Memories of the 1960s

Two Canteens (1960)

A former day-student who attended the University back in the very early 1960s told me that there were two Canteens in the basement of the Residence building. They must have been located where the splash pools had been before they were in-filled after the war. He told me the Canteens had nicknames: Little Israel and Little Egypt.

Exactly why they were called that isn't clear. It's possible that Little Israel was a popular venue with Jewish students, hence the moniker. There weren't many students on campus from other Middle Eastern countries at the time, so maybe the other Canteen was called Little Egypt just because in those days Israel and Egypt were sort of regarded as the yin and the yang of Mideast geopolitics.

Anyway, the two-Canteen layout makes sense because the two splash pools they presumably replaced were divided by a wall, being as they were respective men's and women's facilities in the pre-war era.

Brotherly Love (1960)

I read some of the stories about Taché Residence Life and am prompted to send the following, in case it fits into your short stories. In addition to being a full-time Resident (Jan. 1960 - Apr. 1961), I lived in Taché Hall West and Mary Speechly Hall later on, for every summer session from 1966 to 1978, as I pursued undergraduate and post-graduate education. Residence Life was a great experience. The friends I made there, especially those who were international students, made a lasting impression on me.

Music, Music ... (1960)

During a couple of the years I was in Rez in the early 1960s, there was a group of three guys who sang together at the annual talent shows in the Auditorium. They sang in the style of The Four Lads, The Four Aces, etc., mostly a cappella, but I can only visualize three of them rather than four.
I remember on one warm spring day, they were sitting on the open-window sills of three Dafoe Road-facing rooms in the residence, singing (Stranger in Paradise?) to anyone who was passing by.

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The TV Room and Pizza (1960)

One section of the Men’s Residence that I remember so well was the basement floor TV room. Coming from the “far north,” which was at least 5-10 years behind the progressive “big city,” my family did not have a TV when I was growing up and in high school. As a result, I was fascinated by that technological wonder and spent far too many evenings and late nights in the TV Room glued to the black & white screen.

Moon Glow always played before the late night movie started, so even today, when I hear that instrumental played, I am mentally transported back into that Rez room laying across two hard chairs to enjoy the movie.

The other item that was absolutely totally new to me was pizza—Pizza Place was the only pizza restaurant in the city, having opened their first store on Donald Street then, and I immediately fell in love with that cheese & bacon treat. For 75 cents, Pizza Place would deliver all the way out to our Residence in Fort Garry—so I frequently scampered from room to room and polled the TV watchers to get three or four others to order with me so we could share that exorbitant delivery fee!

I can’t tell you how many pizzas I enjoyed in the Rez TV room late at night, but that dual-addiction probably contributed to a decrease of at least 10-15% of my academic results.

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Of Machines and Men (1962)

In the early 1960s, one of the staff positions in the campus structure was that of the University Dietitian. The incumbent at the time was Miss Anna Rydeen, a slim, perky-looking woman whose smiling face was a pleasure to behold. Her job was a trying one, and among her mandates was trouble-shooting on the subject of soft-drink vending machines in the Men’s and Women’s residences. The idea behind the machines was of course to conveniently provide the inhabitants with liquid refreshment as desired. But as Robbie Burns put it, “the best laid plans of mice and men aft gang agley.”

In early 1961, a debate was brewing over the provision of soft drinks in bottles versus paper cups. Initially, bottles were the containers dispensed from the machines, but this was a rather poor arrangement because the students were in the habit of leaving their empties scattered around the dorm rather than placing them in receptacles provided for that purpose. Miss Rydeen received complaints to this effect from the Director of Men’s Residence and from the cleaning staff who had to not only collect intact bottles but also to clean up broken glass from floors at the bottoms of stairwells. Also irked were the soft drink companies, who wanted their bottles back. If they didn't get them, they charged the University two cents for every missing bottle, the same profit margin the school received for each bottle of pop sold.

The solution, according to the Dietitian and others in the know, was to replace the bottle dispensers with paper-cup machines. This suggestion was met with swift rebuttal by the University of Manitoba Men’s Residence House Committee, who argued that if the janitors routinely gathered up the empties, they wouldn’t clutter the landscape and there would be no temptation for students to launch them down stairwells. Returning the empty bottles to the racks by the students themselves does not appear to have been an option. Furthermore, it could be anticipated that a certain amount of spillage would occur from the open-top cups as they were being transported from the machines to the students’ rooms.
This not only robbed the students of a certain amount of product, but the sticky mess on the floor would attract flies in warm weather.

And that wasn’t all. Since cups don’t shatter into hundreds of sharp pieces, as do bottles, students would be all the more inclined to drop them, filled with water, down the stairwells as water bombs. Last but not least, the switch to paper cups could be expected to result in “excessive noise.” How do paper cups make “excessive noise”? Well, if you place the empty cup upside down on a flat surface (like a floor) and stomp on it from above with a quick downward blow of the foot, the expulsion of compressed air from the ruptured side of the container produced a loud and pleasing POP that can badly startle someone who isn’t expecting it. Great fun for some, but a nuisance for others.

Confronted with arguments such as these, Miss Rydeen had no difficulty at all issuing a tart rejoinder. She pointed out that it would take a great deal of time for a janitor to pick up empty bottles every morning. The paid staff didn’t have time for it in addition to their regular work, and so it would require extra janitorial service. Having a janitor do it would mean, in effect, that the University was subsidizing not only the students’ consumption of soft drinks but also the lackadaisical attitude they bore toward the disposition of the empty containers. Why, she wondered, couldn’t they simply return their empties themselves?

Nor did she sympathize much with the water-containers-down-the-stairwells problem. Couldn’t proper internal disciplinary measures nullify this form of transgression? Besides, if such behaviour was unavoidable, suffice it to say that paper cups didn’t explode on contact, and create the same hazard, as did bottles striking the rock-hard basement floors of the Men’s Residence. She did promise to seek out more strategic locations for the vending machines so that no one needed to walk very far with his purchase in hand. As for the popping-cups issue, she didn’t dignify that one with a response. But no matter—the die was cast; in future, the students would simply have to endure the hardships of drinking their liquid refreshment from paper cups.

Alas for the long-suffering Miss Rydeen, troubles with vending machines continued to dog her in the years that followed. Vandalism was a chronic challenge. If someone deposited his money and no product was forthcoming, the standard routine was to activate the coin-return gizmo. This brought the risk of bending the coin deposit mechanism and causing follow-on students to lose their money too, thanks to the now-damaged condition of the machine. On at least one occasion the financial losses were reported to Miss Rydeen, who refunded the lost money, presumably from her own budget. At the same time, she sent a note to the Secretary of the Men’s Residence House Committee, making it quite clear that the problems were not answerable by the machine-owners or her office, but by the abusive conduct of the customers.

And there was more than one way to compromise the health and welfare of a vending machine. In early March of 1964, Miss Rydeen was pleased to send a memo to the Men’s Residence House Committee. In light of the fact that she’d been hearing so much about the Coca Cola machine being inoperable of late, she thought the Committee would be interested in what the company found upon recent inspection of their unit. Stapled to her memo was a strip of paper that had been torn from a cup and shoved into the coin slot, thereby blocking it and preventing further purchasing transactions.

To add insult to injury, said piece of paper bore the logo of Coke’s leading competitor!

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From the Tropics to Taché Hall (1963)

I sure remember good old Taché Hall. I was staying in Room 406 or 408 (West Taché) for the academic term 1963 to 1964 doing my third year pre-medical course.

Getting a Room at Last

My experience with Taché began shortly after I arrived in Winnipeg from the hot tropics in the fall of 1962. Through the kindness of Mrs. Unwin, who was then the Director of the Men’s Residence, we were housed temporarily in Taché Hall at level 2 for a few days whilst we tried to get accommodation. Having enjoyed the warmth, coziness, and convenience of the Residence at Taché, I was reluctant to leave.
We barely survived our first-ever winter having to commute to campus daily from our residence at Riverwood Avenue. But we persisted and visited Mrs. Unwin every other week to find out if there was any vacancy. So when the opportunity for applications arrived in the spring of 1963, I was one of the first to queue up at the office to put in my stake!

I still remember clearly the joy that morning of obtaining a room in Taché for the coming academic year 1963-64.

Glorious Food
Not that we disliked the food at Taché, but we longed for some Chinese food every now and then, especially after a long night of study. I remember the skirmishes with Mrs. Unwin and the Residence representative. We had to play cat and mouse when the delivery man from the Chinese take-out at Osborne and Corydon arrived. First, we had to make sure the delicious food was not intercepted whilst we ran from one entrance to the other. Then we had to make sure our room was smell-proof, as we surreptitiously cooked our rice and warmed our food on the heater. We would open the closet door to provide any layer of smell protection. The food never tasted better in those cold winter nights!

Paper and Water War
Then there was this incident involving the Residence student just across from my room. The Resident had returned to his rural Manitoba home for the weekend. Over the two days, his friends managed to get into his room and piled layer upon layer of newspapers into the room. Then D-day came when the Resident returned on the Sunday evening. Hordes of students followed him from the Taché entrance right up to the room at level 4. I can still recall the horror when he opened his door and the pile of papers came flooding out and the roar of laughter as the poor victim rushed into the sea of newspapers. But that was not the end. Out came the water hoses as the students sprayed water to clean up the mess. The scene was as chaotic as it was funny. This was the paper and water war of Taché 1964!

Memories of a Taché Hall Resident (1963)

Year 1963 first-year Resident Taché Hall West Room 20?? something.

- Many new friends & many new experiences.
- The “LAST” good Panty Raid on Taché Hall East, before the opening of Mary Speechly Hall.
- The Sunday nite movies & dances, the Engineers Band.
- Water fights.
- Filling rooms with newspaper.
- Moving the garbage can from the washroom (about 4ft in diameter) & filling it with water. This happened down in the basement in Taché Hall West, in the winter. The Residents somehow opened their window and were able to dump or throw the water out the window. The garbage can was so heavy that it left a great big impression in the floor.
- In Chemistry Lab the day JFK was assassinated and the subsequent fears of a Russian invasion or bombing. All on the radio not the TV.

Years 1964-1967 Taché Hall East Rooms 400, 405, 403.

- Down to some serious work after the first year.
- Easy access to the Arts Building (extra sleep).
- Line ups for meals in the new dining hall, everyone’s favourite (tuna noodle casserole), and subsequent Pizza order.
- The spring “Residence Formal.”

Residence Life was just like the rest of life, “the worst of times & the best of times.”
During the years 1961 through 1963, I was an undergraduate student at St. Mary’s University (SMU) in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Following my second year there, I decided to transfer to the University of Manitoba to complete my post-secondary education.

To me, attending university meant living on campus, and so the first item of business following acceptance at the U of M was to get myself established in the Residence. During the 1963-64 academic year, “Residence” was what is known today (but not then) as Taché Hall. East Residence (now East Taché) was the women’s dorm, West Residence (now West Taché), the men’s. A Canteen, a Dining Room, and an Auditorium, all stacked one on top of the other, separated the two dormitory wings. That was the closest we got in those days to co-ed accommodations. This separation of the sexes went strictly by the book, and hence no women lived in West Residence, and no men lived in East Residence. Since the first name on my application form clearly disclosed my gender, the “Powers That Be” made good and sure that I was duly deposited in West Residence upon my arrival.

At some point during my transfer there came to hand a tidy little booklet titled The Residence, The University of Manitoba, Winnipeg: General Announcement and Residence Rules. The contents of this 20-page publication were a model of practicality and common sense, but the inside back cover contained a set of dire warnings about certain infractions and attendant fines that were entirely unanticipated by a newcomer, such as myself. Three of them read as follows:

1. For use of fire hose in any fight ... $50
2. For use of water in bags or other containers in any fight ... $25
3. Participating in any raid ... $25

Fights? Raids? Fighting whom? Raiding what? Since St. Mary’s was governed by the no-nonsense hand of the Jesuits, in-house combat was a non-issue, at least on paper. But at the U of M, apparently, intramural “fights” and “raids” were to be anticipated and summarily dealt with. Presumably, the previously-noted prohibitions and penalties had arisen from harsh experience in days of yore, and were deemed necessary by the authorities in consequence thereof.

“Verily,” thought I, “this is indeed the Wild West.”

No less astounding was the magnitude of the fines to which aspiring belligerents were subject. To an impecunious university student in the early 1960s, $50 was a king’s ransom. The prospect of being rendered financially destitute for engaging in such frivolous and unscholarly pursuits as fighting and raiding should have been a convincing and effective deterrent to would-be commandos, one and all.

Not so. During the spring term of 1964 and at the impressionable age of 19, I found myself, and a host of like-minded West Rez colleagues, in the midst of a boisterous nocturnal brouhaha in the women’s dorm. A number of things quickly fell into place for me that evening, not least of which was the fact that the “raids” referenced in the handbook meant raucous intrusions into No Man’s Land by platoons of the young and restless with time on their hands and a firm consensus about exactly what to do with it.

Now to me, raids on women’s dorms in those days meant panty raids, a phenomenon that originated in the United States in the late 1940s. For those who are unfamiliar with ancient history, Wikipedia defines “panty raid” as “a prank in which male students steal the undergarments of female students by intruding into their quarters.” Not that I had any first-hand experience in such erotic adventures, mind you: in the early 1960s, St. Mary’s, despite its name, was almost entirely a men’s school and hence there was no on-campus women’s residence. To be sure, there were women’s dormitories elsewhere in Halifax that could have served as stand-ins—Shirreff Hall at nearby co-ed Dalhousie University and the city’s nurses’ lodgings, not to mention the WRENs’ quarters at the Stadacona naval base—but I don’t recall anyone ever contemplating a raid of any sort on these off-site venues. Had anything like it been attempted by “young Catholic gentlemen of our calibre,” as the Dean of Men was fond of calling us, the smart money says we would have been ushered from the hallowed halls of SMU faster than snooze through a goose.
So by the time I arrived at the U of M, everything I knew about panty raids had been gleaned from my perusal of the literature. But as it turned out, the entire concept was moot anyway because, from what I could gather, group-size infiltrations of the ladies’ hacienda at Manitoba were not launched with intent to abscond with feminine under fashions, but rather to baptize as many of the natives as possible with *Eau de Shoal Lake*.

