

Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador
My MUN Experience
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Throughout High School I worked long hours to succeed and do well. I wrote public exams in grades 9, 10 and 11 as there was no grade 12 at that time. The public exams were worth 100% of your final mark for every subject, (except Religion) at the end of the year. It was in grade 10 when Mike Galway, my homeroom teacher, asked me what I planned to do when I finished school. I told him I planned to join the Air Force. He suggested and encouraged me to go to University; and so my MUN journey began. Different career options were open to me but I chose education. I had a lot of great teachers and I felt if I were going to university, I wanted to be a teacher. I had no interest in Medicine, Commerce or Engineering or any of the other available options.

For the most part, my experience at MUN was enjoyable. My years at MUN were closely linked to managing my finances, finding a good boarding house, some social life and summer jobs which were necessary to enable my return to MUN in September. During those years we also made the effort to stay connected to our faith. Many boarding house owners were surprised that my buddies and I would get up every Sunday morning and go to Mass at the Basilica. I did a great deal of studying and learning. From September to May, including weekends, I was consumed with attending classes, studying, doing assignments, and preparing for tests and exams, and at times some social life. I tried to make up for the social life during the summer months. Another thing I always did was shower at the MUN Phys. Ed. Building rather than competing at our boarding house for the bathroom. Using our MUN ID card, we could avail of a fresh supply of towels. This made life a lot easier for me. Our careers were in sight. Our paths for life felt great.

September 1965, the start of my first year at MUN was traumatic and challenging. I was enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts-Education four-year program. The gap between high school and university was overwhelming. My boarding house was at the home of a widow on Merrymeeting Road. (\$15.00 per week, meals included, which was a lot of money “then”) She was a great and a generous cook and had a wonderful personality. This made life at MUN more manageable. Grants were available for Education students for the first two years. I applied for and received a grant the first year. I did not apply for the second year grant because after the second year, if you accepted the grant, you were required to go teach in rural schools for two years. I wanted to complete my four years straight.

Throughout the year, like my close friends, I worked long hours and had little or no social life. It was a time when I really did not know how to plan and study, as I tried to know everything in each of my subject areas. We were not used to having girls in classrooms, since in high school, grades 5-11, we attended an all boys’ school. You can imagine the big adjustment with trying to pay attention amongst the girls, many of them

in mini-skirts! I did not go home many weekends since I was trying to keep up with my studies at MUN. Terms were not semesterized, so courses went on during the whole year. In many course areas there was little sympathy if you could not keep up with the workload. However, there were some professors who made a real difference. There was also Math tutorials that were very helpful. Mrs. Matthews was my Math Professor. She was older than most professors but she was amazing, phenomenal even, as she helped her students a great deal. You could go to her office and she would take all kinds of time to help you. She really made a difference and set you up for success when you were prepared to work for it. Physics was a lot of work but it was difficult to understand the professor. I had never been in a science lab before so the three-hour Physics labs were new to me and a real challenge. The fact that I had a good lab partner made the difference. The amazing Newfoundlander, Ted Russell, taught English and I found him a great professor who made his course interesting and enjoyable. It was much later that I realized what a wonderful personality he had. The French and Education professors delivered their courses well and they made it interesting. The real problem for me was organizing the material, being selective with studies and keeping up with the workload.

One of my few disappointments with MUN came during my first year. It was when the Bell Island mines closed completely. There were many students from the Island and it was a shock to have all of our parents out of work. To my recollection, the university did absolutely nothing to encourage and support us in any way. They really had no understanding of how we felt and what we were experiencing.

After my first year at MUN, I applied for and got a job as an orderly at the Walter Templeman Hospital on Bell Island during the summer. I really enjoyed that experience and the extra funds helped prepare for another year. I had a wonderful summer. Life was great during this time away from school.

During my second year at MUN I switched majors from Math to French with a minor in English; even though I had a better grade in Math my first year. I also understood that French would make me more marketable for teaching positions. This proved to be correct throughout my entire teaching career; and it also seems to hold true today. There was still a tremendous amount of work. My future brother-in-law and I had another great boarding house. (\$17.00 per week, meals included) Premier Joseph Smallwood introduced a salary program for students; fifty dollar per month for students living in St. John's and \$100 for students from outside St. John's. It made a tremendous difference in the amount of student loans you had to borrow and pay back at the end of your four years. At the end of every month I can remember students lining up to receive their monthly cheque.

