



# Connecting With Billy Pete Huddleston '56

**B**illy Pete Huddleston had plenty of choices when it came time to pick a college. He was a three-sport star in high school, started every football game for four years and was one of the top rushers in the state. He was All-State in football, All-District in basketball, ran track, set a state record in the hurdles and received scholarship offers from more than two dozen colleges.

But although Huddleston was a star athlete, he was also a young man of old-fashioned, small-town values and discipline. He was born in 1934 in the West Texas oilfield camp of Iraan, and he had been working in the oilfields since he was 12. He visited many of those other schools, but A&M was “by far” the place he felt most comfortable.

“A&M was a lot of small-town country people,” he said recently while recalling his visits to prospective colleges. “I was back in my element.” Of course, there were some adjustments to be made.

“I had been very disciplined,” he said, “but I didn’t realize it was a sort of lone-wolf discipline. So when we started marching, they had to holler at me to get in step. The military was different for me. For one thing, nobody had ever hollered at me before.”

And although A&M's student body at the time was mostly "small-town country people" like Huddleston, the sheer number of students on campus was something of a shock to him. "I never had seen this many people," he said. "And the first day of football practice was an absolute shock. We had 133 players. I had never seen more than 22 players on the field at any one time. And everybody was All-State, All-District, All-Something. I had never seen so many big, fast people. It took me a while

to adjust." But he adjusted just fine, playing four years for legendary coach Paul "Bear" Bryant and serving as captain of the 1955 team. He even survived the legendary summer at Junction, though it wasn't quite the ordeal for him that it was for some: "Some people from ESPN came to interview me about Junction and I told them that Junction is where boys from Iraan used to go on vacation."

The ESPN interviewer wanted to know if that brutal summer practicing in a Junction goat pasture was the worst experience of his life. "Heavens, no," Huddleston replied. "By no means." Then what was, the interviewer asked? "Thermodynamics," Huddleston retorted.

Huddleston could have made a career out of playing and coaching football, but he had other plans and other talents. By the time he got to A&M, he was already an experienced oilfield hand, and he continued working on rigs in the summers. He had been a derrick man by the time he was 16, and before the age of 20 he was probably the youngest driller in West Texas.

He graduated from A&M in June 1957 with a bachelor's degree in pe-

troleum engineering, and then spent a couple years in a fighter-interceptor squadron for the Air Force and several more working for Marathon Oil before starting his own consulting firm, Huddleston & Co., in 1967. Then in 1971 he founded Peter Paul Petroleum Co., which manages interests in more than 2,500 oil and gas properties and 525,000 mineral acres.

"Now I've got 62 years in the oil business in some form or fashion," Huddleston said.

His expertise in petroleum engineering would eventually earn him an invitation to serve as a visiting professor of petroleum engineering at Texas A&M. He taught for 17 years, starting in 1981, and estimates that at one time he had taught about 15 percent of all the practicing petroleum engineers in the United States.

He is retired from teaching now, but Huddleston & Co. and Peter Paul Petroleum are still going strong, and Billy Pete is still the chairman of both companies. He notes that his wife—her name is Flora but he calls her Flos—is "super smart" and does all the financial work for the two companies. "We still work every day," he said, "and we don't plan on retiring any time soon." The two have been married for more than 52 years, since his fifth year at A&M. But they've known each other much longer than that, having started first grade together back in Iraan.

The Huddlestons have eight grandchildren, including two who are students at A&M. But they have made, and are making, a difference in the lives of many more students. "We have had well over 100 scholarships for students,

not all at A&M, but most of them," he said. "We require each one of our students to either write us a note or call us at the end of each semester. We have over a 90 percent success ratio, and we think it's not the money necessarily. It is knowing somebody believes in them and they have support. That's been very rewarding."

The Huddlestons are also prominent supporters of the project to enhance the Clayton W. Williams, Jr. Alumni Center. He said that is partly

due to his friendship with Williams—"Clayton and I have been close friends for many years"—and partly due to his belief in the work of The Association of Former Students. "I think The Association just does a very good job," he said. "Since that building was created over 20 years ago, certainly we way outgrew our building, without any question. We're going to have to have more former student support in the future to fund things like that. And I think it will be there."

He said A&M is deserving of such support because it is such a special place. "The unique thing about A&M is that it builds confidence," he said. "The graduates, if anything, are probably overconfident. You can have the guy that is the county agent in East Texas who doesn't mind telling the president of the University how to run the school. A&M builds confidence that stays with you all of your life."

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