

Memories of the Barracks: A Refuge for Rutgers Journalists on Livingston Campus

By Glen Weisman, LC'86

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The Barracks were a set of old U.S. Army barracks from the former Camp Kilmer which found a second life as classroom space for Rutgers' fledgling Journalism Department. Housed at the end of the Livingston College Campus, this last group of Americana used to house soldiers during World War II and had almost hauntingly survived into the 1980s.

Everything about The Barracks seemed old, broken, used up by the time I was to take residence in its hallowed halls and stuffy atmosphere.

It wasn't just the air in the classrooms that had been living there since General Pershing was a cadet or the creaky boards in the hallway, which were undoubtedly milled a century ago by men in overalls with long, dusty beards. It was also the facilities in and of itself.

The J-program was run on a shoestring budget. We were only students, but it wasn't hard to figure these things out.

There were new mainframe computers at the Hill Center on Busch, a very important thing for a university, but our equipment had lived out its glory days decades earlier in more noble settings. Our manual typewriters were hand-me-downs from The Home News, where reporters once banged out stories on crime, corruption and students high on LSD. Our radio studio was equipped with turntables, a board and monitors which may have once thrilled listeners at WCTC with the latest from Eddie Cochran or broadcast the shocking news of President Kennedy's assassination from the studios of WERA. Our TV studio, although not nearly as antiquated, was second rate at best. But there must have been some

talent on hand as some of us would go on to reasonable careers.

An actor named Richard Joseph Paul was a fellow barracks dweller who I would later see in a Burger King commercial and then in *Revenge of the Nerds II*, where I recall his character getting that key line, "The Nerds are back! And they're bad!" (Note to self: Stop watching so many late-night reruns.)

I took at least three classes at The Barracks, and taught two there. I had keys to the place, and though I didn't abuse the privilege, it was an occasional private refuge. It was like that crusty uncle, with an Old World accent, who told stories of places in time you could never visi

It was that stifling aromatic attic where you might take refuge and take inventory of those touchstones in your life. A place you go to experience all of those items still wrought with character, smells and memories, but whose best days belong to another time.

And so it was with The Barracks. In my time there, it was an outpost for the old world of media, where ghosts inspired by the dreams of soldiers and students lingered in the rooms and hallways, hoping to be captured and given new form in the modern world. Our metaphorical compasses (Army issue, no doubt) were gifted to us in those creaky old buildings, and they pointed to the radio stations, television networks and newspapers where we hoped our careers would take root.

Today many of those media institutions are like The Barracks – looking back on their glory days, if they have survived the latest modern era intact. In today's information age, you don't really need a space like The Barracks to become what we today call a "content creator," really a much less noble name than producer, reporter, writer, director or even deejay. Television studios are now carried around in people's pockets, integrated into a telephone and at the ready to record every event – the good, the bad and the stupid.

The last time I was to Livingston, it was a radically different place. The changes that have taken place on Route 18 have erased familiar signposts at the entrance to the campus. The "back road", Cedar Lane, has also undergone a transformation. I didn't much think about The Barracks when I was there, focusing instead on driving by The Quads and The Towers, which held those special, personal memories. (It's worth noting that I was among the first Livingston College students who moved into a floor in The Towers back in 1985. We'd returned to Livingston's high rise after many years in exile.)

So I spent some time looking for The Barracks online. I learned that there is or was a show called "Breakfast at the Barracks," but that's not at my Barracks. I've looked at some overhead views on Google maps, but I'm not sure if my Barracks is still there. And really, it doesn't matter. For me it will occupy a funky corner of my memory's attic – a place that inspired dreams.

Glen Weisman is a 1986 graduate of Livingston College at Rutgers University.

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