how difficult it was to teach business students to distinguish “positivity” in their messages from deliberately misleading statements which deliberately misrep-

sents the facts. I wish I'd had this press release in my files then for an example of the latter.

A close reading would take more time than I've got here. I'll say only that the release attributes to the AAUP "claims" made in terms that I've never heard them make and equivocates terrifically. We've been warned, for instance by the AAUP, that the University is asking for the creation of a large number of five-year non-tenure track appointments, which the union is resisting. The University says, however, that the union has claimed that it wants to end tenure, and it graciously assures the world that all tenured faculty will remain tenured, saying nothing about the proposed proliferation of non-tenure track faculty. In short, the university equivocates: it doesn't plan to end tenure *immediately*, but it wants to take major and rapid steps in that direction immediately.

Overall, the press release intimates that the university is offering a contract that anyone would be a fool to decline. All of us on the picket line agree that if the university is offering what it suggests that it's offering, hey, we're totally down with it. We consider walking en masse over to the Presidential Bunker and asking, "Where do we sign?"

So: OU ADMIN says it's offering us a deal we can't refuse. The union negotiating team is telling us the deal we're being offered is unacceptable. Whom to believe?

(Rhetorical question.)

10:30 AM: Carissa, a student from my 7:30 AM Summer 2004 intro to Shakespeare class shows up bearing a couple of dozen donuts from the Wayne State teaching assistant unions. She's finishing up a doctoral program in psychology. Thanks, Carissa! I love our alumni more and more—and resolve to go to more alumni functions.

Will picket for donuts.

11:15 AM: Meeting at Caribou with OU's 2009 nominee for a Rhodes scholarship to go over the application. We're not the only faculty-student conference going on there.

1:30 PM: I double check the university website to make sure that I really read what I remember reading. The bit about the faculty "injuring" the general public is gone.

2:00 PM: Union Meeting

We are instructed that we are not "on strike." We are "protesting unfair labor practices." OK.

The union president parses the university's press release in more detail. The kicker: After the university had dropped onto the table its latest surprise demand, our team went down the hall to make copies. When they came back, the university's team was packing up to leave, which they did. Hence, the university's announcement that it is "disappointed that despite marathon bargaining and a substantial contract offer, faculty representatives walked away from negotiations at approximately 5 a.m. on Tuesday." Here, the university uses the literal meaning (yes, the team walked away, all the way to the copy machine) in order to adhere to the strict truth of the matter, while hoping that readers will latch onto the figurative (they "walked away").

Whom to believe? (Still a rhetorical question.)

So what exactly was the deal breaker? This is long and complicated and there are a lot of references to a past grievance which the AAUP won in court and which the university still does not want to settle on, and all of this is difficult to follow. What it boils down to is that the faculty contract mandates that both faculty and the university adhere to all of the university's policies—the university's constitution, its procedures for hiring and firing, procedures for development of new programs, everything. The contract is what legally binds both the faculty

and the university to follow the rules. And the university would like to remove that from the contract. “Trust us,” it’s telling us: “We’ll follow the rules; we don’t need no stinking contracts.” Then why, one might ask, do you want it removed from the contract?

Let me break it down further:

Scenario 1, without contract:

OU: The University is pleased to announce the new College of Cruise Operations. We’ve noticed that the cruise industry continues to offer great jobs and we’ll be the first university to offer this exciting opportunity for our students to train for careers in the cruise industry. We’re also pleased to announce that Thurston Howell III, whom you know has donated a gazillion dollars to the university over the past three months, will be named Eternal Dean in Chief and Distinguished Professor of Cruise Theory. Congratulations Dean Howell!

Faculty: You can’t start a new program without consulting with us. You can’t appoint a new dean without consulting with us. And you can’t grant tenure without our reviewing the credentials of the candidate.

OU: Yes we can.

Faculty: Oh.

Scenario 2, with contract:

OU: The university is pleased to announce . . . yadda yadda yadda . . . Congratulations Dean Howell!

Faculty: You can’t . . . yadda yadda yadda . . . credentials of the candidate.

OU: So sue us.

