



Sleep

STORY BY
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FROM THE POSTWAR HOUSING CRUNCH
TO COLUMBIA'S OWN HAIGHT-ASHBURY,
MU STUDENTS HAVE SCRAMBLED TO FILL
THE NEED FOR FOOD AND SHELTER.



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The Mizzou campus once was surrounded by huge rooming houses that were homes away from home for students trying to stretch their budgets. This building at 709 Hill St. once housed 24 women.

JUST ABOUT EVERY COLLEGE STUDENT has lived in one of these places or knew someone who did. Maybe you remember that mildew motel in a dank basement apartment where laundry left out too long sprouted mushrooms. Or how about that cockroach condo with a resident population of insects that had evolved into a super race of unsquashable bugs?

Tom Schultz, BJ '56, remembers one basement lodging in particular from when he spent a summer in his Kappa Sigma fraternity's annex. This was well before the days of universal air conditioning. Schultz, now an MU development officer, decided to live in the basement to avoid the summer swelter. Then he discovered that his roommates included a battalion of bats that migrated through the basement each night. "One of them landed on me one night, and that was all it took," Schultz says. "I charged up to the housemother and told her I was moving upstairs."

As a wide-eyed freshman living in the frat house, Schultz had the bottom bunk, and a grizzled World War II veteran who was probably all of 25 slept in the top bunk. The radiators that heated the sleeping rooms couldn't be adjusted. They were either on or off — nothing in between. "In order to kill the germs, they left the windows open at night," Schultz says. "It was ice cold, but there were no germs." He woke up one snowy night and peeked at the guy on the top bunk. "He had snow on his hairy chest, and he was

& Eats



FILE PHOTO BY ANNE E. YON

sound asleep," Schultz says.

To be fair, for every wretched hovel a student has called home in Columbia, there also are plenty of perfectly comfortable off-campus apartments, places that are clean, roomy and reasonably priced. But it's much more fun to swap stories about that dump you somehow managed to survive, that house or apartment that was a bridge between Mom and Dad's place and the real world.

That's because college life is much more than classes and library study sessions. It's also a crash course in personal

growth and independent living, a time to learn about balancing a household budget and expanding your cooking repertoire beyond boxed macaroni and cheese.

There's no better way to learn than to set up housekeeping by yourself or with a few roommates. Much has changed for Mizzou students through the years, but one thing hasn't: They all need a roof over their heads and food in their stomachs.

THERE GOES THE NEIGHBORHOOD
THERE'S A COROLLARY OF THAT RULE FOR college towns: If you throw a rock from

Generations of Mizzou students have chomped down at Ernie's on Walnut Street and considered its signature sandwich, the Twin Chopped Cow, one of the basic food groups.

any edge of campus, you're likely to hit a student neighborhood.

Columbia has always had its share of student enclaves, beginning with the area known as Campustown, a bustling district of boarding houses and businesses that started just across the street from Jesse Hall. Campustown has been absorbed by the University and is now a quadrangle named in honor of the late

Gov. Mel Carnahan, JD '59. But the East Campus neighborhood still bumps up to the edge of Mizzou, and it's still a hotbed of student housing where once-stately homes have been cobbled into beehives jammed with student apartments.

During the counterculture days of the 1960s and early 1970s, Columbia even had its very own — although much tamer — version of San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury hippie district along Paquin and Waugh streets north of campus. Love may have been free there, but rent sure wasn't. Student demonstrations along Paquin later in the '70s led to Columbia's first rental housing inspection law.

Speaking of free love, a crowded casbah of small apartments, duplexes and even war-surplus Quonset huts at the south end of College Avenue earned the title of Sin City because it promised the salacious possibility of unsupervised romance.

As more and more students brought their cars to college, student neighborhoods hopped to the west side of town along Stadium Boulevard, where investors in the 1960s built giant apartment complexes such as Gatehouse Apartments, Holiday House and Tiger Village.

What's the attraction of off-campus living? For some, the prospect of living without the rules and regulations of dorm or Greek life is appealing. But many students would say that cost is the most important consideration. The more roommates you can cram into an apartment, the cheaper it is for everyone.

That's something else that hasn't changed for MU students. Cheap is good. Years ago, living expenses made up the largest portion of college costs. The 1907 University bulletin advised that "board and lodging with private families may be had for from three to five dollars a week."

By 1914, the MU bulletin estimated these yearly expenses for students: \$35 for fees, \$135 for board, \$50 for rent,

\$25 for laundry, \$15 for books and \$40 for miscellaneous expenses. The bulletin noted that "expenses for women will usually be \$75 higher," though it didn't say why.

