

## STUDENT LIFE – 1950s

**Phil Williams '58:** The folk dance operation was really a big release from the strains of having to deal with the academics. We danced our heads off. We didn't care how accurate we were doing the dancing. We were doing the dances where the girls get spun around and their feet go out and fly out in the air and everything else. Well, one day this fellow shows up. I think he was a Balkan dance instructor, and he brought somebody else along. He was looking at what we were doing, and boy, was he ever horrified. He was determined to talk us into hiring him to teach all these Reed people how to do these dances properly. And of course we wouldn't have anything to do with it, and let him know, and he left and we went back to our usual having fun.

**Jerry A. Case '59:** KRRC was started while I was a freshman. One of the physics majors put together what was then known as a 'carrier current' transmitter which simply fed into the power lines at an AM frequency and could be picked up around the campus. He kept increasing the power input until he finally got a nasty letter from the FCC noting that the station had been picked up at the power generating station. After a while, somebody got one of the local Portland stations to donate some of their old equipment to the college, convinced the college to apply for an FM license, and voila!

KRRC was in the Doyle basement. The 'studio' was near the washing machines and was covered with scavenged egg crates for sound deadening. In the days I was there KRRC was mostly into classical music and talk. At the time, KRRC was about the only game in town for decent classical music and serious talk. A good friend of mine, Steve Piker '59, had a periodic program on which he talked about Beethoven for 30 minutes.

Early in my freshman year, someone wired together all the hi-fi's in the old dorm block so that records could be played in one place and heard in many places. I remember awakening one morning to the "Triumphal March" from *Aida* and, upon looking out the window, saw a number of people carrying a bed upon which sat someone in pajamas. When interrogated, said people said that the guy on the bed had always wanted to have breakfast in bed so they were carrying him to the commons to do so!

**Alice Moss '52:** My father drove me to campus on my first day, and as we were taking my stuff up to my dorm room, the first thing I saw was Gary Snyder '51 climbing up the side of the Ladd dormitory with rope and climbing equipment to visit his girlfriend, Robin Collins '51, on the third floor. He was dressed in a Tyrolean hat with a feather and lederhosen.

**Nick Wheeler '55, Physics Professor, 1963-2010:** Students were falling in love. There was one room in Winch reserved for heavy necking. The guy who came around and locked up the dorms at night locked up that dorm last, and he would let the serious people stay there until the last possible minute. There was a woman who regularly crawled in and out of the window in the Foster dorm. She was a free spirit, the daughter of a very well-known, wealthy man.

**Dorothy Moore Edlin '56:** All the freshmen women on campus were given this lecture by Ann Shepard '23 in Anna Mann. It was that the college was acting *in loco parentis*,

and that there was a big emphasis on the Honor Principle, and how we had to watch out for the view the community had about Reed. What she said was ambiguous but I took it to be giving us the message that the college would not tolerate any appearance of sexual impropriety, but it was only the appearance that really counted. I got the idea that we were being advised to engage in hypocrisy, but I may have not understood her correctly.

We were supposed to be pure. We had intervisitation on Sunday afternoon from two to four o'clock. The rule was that the door of the dorm room had to be open. At four the boys had to go. They just couldn't wander in and out at any time. We had the famous Skinny watching over us as a night watchman. He was a scary guy. On Christmas, the girls gave him a bottle of booze, so that he would get drunk and then we could stay out later without being harassed by him. The curfew was 11 p.m. on weeknights, and 2:30 a.m. on weekends, which was very liberal for a college in those days, very liberal.

There was a German student, Gerhardt Wendell, who was as sweet as could be. The story was that one night he crawled over the top of the Old Dorm Block through some passageway over the Sallyport, to visit his girlfriend Molly Cavanaugh '55 in the Kerr dorm. Dale Jorgenson '55, who has become a famous economist, made an honor case out of it, charging that Gerhardt had violated the Honor Principle by violating intervisitation. Gerhardt was expelled. I think Molly was also. There was a mass dislike of Dale Jorgenson at the time. But he held his own. It's hard for people who grew up in more liberated times to understand just how limited we were. Constrained. We had been raised that way, and we basically accepted it, but things were starting to change.