Such was the general theory. Regarding the particular foray of early 1964: judging by the effectiveness with which the women met the onslaught, one must assume that they were tipped off ahead of time, probably by a boyfriend cum double agent in West Rez. In any event, the ladies weren’t caught with their pants down (so to speak) and they gave as good as they got. In fact, looking back, it occurs to me that the whole thing may have been organized by a select “coalition of the willing” drawn from both sides of the divide.

Whatever the case, according to the aforementioned handbook, unauthorized visits such as this were verboten, but there I was—bold as brass in the women’s chateau; and since I wasn’t a woman, I must in retrospect allow that my reasons for being there weren’t entirely scholastic. As a budding anthropologist, was I perhaps in attendance as a “participant observer” to document the inter-group behaviour of excitable young people who lived under the same roof, separated only by the porous membrane of a connecting Auditorium? Probably not, as I frankly don’t recall conducting interviews or taking field notes in the course of the mêlée. Nor do I remember having been levied any fines in the aftermath—a jarring trauma that, had it come to pass, would surely have left me scarred for life.

In the years that followed, I learned that the raid and accompanying water-fuelled skirmishes in the Women’s Residence were more or less an annual event. It could also be described as a minor episode within a wide spectrum of more conventional traditions, routines, and events that cumulatively defined Residence culture … and one in which I participated no further. Mary Speechly Hall opened in the fall term of 1964, and henceforth the women were housed there. Unlike Taché, which is built like the Rock of Gibraltar, Speechly struck me as a rather fragile edifice that would probably collapse like a wet noodle if it got too soggy. Besides, 1965 was my graduating year and then it was on to a Masters, so the rather sophomoric notion of raiding the women’s dorm and irrigating its inhabitants was something I simply grew out of after my first and last campaign.

Two years later I was still in Taché Hall, grinding my way through a demanding MA program. But through the appreciative eyes of a 21-year-old, the women’s domicile was now perceived as home to an elegant cadre of young Canadian womanhood that deserved better than what could be proffered by squads of rampant banditti. Sooner or later one learns that kinder, gentler, more interesting things can be enjoyed in the company of educated young women—like discussing the socio-psychological relevance of Shelley’s *To a Skylark* (“Hail to thee, blithe Spirit! Bird thou never wert,” etc.), or, on the more erotic side, comparing notes on the reproductive organs of the common frog. In fact, by the time I left Taché Hall in the spring of 1967, I had managed to convince one of the Speechly madonnas that it would be in her best interests to marry me, and one doesn’t accomplish that by behaving like a bog-born hooligan. Now all grown up, I had long perceived the raid as little more than a mindless perversion best left to undergraduates.

Fast forward to 2009. Presumably, the silly diversions in which my generation occasionally indulged are a thing of the distant past. The current *Residence Handbook* carries no sinister warnings about fights, raids, the misuse and abuse of fire hoses, or “water in bags or other containers.” I take this to mean that the plumbing is nowadays put solely to the uses for which it was originally installed; that perhaps the institution of bona fide co-ed dormitories has rendered the above-described modes of conduct irrelevant and passé; and that the recent generations of Residence students now favour more cerebral entertainments befitting a community of scholars. If so, then I can only conclude that life in the residential precincts of the academy is evolving as it should.

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Sports Trophies (1963)

My world revolved far more around the Residence in those years than it did of my faculty or the University in general. Every year I had a different roommate, and “graduated” from 2nd floor to 3rd, and eventually to a 4th floor room. I recall my last year spent listening hour-after-hour to the pile driver working behind the Residence, laying the foundation for the new “high rise” dorm.

I’ve attached a couple of photos from that era.

The eye patch was because I had just caught a puck below my left eye in a Science faculty hockey game.

The trophies below are Residence trophies that I had my name engraved on—one for hockey and one for basketball. They were always displayed in a case in the central 2nd floor “common room/reception room” and I saw them there several years later, but they must be in the Rez archives somewhere now, or long gone.

Whenever I pass through Winnipeg, I always try to do a tour of the U of M campus, and I did go into the old Men’s Residence about five years ago and walked around just to experience the wonderful nostalgia for those days.

Finally, thank YOU for the wonderful website and the trip down memory lane.

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This one from October 1963 shows my room and some of the furniture we had then—check out the loud curtains!!

This one from 1964 shows another of my rooms with my “fancy” desk, and me with my eye patch.

The MRHC (Men’s Residence House Committee) hockey trophy to the left, basketball to the right.

The H.H. Saunderson (U of M President at the time) Men’s Residence Basketball trophy, hockey to the right.

Also attached is a photo of two of my old Residence chums and me in front of the Administration Building.
Our foreman was an older chap (maybe in his 30s), who had his own way with words. It was his custom to casually ask us at the Monday morning coffee breaks if we “took tail” since we parted company on Friday afternoon last. It was a peculiar way of saying it, but of course what he was getting at was whether or not we had successfully negotiated sexual congress with a member of the feminine gender over the weekend. I don’t remember if he ever got an answer, or if he even expected one—it was just your basic “guy talk” that helped fill the conversational void.

Another piece of diction that the foreman used in rather creative fashion was “radiation.” Back in 1963, the Cold War was in high gear, and there existed within North American society an abiding fear of being bombarded by the Soviet Air Force and blistered with atomic radiation. The sociopolitical wits of the day coined an adaptation of the children’s nursery rhyme *Ring Around the Rosie* that encapsulated rather nicely the abiding paranoia. It went like this:

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Positrons, positrons
A pocket full of neutrons.
Fission, fission
We all fall down.
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So “radiation” was a bad thing, a fact that was not lost on our foreman. But his application of the term wasn’t confined to the horrors of nuclear warfare: for him, anything that went wrong anywhere, including the local work place, was “radiation.” Dropping a 60-pound wooden box of cold, hard butter on your foot was a familiar example of radiation.

Of course, personally coming to grief in such a fashion could be expected to elicit a strong vocal reaction from the individual who got radiated. One of my co-workers (I’ll call him “Alfie”) had an amusing way of expressing his discomfort and dismay when a part of his anatomy came in rough contact with a hard object, to wit, he’d squeal like a pig, thereby lending an air of barnyard pandemonium to the otherwise repetitive and
hum-drug warehouse proceedings. And he was very good at it; he really, truly sounded like a stuck pig when a crate of butter fell on his foot or barked his shin.

Alfie well and truly knew the difference between right and wrong, and he could become very vocal indeed when someone was behaving badly. One evening a bunch of us went to a drive-in movie. Now Alfie took his movies seriously. To him, those were real people holding forth on the screen, and he could really get up-close and personal with them when circumstances warranted it. The feature film on that particular occasion was “Blue Hawaii,” starring Elvis Presley. Elvis played the role of a lowly labourer on a pineapple plantation. The wife of the company owner was a snooty middle-aged socialite who was given to making rude, condescending remarks to and about the employees—people like Alfie, for instance.

If memory serves, Elvis took a shine to the boss’s daughter and vice versa, but of course the old shrew was steadfastly against that development and she took great pains to scuttle it. Her arrogant conduct was a bold affront to Alfie’s deep-seated sense of social justice and fair play, and she didn’t have to work very hard to get his shorts in a knot. She was pure radiation, that lady!

And thanks to our fulminating hero in the back seat, her acidic invective didn’t go unchallenged: if Elvis wasn’t in a position to defend himself, Alfie was. Every time the missus vented her spleen at poor Elvis, Alfie told her right to her face, in technicolour language, exactly what he thought of her. Talk about audience participation! By all indications, she completely ignored him (she was, after all, just an image on a movie screen), but that was OK. As is to be expected in a Hollywood fantasy such as this, things worked out just fine for Elvis in the end: he got the girl, and the obnoxious matron was deservedly hoist on her own petard. And thank the Fates for that—there’s no way on God’s green earth that Alfie’s fragile intellect would have survived an unhappy ending to that flick.

There was an endearing side of Alfie that makes him further stand out in my memory. Back in the early 1960s, going to university wasn’t as common as it is now. There was a certain amount of status to being a “college man,” and Alfie was quite taken with the fact that he was working alongside one on the loading dock. To make me feel at home in this menial job, or perhaps to assure me that, appearances notwithstanding, I was in polite company, he would quote and act out lines from Shakespeare while we were going about our routines! I have a hunch that, in order to make that possible, he took it upon himself to memorize bits of classical literature in the evenings before coming to work the next day. On the other hand, maybe he was just a lot better educated than I gave him credit for. Either way, he possessed a truly colourful personality and I sincerely hope that the years have been kind to him since I first met him in that fondly remembered summer of long ago.

Twelve months later I found myself working in a lab on campus and doing things that related directly to my course major. As a matter of convenience, I was living in the Men’s Residence (Taché Hall), and my roommate was one of several Brandon College students who were taking summer courses at the U of M. Here was another set of characters with their own peculiar repertoire of witticisms, erotic expressions, and obtuse behaviour that kept me amused and in high spirits. But I must say that I do especially cherish my memories of the summer of 1963, when I loaded box-cars along with a small cadre of genuine, down-to-earth, everyday people who in all likelihood were destined never to see the inside of a university classroom.

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The Untouchables (1963)

When it came to the women in Rez, I think I was most in awe of the quality and number of beauties all in one place. My meals were always partaken with a mixed group, male and female, that is, but never with any person I was dating at the time. Rather, I must have preferred to moon over them from a distance, exchanging shy smiles from across the hall.

I remember one particular Rez Interior Design sweetheart for whom I would gladly have given at least one limb or appendage to take out on a date. She was Elizabeth Taylor-gorgeous, but I never approached her because I was just too intimidated and thought myself unworthy of asking her out ... especially once when I saw her with her latest date, an absolute Adonis from Architecture. My suspicions were confirmed ... only true gods were allowed to date goddesses!
Then there was the Rez girl who was the spitting image of Doris Day—therefore, far too exotic and famous for me to approach.

Ah!!! The angst years!

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**Tight Skins (1963)**

I was born with a natural sense of rhythm, in consequence of which I purchased a small set of bongo drums (“skins”) when I was in University. They were the simple untuneable kind, which means that I couldn’t tighten the skinheads like you can with the tuneable ones.

When the drumheads are good and tight they emit a sharp metallic sound when struck with the fingers. If they’re cold and can’t be tightened, they go flat and lose their high tone (the drumheads I mean, not the fingers). To prevent that from happening it was necessary to warm the heads somehow, because heating them caused the membrane to contract and tighten up.

It was common for me to accompany musicians who played other instruments during the talent nights in the Residence Auditorium. And of course, the trick was to have my bongo skins good and tight when performing on stage. That was never a concern, because in those days the radiators in our rooms in Taché were relics from the time of the First World War or something. We were asked never to turn them off completely, because in the winter months there was a danger of the coils freezing, resulting in their bursting and causing a flood.

This never-ending source of local heat was just what I needed to keep my bongos in tune; so on talent night, I placed them on the rad before the show began, and shortly before we were scheduled to go on stage I would slip over to my room, pick up the heated drums, and return to the Aud in time to take my place for our performance.

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**Winning the War of the Sexes (1963)**

I had a room in East Residence in the final year (1963-64) that it was the women’s quarters. True to tradition, the annual raid on our dormitory was carefully choreographed; both Residence Directors knew when the raid was going to happen, and it had their sort-of blessing. The Women’s Residence custodian unlocked the door between the two wings, and since they were connected via the Auditorium, the horde from West Rez didn’t even have to go outside in the weather to get at us.

I remember over 20 women raided the men one night when I was in my 3rd year. This was in 1965-66. It wasn’t so much a raid in the usual sense as it was a clandestine hit-and-run operation under the cover of darkness. By this time the women were housed in Mary Speechly Hall. The custodian of the men’s dorm let us into the building (now renamed Taché Hall) to do our dastardly deeds. We knotted nylon stockings end-to-end and then tied the doorknobs of facing doors to each other. The doors opened into the rooms, and since we strung the nylons from a doorknob on one side of the hall to the doorknob directly opposite, the guys couldn’t get their doors open.

One guy woke up and was headed to the washroom when we were doing this, but I told him to just go back to bed ... and he did!!!! He was so sleepy he didn’t even twig to what was happening or question why there were women in his Residence. Since we thwarted his trip to the facilities, did he end up wetting the bed? Was he in deep doodoo with the rest of the guys the next morning for not raising the roof while we were there??!!! I seem to remember something about syrup on the toilet seats, and Saran Wrap stretched over the tops of the toilet bowls. It all went without a hitch, and we made our getaway as clean as a whistle.

Oh my, what good times we had!
Career Choice of a Rez Student (1964)

This is not strictly a Residence story, but occurred while I was still living in Residence at the U of M. A job fair was organized during my final year and interview cubicles were set up in the Psychology Building, so I decided to go and see what was available. I was mere months from graduation and still hadn’t decided on a firm career path. I was also planning to attend a party with some Residence buddies that evening.

The problem was that when I arrived late in the afternoon, there were horrendous line-ups of students waiting to speak to the IBM head-hunters, the Great-West Life Insurance Company rep, and other popular prospective employers’ reps. I despaired of ever getting to speak to anyone and still make the party, but then I spotted one cubicle with no line-up at all. It was the military officer from the downtown recruiting centre. He convinced me that, since I didn’t have a definite career plan, why not join the military and spend a couple of years thinking about it while getting paid and experiencing the thrill of flight training. The rest is history, as they say! I filled out the application form and then left without so much as a fare-thee-well to the other interviewers.

After signing up, there was a gap between my graduation in May and when I was called up for the July 2nd swearing into the military. In those intervening months, I had to return to my hometown and wait for the call-up. It wasn’t enough time to get a “real job” but too much time to just hang around, so I managed to snag a job at a grocery wholesaler’s warehouse. My co-workers there got a real kick out of this fresh Bachelor of Science graduate applying his education and skills ... bagging potatoes!

Within the first year after enrollment in the RCAF as a Flying Officer, I was convinced that it was indeed the life for me, and never regretted my “snap decision.” I had an interesting and varied employment career in the RCAF and Canadian Armed Forces, spent over 32 years at postings across Canada and in the United States, travelled the world, and found my Shangri-La through the military when I finally reached retirement age.

