Memories of the 1990s

Memorable Events of the Year (1990)

At the beginning of this decade, one was not oblivious to the Internet. I can still remember the novelty factor of this new means of entertainment and having gross-out contests with my friends to see who could find the most disgusting images on the web (some things never change). Here are some memories of Taché Hall and those who called it home for a few years of their early adulthood.

• The “gross” gifts left for the men of 3rd & Long.
• Colour Night with [BC].
• A friendly hello & one hell of a goodbye to the Lord Selkirk.
• Tucker moves in, Tucker moves out, Tucker moves in. . .
• Torch finally gets off RSAC.
• Parties on 4th East.
• Farm animals on the Far Side (other than [W] & [B]).
• Awesome trip to the Agassiz Alps (nice wipe-out by the Baron).
• Hot-pot sh*t-showers.
• Shaker pukes in the 1st East water fountain.
• The “East Sucks” banner hanging from the windows, shown to all of campus.
• Floor hockey party in Bubba’s room.
• [DT] gets tubbed by girls.
• The fiery romance between [B] & [S] gets extinguished (on her neck).
• Nothing happened in Speechly, AGAIN!
• The city police being called to Speechly/Taché for quite an array of complaints.

What were the “gross” gifts left for the men of 3rd & Long? These gals look like they’re up to something!

The rivalry between East and West took on major dimensions.
Publicity (1990)

Publicity can be a many splendour’d thing. It has the notorious ability to either make or break. For a time back in 1990, the corridors of our Residence were echoing with voices of discontent after the Winnipeg Free Press had printed an article on October 28, 1990, titled “Scared Co-ed Wants Residence Animal Act Halted.” In light of that publicity, our Rez got a pretty rough ride, and no one in the ’hood was amused, myself included. Speechly/Taché quickly became a hotbed concerning sexual harassment. Other media flocked to our Residence like flies to honey in an effort to investigate allegations surrounding this issue.

In retrospect, the female student who had voiced her grievances could not be condemned—she was well within her rights to air her complaints. As in any case, however, there were two sides to the issue, and thanks to freedom of speech, expression, and the press, a number of Resbians did make their positions known on TV or by writing letters to the editor of the Winnipeg Free Press and The Manitoban. Personally, I felt that the newspaper article was a gross misrepresentation of our Residence, and even though a more balanced follow-up article was published shortly afterwards, it was the first one that left the deepest impression.

I had higher expectations of the Winnipeg Free Press than what was printed. For one thing, the sensational headline carried a vague meaning. What exactly was the journalist trying to get across by his use of the term “animal act”? That was the sort of thing I’d have expected when looking at the tabloid rack at the supermarket. Who’s to say whether the Free Press would have carried a follow-up article had it not been for ticked off Residents in Speechly/Taché expressing outrage at the negative media coverage?

When the general public got wind of such “information,” Residents, as a whole, were immediately cast into the same mold. Sad to say, that’s how human nature works. One student wrote to the Letters to the Editor section of the Winnipeg Free Press expressing her dismay at the slur this put on the image of all Residence students, and she, personally, was going to graduate as a teacher the spring and this could hurt her job prospects.

Unfortunately the damage had been done and the image probably persisted. It brought to mind the “soup can” analogy: no matter how much of the label you tear off, there’s always some little piece of paper or glue left on the can.

Storming the Lege (1990)

At the time, I looked on it as a party. It was unique because it was productive; unlike a Rez social, something good had been gained for U of M students. The event in question was the 1990 FIGHT UNDER-FUNDING rally at the Manitoba Legislature.

Upon hearing about the rally, I thought that it sounded interesting. UMSU said we were under-funded. Going to the rally would give me a chance to hear the government’s side of the story. But I only wanted to go if some of my hallmates would go, too. Five of us (18 percent of our entire hall) ended up going to the Oak Room to assemble with other Rez people. From there, it was on to the Administration Building to join up with the out-of-Rez crowd. As it turned out, Res was the U of M student representation. A few speeches at the Admin steps and it was time to board the buses.

A slight hold-up was getting everyone edgy. A guy went to the front of the bus and said we would be leaving in three and a half minutes. Not three minutes. Not four. Three and a half. Sure enough three and a half minutes later, the buses left. Once at the U of W campus, we unloaded from our
buses to join the mass of students who had collected scant yards from Portage Avenue. The already-arrived students from U of Brandon, U of Winnipeg, and St. Boniface College dwarfed the U of M (mostly Rez) contingent. A poor effort by our University! A few chants were recited and off we went—down Portage Avenue, halting traffic, making noise, and generally gaining attention. Taking a right at Memorial, we headed south towards the Legislature, chanting the whole way.

