

## SMOOTS! By Carole Greenes

I spent a great many years teaching at Boston University. Near BU is the Harvard Bridge that connects Boston on the south with Cambridge in the north. On the Cambridge side is the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

What is different about the bridge is the length of stripes on the road. On federal and state roads, stripes are 10 feet long. On the Harvard Bridge, that changed in 1958. What happened?



In 1958, Oliver R. Smoot, 5 feet 7 inches tall, was a freshman at MIT. He wanted to join a fraternity. To become a member, he had to take part in an activity. What was the activity?

Fraternity members had Oliver lay down with his head on the Boston edge of the bridge with his feet pointing toward Cambridge. Then they kept rolling him over, feet to head, head to feet, until they reached the edge at the Cambridge side of the Bridge. The Harvard Bridge measured 364.4 Smoots + an ear long. The fraternity members made a major mark on the Harvard Bridge after every 10 Smoots.

Every time the Harvard Bridge had to be repaved, Massachusetts citizens voted against removing the markers. So, to this day, the Smoot marks remain.

And **smoot** became an official unit of measure!!!

By the way, Smoot is living in California.

How tall are you in smoots? How about other members of your family? Your friends?

In smoots, what is the length of your:

- Walking step?
- Desk?
- Floor?
- Wall?