Dressing Up! (1964)

Mostly we dressed in the Kingston Trio-type attire—slacks, short-sleeved shirt, perhaps V-neck or shag sweater over top.

- This 1964 photo shows my 4th Floor roommate from Dauphin, dressed in the fashion I described above. Notice the Sadie Hawkins corsage pinned to the bulletin board.

- The second picture of him with the shoe polish is just plain funny—waste not, want not!

- The third photo of me with another friend probably showcases how most male students’ Residence room walls were decorated in the 1960s (à la Hugh Hefner). Not only that, but he had better curtains than me for sure!
Dumbwaiter—More Like Dumb Waiter! (1964)

The following is one of my memories of Residence Life. I lived in the Men's Residence for four years (loved Mrs. Unwin!) between September 1960 and May 1964.

In another story on this forum, a previous Taché Hall Resident described the central column of the Residence building that comprised the Canteen, Dining Room/Kitchen, and Auditorium three-floor “stack.” Someone else also explained the propensity of the boys on the one side to invade the “girls dorm” on the other, and the hatching of various plans to accomplish those forays successfully. Both played a part that traumatized me as a young man, so much so that a sense of claustrophobia still gives me the cold sweats almost 50 years later.

In 1963 or 1964, one of my Rez buddies was a young student from Texas (given the era, he probably still relates to his grandchildren that he was “stationed in Canada” during the Vietnam War!). In any case, I was daring, yet naïve, enough to be led into various escapades, one of which was a specific plot to discover new ways to circumvent the barriers against traversing from the Men's Rez to the Women's Rez sections, undetected by the vigilant and protective eyes of the janitors and Residence Directors.

We decided that our best bet was to cache ourselves in the lower Canteen area until the doors were locked, then have free rein to investigate any weaknesses in the established defenses. This we did—but for whatever reason, we could not just cross the floor and enter into the women's side from the Canteen. Then we discovered the dumbwaiter that was used to lower and raise food and dishes between the basement and the kitchen floors. Perhaps from the kitchen floor, we would be able to access the women's side. My “buddy” (and I now use that term very loosely) talked me into doing the trial run since I was fairly short and slight. After scrunching myself into the approximately two-foot-cube space, he pulled the doors closed and activated the dumbwaiter to raise me up to the kitchen area.

Halfway between floors, I learned of my friend's true nature, as he forcefully pried open the dumbwaiter doors on the lower level, which caused the chamber to stop abruptly between floors. There I was virtually folded around and over myself like a contortionist, staring at nothing but the brick walls of the shaft one-inch in front of my eyes.

He yelled up at me, “We're in trouble. The thing is stuck. I'm getting out of here!”

Visions of the old Ray Milland movie about being buried alive instantly popped into my head, and I probably screamed like a little girl at that moment. Of course, that was my buddy's idea of a great joke—he hadn't abandoned me, and eventually he closed the dumbwaiter doors so that it could move again. But for several interminable seconds I was in a state of panic at a level that I've never experienced again, even all through a subsequent military aircrew career. Needless to say, I never again trusted him enough to investigate alternate avenues in the future.

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Knowing Yourself (1964)

One important reason for going to University is to learn stuff. And if you live in the dorm, you may very well learn a few things about yourself while you're at it.

In the part of the country I hail from, the black community forms a large visible minority. Before entering high school I had no occasion to meet any of these folk, but my family and I frequently drove through one of their communities on the way to and from somewhere else, and it was clear that they were among the poorest of the poor. As such, they didn't enjoy much respect from Euro-Canadians of my parents’ generation and social standing, and the “n” word was routinely and unabashedly (though never maliciously) used in our household when referring to them. Nonetheless, it wouldn't have been a surprise if, under the circumstances, I had entered young adulthood bearing a degree of racial prejudice against persons of African descent.

When put to the test, however, it was abundantly clear that I did not. This fortuitous aspect of my character was revealed to me on one occasion while a student at the University of Manitoba.

When I enrolled at the U of M, I took up residence in what eventually became known as Taché Hall. Allocation of rooms was the responsibility of the Director of Men's Residence, the late Mrs. C.E. Unwin. I had a job on
campus following the 1964 spring semester, and I was allowed to remain in Residence because of it. With summer school still several weeks away, I would have thought that in the interim plenty of rooms would have been available for students who were finishing up their theses or incomplete course work. Ergo, there would have been no reason for having to double up. That wasn’t the case, and before too very long Mrs. Unwin approached me with the prospect of my receiving a roommate for a few weeks.

Being the sensitive and aware individual that she was, she quietly informed me that the fellow was black and asked if that posed any manner of difficulty with me. In a way, the situation put her on the spot: I could have taken the question to imply an opinion on her part that I might be racially prejudiced, if not an outright racist, to which I might have taken strong exception if I wasn’t. On the other hand, to simply assign the fellow to my room without consulting me beforehand ran the risk of my raising an objection after the fact, thereby creating an embarrassing situation for all concerned, if I was indeed racially biased. No doubt there were people who would have reacted in just that fashion.

I assured Mrs. Unwin that I had no qualms whatsoever of having the gentleman—and a gentleman he was—for my roommate. Several years my senior, he was, I think, a PhD student tying up loose ends on his dissertation. And I believe he was from the West Indies. Despite the dismissive, negative attitudes toward black people to which I was exposed during my upbringing, sharing my space with him was as natural to me as breathing the fresh morning air.

My “colour blindness” was further reinforced by my program of studies: I was an anthropology major and as such was receiving a solid introduction to the scientific explanations of cultural and biological diversity. It all made perfectly good sense to me, and when the time came to put my education into practice, it held me in good stead.

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**Plus Ça Change (1964)**

In the early 1960s, when I first attended the University of Manitoba and lived in the Men’s Residence, our mailboxes weren’t located within the dormitory complex as might be expected. Rather, they were situated across the quadrangle on the ground floor of the Administration Building. To get access to them you entered via the south door. With the opening of Pembina Hall in the summer of 1964, a new bank of mail boxes was installed there, a much more convenient arrangement from the Residence students’ standpoint.

Although the plaque on the wall says that Pembina Hall was officially opened on October 24, 1964, I’m quite sure it was already in operation during the summer of that year. Its activation brought with it the discontinued use of the old Dining Room in the Centre Block as the central eatery. I’ve noticed in publications that this former dining area has been called the “Oak Room,” but I never knew it as such during the single year that I took my meals there—it was just the “dining hall.”

One thing that didn’t change was the students’ inclination to dress up in bedspreads and sheets in response to situations as they arose. In early April 1966, there was a threat of a flood by the mighty Red. I recall a group of suitably attired “druids” conducting rituals on an earthen dike that had just been built south of Mary Speechly Hall. The purpose of the ceremony was, apparently, to beseech the River God to boost the water level sufficiently to inundate the campus and necessitate cancellation of exams. It didn’t work.

Another dress-up opportunity developed when a group of students from University College (“Oxford on the Red”) was invited over to Pembina Hall for supper. I presume this event was arranged to help the Speechly/Taché people and their UC colleagues to mingle a bit in hopes of avoiding the development of two residential solitudes on campus. The UC folks were wearing their lah-de-dah burgundy gowns, which fact didn’t impress the nuts-and-bolts crowd in Taché, who regarded such pomp and circumstance—indeed the whole snooty idea of high-brow University College—as a trifle presumptuous. The following supper hour (or maybe it was that same day) a group of high priests from Taché walked in procession to the servery, all resplendent in bed covers and linens, with some carrying T-squares like you see when acolytes bear crosses at a High Anglican church service. I don’t know if the Lords and Ladies ever came back.

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The word “custodian” is variously defined as “a person in charge, a guardian or keeper, a caretaker.” And if you’re going to operate a building the size of Taché Hall, you’re definitely going to need a custodian or two.

When East Taché was still the women’s dorm, our custodian was a dear old soul whom we affectionately knew as “Pops.” His counterpart in West Taché (the men’s side) was Joe. Pops’ mandate was multi-faceted. To him fell the task of kicking men callers out of the women’s common room at 9:30 or 10:00 pm in the evenings. He did security rounds every hour or two each night, in the course of which he had to punch a time clock located near the fire door on each floor.

In 1964, we moved into the newly-opened Mary Speechly Hall, and Pops was hot on our heels. When he wasn’t doing his rounds, he occupied the Director’s office that was all glass [see the essay Mrs. McKinnon and Me in this series] and in full view of the only set of outside doors. If a Resident showed up after curfew, Pops was the one who let her in. I think he was there once every half-hour or something. I do know it was at certain regular times, and in the dead of winter we got mighty cold waiting for him if our timing was off. I never did learn what Pops’ real name was, although he surely must have had one. And as it turned out, that wasn’t all he had!

In my day, the Taché Auditorium was a fully functional concert hall. It had a stage, a main floor that sloped gently downward to accommodate viewers seated in rows of folding chairs, and an upper gallery that fronted the three walls facing the stage. We used to put on variety shows there every year, and there never seemed to be a shortage of students who were prepared to strut their stuff—at least the kind of stuff you could strut with your clothes on (for the record, even tho’ I wasn’t in Fine Arts, I did NOT approve of that guy in one skit wearing the white T-shirt with “Fine Arts Fruit” written across the back. Thank you).

But I digress—on one such occasion, the audience got quite the surprise indeed when one of the performers was introduced as Pops’ son. The latter was not a University student, mainly because he couldn’t have been any more than seven years old at the time. Well then … wasn’t this a novelty? And how was the little chap going to entertain us? He was going to play the piano.

Now you have to understand that to our own youthful eyes, Pops was no poulet de printemps. He had to be, what, 300 years old? The very fact that someone of that antiquity could have fathered a son a mere seven years ago had to be a miracle of reproductive engineering. “Way to go Pops, you rascal!” Quite frankly, things would have seemed more in order if the boy was his grandson rather than his son. On the other hand, word had it that Pops had married late in life, so … Anyway, we got comfy and prepared ourselves for a cute little rendition of “Chopsticks” or “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star,” as one might expect from a child of that age.
Well, not on your life. This guy was into the classics, and I don’t mean Bill Haley & the Comets. Nossir, we’re talking Chopin, Bach, and the boys. Not only that; young Pops II was very, very, very good … a child prodigy he was, and no doubt about it.

Cripes, right here on Rez Talent Nite. What next?!

As you might expect, the response following the first two pieces he played was thunderous. Nor was the initial display of enthusiasm lost on his proud papa, who in reply prompted the little marvel to keep on playing … and playing. Forty minutes later, Manitoba’s answer to Beethoven was still tickling the ivories as our variety night progressively morphed into a single-theme, one-man gig (sort of a high-brow Little Richard concert without the screeching Spirited Energy).

Meanwhile the crowd, not least the ones who were still waiting in the wings to do their own thing, was getting a mite restless. The emcee, who had kept his silence longer than usual out of deference to Pops, eventually and diplomatically brought the performance to a close—the show, after all, must go on. The little fellow took a polite bow to a final, well deserved, if somewhat more subdued, round of applause.

I don’t remember too many of the acts from the annual Residence music ‘n’ skits, but Pops and the apple of his eye sure put the “talent” into that one.

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Pops—A Dedication from The Roomer (1964)

The 1963-64 academic year was the last year that East Taché was an all-women’s dorm. The Roomer was their yearbook.

This 1963-64 edition of the Roomer is respectfully dedicated to Mr. William A. Lush, known and appreciated by the Residents as ‘Pops.’ Since 1947, he has diligently watched over his brood here in Residence. As one of the thousand or more girls he must have met during his work here, I would like to say ‘Thank-You Pops’ for we always know that when you are here, everything is safe.

Born in England on August 15, 1895, Mr. Lush came to Canada at the age of thirteen. Since that time, he has seen most of Canada, travelling from Coast to Coast while working at many different occupations. If he were ever to write an autobiography of his life, it would be very interesting to read of his many experiences including work as a farmhand, a cook, a steeplejack, and of his service in both World Wars. However, a major portion of such a book would likely be primarily concerned with his work here at the University, because in Pops’ own words, ‘he will long remember campus life and the many friends made by the students.’ He has met people from all parts of the world, and must be known over the largest part of the globe. In fact, he receives fan mail from many countries. He is probably the only man many of us know who has already signed his initials thirty or forty thousand times.

Pops, we hope you will enjoy this yearbook, and with it we extend to you, your wife, and your son, our best wishes for the future.

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Sounds of the Sixties (1964)

The University of Manitoba has never existed in a bubble—it was of course always part of a larger cultural setting. When I was a Residence student there in the 1960s, many off-campus influences came to bear on my consciousness. One of them was the miracle of radio.

Two things stand out in my mind about Winnipeg radio in those days—the popular music, and certain advertising commercials. And subject the latter, two adverts in particular linger in my memory. One was for the now-defunct Radio Oil Company, acronym ROCO. The poster boy for said company was “Johnny Roco.” I thought that was a cool name; it sounded to me like a greaser pop star or a West Side Story-type bad-boy gang member, neither of which I was destined ever to become.

The ROCO commercial comprised a jingle. At the beginning a girl with a sexy voice lightly chirped, “Johnny Roco says …” and then another girl joined in and they sang, “You can’t buy a better gasoline at any price.” Since I liked girls (a lot), I would have been only too pleased to buy their gasoline “at any price” if it made them happy. Trouble was, I didn’t own a car.
In a perfect world (not always an accurate description of my university days), there would have been a place in town where I could procure a vehicle that I could fuel with ROCO gas, just like the girls wanted. And there actually was; a good ol’ boy named Don Post ran a used-car lot on the Portage Avenue strip. Mr. Post was from the Deep South, and he sounded like it. His standard line was, “Howdah folks, Don Pos’ callin’. If yew-all got twenny-fah dollahs, Ah got a GOOD used cah foh yew-all at twel’nahnnny-one Po’tage Avenoo.”

I assumed that the “twenny-fah dollahs” was a down payment, not the full price of a used horseless carriage: even back in the mid-1960s, $25 didn’t buy you much of a car. It was all academic to me anyway, because I didn’t have $25 with which to buy the car nor the funds for the petrol, oil, or lubricants that I’d need to run it. So I had to disappoint Johnny and the ROCO girls and not buy their gas.

