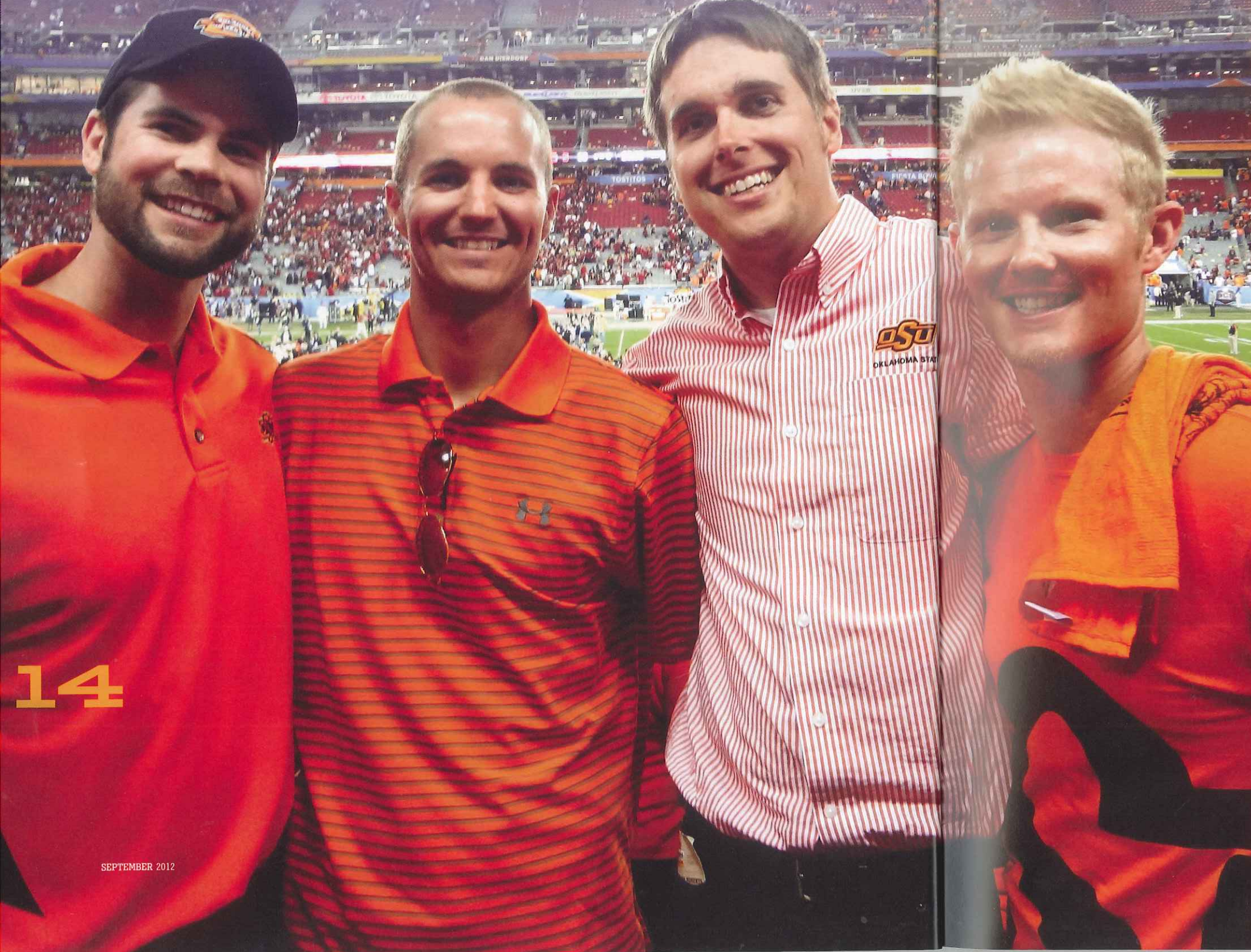


# A Lasting Legacy

STORY BY CLAY BILLMAN



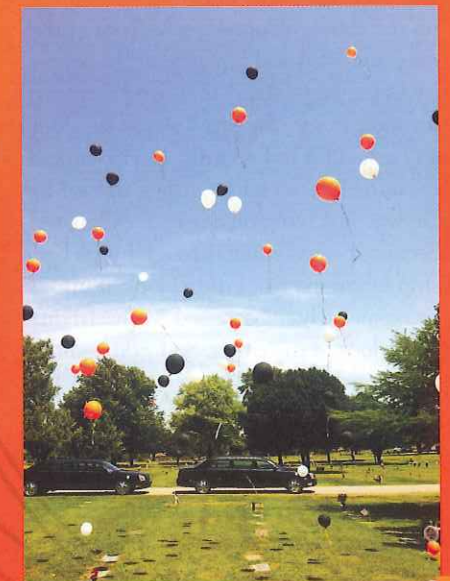
*"It is not length of life,  
but depth of life."*  
— RALPH WALDO EMERSON

For all of his 27 years, **MICHAEL GRISMORE** lived deeply. For one-third of his life, he lived **ORANGE.**



The Bartlesville native passed away in May from a pulmonary embolism (blood clot) while being treated for a collapsed lung. He left behind a grieving family, friends as close as brothers, a dog named Pistol and one orange tuxedo.