I had a roommate in my freshman year, Gloria Graham '56, who came from a Portland family. She had some problems with her parents over the liberalness of Reed, which she solved by getting married right away. She married Ivan Vesely '55, who was a nephew of Arthur Scott who taught chemistry. She solved the problem with her parents by becoming independent. There was also somebody named Leo deSaussure '57 who lived off campus with a woman. Somehow it became a matter of a violation of the Honor Principle. He got expelled, and there was a huge student uproar over it.

**June Burlingame Smith '56:** Those of us who were dorm advisors lived on the first floor of the dorms, and learned that you just left your window open. You had a sitting room and you had a bedroom. You opened the window in the sitting room, went to bed and shut the door between your bedroom and the sitting room.

**Vivian Tomlinson Williams '59:** There was curfew for girls. It was ridiculously early, like ten or ten-thirty. Since I had a first floor room, I let people know that if they needed to get into our dorm after curfew, just knock on the window. Because I thought that was just ridiculous. During the day, men and women could visit each other's rooms, but the rule was four feet on the floor during intervisitation. I was also in the habit of defying that.

Phil Williams '58 was in the dorm next door. Not everybody had record players back then, but he did. He had a real good hi-fi with a speaker system set up that went all over, into anybody's dorm room that wanted it. He would just trim some wire and stick it in the system into your room with an on/off switch, so that if he was playing records and you felt like listening, you could turn it on. His system was set up in the Westport social room. One day there was a big dorm advisor's meeting in that room. Phil

set up a secret microphone in the room that broadcasted over the speakers. We eavesdropped on the meeting in my room through these speakers. Nothing came out of it, it was just dorm advisor nonsense, but we thought we were so cool.

**June Burlingame Smith '56:** Reed was a place where you didn't have to have a date. Lin Frothingham Folsom '57 had an old hearse. We would say, "Okay, who wants to go to the movie?" and we would all pile in. When we got to the movies, it would be like a clown show at the circus—seventeen people would climb out of the car. One day we decided we were going to have a mini-Rose Parade on campus. We decked the hearse out with flowers, and some of us rode inside, others rode on top of the hearse, and we just started this impromptu parade. It was near finals time, everybody was totally exhausted and in la-la land, and the parade just gathered steam as we passed through campus.

**Michael Munk '56:** Paul Robeson was blacklisted at the time and forbidden to travel abroad. He had previously filled the Civic Auditorium in Portland with his concerts, but in 1958 people from those venues were afraid to be associated with him. So, FOCUS agreed to sponsor him, Tommy Bransten '58, who had been babysat by Robeson when he was growing up, invited him, and Robeson agreed to come.

This event taught me a very important lesson about the racial divide in this country. I was distributing posters for the concert around downtown but none of the establishments would accept them. Then I went to the black neighborhood, which was concentrated around North Williams Avenue. The response couldn't have been more different. As I started down the shops that lined the street, people came out to meet me from barber and beauty shops, taverns and night clubs, all eager to put up a poster in their windows. The proprietor of the House of Sounds record store offered to sell tickets to the concert. As a result, on the night of the concert, the Eastmoreland trolley buses stopped at Reed packed with hundreds of black people who had never been to the Reed campus before. There were about twelve hundred people in Botsford that night for the concert and at least one third of them were black. It was evidence that the black community was not intimidated by McCarthyism while the white establishment still cringed in fear in 1958. What a contrast!

The college did not support the concert. Sullivan was president then, and he told the papers that it was not a Reed College function, just a concert sponsored by a tiny student club. It was during his visit to Portland that Robeson received word the Supreme Court had ordered the government to give him back his passport. After the concert, we gave a party for Robeson at our place on SE Lambert Street. It was Robeson's tradition to have a steak dinner after a concert, so my wife Erika Zusi '60 cooked him a big steak. It was a memorable evening.