In the summer of 1964, the Winnipeg radio station CKY came up with what I thought was a tremendously novel idea: it offered to promote the village of La Rivière over the airways as a holiday destination if the place agreed to change its name to “Seekaywye,” which is CKY spelled out. The idea didn’t wash with the local folk, and La Rivière is still La Rivière—home of the successful Holiday Mountain Resort even without the backing of CKY. But there was quite a bit of hype about the proposal at the time on the radio station, to which I listened a fair bit because it played lots of rock ’n’ roll.

Speaking of which, my archaeology professor (also the Department Head and my future thesis advisor) used to pay me grant money to make pen-and-ink drawings of arrowheads for his publications. Since you don’t need to think very hard to draw arrowheads, I could do so and play my transistor radio all at the same time. My prof had been a member of a smooth jazz band in his younger years, and in my arrowhead-drawing days he was very partial to the mellow bossa nova sound. One might say that his musical tastes and mine didn’t coincide.

The good professor had an office near where I did my artwork, and one day I was listening to a song that involved a goodly amount of guttural screeching—music to my ears but not to his. He said, “Leo, turn that thing off when I’m here [I did] and don’t make me have to tell you again” [I didn’t]. Truly, he wanted neither truck nor trade with Eric Burdon and the Animals; as we say in French, ils n’étaient pas son sac. For my own part, I was mortally afraid of annoying the professoriate in whose hands my future rested, so henceforth I saw to it that my turned-on radio and my turned-off prof were never in the same place at the same time.

One radio-listening experience I surely won’t forget came in August 1964 when the Beatles’ airplane landed at Winnipeg International Airport to refuel. The Fab Four stepped outside the plane to wave to a hysterical crowd of bubble-gummers who had descended on the aerodrome to witness their darlings. A DJ from a local radio station—probably the same one that alerted the teeny-boppers that a miracle was about to happen at Winnipeg International—went out to interview some of the kids, and he got put in his place under no uncertain terms. One girl, clearly smitten with the appearance of her majestic heroes, told him live, on-air and straight to his face that he was hopelessly ordinary, drab, common-place, and square. In modern parlance, that probably would have come out sounding as, “Like, eew, you’re, like, so totally nowhere.” The guy tried to explain that, well, he couldn’t help it … he was just a poor university student doing his summer job, but I don’t think that garnered him much capital from the screaming meemies.

Of the great many experiences I had as a student, and of all those that might have become lodged in my memory, isn’t it odd that these trivial relics of my callow youth have survived and remained with me after all these years?

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Tap Tap Tap (1964)

In 1964, long before the universal carriage of cell phones, text messaging, and Skype, the only communication lifelines from the Taché and Mary Speechly Residences to the outside world were pay phones. These coin-eating black demons swallowed coins voraciously, particularly when calling even short distances outside Winnipeg. Then one day, some clever student, probably an Engineer, revealed an amazing technical fact. It was possible to call out on the incoming-only phones (ones with no dial) by clever tapping. Quick tapping of the receiver button to correspond to the desired number would allow the typically impoverished students to call home for FREE.
The world opened up for those that dared to tap, a sometimes challenging task when calling phone numbers with large digits containing nines and zeros (10 quick taps). Sadly, some took the practice too far, and there were incompetent tappers. The University Administration likely took exception to long-distance calls to exotic locations such as Florida (area code 305), the result of a failed attempt to reach Saskatchewan (area code 306).

It was Taps for tapping.

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**“These Guys” (1964)**

It’s my occasional experience nowadays to be seated with my wife in a Winnipeg restaurant awaiting the arrival of the waitress to take our orders. In due course a perky little creature, young enough to be my granddaughter, approaches our table, pen in hand, and greets us with something like, “Hi. What can I get for you guys?”

Now, there are people my age who take a rather dim view of having their dining-out experience embellished by being addressed as “you guys.” When it happens to me, however, it never fails to bring a smile to my face, because it takes me back to my far-off but fondly remembered undergrad days (one of them in particular) when St. Paul’s College was “The College” and the non-denominational portion of the University was “Campus.”

During the 1964-65 academic year, I was enrolled in an English Literature course at St. Paul’s that was presided over by the late Reverend Father Patrick Mary Plunkett, SJ, BA, MA, STL. A friend of mine, and also fellow Resident of Taché Hall, started out taking the same course on Campus, but he had a problem with his professor there and so he either attended Father Plunkett’s classes as a supplementary audit of some sort, or else he switched sections altogether.

The Jesuits placed a premium on their teaching. They were all very good at what they did, and Father Plunkett especially, with his gentlemanly bearing and mannerisms, brought an air of dignity and poise to the lectern.

That year, we were studying the works of such literary icons as William Wordsworth, George Gordon Byron, and Percy Bysshe Shelley, and when Father Plunkett spoke thereof, he did so with all due deference and respect.

Even his (to me) abstract witticisms about the poets and their writings were delivered with a certain je ne sais quoi.

Not so his counterpart on Campus who, according to my friend, referred to said worthies as “these guys.” As one who took his English Lit seriously, my friend was shocked and appalled at this unpolished departure from scholarly decorum. A far more genteel approach to the subject was clearly in order, and Father Plunkett’s lectures were just the antidote my classmate needed to cleanse himself of the verbal soot that had settled upon his head while attending classes on the Dark Side.

He only said it to me once, but after 40+ years I can still see my friend furrowing his brow in disapproval and dismay when quoting his (former?) prof’s irreverent allusion to those monumental figures of English verse. And what could I do but sympathize? Never in my wildest flights of fancy could I imagine Father Plunkett referring to the august bards as “these guys.”

The moral of the story? If you wanted to take English 4.330 in 1964-65, and you wanted assurance that your Heroes of Olde would be handled with kid gloves, there was a corner of the U of M where, Deo gratias, satisfaction was guaranteed. And did it work? Suffice it to say that in all my years since, it has never become my custom to refer to illustrious dead poets, Jesuit priests, Campus professors, or Winnipeg waitresses as “these guys.”

Nihil Obstat

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**Voyeurs (1964)**

During the summer of 1964, I was employed as a student research assistant in the U of M Anthropology Lab, and so it was particularly convenient for me to reside right there on campus. I occupied a room in the far west side of the Men’s Residence, or what later became known as Taché Hall.

My room was located in the basement directly opposite from where the Arthur V. Mauro Student Residence stands today. The floor of my room was below ground level, which may explain the thriving colony of silverfish that was always there if I needed company. Running parallel to the
building, right outside my window, was a sidewalk. And in some respects, this was a perfect setup for girl-watching.

I say that in part because it just so happened that an ingenious piece of feminine outerwear was in high fashion that summer. It was called the “miniskirt,” and it was so skimpy that it was hard to tell whether the girls wearing it were on the inside trying to get out or on the outside trying to get in.

Thinking about it now, I’m not sure why so many women were using that sidewalk at the time. Summer school was in full swing, but Mary Speechly Hall was still under construction, so they weren’t going to and from there. Maybe there was a parking lot or something just down the way. In any event, our below-grade domicile offered a dazzling gopher’s-eye view of the girls’ legs as they walked past our window.

Enthusiast though I was, I frankly didn’t have much time for this distraction. Whatever else competed for my attention, I was still on my professor’s payroll from 9 to 5, five days a week, and my job description was silent on the matter of abbreviated feminine apparel and the good things that went with it.

All in all, though, it was a very good summer.

A Bad Choice of Words (1965)

In my day, an important organization within the Speechly/Taché community was something called the “Resident Students’ Association Council (RSAC).” This body comprised an executive and a number of program-oriented positions filled by sports, social, movie & stage, and publicity conveners. The executive was made up of elected representatives and included a President, a Vice-President, and a Treasurer.

At no time during my years in Taché Hall did I have any “political” aspirations vis à vis membership on the RSAC. In my final undergraduate year, however, a friend of mine decided to run for the Treasurer’s position. The campaign routine involved each candidate making an election pitch before the assembled multitude in the Auditorium, and he/she had to be introduced by someone before giving his/her reasons for why he/she would make a good Treasurer. Since I was an upper classman and therefore presumably educated enough to give my friend an intelligent introduction, he chose me to do just that.

I drafted up a little intro and ran it by him. He OK’d it and we were ready to boogie. On the appointed date I got up on my hind legs and told the assembled constituents that, among other things, my choice for Treasurer had considerable previous experience in “financial manipulation.”

Now, the word “manipulate” has several definitions. It can mean, “to handle or treat with competence and skill,” in which sense it has nothing but positive connotations. But it can also mean, “to manage shrewdly and deviously for one’s own profit”—hardly the sort of conduct we’d want to see in a Treasurer! When I proclaimed loud and clear that my hero was well practiced in financial manipulation, I of course meant the former. But from the nervous titter that ran through the crowd, it was immediately apparent that they thought my choice or words was rather odd.

In deference to my audience, they surely gave me the benefit of the doubt; after all, everyone knew that my whole purpose was to shed some positive light on my candidate, not to cast doubt on his integrity and blow him out of the water before he even hit the stage himself. But I don't think I did him any favours either. “Financial management” would have been a much less ambiguous choice of terminology, so I must concede poor judgement on my part. Admittedly, “financial” and “manipulation” don’t make very good soulmates when uttered in the same breath!

To make a short story even shorter, my man lost.

The Black Whole (1965)

Universities are places that draw people together from far and wide, and on-campus residences are typically populated with individuals of diverse backgrounds, interests, and talents. Taché Hall, the men’s dormitory at the University of Manitoba, comprised just such a community
in the 1960s, and an example of what can develop within this kind of social milieu was an in-house musical band that formed during the 1965-66 academic year.

There were four of us in the band: one was from Killarney, MB; another hailed from Saskatoon; one was a Calgarian; and then there was myself, a grown-up Air Force brat and a Maritimer by birth. Two of us were Architecture students, one was in Interior Design, and I was in my Pre-Masters year in Anthropology. These were very demanding programs of study, and the time available for non-scholastic diversions was at a minimum. Still, all work and no play …

The origins of the group were simple enough—on a couple of occasions early in the fall term, someone heard someone else playing a musical instrument through an open door, and went in and got acquainted. If one of us was a novice, he learned the basics from one of the others. Before we knew it, we were jamming and eventually settled on a name for ourselves—“The Black Whole.” One of the architects came up with that (architects tend to be a creative lot), and it was a play on words: “Whole” was the defining term; it meant solidarity and togetherness, the necessary glue for a group whose *modus operandi* was sound coordination, unison, and harmony. “Black” lent an air of mystery—on the Edge, deep in Meaning. We all dressed in black suits, black turtleneck sweaters, and black shoes. Those of us with fuzzy vision wore black horn-rimmed glasses. We were, in a word, “cool.”

Two of us played electric guitars and I played bongo drums. The guy from Killarney had his own Hammond B3 organ right there in his pad. Three of the songs in our repertoire that we can recall were *Baby Elephant Walk*, *La Bamba*, and *Louie, Louie*—all instrumentals. For our own amusement, we must have played together in a music room somewhere within the bowels of East Taché or in the Residence Auditorium. Either that or else we were careful in timing our get-togethers; I can’t imagine two guitars, an organ, and a set of bongos all sounding off at the same time in one of our chambers without a neighbour (or two, or three) lustily inviting us to cease and desist because they were trying to sleep or study.

A regularly scheduled happening in the Residence community was Talent Night, and during the 65-66 academic year one such event was held in both the fall and spring terms. Our practice and jam sessions culminated in our performing in both, although if memory serves, we hadn’t formally emerged as “The Black Whole” until the spring edition. In any case, I remember that we got an encore for our efforts at one of them. Sometime later, we held forth at a dance in the Auditorium following the Sunday night movie. On this occasion we were simply introduced as “The Rez Band.”

Our enterprise didn’t survive beyond that first year. Although I returned to Taché Hall in 66-67, the others in the group went elsewhere and “The Black Whole” passed into history. *Sic Transit Gloria.* Speaking of Gloria (or Susan, or Louise), one thing we didn’t have was a cadre of adoring groupies clamoring after us. I prefer to chalk that up to our all-too-brief moment in the sun (these things take time, do they not?). In the 1960s, Mary Speechly Hall was exclusively a women’s dorm and, of course, an integral part of the on-campus Residence complex. Surely a few of its occupants would have...
eventually paid us some modicum of off-stage attention had we endured beyond that first and last year. Or not. Drugs, sex, and rock ‘n’ roll? Hardly!

While preparing this brief retrospective, I was successful in tracking down two of the lads for information and, in the process, renewing acquaintances from a time long ago when Taché Hall was home away from home and our world was young.

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**Competition (1965)**

Near the town of Gimli in the mid-1960s, the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) operated No.1 Flying Training School (1 FTS), the purpose of which was to teach student pilots how to operate military airplanes. In those days, the fledgling air crews were all male, and so the student body at 1 FTS was definitely *not* co-ed.

Located some 90 kilometres to the south of Gimli was the University of Manitoba, another centre of higher learning; but unlike the aforementioned, it definitely *was* co-ed. Not only that, a large concentration of attractive young women resided on-campus in the Mary Speechly Hall dormitory, aka “Mary’s Place.” Beyond the fact that they were all students, the 1 FTS trainees and the Speechly co-eds didn’t have a whole lot in common, and for 99.99% of the time it stayed that way. What transpired during the other 0.01% is the subject of this essay.

Gimli is situated in a rural area, and a bountiful supply of feminine companionship was not locally available to the pilot trainees after school got out. By contrast, Mary’s Place was located directly adjacent to Taché Hall, the main men’s residence at the U of M, so opposite-gender company was readily available to both parties, if such were desired.

But compared to their counterparts at 1 FTS, the chaps in Taché Hall possessed a conspicuous handicap: not a single mother’s son among them was a flamboyant, gung-ho, high-flying caballero who earned his spurs by rocketing about the wild blue in a spiffy jet trainer. Given the choice between a dashing and daring jet jockey from RCAF Station Gimli and an earth-bound, down-home Romeo from Taché Hall, a gal could be forgiven if she opted for the former now and then, should the opportunity present itself.