Even the University administration picked up the mantra that thrift builds character. "Students are advised to live simply and avoid needless expense," the 1943 bulletin soberly advised. "Parents should not permit excessive expenditures for any purpose. The attempt to maintain one's self on a semiluxurious scale of living is not only unnecessary but detri-

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mental to good scholarship, conduct and health." The amount a student of limited means would spend each semester "need not exceed \$200," it said.

For Bill Taft, BJ '38, MA '39, his \$7-a-month room in a Campustown building was a step up from the year before, 1937, when he and one other student shared a tiny basement place closer to downtown Columbia.

Years later, when he was a professor in the J-School, Taft went back to look at his old digs. The building was still there in the 1960s and still housed students, he says. "I think they had 12 people living in that little basement in double-decker beds with two-by-four walls."

Compared to that basement, his Campustown place across from Jesse Hall was positively palatial. "It was right on Conley Avenue. You couldn't get any better than that," Taft recalls. Everything



was within walking distance in Campustown. Gaebler's Black and Gold Inn, where Taft worked in exchange for his meals, was just down the street. When he wanted a culinary change of pace, Harris Café and the Piggly Wiggly grocery store were just a few blocks up Ninth Street.

Renting out rooms to MU students put food on the table for many Columbia families. When Donald Hayden arrived on campus as a freshman in 1933, his widowed mother decided to come to Columbia and start a rooming house for students. Campustown was the logical location. Over the next several years, her business bounced from a house on Conley to one on a nearby cul-de-sac called Allen Place, and finally to a home on Missouri Avenue.

"I expect she charged all of \$5 or \$8" a month for lodging, says Hayden, BA '36,



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World War II veterans who flooded Mizzou in the fall of 1946 mistakenly thought their days of standing in line were over. This battalion of ex-GIs, above, waits for emergency housing assignments. Married vets and their families made do with accommodations in slopped-together shacks and rickety trailer courts such as Fairway Village, right, south of Rollins Field.

MA '37, a retired college professor who lives in Tulsa, Okla. Ten dollars would have been out of the question during the height of the Depression. "A dollar would go a long way then," Hayden says, "but getting that dollar was the difficult part."

Like many other students of that period, he worked for his meals by waiting tables at the Topic Café, a Campustown eatery near Gaebler's. "An hour equaled a meal," he recalls. "We shared tips, but there wasn't a lot of tipping going on."



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CHANGING HABITATS

PERHAPS NOTHING CHANGED THE HOUSING scene at Mizzou more than the crush of World War II veterans, lured to college by the promise of GI Bill benefits. MU scrambled to find room for them all. When enrollment almost tripled to a record 10,236 students in the fall of 1946, the University shipped in dismantled surplus

barracks and put them up as temporary dormitories. Married vets and their families crowded into trailers and flimsy shacks in settlements they called Dairy Lawn, GI Village and Pneumonia Gulch.

Columbia church leaders asked their congregations to make room for students in their homes. Many did, but the supply of living space didn't come close to meet-

ing the demand. The University tried to get a handle on enrollment with a policy that said students could not register for classes without proof that they had a place to live in town.

That new rule, though, drove many would-be Mizzou students to accept any living arrangement. One classified ad in a Columbia newspaper shows what students were up against that fall: "Three students (male) desperately need elegant accommodations: bath, lights, innerspring mattresses, etc. Will accept empty garage, chicken coop or tool shed."

With postwar rationing still a fact of life, students offered scarce nylons, car tires and even sugar as rewards for leads on available rooms. Another classified ad around that time demonstrated that rental housing was still a seller's market: "Semester's free rent in new home for student who can secure 1946 model car for me. None other need call."

Until the early '70s, the University made a game attempt at regulating off-campus housing. Students could live only in houses and apartments approved by MU's housing office. University inspectors had a bare-bones checklist: For each student there had to be a bed, a desk, a chair and a lamp with at least a 60-watt bulb. The rules set a limit of eight students to a single bathroom, and they required a minimum space of 70 square feet for the first student and 50 square feet for each additional student, just a little larger than a good-sized prison cell.

The guidelines told inspectors to check for adequate heating and added, "This holds particularly true for former porches." But MU's longtime off-campus housing director, the late Howard Huskey, acknowledged that inspections weren't always up-to-date. He spent most of his time "absolving differences" between landlords and student lodgers, Huskey said in a complaint memo to his boss, Dean of Students Jack Matthews.

