

Uptight in the '70s

From demonstrations to disco

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In the seventies students at York changed from relaxed, noncompetitive 'flower children' dabbling in radicalism, who thought university was a place to expand their minds, to subservient, anxious achievers worrying about marks, jobs and money.

These may be oversimplified stereotypes but they do reflect the evolution of students' self-image during the last decade. The change did take place. I was here and watched it happen.

Before 1969 York was a highly-structured, rather elitist bastion of conformity. At Glendon, men and women were strictly segregated to their own residences. Visiting was allowed between 2 and 9 pm. Formal dinners were held once per week, requiring jackets and ties for men and dresses for the ladies. A mark of social status was an invitation to a sherry party in the principal's dining room.

In the first two years of an undergraduate degree eight of the ten courses were compulsory at Glendon.

Radicalism finally caught on at York in 1969. Its popularity and the fervor of its adherents can only be compared with the phenomena of disco dancing today. Radicalism was a lifestyle as much as a political belief. The fashion at York was sparked by the "Year of the Barricade" conference. Student radicals and revolutionaries from all over the world were invited to York to discuss their views on society.

The Viet Nam war was in full swing during the late sixties. In 1969 York held a one-day moratorium protesting the war. This sort of protest was quite safe. The faculty went along with the protests. In some cases they were the principal organizers.

Students and professors seemed to be on the same side on most issues. After all there wasn't even that great an age difference between them in the late sixties. Many of the people teaching at York had been students during the days of the hippie movement in the United States before they came here.

When the seventies began, final exams were abolished in many courses. Students were sometimes asked to set their own grades and marks were completely abandoned by instructors. Editorials in *Excalibur* urged us to "get the competitive spirit out of education."

Students were told that the 'whole man' should be their ideal and they took it seriously. They really expected something to happen to them when they came to York, although new students weren't always sure what it was.

Of course we all knew that good jobs awaited us if we finished with a B.A.

I should not paint too idyllic a picture of the early seventies, however. Protesting might have been safe but a lot of other activities were not: the joys of drugs were extolled in the student press but the students experimenting with them were constantly afraid of drug 'busts' on campus. The administration made it quite clear that the police could raid the residences if they wished. Other students were afraid that police raids for drugs would uncover their caches of illegal alcohol—the drinking age was twenty-one and so every residence party broke the law. The Birth Control handbook, which is now given out in most Natural Science courses, was an illegal document and *Excalibur* staffers risked prosecution in 1969 by distributing it.

In the first two years of this decade the big issues were the American domination of our economy and the pollution problem. The formation of a pollution probe chapter and the protests against the Spadina expressway fit nicely with the hippie stereotype. Nationalism does not.

The major controversy in the spring and fall of 1970 was the fear of American domination of York. With 57 per cent of the new faculty non-Canadian, they had reason to be alarmed.

Our 'flower child' image was completely shattered with the invoking of the War Measures Act in Oct., 1970.

Fifteen hundred students gathered at a mass rally supporting the government's action in suspending civil rights. The professors spoke out against it. The students of 1970 were not hippies in the southern mold. They were a curious amalgam of 'flower children' with conservative souls.

In 1972, the budgetary axe fell. The president announced a budget deficit of \$4.1 million. Expenditures were to be immediately cut by \$2.7 million and that would have entailed dismissing 200 instructors.

It later turned out that the deficit was greatly exaggerated and the layoffs did not occur. In fact, when Slater resigned in Jan. 1973, it was generally accepted that he was taking responsibility for the error.

passion on any issue. Instead there were the usual stories complaining about food services. If *Excalibur* is assumed to reflect student thought and opinion, then it is evident that the only event which aroused vehemence and indignation in the York student of the late seventies was his dinner. Perhaps enrollment could have been boosted if the university had spent more money on chefs' salaries and less on the professors'.