Ideally, then, there should have been a way to introduce the handsome young men at Gimli to the attractive young women in Speechly for some pleasant evening get-togethers. As it turned out, that’s exactly what transpired from time-to-time. And why not? As Cyndi Lauper tells it, “girls just wanna have fun.” As for the pilot trainees, well, all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy, and the last thing the Blue Empire wanted on its hands was legions of dull pilots.

And in fact, for decades the Air Force had a tradition of bussing groups of single young women from places like the Winnipeg YWCA and nurses’ residences to the air stations for an evening of socializing with the aircrew trainees. The Air Force was known as the Gentleman’s Service, and being wined, dined, and made a fuss over by the up-and-coming officer corps was something the women would understandably look forward to with keen anticipation. Although I was in no way involved in any of this and am reading between the lines, I’ve long thought that the whole idea was absolutely brilliant.

Not so some of my colleagues in Taché Hall. Being a bit of a loner who lived on the fringes of Residence society, I was rarely involved in the ongoing ruminations of my peers. Nonetheless, it was clear that some of the Taché lads were a trifle miffed at the idea of “their” women consorting with the boys in blue. We used to have Talent Nights in the Rez Auditorium, and I vaguely recall a skit being put on by a few of the Tachéites. Its intent was to afford the upset/grieving coterie an opportunity to express to the audience—which included the errant damsels, by the way—just what they thought of the arrangement between Mary’s Place and the flyboys.

Needless to say, the aspiring (and of course absent) Top Guns came off rather poorly in the skit, which the ladies must surely have found amusing. For my own part, I considered the “Talent” Night theatrics a bit lame—at the end of the day, about all the wounded parties could really do was cry in their beer and hope the pain would soon go away.

Because like it or no, when it came to showing a gal a good time, the Air Force was a hard act to follow.

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Double Standard? (1965)

During my time in the Men’s Residence at the University of Manitoba, there was a dress code in effect. On paper, it was rather brief; it didn’t state what you had to wear, but rather what you couldn’t: the women were prohibited from wearing shorts, slacks, kerchiefs and bandanas in the Dining Hall or in the Reception Rooms of both Residences. For the men, anything was fine as long we didn’t wear blue jeans in the designated areas (I suspect, though, that the Director of Men’s Residence would have requested a quiet word with anyone who wore his pyjamas to supper).

As a result, the standard apparel of most male students at meals was entirely casual. With the women, however, things were noticeably different. I don’t think “semi-formal” is quite the term I’m looking for, but my recollection is that skirts, dresses, and jumpers were typical pieces of feminine attire in Pembina Hall. Sweatshirts or T-shirts would have been out of place along with a skirt and nylon stockings, so blouses, sometimes in combination with sweaters and vests, were the order of the day. As a consequence the women, in my opinion, displayed a somewhat classier appearance than did most of the men, whose equivalent would have routinely included a shirt and tie had more stringent rules been in effect for us.

Before attending the U of M, I was a student at a Jesuit-run university in Nova Scotia. The student body there was almost entirely male, and it was mandatory to wear a sports coat and a shirt and tie to class and, for residence students, at meals. At Manitoba, no such standard was called for.

I recently discussed these matters with a former Resident of Mary Speechly Hall, and her comments were most interesting. She had no difficulty with the dress code for the women. It was understood that many of those who graduated from university were likely to assume positions in the professional world where a certain standard of dress would be expected of them. Accordingly, the Residence experience was part of their career preparation. For some reason, this same philosophy didn’t seem to apply to the men, although some of them had the maturity to dress in a business-like manner without being prodded. But it does seem that, overall, the women were expected to adhere to a somewhat higher standard than were the men in terms of appearance in certain areas of the residence complex.

Letters from God (1965)

The brochure said that Taché Hall had accommodations for some 500 students. In a crowd that size, there will inevitably be a generous sprinkling of memorable characters—like the one on my floor who got letters from God.

Actually, he really didn’t get letters from God; he wrote them himself and forged God’s signature on them.

The reason for this practice isn’t all that difficult to fathom: at the time, our scribe wasn’t a very good student, being prone to distraction from his scholarly pursuits to the point where his prospects of passing his year were in serious doubt. He was well aware of his dilemma, and clearly he had to do something to motivate himself intellectually. His solution was to receive angry missives from the Supreme Being reminding him that, if he didn’t change his ways, he was in danger of flunking out (and presumably, given the “source” of these ominous memos, he was also at risk in the long run of being denied entry to the Choir Eternal).

So he would write these threatening notes from a Wrathful God and put them in his desk drawer. When his conscience was getting the better of him he would read one of them, and theoretically this would spur him on to better things. Needless to say, he did it as a lark, and of course it was good for a laugh when he explained it to his buddies and showed us the paperwork.

Just recently, I took to wondering if the scheme actually bore fruit (the Almighty works in mysterious ways, does She not?), and so I checked the records to see if my friend did indeed graduate. No confirmation to that effect was on the books, so I must conclude that his exhortations from On High were to no avail.

He was an amicable individual with an easy-going manner and a clever sense of humour. The fact that I still remember him with fondness after 40+ years bespeaks of his pleasant and engaging personality. For all his struggles in applying himself to his studies, I hope that the years have been kind to him and that the failings of his restless youth have long been forgiven and forgotten.

Amen.
Love Story (1965)

In the 1965-66 academic year, I was enrolled in a pre-masters program at the U of M. The course load was very heavy, and from day one, I was totally immersed in my studies. As a result, I became a hermit. I developed no social skills that year, and anything I had garnered previously somehow evaporated. I rarely came up for air, and contact with members of the female gender mostly amounted to the occasional sharing of a table at suppertime in Pembina Hall, being as I was an inhabitant of Taché Hall Men's Residence.

It was in that context that one of the Speechly goddesses in particular caught my eye, but not much else. I really didn't get to know her at the time, but her remarkable good looks were enough to make even a campus hermit take notice.

Then one day I met her coming toward me just as I left Taché on my way to the laboratory.

You know how in those movie musicals where the shy hero gets a peck on the cheek from the girl he secretly admires, and in the next scene he’s romping through a field of daisies singing at the top of his lungs? Well, just as I was passing Manitoba’s answer to Miss Universe, she said hello. There was no peck on the cheek, and it being the dead of winter in Winnipeg there was no field of daisies either. Nor did I burst into joyous song. But shortly after I returned the greeting my feet took wing, as it were, and I don’t think they touched the ground twice all the way to the lab. “On cloud nine” I think is the appropriate expression.

My euphoria was brief—in the short run. I still had to complete my semester, and that didn’t leave a whole lot of room for a girlfriend. But the following year after we returned to campus, she became just that, and then my fiancée, and finally in the summer of 1967, my wife.

When a quiet, fleeting hello is all it takes to send you airborne, you can be pretty sure that she’s The One.

Mrs. McKinnon and Me (1965)

I have long considered the Speechly/Taché/Pembina Hall complex a masterpiece of social planning and architectural engineering. The men’s [Taché Hall] and women’s [Mary Speechly Hall] dorms were separate, but the close juxtaposition of the two, connected by an enclosed corridor and a shared Dining Hall, made for ready communication between the two populations (read “genders”). This was especially convenient for couples who struck up a romantic relationship, a not uncommon development under the circumstances.

On the main floor of Speechly, right at the end of the connecting corridor with Pembina Hall, was a fishbowl-like office occupied by Mrs. M.V. McKinnon, the Director of Women’s Residence. Mrs. McKinnon had been on the job for a full decade, and she knew what she liked and what she didn’t.

In one of my years at Taché, I had a girlfriend in Speechly. It was my custom to walk her “home” from a movie or dance in the Taché Auditorium, or whatever it was we were up to in the dark recesses of Pembina Hall, and kiss her good night where the end of the corridor adjoined Speechly—in other words, right outside of Mrs. McKinnon’s office.

Even though the walls of her work area were entirely of glass, Mrs. McKinnon usually wasn’t witness to our parting rituals because

Mrs. McKinnon.

Me.
they took place long after she had vacated her station for the day. On one occasion, however, two things happened all at once: she was working late (something I didn’t notice in a timely fashion), and my good-night nick on the cheek quickly evolved into something a tad more ... elaborate—right there in front of Mrs. McKinnon. Her ladyship took grave exception to the outpouring of affection being played out in front of her, and it wasn’t long before I heard a loud rapping on the glass wall behind me.

I turned to see the Director of Women’s Residence vigorously waving an arm back and forth, and I quickly realized that she wasn’t batting at flies. Rather, she was instructing us to take our act elsewhere, in consideration of which my girlfriend sheepishly withdrew post-haste to the Speechly elevator and up to her room. Likewise, I slunk down the corridor and back to the comforting bosom of Mother Taché.

Parenthetically, the 1964 Brown and Gold yearbook describes Mrs. McKinnon thusly: “Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, Mrs. McKinnon is available to guide and help the two hundred girls that are in Residence. She finds her work very rewarding, and enjoys especially being in contact with youth.” Well, most of the time, maybe; her animated cease-and-desist order left me with the distinct impression that her “contact with youth” that evening was less than enjoyable for her. Like good Queen Victoria, she was not amused.

In all fairness, I really don’t think Mrs. McKinnon had a problem with young love; she just wasn’t particularly interested in seeing it blossom on her doorstep. Especially when she was trying to get some work done. I mean, how could she be expected to concentrate on the important stuff when a couple of kids are necking up a storm in the hallway right outside her glass-walled office?

Anyway, our up-close relationship notwithstanding, my girlfriend was a virtuous little creature who was utterly mortified by our having aroused Mrs. McKinnon’s displeasure the way we did. When I met up with her the next day (my girlfriend I mean, not Mrs. McKinnon), she did the only thing she could do: she blamed it all on me. Thankfully, she was as forgiving as she was virtuous (my girlfriend, I mean), and her upset with Bad Man José was short-lived.

One thing for sure—our late-evening signing-off ceremonies were thereafter conducted well clear of Mrs. McKinnon’s office.

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Mrs. Unwin (1965)

In the early 1960s, when the women and men lived (separately) in the same building (now Taché Hall), the student dorms were administered by a Director of Women’s Residence and a Director of Men’s Residence. The latter was an elderly Englishwoman by the name of Clara E. Unwin. I think she was a widow because she was a “Mrs.” and her living quarters were next to her office right there in the Men’s Residence. These impressions must be correct, as I don’t recall ever hearing of a Mr. Unwin, and I have a vague recollection of seeing her ladyship in her housecoat and slippers once when she appeared unaccompanied in the hallway to manage the latest outbreak of nocturnal rambunction being perpetrated by her restless charges.

I believe Mrs. Unwin retired following the 1965-66 academic year, because I remember her tearfully receiving a gift and a standing ovation from the students one evening at a function (Colour Night?) in Pembina Hall. That same year the Rez students published a yearbook that they dedicated to her in recognition of eleven years as Director of Men’s Residence. But Mrs. Unwin didn’t have to be leaving in order to receive recognition; below is a well-deserved testimonial that appeared in the 1964 edition of the Brown and Gold:

There exists at the University of Manitoba a particular strain of individuals who abide and work in a world void of public recognition. They perform flawlessly their assigned duties, but nevertheless find the time and patience outside their official capacities, forming a major component in the massive machinery of University life.
Symbolic of these individuals is Mrs. C.E. Unwin, Director of the Men’s Residence, whose warm heart and gentle affection have helped for many years to ease somewhat the burden of loneliness and confusion so prominent in the Residence among Freshies, and whose competent mind and genuine concern make her a trusted friend and valued advisor of all Residence students.

It is with the greatest admiration that the editors of the Brown and Gold respectfully dedicate their efforts for the year 1963-64 to the wonderful work done by people such as Mrs. Unwin.

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Residence Food (1965)

It’s long been fashionable for folks everywhere to complain about institution food. I don’t recall hearing much griping about the quality of the Residence food at the U of M, nor can I recollect complaining about it very much myself. I wasn’t born with a silver spoon in my mouth, so my expectations about a lot of things have never been very high in the first place, and constructive grousing isn’t my forte. However, as a Residence student I must have been pretty hungry most evenings, because if I had the chance to eat something several hours after the supper meal, I always did.

In the summer of 1965 I was a student assistant on an archaeological expedition in rural Manitoba. At the end of the field season there was some canned fruit left over, and this was stored in the Anthropology Lab for use the following summer when the field season resumed. As a graduate student, I had a key to the lab where I spent most of my time studying and writing my term papers. Having been a crew member on the project that produced the leftovers, I knew they were there, and I recall gratefully consuming some of them in the evenings and wee hours of the morning over the course of the 1965-66 academic year. I must have obtained permission from my Department Head to avail myself of them, because to simply help myself without his blessing would have amounted to petty theft. No doubt he knew a famished dormitory waif when he saw one. In any case, it was a windfall that certainly none of my contemporaries in Taché could count on, and one of the rare “perks” of being a grad student, I suppose.

The inhabitants of Speechly and Taché all took their meals during the same hours in Pembina Hall, and with several hundred students being fed at the same time from the same kitchen, the setting was tailor-made for a food-poisoning incident of sizeable proportions. In my four years at Taché, I can recall only one instance of general gastronomic distress, and it can be described as minor in the sense that no one became seriously ill as far as I know. But one evening, a large number of the students in Taché and Speechly came down with diarrhea more or less at the same time, with predictable results.

Somehow, I missed the whole thing. I don’t remember being involved in the excitement, or even witnessing it. Perhaps I was over in the lab at the time. I have always assumed that I escaped it because something I ate after supper somehow neutralized the bug that claimed the general populace. Whatever the circumstances, I wasn’t victimized by it and so the whole affair was “academic” to me.

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Saratoga Chips (1965)

Pembina Hall was the eatery for Taché Hall. And Pembina Hall, like love, was a many splendour’d thing. You could go there to eat food, watch girls, meet and discuss things with friends over a meal, watch more girls, or stimulate your intellect by wondering about the names of things listed on the menu … when you weren’t watching girls.

For the most part, the meat-and-potatoes fare dished out at Pembina Hall didn’t do much to generate abstract thought in developing young minds. There was, however, one food item they fed us that really made me ponder. Now and then, the suppertime potato component was something called “Saratoga chips.”