The church was decked-out more like a pep-rally than a funeral.



"It was the orangest service I've ever been to," says Larry Reece, OSU public address announcer and associate athletic director for development. "It had a big-time OSU feel. At the cemetery, dozens of orange, black and white balloons were released. It was touching.

"And then the tailgate party started after that."

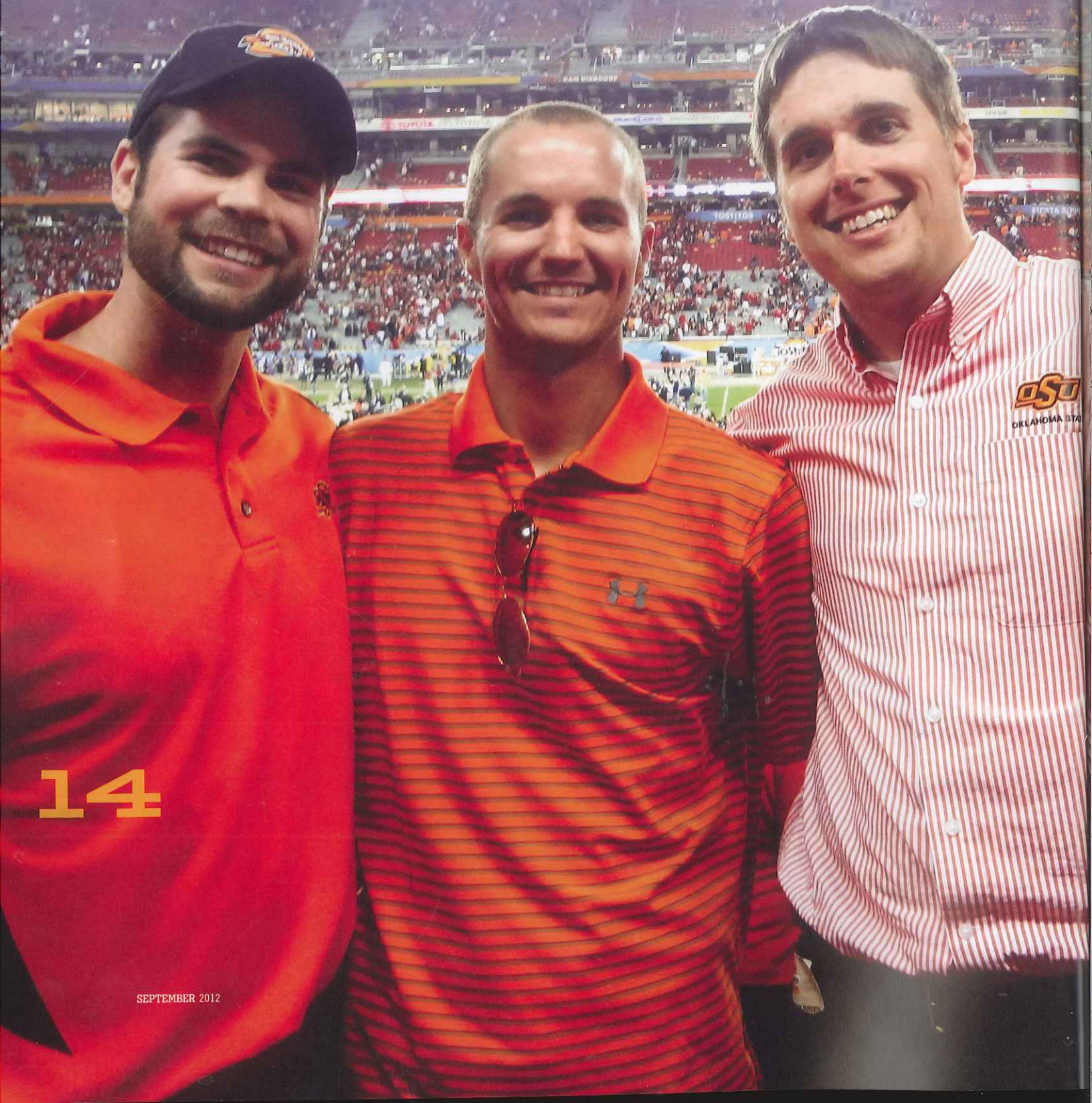
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In true Grismore style, friends and family celebrated “Mo’s” love of attending Cowboy games.

