

# “THE CORRIDORS OF YTTERBOE HALL – CHRISTMAS DECORATING COMPETITION”

BY WILLIAM R. GRIMBOL

Mike and I were walking back from having a burger at the Quarterback Club in downtown Northfield, and it was pretty slow going. There was already a good 6 – 8 inches on the ground, and it was still coming down at an incessant pace.

St. Olaf Avenue looked a bit like an old British Christmas Card, or a long wedding aisle for a magical Cathedral. It was pretty splendid, and we both commented on its beauty.

We were dreading our return to campus, however, as we were to get our first glimpse of what our corridor had created for the Christmas decorating contest at Ytterboe Hall. Mike and I were Junior Counselors for the very first Paracollege freshmen class, and to say the least, this decorating competition was met with the enthusiasm of an enema

We could not even imagine what our motley crew had imagined to celebrate the corridor and Christmas. We trudged up the steps to the top of the Hill, and then some more steps to our dorm. We walked in, and were quite pleased to see a decorated tree in the center of the hall, and garland neatly trimming all the door ways.

I said with pride, “I am impressed, this looks alright, and they used snow covered icicles to decorate. It looks festive.”

“Those are not icicles, Bill, those are joints!”, Mike muttered.

We stared at one another, and stared again at our corridor’s entry to the competition.

Then we simultaneously yelled, “Guys, get the Hell out here!”

By the time the whole gang straggled out of their rooms, we were laughing so hard, we could barely breathe. It would be a most interesting and intimate year at Ytterboe. By the way – we lost!

# “PARACOLLEGE” by WILLIAM R. GRIMBOL

I clearly recall being impressed upon hearing Bill Narum and David Wee explain the concept of Paracollege. It was rare to see professors excited and enthused and being so animated.

We were told about the education strategies and paradigms used at Oxford and Cambridge University, and how Paracollege was modeled after those famous British schools, but would also reflect a more modern and uniquely American college perspective.

They spoke with passion of the importance of getting Paracollege students to be actively engaged in designing and developing their own courses of study, including a mainly self-selected reading list for the freshman year.

I thought about a few of the guys in our corridor, and was hard pressed to figure out how thirty-six issues of PLAYBOY, and a pretty amazing collection of Marvel comics, warranted such trust, but hey – who knew?

It took several months for the true spirit of Paracollege to kick in. Freedom can be quite overwhelming at first, and the guys certainly did their fair share of floundering and faking it. However, something happened when they returned from Christmas break, as they were clearly ripe to be creative; pursuing their seminars and tutorials and discussion groups with zeal.

I had been asked to be a discussion leader, and took it on with skepticism. What I found were gatherings of students ready to dialogue, debate, disagree, and seek to learn. Since there were no grades, the desire for knowledge seemed almost pure, and their raw energy showed.

I suspect Paracollege has pretty much vanished from Campus conversation these days. I know it must still exist in the hearts and minds and souls of those who participated in what was labeled “a great experiment”.

What I remember best, was how fully present these guys were to their education. They were engaged, involved, and inspired. They were in charge, and they knew it. It was a challenge, a charge, a calling. It was a giant step outside of the box. It felt awkward, yet right; clumsy, but sure footed. It was an education in motion, a process, a becoming.

I would bet it worked far better, and for more students, than anyone would admit. I think it was a smart risk by St. Olaf. I hope we all remember it kindly, and with respect.

# “BLINK” by WILLIAM R. GRIMBOL

50 years. We graduated from St. Olaf in 1971, and here we are, enduring the echoes of fascism, and trying to locate some hope in 2021. Where did the time go? It was like the blink of an eye we mutter.

My fifty went mostly in circles, until I married Christine, who demanded that I grow-up, which even she admitted – I DID. We had a son, Justin, who is my spiritual opposite, and best friend. I got married again, to Patty, and we created a Mayberry of a life, and enjoyed it for a few good years. Both Chris and Patty died early and hard.

I was a youth minister for forty years, and managed to chew my teeth down to nubs. I grew witheringly exhausted at trying to teach them religion; much ado about nothing. I always knew faith could not be taught, but I did a half decent job of inspiring belief in something which mattered.

There have been a swarm of losses along the way, including most of my belief in the Church, capitalism, and the American Dream. My faith still has a pulse, but weak, and I am presently trying to relocate my soul under the rubble of four years of Trump. I have a grandson now, and he is a bulbous goosebump.

Then there we these four years at St. Olaf. Autumns of golden yellow, which made one think of walking on the inside of a pumpkin. Winters wickedly cold and clean and bracing, and so stunning they could move you to tears – which would then freeze and hurt. Springs draped in lime lace and lilacs, and wafting with pleasure at the close of another chaptered year.

Who knew how such closure would soon recede to form a great ache, a private yearning for just a moment or few more hours with those wondrous wisdom seeking faces on the Hill?

Just a blink. So long ago. It is finished. But then...I close my eyes, and it is all there. No longer for the taking, but for the remembering. It is eternal, as it is unforgettable. It is still a home away from home.

I keep my eyes wide open for as long as I can.

# WHEN OUR LOSSES COME A CALLING

by WILLIAM R. GRIMBOL

There are those days, now and then, when our losses come a calling. They whisper in our ears, or hum tunes our souls know so well, we may wind up singing them all day long. They sound a lot like lullabies.

The images which flicker and dance in keeping with the melody, are delicate, light stepped, and agile. The movements swirl and twirl and glide, as if on ice. The faces hidden within the fire, are gauzy, even lacy, and cast no shadows at all, and give just the slightest hint of resemblance.

We listen hard. We look deep. We feel the presence, like the breeze made by a butterfly wing. It is just enough of a draft, to sense a caress which feels like the very tips of God's barked fingers.

We are deeply touched by the moment of their landing, and we can smell the lilacs of May on the Hill. We are keenly aware of the bittersweet taste which coats our throat all the way down to our heart.

We have, one might say, come to our senses, and we remember fully the love we once felt, and which now hovers about the loss of one we knew so well but briefly, and who now simply -- calls our name out loud, as we call theirs.

We are transported on these days of listening to our losses, transformed by the echoes of eternity we can finally hear. We are dumbstruck and dazzled. We cannot move, as we are too moved.

We recall with such clarity the golden leaves in which we played student, and how they formed a canopy like the innards of a pumpkin.

We remember the campus on those blizzardy nights, when tiny halos guided us home to beloved dorms and friends -- with whom we might blessedly talk all night. It was worship.

We reflect upon the raw grandeur of the lime lace which draped our sacred Ole space in Spring, and once upon a time had invited us all to fall in love, and believe we just might uncover or discover the very meaning of Life itself.

These lost faces, so wonderfully young and radiantly beautiful, smile as they grace the Hill lawns once again, walking upward toward goodness and peace, justice and joy, and all things unforgettable.

Those faces fade too quickly, and the day is done, and we return to Life as it is, and always has been, and we wonder what it might be like, where they went, and yet, we also tuck them in under blankets of gratitude, hold them close, and say goodbye again -- for the millionth time.