Truth to tell, Saratoga chips were nothing more than the things you find inside a cardboard box with “Old Dutch” and a windmill painted on the outside. They’re potato chips, simple as that. So why not just call them potato chips? Why the fancy name? I had never heard them called “Saratoga chips” in all my years of growing up.
There are two questions here: (1) Why were these things called Saratoga chips; and (2) What exactly was the reason for calling them such? These queries might sound like two ways of saying the same thing, but they’re not.

When I first entered the U of M, the inside of my head was not simply a black hole waiting to be filled with knowledge, wisdom, and truth. I already knew a thing or two, including a bit about “Saratoga.” I knew it was the name of a battle that happened during the American revolutionary war. I also knew that it was the name of an aircraft carrier.

But what did potato chips have to do with gunfights and aircraft carriers, I wondered. Were the meal planners trying to distract us from the fact that an important portion of our supper was being substituted with snack food that required no cooking and could simply, like corn flakes, be poured from a box? If so, where was the beer, eh? Perhaps the message from On High was, “No, a potato chip is not a potato chip; in this establishment a potato chip is a Saratoga chip.” If this apparent exercise in psychological engineering and terminological subterfuge was supposed to convince us that we were being treated to haute cuisine, it sure didn’t fool me. Did I know a humble potato chip (and they’re all humble) when I saw one? Darn straight I did.

Perhaps the rationale for the fancy name was nothing more than an attempt to avoid confusion. In the real world, there are in fact two kinds of edible “chips,” and they’re very different from one another. One is the crinkly kind discussed above, and the other is a longer piece of deep-fried potato, square in transverse cross-section, and sometimes (but not necessarily) eaten avec poisson. These are also called “fries” and “french fries” (“freedom fries” in the United States). Unfortunately, they are also called “chips,” as in “fish ‘n’ chips.”

To give the culinary wordsmiths in Pembina Hall the benefit of the doubt and a bit of sympathy, they were indeed caught on the horns of a dilemma. To simply use the ambiguous term “chips” with its double meaning was to create confusion and chaos. And so the relatively safe (albeit un-Canadian) “Saratoga” chips was the wording of choice. Personally, its use left me with question marks swimming in my head, being as I was unfamiliar with that particular application of the term. Nor do I remember ever discussing the matter with my fellow diners or the kitchen staff to get to the bottom of the mystery.

All of this is not to imply that the name actually originated in a dining hall at the University of Manitoba. “Saratoga chips” is a bona fide moniker for crinkly potato chips; it comes from Saratoga Springs, New York where said potato chips were invented back in 1853. So its use in Pembina Hall was entirely legitimate and true to history. Nor did I have anything against eating potato chips for supper, although the servings were a tad skimpy for a growing boy. But I do remain convinced that applying the terminology in that social environment was intended to convince us that we were getting something more than we really were.

Sort of like calling a spoon a “personal hand-held direct sustenance-delivery device.”

Sex with his Wife (1965)

Unless you’re a complete pariah with chronic BO and rampant halitosis, chances are that sooner or later you’re going to end up making friends with someone in the dorm. In my BA graduating year at the U of M, I was enrolled in an English literature course at St. Paul’s College. One of my classmates was a West Indian kid from Trinidad. Like me, he was a Resident of Taché Hall, and from time to time we studied our course material together. Eventually we became close friends, and joking with each other became routine. Being a Maritimer, I had a litany of Down East expressions that he found amusing, and it didn’t take much effort to get him laughing.

But better than my entertaining Bluenose mannerisms was my ability to perceive all kinds of profound double meanings, allegory, and brainy metaphors in the English literature that my classmate and I studied together. On one occasion, I came up with a particularly insightful interpretation that impressed him to no end. Clearly, this polished little nugget would bulk large when the time came for him to write his course exam; and so exuberant was he over it that he promised me that, as a token of his appreciation, I could at some undisclosed time in the future have sex with his wife.

Now I frankly doubt it, but maybe in Trinidad a chap customarily repays a favour by allowing his benefactor to sleep with his wife. Much more likely, it was just his way of engaging in more of his collegial banter. Whatever the case, talk is cheap—we were both single at the time and so
my generous reward wasn’t immediately forthcoming. Nor was it clear to me then just how, when, and where he might be in a position to make good on his promise.

My friend graduated that year with his BA, thanks perhaps in some small measure to my enlightening tutelage, and I personally never saw him again after that. But I haven’t lost touch with him entirely; all I have to do is turn to the appropriate page in the university yearbook, and there he is in his graduation robes, quietly smiling back at me.

And of course his wife is still nowhere in sight …

Sweatshirts (1965)

When I was an undergraduate, nothing was sacred. Making jokes about pretty well everything was par for the course, and one of the many things we made light of was fraternities. I was never a frat member, nor were any of my confreres in Taché Hall, but the Greek names of fraternities were commonly the butt of our jokes. For example, we would string words together that more or less sounded like Greek letters so as to produce humorous parodies of frat names. A few oft-cited examples were “I Aeta Pi” (I ate a pie), “I Phelta Thi” (I felt a thigh), and “Snappa Kappa Boh” (the last word being an abbreviation of the name of Saskatchewan’s famous Old Bohemian beer).

In 1965 or thereabouts, a few of us in Taché East decided to form a little “fraternity” of our own. The objective was probably to attract attention to ourselves and to thereby bolster our fragile male egos. Anyway, our outward symbol of this loose confederacy was a black sweatshirt with a large white and red armorial crest on the front bearing the legend “Tappa Kegga Rhi” (Tap a keg o’ rye). We had these things made up at a clothier’s or a novelty shop somewhere, and the day they arrived we put them on and went to supper as a group. When the guys standing in the Pembina Hall supper line saw us coming down the corridor they boooed us to show that they weren’t particularly impressed with our little band of exhibitionists.

We weren’t the only crew in Rez who had custom sweatshirts made up. Prominent among the occupants of Mary Speechly Hall were the all-female Home Economics contingent (Home Eckers). The more out-going ones included a livewire with an artistic flair, and it came to pass that they decided they’d have sweatshirts decorated with her artwork. If memory serves, the shirts were pink with red graphics and lettering. The latter identified their faculty of affiliation, but the wording spelled out “Home Wreckers” rather than “Home Eckers.” Accompanying this inscription was a little female cartoon character in full flight, adorned with big eyes and long eyelashes, and armed to the teeth with a rolling pin in one hand and a pair of scissors in the other.

According to the 1964 edition of the Brown and Gold, “Home Economics is concerned with strengthening family life through education for family living, improvement of goods and services available for families, research concerning the changing needs of individuals and families, and the means of satisfying these needs.” Inevitably, lofty goals such as these were vulnerable to students’ editorial comment, and the Home Wreckers kept the rebellious sixties rolling with their irreverent sweatshirts. I wonder if they ever had the chutzpah to wear them to class in the Home Ec. Building …

But that wasn’t the only thing I wondered … I also wondered if the sweatshirts may have had a deeper, darker meaning than what met the eye. Was their sweatshirt motif a metaphor for something more profound?

Theoretically, there are two ways to wreck a home: you can physically trash the place with a rolling pin and a pair of scissors, or, if it’s not your home, you can have a love affair with the man of the house, thereby compromising the marriage and wrecking the home that way. It occurred to me more than once that the little cadre of Home Wreckers fancied themselves as femmes fatales and that the lively scene emblazoned on their sweatshirts was actually a subtle message to complacent housewives everywhere: “Stand by your man … OR ELSE!”

It bids fair to suggest that that insightful little piece of sociological hypothesizing probably said far more about my own state of mind than theirs.

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Tale of Two Nurses (1965)

In the days when I got my “three hots and a cot” in the Pembina/Taché Hall complex, there was a University Nurse whose name was Miss C. Voetberg, RN. She had a Dutch or German accent and an office in “Ward E” (the Infirmary) of East Taché. Like most of the Residence staff, she was an elderly and, from my limited perspective, competent individual, probably in her mid-sixties.

In addition to first-aid duties, such as patching up cuts and scrapes, Miss Voetberg was on call for any physical, mental, or psychological problems of both Resident and non-residence students. She was in charge of the Infirmary, where ailing dormitory students, other than those requiring special treatment, were accommodated. As the campus doctor’s representative, she made appointments on his behalf and assisted him when he was on site. She was at hand from 7:00 am to 11:00 pm, although a sports injury may have kept her busy all night. It was her view that her job was not one for a young nurse, since experienced counselling was an important aspect of work as a University Nurse. To that I say “Amen,” for reasons to be stated below.

Not being a sickly lad nor one prone to disabling accident, I very rarely had cause to call upon Miss Voetberg’s services. I do remember paying her a visit once, and I must have mentioned to her that I had a fiancée because she offered some collateral advice that was touching in its way. She reminded me that my mother was the first woman in my life, and that young men like me, who were away from home and family and looking forward to meeting the girl of our dreams, should never forget our mothers and the truly singular role they played in our lives. The best wife in the world could ne’er replace one’s mother, who should forever hold a special place in our hearts. Such was the genuinely human manner of Miss C. Voetberg, RN.

To change the topic slightly, bringing liquor into the Residence building and consuming it there was verboten. In saying this, I’m not thinking of Miss Voetberg, although the rule no doubt applied to her as well. More to the point, it was not uncommon for students to indulge in the dew of the barley on a Friday or Saturday night and greet the following morn with vicious hangovers. My church-mouse poverty precluded any abiding commerce with the local bootlegger, so I can truly say I didn’t have a drinking problem—I simply couldn’t afford one.

But on one memorable weekend morning, I did indeed have a raging hangover. The entire contents of my skull were screaming to vacate the premises and, to put it very mildly, I had an upset tummy. I had the gall to grope my way down to Miss Voetberg’s office for some warm motherly sympathy and serious medical relief. Of the former there was, on that occasion, absolutely none and the medical attention I got was, like life in the Stone Age, nasty, brutish, and short. Gosh, that sure wasn’t the TLC that I expected from the gentle Miss Voetberg. It was almost like she wasn’t there.

And as a matter of fact she wasn’t there; she was away for some reason (weekend break?), and her place had been taken by a much younger colleague. Alas, the stand-in’s bodacious looks proved to be misleading and of cold comfort; she obviously harboured a jaundiced eye for (A) foolish young, (B) wretchedly sick, and (C) badly dehydrated “little boys” (her words) who knowingly placed themselves at Death’s door and hence were fully deserving of sharp rebuke. True to Miss Voetberg’s perception of young nurses, I thankfully got no industrial-strength counselling during that particular time of misery and distress.

Under the circumstances, Miss Voetberg probably wouldn’t have bathed me in the milk of human kindness either, but neither would she have resorted, I’m sure, to the temp’s harsh, four-part cure for a hangover, to wit, (1) a cutting glare that could sunder the walls of Jericho; (2) a brief but testy tongue-lashing; (3) a two-bit dose of aspirin that was doomed to failure; and (4) the bum’s rush. If it’s true that “God looks after drunks and little children,” suffice it to say that this woman wasn’t God. Was she perhaps favouring me with some tough love? If so, well please honey, not that morning … I had a splitting headache.
You’d have thought that my rakish (if somewhat bedraggled) good looks would have inspired said nurse to cut me some slack. But the simple fact is, she wasn’t to be swayed by mere masculine physiognomy. The support personnel in Taché Hall were all true professionals—and they knew exactly what to do with specimens like me. Perhaps it was thanks in part to the memory of that nurse’s “surgical” technique that I have more or less behaved myself ever since.

And to give the late Miss Voetberg her due, may I take this closing moment to assure her that thoughts of my mother’s unfailing devotion are ever with me.

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Where There’s a Will, There’s a Way (1965)

“All You Need Is Love”
The Beatles

People generally don’t go to university for the express purpose of seeking carnal knowledge. That said, most of us who went to the U of M did so at a time when our hormones were firing on all cylinders and the birds and the bees were aloft in squadron strength. The students in Taché Hall (all males) and their cohorts in Mary Speechly (all females) were no exception. Although few of us could be considered true gymnasts, among some of the Tachéites at least, erotic gymnastics with the nubile tumble bunnies next door were never far from our minds.

Back in the Good Old Days, there were measures in place to discourage sensual adventures within the Residence complex. There was a commonly held notion that saltpetre was mixed with our food to blunt the sex drive, but there is some ambiguity about this. I know for a fact that this substance is also used to manufacture gunpowder, and it strikes me as odd that a compound that goes into the making of explosives would also be used to pacify randy nineteen-year-olds. Couldn’t it be expected to have the direct opposite effect?

Less chemical devices for keeping the young’uns at bay were rules and regulations. Except for special, pre-arranged circumstances and occasions (e.g., “Open House”), the winsome Aphrodites in Speechly were denied routine access to the men’s quarters, and Speechly was out-of-bounds to the romantically inclined knuckle-draggers in Taché. This meant that alternate arrangements had to be devised by the young and the restless to circumvent the convent-like strictures of Rez.

Certain of the Plans B were oriented toward two in-house venues, neither of which was ideal for indulging in sins of the flesh. The visitors’ lounge on the Main Floor in Speechly was designated a meeting area where “gentleman callers” could sit with female colleagues from upstairs and quietly discuss the subtle differences between the philosophies of Trotsky and Marx.

Predictably, some of the gentlemen callers had more on their minds than mere gentlemanly calling, nor were they much interested in discussing anything. But visits to the Women’s Lounge possessed two unavoidable handicaps: (1) it was very public, and (2) it was well-lit. Truly, it was never intended to be a love nest. No comfort or peace of mind was to be had by either party when a couple was trying to carry on a quiet conversation to some pleasant background music, while nine metres away another twosome was making out like demons. Even for the particularly adventurous and self-absorbed, kissing was, in the interests of fairness and good taste, the absolute upper limit in the Women’s Lounge.

Happily, there was a local alternative.

Off the main-floor corridor of Pembina Hall there was a stairwell that led up to the walkway to Taché Hall; and like all stairwells, it comprised several flights of steps with landings in between. This structure possessed two amenities: (1) it was generally not in use as a thoroughfare after hours, and (2) with the lights out it was so dark that you couldn’t see the end of your nose. It was ideal for the visually impaired and those seeking a hands-on experience. These conditions guaranteed a measure of privacy the likes of which were neither available nor intended in the Women’s Lounge. After Pembina Hall was built, it took the enterprising students of Speechly and Taché no time at all to discover the stairwell and realize that you could do more there than walk back and forth. I’ll call this facility “the Petting Zoo.”