At the Lege we continued shouting different chants, including “FIL-MON” and our favourite “What do we want—When do we need it.” Then the speeches: Len Derkach spoke first, but it was hard to understand him with all the booing and jeering that went on. When Dave Chomiak, the NDP’s Education critic, spoke, he attacked the government saying an education was a right, not a privilege. The Liberal speaker was hilarious and certainly not as tyrannical as the socialist NDP rep was. But before the Liberal spokesman could finish, all hell broke loose. What had started as a few people muttering “Storm the Lege” had turned into loud cries. Everyone looked at each other, and as soon as we had enough confidence in ourselves as a group, all it took was one signal. Then we stormed the Lege!

It was the emotional high-point of the rally. People were going nuts. No thinking involved, just reaction. Once through the doors, we scrambled up the stairs of the main centre block. The security men in the reception area just stood back and watched. Students filled the second and third floor balconies of the centre block. The acoustics were incredible and increased the decibel level of the students. Then after 10 minutes everyone assembled in the main stairwell area for a sit-in. The sit-in was a one-hour-plus smorgasbord of speakers, chanting, and good old-fashioned protesting. Around 3:30 pm the student Presidents came out from Filmon’s office.

In the end, we left with a hollow feeling. The power we felt and transmitted to the higher level of our democratically governing body had not given us the definite feedback we wanted. All Filmon had “promised” was a later meeting. No definite date, just “later.” Most felt it was not a good place to start from.

But looking back, the good things I immediately think of are: cutting class, meeting Elijah (“If you guys don’t have the balls to stand up to the government, I will”) Harper, and having a good time. We may not have gotten even our most minimal demand, but the exercise certainly wasn’t a waste of time. We got across a voice—something to remind our leaders that there were people out there. The rally was certainly no Timisoara or Tiananmen, but it was the same basic idea: we had something to say, we were going to say it, and we did.

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The Bee-Line Mentality, or, Keep Off the Grass (1990)

First, the general theory: The “bee-line mentality” is a human phenomenon that has never evolved out of our complex minds. It doesn’t fit in very well with our cosmopolitan society because, on account of it, we violate laws and by-laws every day to save a couple of seconds transiting from A to B. It serves us well when selecting highway routes to get us over great distances without going hundreds of kilometres out of our way; however, people still employ it unnecessarily when crossing a street without going to the nearest crosswalk. A certain number of bee-liners are killed every year as they are struck down by surprised motorists.

And now, the specific: The Quad wasn’t in any way part of the Taché property, but it was eminently conspicuous to those of us who lived in the building. It formed the spacious northern approaches to the place, and was the setting for many freshie rites de passage and numerous outdoor recreational and
The Quad formed the spacious northern approaches to Taché Hall and was the setting for many freshee rites de passage and numerous outdoor recreational and entertainment activities for Residence students down through the years.

So at the beginning of the 1990 school year, the grass was untainted and fresh following the recent renewal project, but it wasn’t even there for two weeks before there was a fence around it. Without knowing the reason, we felt disappointed and outraged after seeing a new lawn put in, only to have it fenced off and out of reach. Many of us felt like we were being treated like a community of vandals.

The Administration never wanted to keep the students off the Quad; they just wanted the grass to have a chance to flourish. So they decided that during the winter months, the maintenance crew would put up a snow fence around the Quad, forcing the students to walk around it on the provided sidewalks. Once the snow had melted and the grass had a chance to establish itself, the snow fence was removed and was ready for the students to use in the summer and into the fall for events like beer fests, orientation, touch football, catch, etc.

The Balcony Bear (1992)

Many events from my school days came to mind. Some I can repeat and others well, maybe not! I was in the Faculty of Education from 1991–1993 and was fortunate enough to live at University College Residence on the fifth floor. They were the best two years of my Life!

One very cold night, the fifth floor gang decided to play a prank on neighbouring Taché Hall. What could we take that they would really miss? Definitely, taking their large snow sculpture of a polar bear would cause a stir. All that was required was a hacksaw, and someone had one (go figure!). Before we knew it, the polar bear was in two large pieces coming up the elevator of University College Residence and was reassembled on the fifth floor balcony.

