



The following are excerpts from Marshall Gysi's upcoming second book, *U of M Prairie Chickens*, which describes his life in university. His first book, *Prairie Chickens Live Longer—A Decade in Darlingford*, shared stories of growing up in a small Manitoba town.



**OK, WHERE WAS I? I WAS WALKING EAST ON** the road into the University of Manitoba, about to begin a new phase in my life. It was the fall of 1954, and I was 17 years old, soon to be 18. I had spent the past 13 years at Darlingford, Manitoba, surrounded by the Law family. Mom had taken me, and my two sisters, Frances and Pat, to Darlingford in 1941 when

my father had left her to join the Canadian Army. ...

By now I had reached the campus, and was directed to the men's dormitory. At that time, the men's dormitory was on the west side of the dormitory building, and the women's dormitory on the east side, and never the twain should meet. The only occasions for a meeting of the sexes would be the mealtimes in the cafeteria that separated the main floor of the dormitories, and a large room above, where the Friday Night Dances were held. Never, under the penalty of death or banishment, would one consider trying to visit the other side. Two guardians were posted permanently, one to each dormitory, to see that no breach of this rule ever took place.

I was directed to my new guardian for the following two years. Her name was Clara Unwin. She was tough as nails and looked at you with a look that said, "don't you ever mess with me." Mrs. Unwin gave me the joyous news that I was assigned to a room in the dormitory immediately below her office...

One evening, late in the semester, word got around that there was going to be a raid on the women's dorm. This was exciting business. Soon a bunch of guys were gathered at the

far end of the basement hall, beside the elevator shaft. We had a very old fashioned elevator, with a grill at every floor that had to be opened in order to access the elevator. It did not have a good lock, so it could be opened even when the elevator cage was at another level. Our leader pried the grill open, eased over the edge, and dropped down to the sub-basement level. We all followed, one at a time, with the last one in closing the grill on the elevator shaft opening...

We soon found the tunnel leading under the cafeteria towards the east side of the dormitory... We finally arrived at the elevator shaft of the basement of the girl's dorm. We gathered around the grill, trembling with excitement. Soon we heard some girls... When the girls went into their rooms, we pried open the grill, and climbed up and into the basement level. Mission accomplished! Suddenly, around the corner came a girl who gave a loud scream and ran for her room. Many doors opened, and some guys disappeared. The rest of us scrambled out the rear exit, and tore back to the men's dorm. We were breathless, and sweating with nervous excitement. Most of us headed back for the washroom, where we tried to clean up, to cover any evidence of crawling



Marshall Gysi standing outside his residence, 49 years after moving in.

through the dusty basement. Then we quickly retired to our bedrooms.

The next day, the "Dorm Raid of 1955" was on everyone's lips... For me, it had been a tremendous success, providing me with all the spring excitement that one could ever want.

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