“His buddies really honored him well that day,” Reece says. “A lot of people went and put on their OSU gear. I put on my Big 12 Championship hat.”

“Michael would have had everything orange if he could,” says his wife Heather. “He wanted our wedding orange, but with bridesmaids’ dresses it didn’t work out at the time. He wanted our front door to be painted orange. He ordered custom-made Nike shoes online, Oklahoma State Oakley sunglasses ...

**“That whole saying, ‘Live Orange’ — he lived it. He bled it. Everything.”**

The couple met while sophomores at OSU, introduced in a trap set by mutual friends.

“Kevin Bell and Brad Jordan lived in the apartment above me. When Michael was over there one day, Brad carried me up the stairs, plopped me in front of the door, knocked and ran around the corner. I was forced to stand there and come up for some excuse for why I was at the door, so I asked for index cards. Kevin walked me into his room said, ‘Oh, hey, this is Mo.’ He was just lying on the bed, exhausted because he was going through his pledge-ship for Sigma Nu. I didn’t look at him. I was completely embarrassed. Michael didn’t really look at me either. So I grabbed the index cards and left.”

A week later Michael called Heather to ask her out on a date.

The courtship lasted four years, and in that time, Heather got to see his passion for Cowboy athletics first-hand.

“That first winter when we started dating, Michael came over to my apartment after we lost to UT at Gallagher-Iba Arena. His eyes started welling up because he was so heartbroken by that loss. He told me then, ‘You know I have to really care about you if I’m coming here, because otherwise I’d be going home.’

“He got me to be more of a sports fan,” she admits. “I enjoyed it, but he definitely added fuel to the fire. He was an all-around sports fan, but Cowboy Basketball was probably his favorite.”

**“I’ve never met anyone so proud of their alma mater like Mo was,” Bell says. “He was orange to the bone. He was kind of a cult hero around campus for dressing up in his orange tuxedo for basketball games — even exhibition games!”**

The friends were part of the self-proclaimed “Northside Nasties,” a rowdy throng of students on the north court-side bleachers. (On the opposite end of the court were the “Southside Savages.”) Bell wore a referee’s jersey. Mo and Travis Phelps were dapper in their tangerine tuxes.