Faculty: OK.

I exaggerate. The university would never consider launching a new program just because it could raise money from donors that way.

Second on the two-item list of deal-breakers is the innovative new approach to health care that the university would like to adopt, which basically boils down to a two-tier system: faculty with families in which anyone has a pre-existing condition which might, in fact, prompt them to use the services of health practitioners will be placed in a category that must pay exorbitant fees, while those who are likely not to use such services will pay lower fees. Kind of screws up the whole concept of health insurance, if you ask me.

3:00: Rally outside of Wilson Hall. Interrupted briefly by a phone call from our lawyer telling us that the court has rejected the university's lawsuit requesting an immediate back-to-work order. The university would have had to demonstrate "irreparable harm" in the event that we didn't go back to the classroom. That's probably what all the hoo-ha about the injuries among the general public was about earlier in the day. The court apparently didn't buy it. But both negotiating teams will have to appear together in court tomorrow morning. With any luck, the judge will force them into a room together and not allow them to come out until they've negotiated an agreement.

On the university website, OU is spinning the failure of their lawsuit as follows: "Oakland University administrators are encouraged by communication from Oakland County Circuit Judge Edward Sosnick that may expedite a resolution to ongoing contract negotiations that have delayed the start of the fall 2009 semester."

OU ADMIN—a thoroughly cup-half-full kind of group. Nothing here about the failure of their lawsuit.

Thank you to all of the students and alums who came out to support the protest against unfair labor practices today.

6:45 PM: The judge has, as it turns out, ordered the two teams to negotiate immediately and continuously until a resolution has been reached. The AAUP team reports that Oakland's team has locked itself into a room and won't come out.

Wednesday, September 9, 2009

5:30 AM: I tiptoe into the study and fire up the email machine, checking in to see what condition my condition is in. The email box is a mess and it's going to be hard to sort out before the kids wake up.

The OU News team (the official flaks for the university) apparently has sent me another update sometime last night. I appreciate the personal attention they've been giving to keeping me informed. I wonder if anybody has told them that these messages are going to faculty, and I check the address box. Yes, they're sending them out to all faculty and staff. I gotta wonder what on earth they think they're doing, sending out emails that vilify the hundreds of people to whom they're sending them and accusing them of things that they know they didn't do. It's strange, when you start to think about it. But it's not something you want to think about for very long, so let's just see what they have to say:

"For the second time in the same day, the Oakland University chapter of American Association of University Professors union bargaining team walked out on negotiations with Oakland University's bargaining team. . . ."

Whoa! Never saw THAT coming!! as one of my students said when Mr. B. attacks Pamela for the fourth time, early on in Richardson's novel. (We'd covered irony earlier in the semester.)

When I last heard from the AAUP negotiating team, they had given OU an offer and the OU team had disappeared to hudd-

dle. How can that situation have turned into the AAUP walking out?

Let's see what else is in the mailbox. Here's an update from the AAUP President:

"Late this afternoon, I was in our attorney's office in Detroit helping to prepare for tomorrow's court hearing when the administration's attorney called to say our team had walked out. Mr. Gregory immediately called Mike Latcha and found our team was in the MERC building awaiting an administrative response to a proposal they had given the administration some time ago. After several hours waiting for a response, our team was unable to find their team. The state mediator suggested they (our team and mediator) leave."

Whom to believe? It's SOOOOOOOOOOOOOO confusing! [Hands on head; scream-face pose]. I need to re-read Edward Said's *Beginnings*.

Since the email from the union president contains some corrections to previously published statements—the average starting salary for an assistant professor is closer to 50K than to 40K; OU has an A2 bond rating, not a AAA rating—, I'm putting more faith in the AAUP's version than in OU's version, since OU has not seen fit to correct any misinformation that it has released.

