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The story of the first Techonian

or if it stood for anything.

How should I have answered? She was the vice-principal! Still, it was my responsibility as editor to decide what copy ran or got chopped. I looked her straight in the eye knowing that what I was about to say could spell the end of the Techonian followed by disciplinary measures for me and K.M. if they ever figured out who it was. The sound of distant drums pounded against my ear. I could hear the school chorus singing "Jerusalem," then Louis Armstrong lamenting that he had lost his thrill on Blueberry Hill.

Buoyed with such a profusion of support, I replied in a cracking voice, "Miss McCord, if you believe that freedom of the press should exist in this school then you know that I don't have to answer and I won't." I stood in front of her for one breathless moment anticipating her response. Beads of perspiration formed on my forehead. She said nothing. Was she waiting for Louis to finish? Or were the strains of "Jerusalem" just too much for her? She tossed her head back, turned on a dime with the precision of a drill-sergeant and marched back to her office. Wow! K.M.'s identity was safe and the Techonian lived on. To this day I admit to a quiet admiration for Miss McCord. She knew exactly what Kaki Moon meant and the innuendos the article thrust at her. She was testing me, even defending our right to editorial control. Whatever hurt or indignity she may have felt at the time, she harbored privately and with grace.

June arrived bringing with it that final wave of exams. The last edition of the school year was put to bed and that founding group of friends and colleagues scattered without having made any provisions for a successor staff to follow us. But clearly others took up the challenge. I met with some of them a few years later and probably shared the same story you have just read.

I think about Muni and Louis and Miss McCord from time to time. I catch myself humming "Jerusalem" while warmly remembering that homogeneous group of students who brought the Techonian to life and wonder if they, like me, still bore the hell out of their spouses telling the same Winnipeg and St. John's stories over and over and over again.

I also think about Freddie McGrath, Mr. Ridd's secretary who was the real hero of the Techonian that year. Sure, we gathered the material, wrote and re-wrote the stories and put each issue to bed. But it was Freddie who prepared the stencils and ran off each edition on that antiquated Gestetner we boldly called "the press". It was Freddie who gave up too many lunch hours so that the paper could come out in time.

The Techonian ceased publishing decades ago. Now, many of us will return to St. John's on the occasion of its centennial, hoping to capture lightning in a bottle and if we're lucky, re-live a few days of our youth. A handful might even recall that first eight-and-a-half by eleven-inch newspaper born so innocently in the minds of two wild and crazy guys high on Wynola and Jersey Cream. I can't imagine that it will return in this age of the internet and smartphones. Still . . . I would like to think that whenever a current or past student sends a text or e-mail evoking memories of St. John's, that the Techonian is alive . . . just living in another form.

The clouds have closed in on the mountains soon to grow faint - until tomorrow. It's been fifty-seven years since I said, "Miss McGrath, let's roll the press." The coffee has grown stale but that doesn't seem to matter much. Happy Birthday, St. John's. You really did make us reach for the stars, the stars where soon we'll meet up again with Mr. Beer in old room 37 and discuss the true meaning of ki yi, ki yi, ki yi yip.

Written with fond memories of and appreciation for Freddie McGrath - the best secretary a school could ever have and Jim Beer, home room teacher and mentor to many of the Techonian's founding staff members.



Freddie McGrath, "the best secretary a school could ever have", seen at the 75th Reunion in 1985.



Great teacher and mentor, James Beer, retired in June 1967. Photo shows him, his lovely wife and his last homeroom class at his retirement dinner at the Town & Country Restaurant on Kennedy Street.