



**S**PRING WAS JUST THE BAREST WHISPER in the air back in March 1974, when maybe the wackiest student craze ever caught colleges across the nation with their pants down.

Sure, there was more serious stuff going on. There was Watergate. A worldwide recession hovered on the horizon. The energy crisis had American motorists queued up in endless lines at service stations. And on campus after campus, college kids went goldfish swallowing one better. Suddenly panty raids were passe. These cheeky students—men and women both—decided to let it all hang out. They took off their clothes and high-tailed around to the delight of cheering crowds. They dashed naked across classrooms and commons. They scampered *au naturel* through lecture halls and libraries.

It was called streaking.

Things got off to a little slower start at Mizzou, but they don't call Missouri the Show-Me State for nothing. Boy oh boy, did we ever show them plenty.

That spring, MU earned the national streaking title in one astounding night of foolishness and frivolity. On March 5, students in record numbers doffed their clothes on Francis Quadrangle, lined up in front of the Columns and dashed through the stone pillars. As many as 12,000 onlookers shrieked and chanted: "Streak—streak—streak—streak."

Wearing only tennis shoes and smiles, Mizzou students happily obliged. In no time the count climbed to 100, then 200, then 300. When the last bare bottom trotted through the Columns the count stood

## Alumni recall national exposure 25 years later

BY JOHN BEAHLER

at 609. It was more than enough flesh to put Mizzou at the apex of national collegiate nakedness.

ABC Radio reported the record-breaking tally just past midnight. MU didn't exactly throw in the towel, but it wasn't able to hold on to the crown for long. Within a few weeks more than 1,500 students at the University of Georgia had outstripped Mizzou's mass disrobing.

How did all this silliness get started? No one knows for sure. The peculiar phenomenon popped up first at East Coast colleges. Within days, campuses everywhere were trying to outdo each other.

In Orange County, Calif., three naked students dashed across campus through an icy rain. When they got back to their car, they discovered their keys—and their clothes—were locked inside. Four "bare-a-chutists" bailed out over the University of Illinois and landed in the buff to cheers from 6,000 flesh fans.

Closer to home in mid-Missouri, all but a handful of the 125 cadets at Kemper Military Academy in Boonville lined up in nude formation and jogged through downtown and back. Being out of uniform suddenly had a whole new meaning.

Here at Mizzou, Professor Walter Johnson was hammering out a lecture to his Econ 51 class when a streaker crept up behind him on the auditorium stage. Puzzled by all the laughter, Johnson turned around just in time to see the nude

dude disappear through a back door. Johnson didn't miss a beat, though. He looked up and dryly described the episode as "a visual aid for the gross national product."

Chancellor Herbert Schooling attributed the streaking scourge at MU, in part, to the warm weather "allowing students to get outside after being cooped in for the winter, and to release the tension and pressure from mid-term exams."

Well, maybe. But the administration hadn't counted on two other factors. First, there were the shadowy operatives of MU's Intramural Coed Underground Streaking League—or ICU Streak—who helped get out the word about where and when to press the flesh.

The Blue Blanket Lady took over from there. When temperatures climbed quickly into the 70s during the first few days of March, student inhibitions headed south just as fast. Fannies flashed all over campus. The first mass nakedness got under way the night of March 3, when hundreds of onlookers gathered on Kentucky Avenue. Male streakers by the dozen peeled off their clothes and paraded pell-mell down Kentucky, the street that separates Greektown from the women's residence halls in Dobbs Group.

The women there weren't about to be outdone. Lights flashed on and off in the dorm rooms; women stepped to the windows to dance in the all-together. That's when the Blue Blanket Lady made her first appearance on a Laws Hall balcony, wrapped only in a blanket that was gone in no time.

The next day, a St. Louis University radio station ranked the top 10 streaking schools in the nation. Mizzou, it seems, was No. 4. Not quite good enough for ICU Streak, so the word went out: "Tonight's the night. We're going for the record."

By early afternoon, crowds crammed the south end of Ninth Street on campus. Students with walkie-talkies alerted all to the imminent arrival of streakers—streakers on bicycles, streakers on motorcycles and on horseback, streakers who ran by with Roman candles.