A photo of the “balcony bear” made the cover of The Manitoban, but the culprits have yet to be named.

Residence Life was never boring!

Christmas Cheer Board Fundraisers (1993)

Back in the fall of 1993, we put on a couple of events to raise money for the Christmas Cheer Board. The first was an eating contest sponsored by Burger King. The idea was to get 10 teams (we ended up with eight) of five players each. There was an entry cost of $5 per team. Each team member had to eat one entire Whopper and drain one drink before the next person on the team would be allowed to start. The fastest team to finish all the food was the winner. The contest went well, and we
managed to sell left-over Whoppers and drinks for a dollar each. Prizes were given to the first- and second-place teams, which were Keg certificates donated by the Assistant Director of Housing & Student Life.

The day after the eating contest, we put on an “aerobathon.” This project didn’t work out as well as we had hoped. The idea was to have three hours of aerobics led by three different instructors, with 15 minutes in between each hour. Instead, because of cancellations by instructors, we managed to get only two of them for just two hours. They were from private fitness businesses. In addition, participation turnout (12 to 15 individuals) was less than expected. Prizes were purchased rather than solicited because Casino Night was soliciting at the same time. Juices and oranges were donated by Pembina Hall, and T-shirts provided by the RSAC went to the instructors and to the person who had the most money in pledges.

The people who were drawing this kind of attention had requested a high social-interaction area to live in. Everybody else in that area had requested the same thing. Anyone they could possibly be disturbing had accepted the fact that there would be a high level of social interaction in their part of Residence. Anybody who was going overboard in their social interaction probably wasn’t getting much schoolwork done and so they weren’t likely to be invited back by their faculty anyway.

The persons expected to carry out the listing of troublemakers, the RAs, were given sole power of recommendation for their respective floors. They would recommend, then the Office would consider, and then action would or would not be taken. The RAs were chosen for being responsible, intelligent people capable of making decisions. But they weren’t perfect, and they were just as susceptible to personal grudges, bad moods, and making mistakes as the rest of us. Any number of intangible factors could have affected a decision at any given time; I, too, had been a Resident Assistant.

One Man’s Opinion (1993)

I recall a time when I was sitting in a friend’s room, discussing the duties and job description of a Resident Assistant. An RA himself, my friend pulled out a list of the people on his floor with an Office memo attached. He was being called upon to go over this list, check off the names of people whom he didn’t think should be allowed back into Rez, and return it to the Office. He went on to explain that the Office had decided that the best way to tone down Rez was to get rid of the “troublemakers,” and the best way to get rid of them was to ask a panel of people to veto any potentially troublemaking returnees.

The directive was ambiguous. What was, and was not, a troublemaker? Was s/he someone who’d ever stolen a dish from Pembina Hall? Anyone who’d been overly intoxicated? Was the intent to convert Residence into a nice, quiet monastery? It was all well and good to keep the serious troublemakers out—the people who caused property damage and other sorts of malicious misdemeanors. Those were serious violations and I don’t think anybody who called the place home for eight months would have lost any sleep over getting rid of people who were destroying it. I’m talking about the people who just liked to have a good, possibly slightly rambunctious time, during study breaks.

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Assistant, and I would have been very hesitant to trust myself with that kind of responsibility; it was other people’s lives we were playing with.

So the policy was crappy, but I took it for granted that our responsible RAs would realize that and ignore the Office’s request for him to identify who didn’t get to come back to our hall.

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Stories from the Crypt (1993)

I once had to wait in the Taché Residence Auditorium before an exam. It seemed like an innocent enough place, but Taché myth had it that a student committed suicide from the balcony up above. Having heard that one, the Auditorium never seemed the same to me again. Apparently in the early days of the University, a young student, distraught over a lost love, hanged himself before the regular morning prayers. And the story goes that his spirit has never rested: the ghost continues to haunt the Auditorium and, not surprisingly, some very strange things have happened to students who have dared to taunt the troubled spectre.

This, or a variation on it, is the most commonly-known campus ghost story. Another version, if not a separate story altogether, has a soldier haunting the Auditorium. Taché Hall housed soldiers during training for World War II, and while the superior officers would surely have known if a trainee suicide had taken place, it’s also quite likely that the military would have covered up such an egregious event. Anyway, let’s imagine a young man reluctantly on his way to war. He realizes that if he goes, his fiancée will leave him; she can’t handle the stress of wondering whether he will live or die. But he can’t live without her, so he kills himself. Perhaps his fiancée was on her way to the camp to tell her beloved that she has changed her mind [Editor’s note: her access to this heavily-restricted military facility would have been highly unlikely]. But alas it’s too late and of course his spirit has not rested since.