There were exceptions of course: a flurry of excitement ensued when the United Left Slate, under the leadership of Dale Rich, took over CYSF. A record number of candidates were nominated in the 1976 CYSF election. The leftists were turned out of office and the electorate breathed a sigh of relief, stopped thinking

many apparent changes are really just changes in fashion. Much of the lip-service given to the women's movement falls into this category. In the late sixties students elected a 'Snow Queen' to preside over the winter carnival. Both men and women were sold in 'slave auctions' to raise money for the United Appeal. Those activities would be inconceivable today. We have institutionalized the women's movement with the forming of the Women's Centre and the appointment of a Women's Affairs Officer on CYSF. However, striptease shows were held before sell-out crowds in 1971 and 1975 (one was broken-up by a bomb threat). Such an event could not be held today for fear of violence but if it were tried there is no doubt that the largest auditorium on campus could be sold out. We have institutionalized the liberation movement in the seventies but we haven't changed people.

Still there are basic differences between the students of the sixties and those of the seventies. The optimism of ten years ago is gone. Students no longer come to York to expand their horizons; they want to be trained. The business and law schools are full but how many graduate students are there in Classics or Philosophy?

What happened in the seventies; how did this come about? The policies of the administration haven't been modified. Except for the President, few senior officers have been replaced. John Becker, who deals directly with most student organizations, was appointed in 1969.

The paternalistic attitude of the administration has remained intact. Certainly the BOG minutes are not longer kept secret and we have students participating in both Senate and BOG meetings, but important decisions are still made without student consultation. John Becker evicted student clubs on 24 hours notice in 1974 because he had better use for the space. This year he will probably reallocate the *Excalibur* lounge, despite our protests, for the same reason.

The faculty has become more conservative academically: ungraded courses are no longer popular. They have become older and less idealistic. However the faculty are subject to the same pressures as the students and we must look elsewhere for the causes of change.

In the early seventies we were still reacting to the international movement to the left. This movement was brought about, in part, by the horrors of the Viet Nam War and the resultant peace movement on one side and economic prosperity on the other. The government encouraged us to drop out with programmes such as the Company of Young Canadians. These factors certainly do not account for the whole trend but they were important.

There was a strong feeling that anyone could drop out, 'get his head together' and then drop back into society. In Canada, we had it both ways: the media sold us the peace movement and Haight-Ashbury yet we didn't have to worry about going to war.

After 1972 the whole situation changed. The media started feeding us a much slicker, more commercial product. With the continuing economic crisis, students became more concerned with the acquisition of marketable skills. Anyone who 'dropped out' risked not getting back in.

In the sixties, it was felt that everything was getting better. In the seventies, everyone knew that everything was getting worse. As the economy deteriorated, competition increased. The swing to the authoritarianism of the right is world-wide. It's not surprising that we see it here at York.

For all their idealism, the students of the sixties did not change the world. I may be accused of looking back with nostalgia, to the halcyon days of my youth; however, being a student ten years ago was a lot more fun than it is now and that is a fact.



Even if the budget deficit of 1972 was a false alarm, the trend was set. Although the master plan for York called for a college to be added every year, no more college buildings were constructed after Bethune opened in 1972. Tuition fees were raised and students marched on Queen's Park—led by President Slater—to protest.

In Feb. 1973, 6,000 York students took part in the province-wide fee strike by refusing to pay their second term tuition installments.

By 1974 a sea-change had taken place in student opinion. After this time the stories in *Excalibur* were rather boring. There were almost no references to events outside York campus and major political, environmental and social issues had disappeared from its pages. No causes were espoused and there was no show of

about student politics and again became the silent, somnolent majority.

Students did hold demonstrations. For example hundreds of York students marched against cutbacks in 1976—the administration provided free transportation to the demonstration. However, these marches were born of economic self-interest, not in support of a principle. The students of 1976 were not marching to support social justice. They wanted a larger share of the economic pie.

During the YUSA strike last year, some students occupied the President's office to support the strikers. However, student council leaders and the majority of the students just wanted a return to normalcy. They didn't care who won.

It may be argued that students are not really very different now. It is true that