I've always thought that the "uni" in "university" (an oxomoronic word, compounding "one" with "many") is that everybody in the university, from anthropologists to zoologists, in spite of their different disciplines and bodies of knowledge, is trying to find and spread the truth. As a professor, when I profess, I try to profess nothing but the truth; and I study hard, research hard, think hard, and do my fact-checking before I profess anything. Truth is the one thing that's sacred in a university, and you don't mess with it. When students lie or are misleading about papers they've written, we bounce their sorry

asses out of the university for a semester or two or forever to show them how seriously we take misrepresentation. When university administrators or personnel mislead or misrepresent? Not so much.

Quick moodle messages to my gen ed classes, a few answers to student emails and other business, then it's off to wake the kids up, get them off to school, grab an umbrella, and meet the gang for donuts. That's my new euphemism: I'm not "on strike," I'm not "withholding services", I'm not even "protesting unfair labor practices" anymore.

"Your Honor, all I was doin' was havin' donuts with the gang! Is that a crime?"

7:30 AM: Meanwhile, back at the picket lines . . .

Apples and granola bars and bottled water. No donuts. No cops. Eventually coffee. (Thanks Natalie! Thanks Ed!) This is a lot less exciting than it used to be. People start proposing that we bring chairs.

I think: No, don't make this look like a picnic. This is not a picnic.

Some changeover in the personnel. I get to meet a photographer from the Studio Art program that I haven't met before who's incredibly interesting and whose work is in permanent collections all over the country. Realizing this, I realize that all of the other people I'm with are incredibly interesting too, but I haven't noticed it so much recently because I'm used to them: two award winning poets, an award-winning actor and director just back from directing a play in Wisconsin, a brilliant painter, another brilliant artist, a noteworthy Dickens scholar and member of the editorial board from the *Dickens Studies Annual*, one of the world's leading experts on the work of Cormac McCarthy, and a medieval and Renaissance musicologist originally from London. What are the odds that this collection of

amazing people would ever be standing around together *anywhere*? And what are the odds that the place that they'd be standing around would be the corner of Walton Road and West Oakland Drive in Rochester, Michigan? I mean, what ARE the odds?

I don't know what the odds are, but I think the odds are good that there's *someone* picketing at one of the *other* OU gates who could tell you what the odds are in about one tenth of a nanosecond. (Someone from Math and Stats, I'm thinking?) And the number that person would tell you would be very very high. And I think the odds will be higher still if Oakland substantially undermines the faculty in the next contract.

The strike has made me appreciate my colleagues a LOT more. And my students a lot more.

I have a sudden moment on the picket line in which I'm filled with love for everybody everywhere. No exceptions. I love the negotiating teams, I love Judge Sosnick, I love Oakland University.

I love the linguists, the philosophers, the historians, the journalists, the actors, the directors, the musicians, and the artists. Who could NOT love the electrical engineers, the physicists, the biochemists, and the mathematicians? And the reading specialists? I love the reading specialists. And the nurses and the physical therapists. And Cyn and Becky in the English department. And all the ladies in Accounts Payable. And Tammye and Jan in the dean's office, And the cops. And the night crew in O'Dowd. God, I love the night crew in O'Dowd!

The moment passes.

I do not love the Office of Communications and Marketing. Except for Michelle, Kelly, Kathy, and Eric.

And I do not love the Office of the General Counsel to the Board of Trustees.

But after a week, I really want to be back on the campus of my university.

Alum Stan, scholar of all things Elvis, comes back to put in another two hours on the line. Former student Rachel comes by to picket and chat just a little bit before I have to leave; she lets me know that her mother will be in one of my classes this semester. Cinnamon rolls show up from somewhere.

Brian from the Wayne State AAUP comes by—he’s just come from district court where Sosnick has ordered the two negotiating teams into a jury room and told them not to come out without a deal.

My shift is over, and I head home. I’ve got a lot of work to do.

12:00 PM: The mail at home brings a little envelope from Oakland’s office of Annual Giving. It’s full of unmarked seeds. A note reads, “Your gifts during the Campaign for OU provide the seeds of growth for countless students and faculty.”

That’s not exactly what the *Oakland Post*’s interview last weekend with the Office of the Vice President for Financial Affairs seemed to indicate. Instead, they seemed to be saying, essentially, yeah, we’ve got fourteen million dollar surplus on account of the Capital Campaign, but it’s in *designated* accounts, not the General Fund, and so it *can’t* be used to lower tuition for students or to pay faculty.