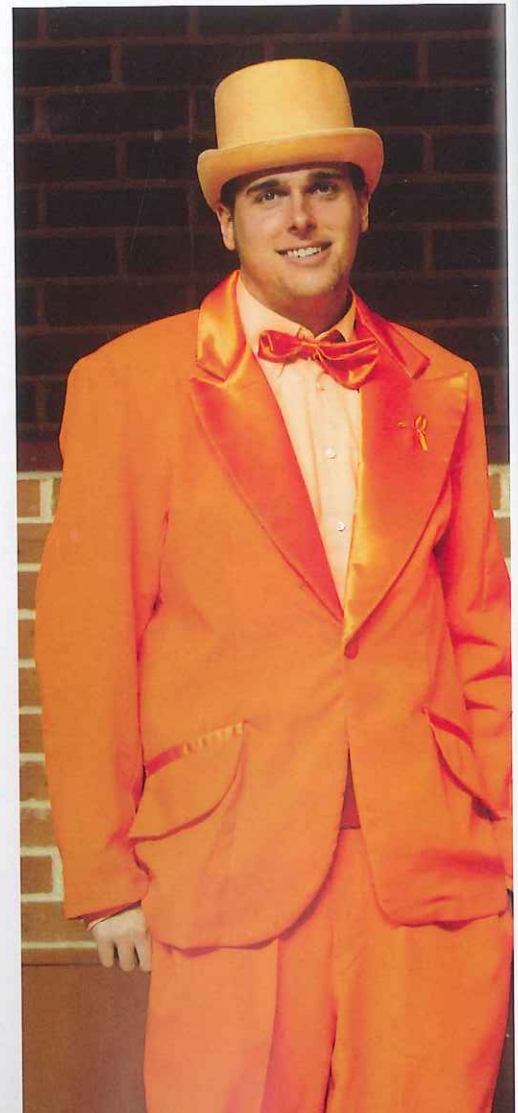
“You couldn’t miss our group of guys,” says Phelps. “During our sophomore and junior years, Mo and I wore Blues Brothers outfits (black suit, orange shirt, white shoes, black and orange tie, orange afro wig and sunglasses). At the start of our senior year, my dad brought back a custom-made orange suit for me from China. Once Mo got a look at it, there was no way he wasn’t getting one. He was the most competitive person I know. Sure enough, he had one at the start of conference play. We had a lot of fun dressing up, and hopefully we made basketball games more fun for the fans and players alike.”

“We spent countless hours camping out for football and basketball games,” says Tommy Christian. “Our crew set up a tent just outside GIA and camped for five days to get the best seats possible for the Final Four. I will never forget that evening before the ticket windows opened, just the excitement we all had to share in this together as a life-long dream for a group of friends who grew up OSU fans. We were there so early we were able to get on the 4th row.”

The circle of friends, old and new, continued to grow after graduation.

“Our group of friends always enjoyed sitting next to each other, even making sure our tickets were by each other when we were out of school and married,” Bell says. “We certainly witnessed the highs and lows of OSU athletics through the past number of years as a collective family.”

“He was truly a special man that would do anything for his friends,” Christian adds. “In the days after his death, I think someone said it best when they noted how many people considered Mo a best friend. ‘Michael was not someone who had a best friend — he had 50!’”



***“Always have faith in God, yourself and the Cowboys.”***

**— EDDIE SUTTON**



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"He had tons of friends," Heather confirms, "starting in elementary school in Bartlesville, high school, and several others came from the accounting program at OSU. He made friends wherever he went. Once he had a friend, he kept that friend. He was good about calling, staying in touch, making sure he spent time with people. He always tried to make people comfortable, whether it was talking sports or other things. He just had an uncanny ability to get along with people ..."

**"If he did something, whether it was OSU or friends or family, he would do it 100 percent. He would go all out."**

Football tailgates were no exception.

"Before every football game, he'd be the first person to send out e-mails to everybody with a list of what we were doing for the tailgate. He would completely organize this huge event, down to the last detail. It was a full-day event. They'd have the tents out there early to mark the spot. We were always the first ones out there in the parking lot getting set up."