One way to get contact with the dead is to have a séance, and apparently Taché had its fair share of them. A former student and Residence member told me of a time when he and some friends held a late-night séance. Nothing happened during the séance itself, but afterwards a daring couple managed to climb their way up to the dome. Apparently when they leaned to look outside the window, a hand came out of nowhere and grabbed the woman’s arm. Spooky!

But here is an even more bone-chilling tale. Chris Rutkowski, writer of Manitoba Mysteries and a local ghost-guru, told us of a group of Taché students during the mid-1970s who were playing with a Ouija board. During the game, a knife fell out of the cupboards, landed on the floor, and started spinning around on its own accord, eventually stopping to point at one of the group. The next day the fellow died in an accident. Coincidence?

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Scandalous Behaviour (1995)

In January of 1995, a bus trip to Scandals Fun Club was organized for the Rez guys by a member of the West House Committee. Transportation was provided by Scandals for an afternoon of “female entertainment.” The event was poorly attended and no money was paid by West House in support of it, but I was incensed. I didn’t presume to make a moral comment about the strippers; the women who worked at Scandals had the right to do as they pleased, and it was not my place to judge them or their actions. I also couldn’t argue with the guys’ choice to visit the club for “an afternoon of female entertainment.”

However, as a female Resident of a co-ed House, I did have every right to criticize any elected official who promoted events that were exclusive and segregating. Promoting a “guys only” event without any consideration for the women students was unacceptable. We represented one-third of the population of West House and the numbers were rising every year. The men could no longer ignore that we existed.
Placing posters in the men’s washrooms “to rez guys” and providing transportation to the club implied that the event was run by West House, and that it was not simply a casual afternoon for a group of friends. This event was supposedly just a bunch of buddies going to the bar; yet a group of Residents were provided with free transportation by Scandals. As I saw it, an elected official had used his position for personal advantage; I was dubious that a business like Scandals would provide this kind of service for just anyone. When the club manager was contacted he said that this service was rare and was usually only given in certain cases, such as trips from Residence. That indicated to me that someone in authority was responsible for the trip.

By the time I had made Tché Hall my home, student self-government and co-ed residence were firmly established on the premises. For all that, there was still plenty of room for improvement.

Kick-Ass (1996)

By the mid-1990s, everything good about Tché was “kick-ass.” That was the operative word. There were kick-ass beer bashes, kick-ass sports programs, and kick-ass snacks in Condo. We had a kick-ass RSAC, kick-ass RAs, kick-ass trips to the Monty, and a kick-ass bar manager. Second Floor East was totally kick-ass. Some things were not kick-ass—the food in Pembina Hall, for example.

We had a kick-ass magazine called The Perspective, and everything in it was 100 percent kick-ass. Here’s an excerpt from my treasured 1995-96 souvenir Frosh Handbook edition:

Dear Frosh, if you can read this letter, you are missing the whole concept of Frosh Month. Right now you should be looking for a honey (male, female, or whatever) preferably with a car and NOT from your floor. If you are not doing this, it should be because you are passed out or so hung [over] from the night or nights before that you can’t even move or speak. But this is no excuse to stop drinking. There is only one reason to stop drinking … no money (but that’s what mommy and daddy are for!).

NEWSFLASH! Rez nights will be regular. Trips to Scandals (strip joint) will be regular. Rez socials will be regular. Sports tournaments will be regular. 7th Floor [Speechly] pre-parties will be regular. To see [“Bob” and “Rob”] drunk at all of these will be regular.

It was indeed a kick-ass life style.

For all we knew, we might even have been attending a kick-ass University, but the record is generally silent on that score.

