



1957

the way we REALLY were

By William Buck Trogdan

NOSTALGIA is a stupid thing – it makes you unhappily long for those days past when you were unhappily longing for these days now. Something is out of whack. So do not call this piece “nostalgia.” I do not long for those days and I did not long for these days. What follows is a distorted recollection of bits from some days past spent in Columbia, Mo., the home for 137 years of the University of Missouri-Columbia (a.k.a., MU).

1957: Twenty-one years ago. About a generation. I was in Columbia then (as part of the freshman class), wearing (like the other thousand males) tan Cramerton cotton twills (three other pairs in the suitcase, two tan, one olive green—the only colors available) and the now famous button-down-collar-button-in-the-back shirt. Oh yes, the pants had a belt in the back; for what purpose we didn't know, but then we had not heard of “planned obsolescence.” Collegians left the penny out of penny loafers.

ROCK-A-BEATIN' BOOGIE: Despite recent reports, we never used that phrase. And we didn't say “the living end, the most, take me to your leader” even if our songs did. Pre-pubescent kids (you know, the sapping-the-strength-of-America marchers and the burners of the Sixties) talked like that because they took our idiotic dance music for tracts and gospels. When they began writing their own music they would write better lyrics but lose our good rhythms. “Daddy-O,” and “cat,” and “wheels,” — all Hollywood imitations of the way we talked. We did say “I s-t you not.” We said that a lot.





with the unbelievable last name of Devine (as in miracle) continued. By the time the freshman of 1957 reached our seniority, an MU football team was Number One in the nation. For one week. It's the only time MU football (or basketball) has ever been Number One. Basketball in 1957? I did not see a single game during that year. Nobody else did either. I don't think the pigeons of Brewer Fieldhouse did, although the games were reportedly played in their spacious aviary.

ONLY X-ACTO: Andy's Corners was a little one-room white frame house that stood on a triangle of land formed by old Route K and Rock Quarry Road. Three or four miles south of town. It was not quaint and not picturesque. It was compact and efficient in getting 12-ounce Stag in returnable bottles (25 cents) from cooler to your hand. After 9 p.m. bodies plugged the doors like corks. If you wanted in after a movie, you came in through a window, climbing up the knee-high mounds of broken (no longer returnable) beer bottles. Any space unoccupied by a human being was occupied by cigarette smoke and noise. LOUD and obnoxious noise. In other words, the place was ideal for the intoxication of 18-, 19-, and 20-year-olds who worried far more (with good reason) about the draft than about examinations. One September (the month school used to begin in) night a couple engaged in your basic process of copulation in the parking lot of Andy's Corners. Most of us who watched had never seen *that* before. Where could we have seen it? The only capital X's we knew were on the boxes of X-acto knives. So it was that Andy's Corners continued the course of education that Jesse Hall (we had classes there) and Lathrop Hall (now, what else, a parking lot) stopped short of providing. We "learned about life" at Andy's and that's what we secretly hoped to get out of college in the first place. We knew we were being educated there. In Jesse Hall we weren't always sure.



ONE MORE THAN WE LOST: The summer before I arrived in Columbia, I heard it said every time I told someone that I would be attending MU in September: "(Clever, knowing smile) The party school, eh? Well, when are you going to get a football team?" In 1957 Frank Broyles (the Frank Broyles) came here as head coach. He stayed one year. He won one more game than he lost, and we all hailed the beginnings of a new era. Of course, we didn't believe it, but the need to hail new eras begun runs deep in the human soul. Our sarcasm fell flat. What Broyles started, a babyfaced coach

BEHIND THE GREEN DOOR: After a time, legend and historical truth have about the same effect on the popular mind. Which this bit is I don't know — the result was the same. In high school we had listened to a strange song called "Green Door" written and recorded by someone named Jim Lowe. It was a good song. All-the-way-to-the-top good. It was about a mysterious door of leafy hue behind which some unknown pleasures regularly took place. The song never told us what. Now the legend in 1957 was that Jim Lowe had been a student at the University. That information solved the mystery for us because there was only one green door in Columbia, and it was hinged to The Shack. We drank beer there and we talked there (we shouted and did something that we called "singing" at Andy's). We also drank in legend and touched fame in that strangest of all Columbia beerhalls. Mort Walker, we knew, invented Beetle Bailey there as he drew cartoons for *Showme* (our own humor magazine known across collegiate America — later it would receive credit for inventing "sick humor") on those rickety, initials-upon-initials carved tables. Even then, its interior was so intricately carved that it resembled one of those hand-carved ivory ball-within-a-ball objects the Chinese esteem. Tennessee Williams, before he had pulled out of the University in disgust with the English department, had sipped over those carvings. Never mind that Mark Twain had stood on the steps of Jesse Hall. History was at The Shack. To drink there was akin to drinking at the Cheshire Cheese on London's Fleet Street. We may not have learned history there, but we surely felt it. In social climate sick with rigidity and conformity, The Shack leaned toward every point of the compass and nowhere was there a true right angle. I think that's why — had it been our decision to find a logo for the University — we would not have chosen the six ionic Columns. Our choice would have been that Mississippi collection of porch flooring and tarpaper, like Sir Gawain's mysterious foe, bright green from top to bottom.

THE SILENT GENERATION: Nobody called us that then. We couldn't have understood it anyway, what with all the noise. Now there is talk of the late-seventies' freshpersons becoming a second generation of silent ones. To them I say: May your silence be as foolishly golden as ours! □