And so it was that on any given Friday or Saturday night, a number of couples would converge on the semi-private confines of the Petting Zoo
and busily go about doing what comes naturally short of “going all the way” (and I don’t mean all the way to Taché Hall). But here again, there were disadvantages. For one thing, the steps and landings were as hard as rock, which denied one and all even the most fundamental of creature comforts. Secondly, continually lurking in the back of one’s mind was the unsettling prospect that some hellish fiend, who knew well enough what was going on in the Zoo, would without warning turn on the lights, thereby revealing the local clientele in all manner of embarrassing positions and conditions. I know for a fact that it happened at least once … and for the record, I wasn’t the Lucifer who threw the switch.

One advantage of the Women’s Lounge and the Petting Zoo was that their use for extra-curricular activity was free of charge. For the financially challenged whose expectations were fairly low, this was indeed a boon. But for those who were loathe to put up with the inherent inconveniences and limitations of these destinations, and who possessed the financial wherewithal to pursue options, there was the small cluster of motels strategically located where University Crescent meets Pembina Highway. I say “strategically” because there’s no way I’ll ever be convinced that those motels came to be situated where they were simply by coincidence. No, I really do think that they were put there with the full knowledge that the nearby campus contained several hundred Residence students who had nowhere to go within walking distance for weekend picnics. That’s my theory and I’m sticking to it.

Truth to tell, though, my personal familiarity with said motels was very limited indeed, saddled as I was with chronic financial grief. However, I do recall a small anecdote that presumably involved one of these establishments. Early one Saturday morning I was on a city bus on my way downtown, when I noticed one of my Speechly acquaintances furtively making her way—creeping like a nun, as it were—up the Crescent toward campus from the direction of the motels. It didn’t take a calculating rocket surgeon like me to figure out what she had been up to the evening before the morning after.

But I did feel a twinge of personal regret in the knowledge that, whatever she had been up to, she hadn’t been up to it with me.

Windbreaker (1965)

In my limited experience, there was a marked difference between the conduct of Speechly women and Taché men. Or at least some Speechly women and some Taché men. Truth to tell, my sample was exceedingly small and the window of observation very narrow; I’m thinking of a cadre of three or four co-eds with whom my friend and I frequently sat at the suppertime meal in Pembina Hall. To what extent this little group of females represented the Speechly aggregate is difficult to gauge, but they weren’t necessarily typical.

In any event, these women presented themselves as prim and proper little ladies, and I suspect that this was the case, not only at mealtimes, but elsewhere as well. I don’t mean to imply that they put on airs or that their deportment was pretentious; they were simply nice, wholesome girls who knew how to behave themselves in mixed company—exactly the kind you’d be proud to take home to mother.

My Taché Hall friend and I, likewise, behaved ourselves properly at the dinner table in the company of these women—no vulgarity or off-colour jokes. As often as not, we competed with one another, trying to be charming, witty, and amusing in order to demonstrate to the girls how charming, witty, and amusing we could be. In the old days we called it “showing off”—the very sort of thing that boys have been doing the world over since Pontius was a pilot.

But the Speechly girls didn’t show off, and I have often wondered: how did they behave when they were by themselves in the privacy of their own quarters? Were they still little ladies, or did they get down and dirty and let it all hang out—like we did, for example.

My enduring guess is that young university women of my generation were not generally given to the loud, uncouth, brash, crude, smart-ass, cock-of-the-walk-type behaviour in which we indulged when amongst ourselves. The sweet young things probably didn’t know very many dirty jokes, and I suspect that the ones they did know were pretty tepid. But put a bunch of us guys together for a bull session and in no time at all we had mentally disrobed, and described in imaginative detail, half the population of Mary Speechly Hall in all its naked splendour.
Some of the Taché guys were genuinely funny and downright talented in a boorish sort of way. One fellow who sticks in my mind possessed a truly special gift: by pressing the palms of his hands together and variously squeezing out the air between them, he could thereby produce a potpourri of low screams, shrieks, and squeaks that simulated a veritable orgy of flatulence. Coupled with this festival of pseudo wind-breaking was an array of facial contortions and verbal self-recriminations for being a bad boy. With no offensive odours to deter us, we could sit there indefinitely witnessing this awesome display of sight and sound.

And the Speechly darlings I knew from across the supper table? I find it very difficult indeed to imagine them behaving in like fashion.

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Do You Remember ... ? (1966)

Here are a few more memories from the mid-sixties that I’d like to share.

- Do you remember Sunday night movies in the Auditorium? That was a real highlight. Free, I think!
- And Saturday night dances in the Aud? Or was it Friday? I remember the stag line. The Speechly girls who came alone and who weren’t asked to be walked home used to skulk out in the bathroom during the last dance, when everyone else was paired off. They all walked home together. Home being just down the corridors.
- And Canteen in the basement of Taché? Every night from 9:00 - 9:30 or so?
- Eskimo Pies (ice cream bars with chocolate covering) made in the Dairy Science Building right there on campus.
- And the three-cornered paper milk cartons—I think the design was based on pyramids. They were quite clever! They stacked together very efficiently. The milk came from U of M cows in the Agriculture faculty.
- There were some blind students in the basement of Taché learning some particular skills—was it computer programming? Although that was such early times for computers.

- And the big flood of 1966. Sandbags all along the edge of the river and not knowing if we would write our finals.
- And just prior to that, the big snowstorm, with feet of snow. March something—it was supposed to be Home Ec. Grads Farewell Ball that night. The Ball on the following Tuesday night just didn’t cut it.
- But I do remember some of the Aggies creating makeshift snowshoes out of beer boxes taped to their boots and making the essential trek to the Montcalm for beer for that weekend.
- In Women’s Rez, the wastepaper basket made a very large punch bowl for some boozy concoctions.

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Get a Grip (1966)

Taking meals in Pembina Hall was simple enough. You picked up a tray upon entering the servery and slid it along a track that ran past a bank of metal food bins. A plate was filled by the kitchen staff from the bins and handed to you as you moved down the line. You then carried your loaded tray to a cashier. After showing your board ticket to the cashier, you proceeded on your hind legs into the Dining Hall and took a seat at a table. When the meal was finished, you were expected to deposit your tray and its contents onto a conveyor belt where the dishwashers took things in hand. A more humdrum operation can scarcely be imagined, and before the advent of food fights, Pembina Hall wasn’t exactly Action Central.

The trays, even the loaded ones, were by no means heavy, and the distance from the cashier’s station to the tables wasn’t all that great. But every so often someone would manage to lose his/her grip en route to a table, and the tray and its contents went crashing to the floor. Not only was there now a mess that someone was going to have to clean up, but also the victim of the accident had to go back to the servery and, sort of like Oliver Twist, ask for more. Actually, it was very rare that anyone suffered a “full toss” such as this: more typically, a single cup or saucer (or both in unison) would jump off the table and plunge to their destruction on the unforgiving floor below. And if you somehow lost control of your tray while carrying it to...
the conveyor belt at the end of the meal, at least you didn’t drop all your un chewed cookies in the bargain.

Inevitably, the self-conscious victim of shattering dinnerware felt some degree of embarrassment, what with being the centre of unwanted attention and all. But it didn’t end there—to compound the annoyance, the assembled multitude in the Dining Hall, upon hearing the clatter, enthusiastically celebrated the calamity by loudly hammering their table tops with their palms and/or fists. Nor were the kitchen staff exempt from our attention: the sound of breaking crockery emanating from the servery elicited a similar response.

Not a Proud Moment (1966)

We can probably all remember indiscretions we’ve committed over the years that we’d just as soon forget. A goodly number of my abominations were played out while a student at the U of M, and this is a story about one of them.

In September of 1966, I returned to the University to complete my MA. I already had five full years of post-secondary education under my belt, and as was my custom throughout my student career at the U of M, I had booked myself into Taché Hall for the upcoming academic year. Graduate students were a rare breed in the dorm, and I was one of the very few who possessed that distinction.

Of course, all of the Taché and Speechly students took their meals in Pembina Hall, so interacting with women at mealtimes was common fare if one was so inclined. The incident I have in mind transpired during the 1966 Freshie Week. It appears that certain senior Speechly women were each assigned a small cadre of female freshies who, as such, were new to the University and Residence Life. The idea was for these upperclass women to introduce their charges to their new surroundings and circumstances. It also provided an opportunity for the older women in Speechly to prevail upon Taché freshmen as part of the Freshie Week hazing rituals.

On one occasion around the end of suppertime, a cluster of Speechly freshies was sitting at a table with their mother hen. They had all finished their meals, and the standard routine was for each student to carry his/her food tray to a conveyor belt that delivered the used dishes and cutlery to the Kitchen for washing. However, with a crowd of Taché freshmen readily at hand, the older girl decided that she’d order one of the maggots to transport the trays to the conveyor belt. Alas, she wasn’t too familiar with who was who amongst the Taché Hall population, because the “freshman” she selected to do the dirty work was me.

She beckoned me over to her table and forthwith gave me my instructions. Being the self-absorbed grad student that I was, I promptly apprised her of my lofty status within the local student body and assured her that under no circumstances was I disposed to comply with her demand. The poor thing was surely embarrassed, what with her freshies sitting right there taking it all in.

I’ve occasionally thought how much more mature my response would have been had I played along and done her bidding (it was Freshie Week, after all), rather than causing her to lose face as I did. What a jerk! I didn’t even have the grace to look her up later on and apologize for my poor judgement and inconsiderate behaviour toward her in front of the younger girls. After all these years, I would gladly go out of my way to do so if I had the chance.

Open House (1966)

In the 1960s, when the women’s and men’s dorms were still separate, Taché Hall and Mary Speechly Hall used to have Open House. Every so often on a Sunday afternoon, the Speechly Residents could visit the men in their rooms in Taché and vice versa, but on different days. I guess the idea was to afford us the opportunity to see how the other half lived.

I think the Open House program began in spring term of 1965–66, but it wasn’t until my final year (1966-67) that I paid an Open-House visit to the Women’s Residence or any of them came over to visit me. Up until then I was really bogged down in my studies, and anything that might have opened up the prospect of my getting seriously involved with girls wasn’t in the cards.
The accompanying photo shows a couple of the Speechly women visiting in one of the rooms in Taché during the 1966-67 academic year. They are perusing with considerable interest a publication that was apparently uncommon in their own quarters—a *MAD Magazine*. Note the box of Old Dutch potato chips in the right background. Wow, did we know how to show the gals a good time or what? Lampoon magazines and potato chips: about all we (or at least I) could afford! But don’t laugh—within a year, the one on the left was in full possession of a life-long companion, and in August 2012 they celebrated their 45th wedding anniversary. In the meantime, she went on to earn an MA and a PhD at the U of M and became one of the leading museum curators in the country.

What Did He Expect? (1966)

Before the Residences at the U of M went co-ed, we had “Open House” events whereby on alternating Sundays students from Taché Hall could visit their counterparts in their rooms in Mary Speechly, and vice versa. (Speaking of vice, the rule was to leave one’s door open [or at least conspicuously ajar], perhaps as a crude means of birth control).

Taché Hall had a lot of inhabitants, a few of whom surely regarded themselves as God’s gift to women. The majority of us didn’t fancy ourselves as Casanovas; we liked girls and, when on our best behaviour, went to dances and movies with them, or joined them at meals in Pembina Hall. Otherwise, we were sufficiently into our studies to keep the ladies at arms length, so to speak, so that they wouldn’t prove too much of a distraction to our scholarly commitments. A few of the Tachéites preferred other boys to girls, and so visiting the ladies in their quarters was, if not academic, at least platonic if it happened at all.

And then there was the odd character (and I do mean *odd*) who was utterly amazed by the very concept of young womanhood, but who was too shy to step up and introduce himself to the objects of his fascination. No doubt, he fantasized a fair bit about what it was like to be a woman, and had all manner of curious notions in his head about how these exotic creatures lived. Perhaps a good way of finding out for sure was to visit one of them in her boudoir during Open House and … pick her brain.

There’s a story about a doughty explorer who made his way over to Speechly on one such occasion to probe the inner workings of the feminine psyche. He noted that a door was open on the fourth floor of this wondrous, mysterious, magical place. Inside was a pretty young thing seated at her desk reading a book. The fact that her door was open could be taken to mean that visitors were welcome, it being Open House and all. Anyway, here was an opportunity for our hero to make the acquaintance of a comely lass and at the very least indulge in some pleasant conversation. What was her name? Where was she from? What year was she in and what courses was she taking? Did she like the university experience, and what were her plans for the future?

But no. He stepped through the doorway and asked her permission to … look at her room. Having been invited in, he quietly stood there in one spot and noted the light fixtures and the furniture; the length, breadth, and colour of the walls and ceiling; and the particulars of the window panels and the floor—without making a peep the whole time. It was all over in a minute; he thanked the girl and left as quietly as he’d arrived.
One has to wonder: What was he expecting to find? Were his suspicions confirmed or denied? Was he impressed or disappointed with what he saw? Did he feel a well-concealed twinge of excitement through it all? Later when he went home for holidays, did he furtively tell his high school buddies, without going into detail and without a word of a lie, that at one time he was (wink, wink, nudge, nudge) alone with a girl in her room?!

Now that I think about it, maybe he wasn't, in point of fact, a curious Taché Haller in search of wisdom and truth about the fairer sex. Maybe it didn't matter to him whether the occupant of the room was a co-ed or a cockatoo. Maybe he was just an aspiring City of Winnipeg building inspector doing his thing.

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**Wonderland by Night (1966)**

In 1966 I was a grad student at the University of Manitoba. As such, I had access round-the-clock to a laboratory that happened to be located in the basement of the Education Building. Not only did I have a key to the lab once I was inside the place—I had one to the outside doors (i.e., to the entire building) as well. Since I did almost all of my studying and writing in the lab, this was a very convenient arrangement indeed, as I could come and go as I pleased 24/7.

And it gets better: I was a patron of the Taché Hall dormitory, so I also had ready access to my barracks morning, noon, and night. In sum, I had this little empire right there on campus wherein I could freely shuttle to and fro as the spirit moved me.