Start of a Hobby! (1996)

In 1996, I was living on campus at the University of Manitoba in Tché Hall. I was stranded like a few other students during reading week (spring break) because I couldn’t afford to go anywhere. As luck would have it, I got my income tax rebate two weeks after reading week was over and wanted to do something fun for some friends. I got the idea in my head from somewhere and wanted to follow through with it. I went to a nearby florist and purchased three-dozen red roses. Thirty were to be wrapped individually each with a card “From your secret admirer!” The other six were wrapped in pairs for specific friends, “From your secret admirer!” And then another dozen roses for the ladies in the mailroom with a note explaining what was to be done. I asked them to put them in random mailboxes, but to give some to guys to throw people off the scent!
It worked out amazingly well and the reactions were awesome. The first young woman to walk into Pembina Hall (Cafeteria) was normally a very quiet and shy gal. She walked in with her tray in one hand and flower in the other and yelled out, “I HAVE A SECRET ADMIRER!” The place went silent for a few seconds. When a second girl walked in and did the same, the sudden silence was followed by a buzz of questions about what was going on. It was the same for each of the next few girls that walked into the room.

When Jeff, a friend of mine who got one, came in and yelled, “I HAVE A SECRET ADMIRER!” the room exploded with questions like, “What’s going on, nine girls have a secret admirer and now a guy?” “Who’s doing this?” “What’s going on?” It was all really cool. A friend who received two roses was sitting at my table, but she hadn’t opened her package until some students from around us coaxed her into it. Her eyes lit up as she opened her package and with an ear-to-ear smile said, “My secret admirer gave me two roses!” and then the flurry of questions went crazy. ...

It was the best-kept secret for all of two months until one day Jen, one of the girls who got two roses, came up and kissed me on the cheek and said, “Thank you my secret admirer!” My playing dumb didn’t work. She said, “My aunt owns the flower shop you bought them at!” I told her I was going there to get my tip back, as I told the florist it was a bribe for her not to say anything! I didn’t, but it was a pretty cool thing nonetheless!

After that, off and on, I would go and buy flowers and give them to random strangers. The last few years it has been something I do more and more, and in the last year it has become a weekly thing.

[Editor’s note: This story was discovered on the Internet, but we just couldn’t pass it up (http://www.randomactsofkindness.org/pdf/Start-of-a-hobby.pdf)].

The Ups and Downs of Condo (1997)

Club Condo provided many services to us Residence students beyond being just a canteen. It was home to Movie Nights, Hall Nights, the Sports Marathon, Rez Olympics, and other Residence events.

The University and the Residence Administration used Club Condo space and equipment for Boost sessions and other Housing & Student Life activities. Condo was still open for a period of time in the summers to accommodate the Royal Winnipeg Ballet and other groups residing in Speechly/Taché; it was an important feature because these visiting groups counted on its being open for their use. It was an important money-maker for the Residence and the University.

During the 1990s, Condo was facing financial challenges. There was a noticeable decrease in numbers of in-house patrons, and the main reason for this wasn’t hard to fathom; TVs had been installed in every lounge throughout the Residence complex and people weren’t going down to Condo every time they wanted to watch a show. This had resulted in a decrease in sales and profit. Expenses in recent years had been higher than usual: a large cooler needed repair, the Lounge was painted, and the purchase of a new TV all made demands on the bottom line.

Even though Condo wasn’t seeing as many students each night as in the past, it didn’t mean that it wasn’t of value to the Residents of Speechly/Taché. It was important that the equipment be kept in good shape by replacing things as needed. Club Condo provided enjoyment for all Residents and was an important feature of Speechly/Taché.
Raft Race Adieu (1998)

In September 1998, RSAC decided to cancel that year’s Red River Raft Race. There had been a change in management at the Winnipeg Harbour Master Office. The former management did not require small events such as the Red River Raft Race to obtain the legal permit that was required to hold any kind of race or regatta on the Red River. The new management had decided that for safety reasons, any event to be held on the river had to be properly certified by obtaining a permit.

In order to receive a permit for an event such as the Red River Raft Race, RSAC would be required to obtain $250,000 in liability insurance, as well as having the event plan passed by the Canadian Coast Guard and ratified by the Federal Minister of Transport. Without a permit certified by the proper authorities, anyone hosting a race or regatta on the river would be in violation of current laws governing the use of the waterway for such events. The violation would include a court appearance and a fine set by the Crown.

When RSAC received notice of this information, we didn’t have enough time to get a permit for our race, as it usually took six to eight months. Nor did RSAC have the means of acquiring the required liability insurance. Council also noted that each year there was less interest in this event, and 1998 was no exception; by the entry deadline only two teams had shown interest in entering rafts in the race. It was decided that in place of the raft race, the Sports Committee would host a “build your own toboggan” race sometime in the New Year.
A very unique view of the entrance to the Auditorium taken by Winnipeg photographer Bryan Scott.