Some sported distinctive fashion accessories along with their basic birthday suits. More than a few favored ski masks; others went in for motorcycle helmets. One modern-day Lady Godiva was mounted on a white horse wearing nothing but a 10-gallon hat.

The scene shifted back to Kentucky Avenue as the sun went down. But this time thousands were on hand. A nude band rock 'n' rolled in a frat house parking lot. The Blue Blanket Lady reappeared, dancing on top of a car, before she helped lead the charge across campus to the Columns and into streaking history.

It wasn't just students who made their way to the Quad. Townspeople flocked there to see what all the hubbub was about. Professors came for the show. Steve Shinn, BJ '50, MA '71, editor emeritus of *Missouri Alumnus* (now MIZZOU) magazine, was on the scene, and he saw more than he'd counted on. As streakers flashed through the Columns, he saw his son Alan, BS Ed '76, a freshman music student, pounding out a drum accompaniment to the proceedings. Alan now is a music professor at Texas Tech University.

"I said, 'Al, what are you doing here?'" Shinn remembers. "He said 'Dad, better yet, what are you doing here?'"

As a longtime observer of the campus scene, streaking was business as usual as far as Shinn was concerned. "You could plan on students doing something every spring about finals time or the end of the semester. Something was going to happen."

This time, everything went off with-

out a stitch—er, hitch. There wasn't any violence; police took a wait-and-see attitude. After all, there was plenty to see.

One of the few arrests for streaking at Mizzou came almost by accident. A carful of naked guys was cruising through campus when one streaker tumbled off the hood and sprawled smack-dab in front of a University policeman. The chuckling officer didn't have much wiggle room to avoid an arrest.

A few days after the great unveiling, University President Brice Ratchford testified at a legislative appropriations hearing about the University's budget needs. State lawmakers, though, were more interested in bare bottoms than in budgets. What in heaven's name, they asked, were these crazy kids up to this time?

One legislator allowed that streaking didn't bother him at all. "It's the first time the students have done something I understand," he said.

Not everyone was so understanding. In a letter to the *Maneater*, a woman student complained that she'd gone down to get an eyeful "assuming that anyone who would bare himself would have something worth showing." No such luck, she wrote. "I was confronted by a parade of guys more evocative of Woody Allen than sex idols."

On that grand night of nakedness, Joe Moseley found himself seriously overdressed. Moseley, AB '71, JD '76, was a young law student who had just sweated through his first moot court argument in Tate Hall. He was walking toward his car on the other side of Greektown when he ran right into all the shenanigans.

"I think I was the only person there in a three-piece suit. People probably thought I was an undercover officer," says Moseley, a former state senator and now vice president and general counsel for Shelter Insurance Cos. in Columbia.

Moseley still recalls the Blue Blanket Lady, the carnival atmosphere and the thousands of people packed as close as they could possibly get along the narrow streets of Greektown. "A patrol car got

caught in the crowd and could barely move," he says. "The police were sitting in their car watching people run around naked, when a streaker came running up from behind, jumped on the trunk and ran completely over the car."

Moseley doesn't see any especially deep social significance in all the shenanigans. "College campuses are fertile ground for a kind of fad. I think students saw it as a harmless way to question authority," he says. "A lot of people were there just to enjoy the view. They wanted to be part of breaking the world record."

And no, for the record, this soon-to-be Boone County prosecutor did not strip down and join the frolic. "I didn't know where to put my three-piece suit," he says. "I couldn't just leave it on the curb."

Wally Pfeffer, BGS '89, was also down there that night for a little look-see. He wasn't tempted to peel down for action, either. "I was a little too shy in those days," says Pfeffer, a Columbia-based insurance agent for Mutual of Omaha. "I waited until the following year, when a bunch of us attempted to rekindle streaking." This time though, "It just didn't take off like it did before," he says.

Streaking died down almost as quickly as it arrived, though a few students, like Pfeffer, tried to get it going again. That doesn't mean a new generation of students couldn't revive streaking some day. Maybe even this spring, on the 25th anniversary.

Who knows, maybe somewhere a few middle-aged streakers from years gone by—with varicose veins and paunches and balding pates—might even hold a historic re-enactment.

Pfeffer reflects for a minute on that possibility: "It would not be as pretty a sight, I can tell you that." ❁

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MELISSA GRIDES