Upon occasion, however, this otherwise ideal set-up proved to be something of a liability. I was constantly preoccupied with my studies, and so my head was generally off in another galaxy. Thusly distracted, I went through my daily secular routines (like closing doors [or not]) without paying much attention to what I was doing.

Something I did do a lot of was work in the lab until about one or two o’clock in the morning—in February, for example. This modus operandi pretty well necessitated living right there on campus, since I didn’t own a car and I’m not sure the buses were still running at 2:00 am. Even if they were, who’d want to ride all the way home (wherever that might be) at that unholy hour? So after plugging away for the entire evening and half the night, I’d depart the building and trudge across campus to the Rez … in -30-degree weather. Thankfully, the dorm was located to the south of the Education Building and the wind was at my back.

Ah, there she is—dear old Taché. To avoid disturbing my roommate, I’d quietly let myself into the room, quietly undress, and quietly slide under the covers. Then I’d lie there and quietly wonder to myself if I locked the doors to the Education Building upon leaving.

Come to think of it, no, I don’t rightly recall having ensured that the doors were locked when I left—my mind was somewhere northwest of Mars at the time. Jeepers, what if some bad people got in through the doors that I left ajar and trashed the entire building … thanks to me? What if they were pyromaniacs and burned the place down, or planted explosives in the washrooms … all because I left the barn door open? Or worst of all, what if a night watchman found the doors unsecured, blew the whistle to the Dean of Education, and I ended up losing the keys to my kingdom?! Well, I’d better do something pronto … never mind that this just happened to be the exact same night that hell finally decided to freeze over.

So (and I’m not making this up) I’d quietly slide out of bed (it’s now ~2:20 am), quietly put my clothes back on, and quietly leave the room. I’d hoof it back across the frozen campus, this time with my face into the wind. I’d arrive at the doors to the Education Building, give them a hefty tug, and sure enough, they were fully locked. Tsk, silly me—this *bleeping* siberian trek was entirely unnecessary! So I’d haul my shivering carcass back across the tundra, quietly let myself back into my room, quietly undress, quietly … I don’t remember how often I put myself through that nocturnal spot of bother, but I’m quite sure it was more than once. In so doing, was I manifesting—at great discomfort and inconvenience to myself—a truly commendable degree of responsibility toward an expensive piece of University infrastructure? Or was I simply a dysfunctional paranoiac who desperately needed to spend a bit more time in the real world?
All I know is, 46 years later I can quietly slide into bed on a frigid February night, content in the knowledge that the Education Building at the U of M never got infiltrated, ransacked, plundered, blown up, or burned down on my account.

### Bad Timing and Passing the Buck (1967)

In an undated document titled “Student Health Service,” it was stated that each member of the medical personnel at the University of Manitoba Fort Garry campus was deliberately selected for a capacity, or an interest, in the field of student health. The full-time staff included a general practitioner; a psychiatrist; a general surgeon; nurses qualified in various fields of public health, hospital, and personal nursing service; a physiotherapist; and an athletic trainer. From September to April inclusive there was also a live-in nurse.

The greater part of the work of the Health Service was carried out in the Health Centre on the first level of Taché Hall East. Here there was an Infirmary of 12 beds for the care of students who required it—the period varying between a few hours and a few weeks. Also there were examining rooms, offices, and other facilities for treatment of ambulant students.

The varied services undertaken at the Health Centre included the treatment of sports injuries, psychiatric consultation and treatment, minor surgery, and general medicine. The official blurb, of which this is but a brief excerpt, surely leaves one with a sense of confidence and optimism. The reality, however, didn’t always quite dovetail with the ideal, in my experience.

One day in March of 1967, I was cut over my right eye during a hockey game. Feeling that the wound might require medical attention, I went to visit the Residence Nurse. At the time I arrived, she wasn’t present in the Infirmary and so I went to her living quarters located on the second floor of East Taché. When she came to the door I told her what was wrong, and without even asking me about my problem she began complaining about my having interrupted her coffee break.

Her attitude seemed to be that getting wounded or becoming ill was all well and good, as long as it was at her convenience! Before attending to my eye, she continued to lecture me about bothering her, saying that I should have come earlier or later so as not to have interrupted her break. My gash subsequently received three stitches, but I really did have to wonder if I needed that verbal thrashing before receiving the necessary medical attention.

As an afterword, it should be noted that a negative opinion of the nurse was common, not only among the men, but among the Speechly women as well. Bearing in mind that her living quarters were situated in a wing of the Men’s Residence, noises emanating from the general area were at levels above what she considered acceptable. She would not hesitate to enter the men’s precincts—indeed, individual rooms—and complain to those whom she considered were the guilty parties, causing considerable embarrassment at times.

It was felt that the nurse was neither of the right age nor temperament to be living in a Residence of young men whose activities could not all be carried out in tomb-like silence. In 1966, the (male) President of the Resident Students’ Association Council wrote the University Administration cautiously proposing a solution to the problem—move her somewhere else. And where might that “somewhere else” be?

Why, to a room in the all-female Mary Speechly Hall, of course! The nurse was a woman, ergo …

Two questions arise from this suggestion:

1. Are young women any less noisy than young men? Judging by activity photographs in Residence yearbooks, the answer would have to be: not necessarily.

2. Did the President of RSAC discuss with the women the idea of moving the problem into their neighbourhood before he suggested it to the Administration? This is unlikely, because if he had, surely the ladies would have politely told him to go forth and multiply (NIMBY [Not in my back yard], thank you very much), and the notion would never have made it into the RSAC President’s letter in the first place!
Happiness Is ... (1967)

It would be unfair to blame it all, or perhaps even any of it, on Taché Hall; the outcome would surely have been the same no matter what university dorm I inhabited. But the fact remains that by the time I left the U of M in the spring of 1967, I was a product of four continuous years of living in Taché Hall and no place else.

In many respects, the lot of a Residence student was a happy one, at least for me. When it came to the nitty-gritty of making ourselves presentable in public, it was left to us to take showers unassisted, clip our toenails all by ourselves, brush our teeth unaided, and do our own laundry. But in Taché Hall we got clean bed linen via maid service once a week, and someone else fixed the plumbing, bought the groceries, prepared our food, washed the dishes, mowed the lawn, shovelled the snow, and took out the garbage.

In other words, it was hard for me to develop a sense of domestic responsibility living in Rez. Actually it wasn't hard at all—it wasn't even on my radar. For an aspiring egghead who didn't want to do much of anything besides schoolwork, most of the cheap physical stuff was simply not my bag. Residence living, on the other hand, was ideal. I was made for Taché Hall, and Taché Hall was tailor-made for me.

And that worldview was all well and good as long as I was single and comfortably ensconced within my bachelorhood in Taché Hall. Then one day I found myself married to a charming little creature who had the not unreasonable expectation that I would do my share of maintaining the household and fixing things now and then. Neither my University programs of study nor Taché Hall had prepared me for that. At long last, reality had caught up to me.

Maybe a crash course in home economics should have been required before they gave me my degree.

Religion in Rez (1967)

It would be somewhat of a stretch to call Taché Hall a religious institution. The name of the building commemorates Monseigneur Alexandre-Antonin Taché, long-ago Archbishop of St. Boniface, but this fact cannot, in any way, be taken to mean that the Lads in the Hall subscribed to the spiritual convictions and worldview of that holy man.

In my experience, the U of M was a self-contained little universe in many respects. For the Residents of Taché who were members of certain religious denominations, it was possible to roll out of bed on Sunday mornings and in no time at all be in attendance in chapels located just across campus. There, if you were of the same persuasion that I was, you could be sermoned about the evils of Playboy magazine by an aged chaplain whose familiarity with girlie magazines was, to my mind, suspect.

There were a number of faith-based organizations on campus, such as B’nai Brith Hillel, Iclarion, the Student Christian Movement, the Anglican Students’ Association, the Newman Club, and the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship. Residence students were welcome to join any of them of course, but no such bodies that I was aware of were set up within the Residence complex by Residence students for the sole benefit of Residence students.

Throughout my sojourn, the dormitory environment in general had remained true to its overall secular character. Predictably, religious debate didn’t get much airing in Taché Hall. On rare occasion, I argued over supper with a chum of the heretical tradition regarding what was right about my convictions and wrong about his. But that was nothing more than good-natured, tongue-in-cheek banter simply aimed at getting on each other’s nerves. And I have every confidence that too-frequent reference to the women’s dorm as the Sanctum Sanctorum, with its religious overtones, would have been impatiently dismissed by certain of my confrères as mere popish mummery.

There was one particular occasion, however, that sticks in my mind. There were within the Taché population those who stood firmly behind their beliefs. One such was a dyed-in-the-wool fundamentalist (I’ll call him “John”). Every year we staged shows in the Residence Auditorium in which students displayed their talents in singing, playing musical instruments,
putting on skits, etc. On one such occasion, John convinced the organizers to put him on the program, his plan being to read out loud several of his favourite tracts from The Bible.

I don’t know how the organizers rationalized their acceding to this most unusual request; it certainly was a departure from the usual fare. Perhaps out of charity and respect, John was given the go-ahead. From his own righteous (and, dare I say it, self-righteous) perspective, the idea must surely have been most insightful: here was a captive audience of several hundred students, not a few of whom were surely in desperate need of salvation. For John, the occasion and venue were ideal for some meaningful but low-key evangelization … at least, that was my reading of it.

The results were predictable: when he finished, the “applause” John received was tepid, to say the least. Clearly, the majority of the audience didn’t think that his performance required or displayed much talent and, content-wise, was entirely out of place at an entertainment event. When all was said and done, I felt sorry for the organizing committee who were put on the spot and probably didn’t want to hurt John’s feelings or come across as prejudiced. I felt sorry for the audience-at-large, who were placed in the awkward position of having to react in a polite but honest way to something with which they did not agree. And I felt sorry and embarrassed for John himself for his thinking that his presentation would be well-received, and because of the token acknowledgement that was reluctantly (?) granted him by a small minority in the audience who were perhaps like-minded or simply compassionate, but who must have felt self-conscious clapping their hands, if only very briefly, while everyone else around them remained resolutely silent.

In fairness, let us concede that it may have taken a fair measure of courage on John’s part to deliver his performance. Surely as a Taché Resident himself he must have known the largely secular nature of his audience and what to expect. In any event, it struck me as a rather uncomfortable experience for pretty well all concerned.

They say that religion and politics don’t mix. I would have to add that religion and Rez talent shows didn’t mix very well either.

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Taché Hall: Celebrating a Century of Residence Life

**Starving Engineers Discover Free Food (1967)**

The rations in Pembina Hall weren’t always sufficient. How could the Dietitian believe that a big, active guy needed no more calories than a smaller girl? Well, there was a solution other than ordering in pizza on Sunday night.

There were food vending machines in the Canteen in the Taché Hall basement. They consisted of a vertical row of doors, behind each of which there was a rotating tray containing sandwiches, cookies, and other snacks.

After several years of Engineering classes, our powers of observation and mischief were sufficiently heightened that we discovered how to empty all the food from these machines for only 25 cents.

All you had to do was insert coins to buy the first item, open the appropriate door, remove the item, close the door and then wait precisely the correct amount of time while the food tray mechanism rotated. At that exact time in the machine’s cycle, it was possible to open any of the other doors (without inserting any more coins) and remove the food item behind that second door. Close the second door, wait the correct amount of time, and you could then open a third door. Repeat until no longer hungry!

Maybe it was a sense of guilt or just the lack of a challenge, but I don’t remember us doing this more than once. Those involved will remain anonymous. After all, we were simply observing a poor engineering design.

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**Wow! Leonard Cohen Plays the Aud (1967)**

Leonard Cohen, originally an angst-ridden Jew from Montreal, is perceived by some to be a world-class purveyor of sad. Usually clad all in black, a costume sonically mirrored by his darkly sombre singing voice, he and his music are not usually described as cheerful.

I was present at one of Cohen’s early concerts in the late sixties. Sitting in a chair in the Auditorium of creaky old Taché Hall at the University of Manitoba, accompanying himself on an acoustic guitar, he played and sang quietly for about seventy-five serious-looking people.
Back then I, too, was an angst-ridden Jew (from the north end of Winnipeg), and I was as serious as the rest of the audience. Happily (or sadly), I was profoundly engaged by his poetic but doleful view of the world.

So Leonard Cohen still sounds like Leonard Cohen, but now he is less occupied with confusion and more interested in insight, less concerned with bitterness and pain, and more interested in compassion. Like Shakespeare, whose penetrating revelations of the realities of life were encompassed by a vast affection for humanity, Cohen has turned from cool irony to the warmth of kindness, from stylish despair to realistic optimism.

From *The Resident* (1969)

Living in Residence is one of the few ways you really feel you belong on campus. Forget the Arts Lounge and the Common Room, haven of mere commuters. Escape to your room! ... That fleeting sense of superiority you feel when you pass the queue at the bus stop at 5:30 pm on a Friday night and it's twenty below. The frequent trips to the Surplus Store for Coffee-Mate and cigarettes. Slushy walks on the river bank in April and the talks in the Canteen. Studying in the Luncheonette for mid-terms and staggering back from Elizabeth Dafoe with an armload of periodicals ... the ten-minute floor meeting that became a pizza party ... the one Gordon Lightfoot LP that became a Dylan session ...

If you have a roommate, you may learn what compromise means for the first time. It's nerve-wracking but semi-groovy. There is someone to listen to you when you freak out over an assignment, to lend you Listerine, or wake you up for an 8:30 am class. If one of you gets hung up, there is a brief unbearable period when you wish said groovy roommate would get lost. There are also a few minor details you wish he'd get straightened out, i.e., like more regular sleeping hours or remembering to take his key when he leaves on a date. Usually though, he becomes one of your better friends in Residence. At least, you manage to put up with each other!

In 1967 singer-songwriter, Leonard Cohen, played to a small crowd in the Auditorium.
The 1970s. A time of new social structure and wonderful pattern—plaid, stripes, flowers, paisley ... anything goes! Part of the crowd in the Auditorium, likely the 1976 Colour Night. Note the three individuals holding trophies. Notice also the many overseas students in the crowd. The foreign students in Taché were always encouraged to join in on Residence functions and activities and frequently did.