**John Graef '60:** We played six-man tackle football because we couldn't get eleven men out for the team. We played the Oregon State freshmen team that came out on a lark. Our quarterback was Vic Novick '55. Their quarterback was some soon-to-be Heisman Trophy winner who could throw the ball the length of the field. I remember them warming up. We were sitting there saying, "Are we *seriously* going to play these guys?" Mike Nelken '60—Big Mike—playing six-man tackle football was one of the funnier sights that you'd ever want to see. I remember an arm reaching out from a pile-up, and

this disembodied arm grabbing the ankle of the other team's runner and just not letting go. It was just an arm. It wasn't like a tackle. It was just this arm that was hanging on and hanging on. At halftime we were losing something like forty to nothing. Coach Jerry Barta decided he was going to give us a pep talk. We all gathered around, and Barta said, "The trouble with you guys is, you're all *gutless*." Somebody said, "You're right coach." And that was that.

**Michael Nelken '60:** We played athletic powerhouses such as Multnomah Bible College, Concordia Lutheran College, and Lewis and Clark junior varsity. Even in six-man football, the team outnumbered the spectators and the sport was conducted for its own sake, for the love of it. The uniforms that we wore had been blessed by generations of Reed athletes before us. The all-leather helmet and the shoulder and hip pads that we wore all bore the sweat of many prior stalwarts who have passed on into legend. Tim Rice '57 was our quarterback and probably the only guy on the team who really knew how to play the game. He was also editor of the *Quest* at the time, but the football activity didn't interfere with that because we had one practice before the season started and no practices after the season started. I was a linebacker and carried the ball a few times just to scare the other team, because I was the biggest person on the field at six-foot-four and 220 pounds. However, I had no concept of how to run. And Dick Levin '60, when he got the ball, always made a touchdown because he knew how to dance.

**Carleton Whitehead '41, administrator 1952-83:** Emilio Pucci '37, who became a big fashion designer for sports clothes, was quite a social animal. He got a master's of liberal studies from Reed. The master's program felt more ad hoc then. If a person had a particular pursuit and they got together with faculty and constructed a program, they could get their masters. Emilio coached the Reed ski team, which did very well. I think it won an Oregon state school championship that year. And he designed a t-shirt for Reed, the one with the big griffin on it.

Later, in 1958 we brought him back to Reed for a visit. He put on a fashion show at the art museum downtown. Then he took a sentimental journey to his old room at Winch. Later, we had a dinner for him. I gather he cut quite a swath on campus. You could tell because some women were just delighted to see him again and others wouldn't come within 10 feet of him. We asked some of the students if they would like to have Emilio put on a fashion show at the campus, and we got a number who said they would. We had a fair number who were going to come but never did. I asked what was the problem, and they said, "Well, we just felt we'd be too conspicuous, walking from the dormitories to the fashion show." Emilio took it in good style.

**Ocoee Peterson Miller '60:** There were only two campuses in the '50s that did not require women to wear skirts. Reed was one of them. I didn't have to wear cashmere sweaters that matched cashmere skirts and dyed-to-match shoes. I could go to class in blue jeans. I could have stringy hair. At Reed, they didn't care how you looked. You could go all over campus barefooted if you wanted. There was a fellow who went everywhere in a beautiful Roman toga. There was another fellow, Hugh McLeod '57, who wore a kilt and played bagpipes out in the canyon swamp early every morning, which just sounded soooo eerie and weird and cool and beautiful. What Keith Miller '57

had to do to stand out dress-wise and be really weird was to wear a suit. Boy, was that weird to have him come into Commons in a suit.

**Robert DeRight '60:** Reed was in many ways a self-contained culture. There was almost no television on campus, and it was ignored as a cultural artifact. The only time I recall watching TV on campus was when Reed was in the College Bowl. My friend, Mike Levine '62, missed a question about the Islands of Langerhans, the pancreatic cells that produce insulin, which may have cost us the debate.

Newspapers were rarely read. People just didn't follow current events on a day-to-day basis. People did go to movies. Foreign movies or art films especially would be sought out.

