

I n - D e p t h

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of things that we've used to (generate) discussion on the immediate political issues in Canada or across the world. And then things like the question of (abortion and) euthanasia are "long term" issues which we've perhaps brought in when they come to the fore."

Besides focusing on important issues, the forums occasionally feature prominent guests such as Mr. Dean Rusk or Gen. William Westmoreland. Such speakers were usually procured for a forum appearance thanks to the help of some of Prof. MacGill's other colleagues: "There was a period when I had colleagues in other departments who brought in guest speakers to the university and I was able to get them into the forum; sometimes simply getting them to come in after their public lectures and inviting them over for coffee afterwards. (However) it was difficult to get the students in the house to go to the lectures beforehand, so that sometimes you would get these rather eminent people ... and students sometimes wouldn't have a clue who they were."

On the occasions when the forum participants were aware of the eminence of certain guests, a certain degree of excitement was often generated: "These types of forums were well-attended and they were quite exciting. I remember Dean Rusk insisting on our tape recorder being shut off before he answered one particular question, I can't remember what it was, but everyone thought that was very exciting that we had to have all the tape recorders switched off before he said anything; so that no one would have any record of what he had actually said."

In particular, Prof. MacGill recalls the evening when Gen. Westmoreland visited Bridges House: "Westmoreland was actually quite delighted that he could actually come to a university without starting a riot because at that particular time all the protests against the Vietnam war were going on in the United States and he didn't dare go to a U.S. university. He was quite amazed that he came to UNB and everything was quite peaceful; because there were no Canadians dying in Vietnam. I don't recall (the students) being particularly hard on him: I think they weren't anywhere near as hard on him as

American students would have been. This was around the time of the Kent state incident (where four U.S. student protesters were killed by National Guardsmen)"

In addition to the well-attended sessions with prominent off-campus guests, the forums occasionally featured guests from the university proper who were able to generate a considerable degree of interest (and controversy). One such figure was Dr. Norman Strax, who participated in an October forum in 1967; while Prof. MacGill recalls little about what specifically was discussed during Strax's visit, he does recall that the event was extremely well-attended with upwards of 50 to 60 people cramming into the Resident Fellow's apartment to participate in the proceedings.

Similarly, comparable numbers

turned out in March of 1986 to attend a forum entitled "Current Issues on Campus" hosted by John Bosnitch - then president of the UNB Student Union. Blessed with an acumen for oratory, the notorious student politician seemed to hold the entire audience, including the cynics, under his sway: "(The Bosnitch forum) was very interesting because he had enormous charisma. There were quite a few students in the house who, when I talked about inviting him in, were very critical of Bosnitch and were anxious to say what they thought of him and what he had been doing. However, when he appeared in person, he more or less had them 'twiddled' around his little finger; he was immensely intelligent and had a great gift of the gab and he



Prof. MacGill's apartment has seen many forum guests over the years from the infamous: Norman Strax and John Bosnitch to the famous: Dean Rusk and Gen William Westmoreland.

could out-argue these people, perhaps due to his being a little bit 'playful' with the truth".

When pressed, Prof. MacGill divulges that often the most satisfying forums were distinguished not by the presence of a controversial or famous guest, but rather by a university colleague: "In a general sense ... the most successful (forums) were ones which involved UNB faculty members, not these very eminent people. What I regarded as the most successful ones were those where you got a very stimulating and interesting discussion going between the students and the visitor; the idea was to keep the lecture part as short as possible so that we could get into a

discussion, rather than just questions and answers. The 'famous people' tended to have much larger egos so they tended to monopolize more. This is one reason why in recent years I have had a lot fewer of these eminent people, although there are perhaps other reasons".

One frequent campus guest was Mechanical Engineering Professor Lou Torfason, who, accompanied by his pet boa constrictors, never failed to draw a crowd of curious (and often timid) onlookers: " (Having Torfason as a guest) was an idea I had borrowed from Leo Ferrari who was the resident fellow at the time in Harrison House ... I discovered that he had had Lou Torfason in, who had these pet snakes which included a

boa constrictor of fairly substantial size, and various other smaller snakes of different sorts. I think in Harrison one of the smaller snakes actually got away and was loose for months and was finally discovered by Leo Ferrari's cats down in the basement."

"For several years (having Torfason in) was a very good opener. He did

actually tell us quite a lot about the snakes and their biological and anatomical features; so it had a certain educational value, but I must admit the main idea was that I usually started the year with the thing and it seemed to be a very effective way of getting the students who might have been a little bit nervous about coming into the apartment (of the Resident Fellow) to actually break the ice."

"It was always very interesting, because people were always absolutely terrified when they first came in. In the slides that I have taken, you can see people, initially, being very gingerly, but then later on as the slides go on you see them with the boa constrictor wrapped around their neck and draping it across several people."

In addition to such snake "taming" sessions, the forums have gradually branched out from traditional group discussion on a particular topic or issue:

"In recent years the forums have broadened out, we have theatre visits for example and over the years we have had concerts and musicians in; and after I got a video machine I started showing 'unpopular' movies which I felt people ought to see, so there is quite a considerable variety of activities hidden under that name. what we have been talking about largely was the traditional sort of thing that it started with, which of course continues but not on the same scale."

As yet another school year gets under way, Prof. MacGill has several forum guests scheduled including Lt. Governor Margaret McCain and local writer and former UNB Writer-in-Residence Bill Gaston. However when questioned about the future, Prof. MacGill's only concern is "that the forums will go on forever".

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