

The University of Alberta is Frum Hell

Interview by Dragos Ruiu and Randal Smathers

The cover of the University of Regina student paper had the following quote in large letters on the front page this week: "If I ever saw her I would ask, Who the hell do you think you are young lady?"

Lloyd Barber, U of R President He was referring to Linda Frum, author of *Linda Frum's Guide to Canadian Universities*. A book designed "to help students choose which school they want to attend," according to Linda. Catching her on her large publicity tour last week we got a chance to ask her this question.

According to her book we should make sure to "check out the bowling alley and curling rink in the Students' Union Building"

Linda Frum is the well dressed, conservative, very self-assured daughter of the Journal's Barbara Frum — and she has managed to arouse the ire of most university students who have seen her book.

"Yes, some students are upset, and I have received some bad press from university papers, but larger papers and the Globe and Mail liked the book. To be honest, those reviews matter more to me," Frum says.

Her book consists of alphabetic listings of universities, each being of a two or three page essay of Linda's impressions of the campus, followed by statistics like tuition costs. The material was researched by Linda on a one year tour of all campuses in 85-86.

A large complaint students have is that her figures are years out of date, and she often makes technical errors. Items like belittling

the U of R engineering department for only having one program when in fact it has three have outraged many people.

"There are some inaccuracies, and I'd like to correct them if I had time," Frum defends. According to her book we should make sure to "check out the bowling alley and curling rink in the Students' Union Building," (sic)

Frum's viewpoint stresses the social aspects of each university, and for her research she tried to talk to students on campus. "I had no pre-assigned appointments. I would go to the student paper, the radio station, student's council, try to sit down with students and talk to them."

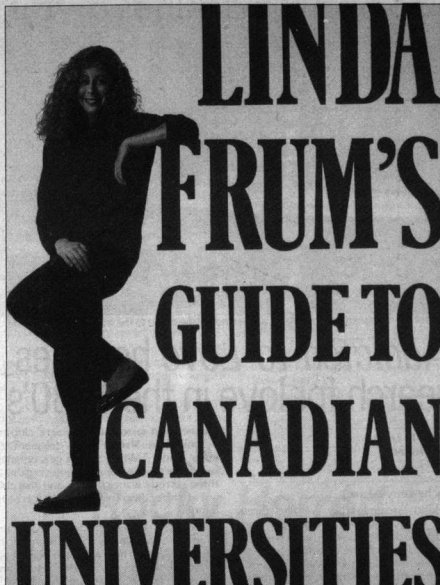
Important to her book are the campus bars and nighttime activities. "In my ideal school, you won't have to go home after school. There would always be something arranged for you to do," Frum says. Another listing you should not miss in her book is the ever important fashion list, where Frum tells you how to dress on each campus so that you can be trendy.

On each campus Frum chooses one major theme to the essay — the predominant impression she got from the campus. Often this impression is generated by seemingly trivial points. The U of A has money coming out of its ears. Queen's is "obnoxious" and "conceited", Calgary's students are "processed like cheese," U of R is hates itself, etc. You might get an idea why Ms. Frum isn't too popular on campuses these days.

"I do mention academics though — I tried to find out the strengths and weaknesses of each school," says Frum. But unfortunately, according to students she failed. "I think she is very biased, she is Eastern Canadian, and is very right-wing — you can tell from her book," said one student here who had read her book.

"I wonder if from reading this book you can tell what my opinions are! I tried to keep it out," says Frum. "But this is a controversial subject; it's unavoidable that you are going to offend some people with what you say."

Unfortunately, the only people she seems to have offended are those she is trying to represent. "The people who like this book tend to have less of a stake in university life," she admits.



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Her opinions, as hard as she tried to keep them out of the book, do manage to make it into the first three chapters of the book — where Linda gets to tell you what she would do if she were in charge. In "What's wrong with the system", she offers "three modest, moderate, and easily implemented suggestions." The top of her list? "Raise tuitions."

"University students almost always come from the richest 20% of families," she says.

Graduating from McGill in 1984, Linda Frum has never been too popular on campuses. In her final year, she started a self-described "radically conservative" magazine. The university shut it down because it didn't

want her using their name. "I was deemed public enemy number one at McGill then," she says.

