

## **OXFORD VISIT**

**by James Collins**

After two years in Oxford England, James Collins Junior was happy to welcome a visitor. When I had to meet with customers in either France or England, I made it a point to get to Oxford to visit my son. In each case, he went out of his way to welcome me and give me a tour of this fantastic University. You could not see everything in a single week. Most people are unaware of it, but Oxford University is a conglomerate of 38 different colleges or universities. Jim was studying in Balliol, one of the more prestigious colleges, and took this opportunity to take me around and show me the different campuses associated with each of the various colleges.

One of these visits stood out from all the others. We started about four in the afternoon and went to a few of the more famous colleges located on the High Street. We also toured the River Isis and witnessed the students punting and rowing on that waterway. Later we went to dinner and about eight o'clock we were touring one of the colleges with expansive fields. A wall, approximately eight to ten feet high, surrounds each of the colleges. That is one of the more noticeable aspects of a walk around the streets of Oxford.

We entered this college through a 20-foot archway on the main building, which led into the inner courtyard. A porter guarded this entrance and made sure that only authorized people entered. From the courtyard, you could go through other portals to the surrounding fields, which were part of this university campus. We did this and witnessed tennis courts, soccer fields, a running track, a stream and a pond with a few rowboats. The fields were expansive. This time of night was English twilight and, though darkness was approaching, there was still sufficient light to see. We were still going out in the fields but most of the other visitors were going back to the main courtyard. We found a bench, sat down, and were having an enjoyable conversation.

In the distance, we heard a loud clang.

“Dad, meet me at the entrance,” was all I heard as my son, who was a four-minute plus miler, ran flat-out past me in the direction we had come from. I didn't know what happened, but he was my guide and he effectively said, “We have got to go,” so I went.

I walked as quickly as I could, and arrived at the entrance gate to see my son chatting with the porter. I noticed that this 20-foot handmade cast iron gate, which was curved at the top to fit the right side of the arch, was closed. I figured this is what had made the noise. The other half of the gate was being held open by the porter.

**"Hi Dad!, I'm glad you could make it back that quickly. Mike here was kind enough to hold the gate open here so we could walk out like gentlemen."**

**"Sorr, it's great to meet you. Yorr son here was jus' telling me that you are visiting from America. I hope yorr liking England and especially Oxford."**

**"Thank you so much, Mike, for holding the gate open. I appreciate it," I said as I shook his hand.**

**Then Jim and I walked through the portal back onto High Street.**

**"Jim what was that all about? You took off out of there like you're going to a race. What happened?"**

**"Dad I forgot it was nine o'clock at night. When I heard that loud noise, I knew they were closing the front gates. I ran there as quickly as I could, to catch the porter, before he put the big chain on that gate."**

**"Jim, I didn't think it was that much of a problem. The gates are only eight foot high. I figure we could climb them with no trouble at all."**

**"Dad I know your stories when you were a kid in the Bronx and how you guys use to practice climbing ten foot chain-link fences and scaling walls. I figured you could handle the wall but I didn't think you could outrun the dogs."**

**"What dogs?"**

**"Dad this is a college with dormitories, laboratories, computers, and thousands of items which can be stolen and sold on the open market. The grounds are enclosed by eight-foot walls, which, as you know, are easy to get over. When they close the front gate at nine o'clock, they turn a half dozen large dogs, Dobermans and German Shepherds loose on the grounds. These are the equivalent of England's junkyard dogs. It keeps out the thieves, hoodlums and vandals. I wasn't sure you could outrun them as I can."**

**THE END**