**Carol Burns '62:** There were no television sets on campus. There was no influence from television or any other form of popular culture. We weren't listening to The Beatles at Reed. Rock and roll was coming along, but at Reed we were listening to classical music and singing folk songs and labor songs. We were singing: "Shoeless, shoeless are we. Just as shoeless as shoeless can be. Because we don't get money for the labor." How goofy is that? We had no contact with popular culture, with television.

**Michael Nelken '60:** The intrusion of the outside world onto Reed campus was very, very limited. You never saw a newspaper lying around, you never saw a news magazine lying around, you never heard a radio or television news playing. Anybody who was keeping up with the outside world was doing it in a very quiet, personal way. And there certainly was no ongoing gossip about the activities of the mainstream culture. We were conscientiously remote and isolative by explicit wish—and as a semi-religious devotion. There was a little commotion with the Cuban Rebellion success in 1959 when Fidel Castro came to power. But even that commotion was just limited to one night when the news was discussed and shouted around a little bit. There weren't any repercussions the next day or subsequently. And there were certainly no flags waving to represent the various factions.

**Miriam Weitz Orzech '52:** There was a lot of listening to music. At Winch Social Room every week there was an informal concert and folk singing. Herb Gladstone, the professor of music, had a big record collection, and a huge marvelous record player. Sometimes there were formal concerts through these records at Winch. We'd all sprawl on the floor, sit around, I suppose drink wine. Everybody went.

**Phil Williams '58:** I ran the Capehart music room for three years. We played records in there, and we also had a harpsichord and a clavichord piano. Since I had the key to the room, Vivian Tomlinson and I and several other people would play baroque music in there. We would go in and use the harpsichord and play largely music from the Baroque era, chamber music.

My roommates and I had a really good audio system with a professional tape player in our dorm. This was an era when there weren't many things going on in audio. Other students didn't have their own music players. We went down to the surplus store and got several rolls of army surplus Signal Corps wire, and then around to the thrift

shops and got lots of speakers, and came back to campus and wired up the whole dorm block clear down to Anna Mann. All day long we played mostly classical recordings from our room that in any of the dorm rooms could listen to simply by turning on a switch connected to a speaker in their dorm room. Later on I helped build the transmitter for the first Reed radio station, KRRC.

**Michael Nelken '60:** There was a party every weekend and there was no barrier to any Reed person going to any party. There was a formal prohibition of fraternities at Reed and informally also, it seemed that there was an egalitarian atmosphere where just by virtue of going to Reed, you were acceptable to every other person that went to Reed.

Despite that, there were all kinds of people there. There were some people who dressed formally every day—guys who wore a white shirt and tie to every class, and girls who wore nylons and relatively formal dresses with crinoline slips—and then there were other people who showed up for class in a t-shirt and shorts and no shoes at all. They all talked to each other, and even if you weren't particularly friendly with someone who was at the other end of the spectrum, you always heard about what they were up to because the school was small. In that sense Reed was like a big fraternity more than a college. Because you kind of knew what was going on in everybody's life, and in that way it was, I think, a breeding ground for psychiatrists. I'm sure Reed has the highest per capita number of graduates who have gone into psychiatry and psychology of any school on earth. There were occasionally formal activities at the school. Dances, a couple of them a year, and concerts and plays. But most of the social life went on either on the steps of the library or in the coffee shop in the student union. The nice thing about social life at Reed was that anybody could talk to anybody any time. There were no cell phones then, so nobody was busy.

**Robert DeRight '60:** The student body was liberal, if not radical. There were a lot of family ties back to '30s radicalism in this country. For example, one student had been living in Mexico City prior to coming to Reed, because his parents had essentially exiled themselves there in the late '30s. They were radical-anarchist types.

Oregon at the time was very egalitarian. On the Reed campus there was certainly a faction that talked about Marxism and free love, but I don't think the school was large enough or threatening enough to have deeply-felt enemies. The Eastmoreland neighborhood next door was very conservative. There were a lot of students who lived or lodged in houses there, and I found no great animus.