Things haven't changed much. The majority of the comments in her book are negative. Ms. Frum is down on everything. It's almost as if this is her way of getting back at universities.

"I have no regrets," Frum states. "I think I did a pretty good job."

When asked why the publisher chose her to write this book she responded: "Because I'm enormously talented." After a few seconds she said, "I'm only j.k.ing..." Let's hope so Linda.



The most active Canadian comedy troupe since SCTV

The Frantics Talk

Interview by L. Robertson

Are The Frantics popular? That seems to be an easy question to answer as of late. If it's any indication, nearly half of the town of Sackville, New Brunswick came out to be entertained by the comedy foursome in late October. They also attracted a large crowd in Halifax, the starting point for their newest Canadian tour, "The Frantics Walk Upright."

Frantics member Paul Chato comments on their recent success: "We're very pleased with the way the tour has started out. We haven't been playing to crowds of less than a thousand people. Now we're looking forward to reaching the rest of Canada."

For those who are unfamiliar with them, the Frantics are the most talked about and most active Canadian comedy troupe since the gang from SCTV. Founded in 1979, the group includes Paul Chato, Rick Green, Dan Redican, and Peter Wildman.

The Frantics have consistently evolved from their origins in Toronto comedy clubs, U of T fraternity parties and opening spots for rock bands.

From their initial success, they put together more than 120 installments of "Frantics Times," a series of weekly radio shows that aired on CBC. The series ran for almost four years before the CBC, which they refer to as the "Mother Corporation," signed them up to produce their best known material to date — "Four on the Floor."

"Four on the Floor" was a weekly television series that generated some of the Frantics funniest sketches. In all, thirteen separate issues were aired, six of which found their way to American audiences via the pay-TV channel, "Showtime." The show was a quality piece of entertainment: it not only made the "Mother Corp." proud, but also created some rabid Frantics fans. Nevertheless, as

Paul Chato explains, budget cuts forced the cancellation of the show.

"Production values were very high for "Four on the Floor." It was a very expensive show to create and the funding for further shows just wasn't available."

But Chato is quick to point out that the cancellation hasn't slowed them down, nor discouraged them.

"We've been working on a number of things since then. Most notably, a series of six half-hour radio specials called "The Frantics Look at History." We've also got an album out titled *Root to the Head*."

The album which Chato is referring to is a collection of sketches performed by the Frantics at the annual Toronto Free Theatre. Some of the sketches were taken from "Four on the Floor," and listeners will recognize several characters from the TV show.

Touring has also been high on the list of Frantics' accomplishments, with stops in both Canada and the U.S. Chato offers his analysis of the Canadian audience and compares it to his American counterpart.

"Canadian audiences, at least for me, are a lot more fun to play for. They seem to be more open-minded and intelligent when it comes to accepting new jokes. The American audiences tend to be stricter in their appreciation of humour. They are easier to confuse and easier to offend."

Chato uses Los Angeles as an example. "Recently we played L.A. It's the type of city where you expect a truly eclectic audience: open-minded, and appreciative. Yet we had some people there who were very offended by our religious material. That seems to be common in the U.S. We just don't get that in Canada, not even in the "bible belt" of southern Ontario."

This seems to be in contrast with the SCTV style, which found more widespread acceptance in the U.S. on a regular spot on

N B C. Chato offers an explanation however, by pointing out that SCTV provided very little inspiration for the Frantics, and that the two styles are quite different.

"The Frantics Walk Upright' show will answer the mysteries left unanswered by religion, science and Trivial Pursuit."

"We've mostly been influenced by British comedy. Monty Python, National Lampoon, and the Two Ronnies, for example. I think that kind of material goes over a little better in Canada."

You'll soon have an opportunity to witness their brand of humour as the Frantics will "Walk Upright" in the SLB Theatre November 6th and 7th. The show springs partly from their radio version of the history of the world. The show includes nearly 60 sketches and runs for about 2 hours. Essentially, it covers major historical events from the beginnings of life to the present day — viewed from the Frantics' own perspective, of course.

Chato admits that there's a lot of material to cover. "Naturally we'll have to skim through it a bit. The year 1383 gets only a passing glance."