

Tales from the Excal archives

Thousands die in grad residence

By JAMES CARLISLE

Making up headlines at 3 a.m., that's the most vivid memory remaining from my time at *Excalibur*. After the layout was finally done and all the copy proofread, Hugh, Mark and I would stare at the blank spaces above the stories trying to think up headlines that were both witty and accurate. When it came to a choice we usually took witty over accurate. Production day was always a marathon of 16 hours or more so our judgement wasn't always the best by the end of it.

The next day, bleary-eyed, we would attend the meeting with the staff to go over the week's paper. Somehow the wide-awake staff didn't always appreciate the heads that seemed so brilliant in the middle of the night. It didn't help to explain that thousands of cockroaches really did die in grad res and with that headline a rather boring story would certainly be read.

When a labour dispute arose between the manager of the bookstore and his secretary, a staffer wrote a serious account. The manager had told his employee to get him some coffee. She complained that this wasn't in her job description. Eventually the dispute went before the Labour Board so this was front-page news by our standards. Our headline, suggesting a solution, "Tea for Two?" managed to offend the writer, the feminist left and the pro-administration right-wingers on the staff all at the same time.

One of our headlines, "Paper Won't Fold" was approved by the staff. The time I was most involved with *Excalibur* was in 1979-80 when Hugh Westrup and Mark Monfette were editors—probably the time of the worst financial crisis in the history of the paper. For much of the year it looked as if *Excalibur* would fold. We owed the University about \$40,000 and Youthstream was suing us and threatening to close us down if the University didn't. That pressure couldn't help but colour our year. It was with great relief that we were able to announce that *Excalibur* had a recovery plan but it was Spring before we were sure the paper would survive.

Reflecting the interests of the students *Excalibur* was concerned mostly with internal York stories. We did a whole series on student protests over the quality of cafeteria food. We may have been provincial but those really were the main concerns on campus then.

That year the staff took responsibility for all the paper's affairs—both editorial and financial—for

perhaps the first time. Previous staffs could take the survival of the paper for granted but we couldn't. We didn't always win: Hugh and Mark went without pay for several weeks when the University closed down our accounts; we lost a large part of the *Excalibur* office space and we had to accept a paper that was half ads.

I learned a lot as Chairman of The Board of Publications but my real education at *Excalibur* was in that first year when Hugh, Mark and Greg Saville taught me the elements of newswriting. Then, as now, anyone who put in the time got some editorial responsibility. Within a few weeks I was News Editor scrambling to learn the job and writing editorials that can only be called naive. (The only one I will admit was mine was "Tentanda Agnus—The Sheep Must be Tried".) Not all the editorials were naive, but mine certainly were.

I knew I progressed over the year because I tried to sell my first story, an interview with a visiting scientist, to the *Toronto Sun*. They rejected it. A year later they accepted a story without any editing changes. Jon Mann may have completed my education by convincing me I shouldn't want to write for the *Sun*.

My second assignment at *Excalibur* taught me some differences between the political parties. Kim Llewelyn sent me out to interview the federal candidates in our area. Vince del Buono, the NDPer, offered me a job. Bob Kaplan, the Liberal, bought me lunch. In our interview, Kaplan told me he entered politics because the law bored him. A few months later he was Solicitor General.

Excalibur was a great place to be in the late seventies and early eighties. There were problems—our money worries and the pressures of trying to learn our jobs quickly as well as going to school. But we really learned how to put a paper together. Hugh insisted that the layout was perfect. He made sure *Excalibur* looked professional. So even if in our inexperience the best editorial decisions weren't always made (Maybe Stuart Ross should have been allowed to run his interview with Tom Walmsley complete with four-letter words and sexist expressions.) and our view of the world was still immature (Jon Mann said he didn't think he would ever know enough to be a political reporter.), we learned how a newspaper should be run. The best part of *Excalibur* was the camaraderie. We helped and taught each other. Friendships were formed there which will last us the rest of our lives.

cont'd from p. 20

YORK PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE ASSOCIATION GENERAL MEETING—Thursday, October 23rd, 4:00 p.m. SLH 'A'. Topics include: Election of two Directors, Constitutional Ratification, Policy Debate. Speaker: ANDY BRANDT.

ECONOMICS, BUSINESS STUDENTS—Have you heard about AIESEC? An international experience. Find out more!

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LAWYERS FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY—"Should Ontario be a Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone? MPP Richard Johnstone speaks about his upcoming resolution, October 22, 12:00 p.m., Room 104 Osgoode Hall.

DEUTSCH-KANADISCHER STAMMTISCH—For those who speak German, for those

who would like to (like Sylvia L.), come out October 20, 12-2 p.m., S562 Ross. See you there!

TO ALL YORK STUDENTS—As you Board of Governors representative, I would like to inform York students that they can get a hold of me through CYSF at 736-5324 or leave a message in my mailbox at CYSF. If you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact me. **Mar Evans**

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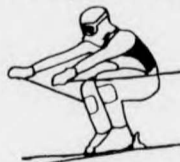
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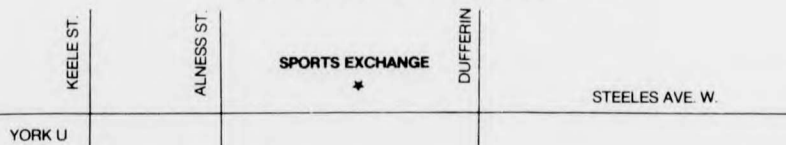


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