"Tailgating allowed Mo to enjoy his two favorite things in the world: friends and OSU sports," Christian says. "No one would be a stranger at our tailgate. He loved to make an event out of the day and really took it to the next level. Michael created the menu and made sure everything had a purpose, such as grilled 'Dawgs' for the Georgia game."

Michael and Heather also enjoyed annual postseason parties with friends and family. The more the merrier.

"My parents and brother would go with us to all the bowl games," Heather says. "It was a huge group. It kind of became a tradition. His brother David just graduated this year. They were extremely close, too. He was really close to his family."

It was that family connection that brought Michael back to Bartlesville after he completed his master's in accounting.

"He wanted to be close to his family, and it worked out," Heather says. "He got a job with the accounting firm Ernst & Young, auditing ConocoPhillips, so that took us back to Bartlesville. We've grown a pretty good network of friends and got connected to a church there. Once he got involved in the church, it was just full speed ahead with Bible study groups and our Sunday school class. Anything he got involved with, he put his mind to it and really gave it his all."

"He knew how to plan ahead," she says. "He had goals for the future and he knew how to strive for those. He was very goal-oriented."

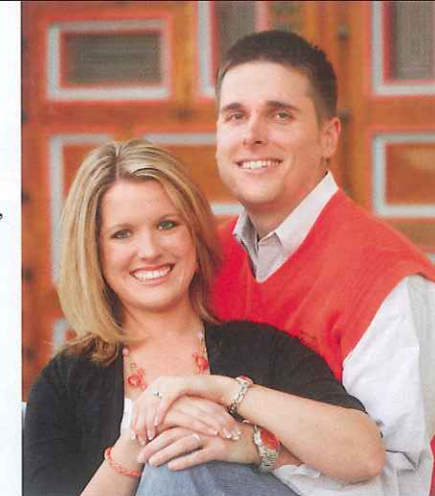
During the 2010 Cowboy Caravan stop in Bartlesville, the couple approached Reece with a plan to give back to their alma mater and accomplish one of those goals.

"I got up and spoke as we do at every caravan about our 'Leave a Legacy' program," Reece recalls. "Michael and Heather wanted to visit further on endowing a scholarship. It was a little bit shocking to me, just because of how young they were at the time, because most people when they talk about leaving a legacy they're at a much older age. To have a couple in their mid-twenties thinking about that was pretty extraordinary."

**With a matching offer from T. Boone Pickens, the Grismores signed a pledge to endow a quarter-scholarship (\$125,000) for men's basketball.**

"It took a little bit of talking, but it was a pretty quick decision," Heather says. "Michael was a CPA, so he was very much a planner. He was able to map out how it would work and what we could do. We felt confident enough in our situation and we wanted to help out to give back somehow."

"They've already paid two years of it," Reece says. "We're talking about some ways to continue that scholarship. He's got a lot of great friends that want to see that scholarship fulfilled and maybe even increased, so we're in some talks about ways to do that in his honor."



**"I've always thought that we should do a story on this young couple as great supporters of Oklahoma State, I just didn't know there was going to be a tragic part to the story,"** Reece adds. "They're a great example of how you can be young and be thinking about these types of things. It's just tragic that we've lost Michael, because he was such a great person and a great fan, but the fact that he was thinking about leaving his legacy at such a young age is remarkable."


Heather says her faith (and Michael's) has sustained her in this difficult time.

"I really feel like there was a reason for it," she says. "I feel very strong. My faith has really come in and has been tested, but I will tell anybody now that I know God comes through. I will use this as a witnessing testimony. We've had several friends contact us, asking about the faith Michael had and how they could have it. As hard as it is, it's becoming a very marvelous event to see how he is having that impact now."

An elementary special education teacher, Heather has endured a long summer break trying to cope with the immense void in her life.

"I'm still going," she says. "From the moment the summer started, that has been my goal: make it through each day. Just make it to the fall. Make it through the summer. Fall brings back school and work and all of the patterns and routines."

**And football.**

"It's my intention to keep it up and go to the games," she says. "And we'll have someone there in his seat every time." 

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