But I appreciate the gesture and sentiment, and I put some dirt in a pot, spread the seeds around, toss a little more dirt on top and water it. I have no idea what the hell the seeds are.

12:30 PM Wednesday—5:00 AM Thursday

No news. Good news?

The waiting is the hardest part.

The university posts a notice that we’ll be closed again on Thursday.

Every day you see one more card.

Radio news says that the negotiations continue.

You take it on faith; you take it to the heart.

I'm going to bed. I pack my bag for the picket line.

The waiting is the hardest part.

5:30 AM Thursday, September 10: Email says we've got a tentative contract. AAUP page says we've got a tentative contract and have had one for almost two hours now. University says we've got a tentative contract, and that classes begin at 7:30 AM. Everybody's in the same story. Yowzah.

Count me in.

Details begin to come in: Health care, check. Faculty governance intact, check. Pay raise, maybe in a year or two, but presumably not much. Med school faculty part of the union, no. Five-year appointments, very limited, check. Research money, more. Summer salaries, remain the same. Domestic partners, check. Penalty for donuts with the gang, two days' pay. University declines AAUP request to have this money go to student scholarships. Lots of other details that I can't seem to bring myself to care about very much.

The two days' pay will have to be deducted from my contribution this year to the OU Annual Fund. The money I donate to OU comes from designated funds, not my General Fund, and I can't apply General Fund monies to contributions to OU. I'm pretty sure that the two days for which they're docking my pay are, in fact, two of the very same days which I had designated for contributions to OU. Fortunately, there are a couple of other days that are designated for contributions to the English department and to the Oxford program and to a couple of scholarships.

I could wonder why we couldn't have made this deal a week ago, but there are only two handfuls of people who know the

answer to that one, and I know that speculation could go on endlessly. So I decide not to wonder.

9:30 AM—O’Dowd Hall: The clock on the second floor is still two hours and six minutes off. The elevator still greets me with a quasi-friendly, “Going up?” The halls on the fifth floor are relatively quiet. The red message-waiting button on my phone is flashing.

I fire up the computer and unpack my bag. There’s a knock on the door, and one of my student walks in.

It’s all over except for the thank-yous.

Thank you Mike Latcha, Chief Negotiator; thank you, negotiating team: Jim Cipielewski, Scott Barns, David Garfinkle, and Frances Jackson. Thank you, Joel Russell, OU AAUP Chapter President. Thank you, Gate Captain Natalie Cole; thank you, spokespersons Liz Barclay and Karen Miller; thank you, AAUP colleagues, donut buddies, AAUP chapters at WMU, WSU, and EMU; thank you Stan, Carissa, Grace, Rachel, and Andrew for showing up with your smiling faces and support; thank you to the three exchange students from Japan who had no idea what I was saying but took my strike-information bulletins graciously, with big smiles and little bows; thank you, former student Kim, for the dial-up legal advice and for assuring me that the AAUP has “clean hands” (Good luck on the bar exam!); thanks to all the OU students who’ve been patient and supportive for your patience and support; thanks to all the OU students who have not been patient or supportive for not throwing things at me; thanks to all my Facebook friends for the moral support; thank you, Virinder for the thumbs up; thank you, Arthur McBride, thank you Joe Hill, and thank you Mother Jones.

Postscript:

The seedpacket didn’t identify the seeds enclosed, but the label did indicate that the packet had been prepared for 2009



While our friends in Annual Giving suggested that the seeds were symbolic, I tend to think them allegorical.



planting, so I went ahead and put them in a pot. Though the seeds in the packet appeared assorted when I planted them, only one type—apparently hybrid sunflowers—successfully germinated. The plants were initially fast-growing and—with the waning sun of the autumn—very leggy; as sunlight decreased in October they became leggier still. Clearly, the timing—especially for fast-growing high-maintenance plants like sunflowers—was not quite right. By late November, the plants required watering twice a day. Nonetheless, the first pale bloom appeared during the first week of November.