One of the problems, according to Huskey's 1957 memo, was that "the householders still visualize their holdings

as being of the same quality and comfort as the day it was purchased ... Students are very anxious to find accommodations as convenient as these, but after they have been in the property for a while, there are rumblings of discontent."

'IT WAS TERRIBLY RUN-DOWN AT THE TIME. HOWEVER, IT WAS AN INTERESTING PLACE WITH A BIZARRE CAST OF CHARACTERS.'

New rental properties revealed a higher level of accommodation, Huskey wrote: "Unfortunately, many of these facilities go unoccupied because of their distance from the University." He had put his finger on the issue. As with all real estate, the three most important factors in off-campus rental housing are location, location, location.

EAST CAMPUS BOOGALOO

THE EAST CAMPUS NEIGHBORHOOD, across College Avenue from the White Campus, has always been a favorite student living spot, perhaps as much for its cheap rent, shady streets and funky old houses as for its proximity to campus.

Retired anthropology Professor Clyde Wilson has lived in East Campus since he came to Columbia in the early 1960s. Over the years, he has watched as the neighborhood turned into a student ghetto with all the attendant headaches: rowdy weekend parties, litter and congested parking.

As a Columbia City Council member and former mayor, Wilson introduced the city's housing inspection ordinance in 1974 and shepherded it through the council. Some landlords do a good job maintaining their rental units, but others see them as investments rather than homes, Wilson says. "I saw the condition of some of the houses, and they were not the type of places I would want my children to live in."

Many had no smoke detectors. "In one case, a shower had been built on a landing between the first and second floors, and the water just drained through the floor," he says. Some landlords weren't taking care of their property and didn't care what students did as long as they could rent it again.

Wilson has also seen East Campus begin a turnaround, led by homeowners who volunteered to upgrade their zoning from apartments to single-family homes. In 1996, the entire neighborhood was listed on the National Register of Historic Places, which opens the way for owners to earn tax credits for renovations.

People who dismiss East Campus residents as antistudent grumps are missing the point, Wilson says. "We like the neighborhood, and part of the thing we like is the environment created by the students, the rhythm of student life," he says. "We know it's here to stay; those big houses aren't going to become single-family dwellings again."

The everything-within-walking-distance convenience even closer to campus landed Donald Tepper in a seedy apartment building at the corner of Hitt and Paquin streets a few blocks north of the Memorial Union. It was an elegant address when it was built in 1911, but the old building had fallen on hard times when Tepper, MA '73, took up residence in 1972. Probably hundreds of MU students called the place home before the University bought it and demolished it in the early 1990s.

"It was terribly run-down at the time," says Tepper, who now edits *PT Magazine* in the Washington, D.C., area. "However, it was an interesting place with a bizarre cast of characters. There was a would-be pro golfer, a would-be artist, a burnt-out hippie. The residents were a combination of MU students, MU dropouts and a few aimless kids."

Depending on the size, rooms rented for \$35 to \$55 a month. Shared bathrooms were down the hall, Tepper recalls. "They were in such poor condition that a



BOONE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY PHOTO

Town and gown rubbed shoulders on South Ninth Street, above, at hangouts such as Booche's and the Harris Café. Part-time jobs put food on the table for many students. This trio, right, including the late Harry B. Robinson, BA '28, BS Ed, MA '33, center, earned 25 cents an hour in 1925 busting suds in a cafeteria at the original Missouri Bookstore building.

places the floor had rotted away through the ceiling of the bathroom below."

Still, "it was incredibly convenient, and it was cheap," he says. "I didn't mind living in a somewhat grungy place."

There were no leases to sign, no references to provide, and in some of the cheaper rooms a new, low-rent resident turned up almost every month. Tepper remembers one who took the Rolling Stones' advice and painted his room completely black.

The apartment building, he says, "was kind of an intersection for a lot of people who ordinarily would not have their lives



PHOTO COURTESY OF HARRY B. ROBINSON

intersect." That accidental intersection of people and their lives is one thing that can make off-campus living so much fun. Students who band together in search of cheap rent discover friendships that last for decades.

Or not. A 1976 housing guide for Mizzou students touched on one common irritant of apartment life: "Some students have been upset to find that their room-

mate comes complete with a companion roommate of the opposite sex."

Then there are always those roommates who play Pink Floyd albums at 3 in the morning or spend their rent money partying. And everyone has probably had a hygiene-challenged roomie who never washed a dish or picked up a sock. Maybe that's something else about student life that never changes. ☼