History was a real challenge in my second year. As I remember my initial History professor had little or no consideration. I failed History the first semester. It was the first time I had ever failed any course or subject. It was by the grace of God that the History professors were switched after Christmas and I had Dr. Alexander. I put a tremendous amount of work into a major research paper and received an "F". I went to see him and he told me that I had written a 'scissors and cut paper' with no proper footnotes or proper

bibliography. I told him I did not know how to do those things. He was quite surprised and arranged for me to meet with him on a regular basis and showed me how to write a proper research paper. I achieved an 'A' on the next paper. He then re-read my first paper and gave me a 'D'. He was another awesome person who made a difference in my life. Every paper I wrote after that (and they were numerous) I received 'A' grades. My French and Education courses went well and I found the professors interesting and easy to understand. I learned a lot from them and their experiences.

After my second year I applied for a job at St. Clare's Mercy Hospital instead of going back to Bell Island hospital. I started work in May. One day in late June all these girls in white uniforms arrived at the hospital to work. I asked the head nurse on St. Jude's floor who they were and how long they would be here. She told me they were nursing students who would be on the floors all summer. I remember walking down the corridor and raising my hands towards Heaven and saying, "Thank you, God". Needless to say, I made many good friends while working at the hospital for the next three summers. During those years I lived with a family at a boarding house on Pleasant Street who treated me like part of the family.

My third year of my university program was the most challenging. The course loads were very demanding and I had no life other than studying. Our new boarding house did not help. (\$20.00 per week, meals included) There were three of us. The lady did not want to really feed us anything close to a decent home cooked meal. I remember that her husband shot a moose. We ate so much moose that winter I thought I was going to grow antlers. Another time I remember having homemade soup for supper which was a mixture of leftovers such as beans, capelin, and ingredients from other previous meals. We had enough. We decided to express our concerns so we drew matches to see who would deliver the message. I got the shortest match. I met with the husband and wife and expressed our concerns about not having reasonable food for our meals and gave them examples of what they had been feeding us. They told me I had to leave. When the other two boys told them they would leave also, we would report them to the university, and we would sit out on the sidewalk without luggage and call the media to report how we had been treated. While the atmosphere was a little uncomfortable for a while, after that the food was more acceptable.

During my third year some courses were semesterized, so there were more course options like History, Psychology, and Sociology. At the orientation week for first year students, I sat near the steps of the Arts and Administration building with a group of boys from Bell Island. Since I was the only one not having a steady girlfriend, they borrowed a beaney (the mark of a first year student) from one of the boys and put it on my head. I sat on the steps of the Arts and Administration building pretending to be a first year student. Since first year students had to do what senior students told them to do during orientation week, within reason of course, the boys told the female first-year students, who also wore beanies, they had to kiss me on the cheek. However, when the girls went to kiss me on the cheek I turned my head and kissed them on the lips. We did this several times before other students caught on. I suppose nowadays you would be charged with some kind of

offense. Anyhow, it was a great laugh for all of us, especially me. Unfortunately this is when the fun really slowed down.

I completed two very difficult French courses (how I passed them I don't know) In one of my French courses we had three different professors; and several times one of them did not show up for class due to illness. We would have substitutes instead, which made it even more difficult. I also completed an English course, the complete works of Shakespeare, one Education course and one Sociology course. Even though I attended all the classes, did the readings and any assignments, I was not prepared for what I faced in the final exam on the complete works of Shakespeare. All courses were extremely difficult. I could not even figure out what the Education course was about, even though I attended the lectures and read the text. It was another time when the grace of God was there for me. Two nights before the Education final exam I met a girl who did a lot of courses with me. She asked if I knew about the Education exam which counted as 100 % of the mark. I told her I didn't even know where to begin. It was my last exam and I had two days to study. She told me she had a book of objectives based on the course with the answers and I could borrow it for one night. I promised her I would have it back to me the next day. Into the long hours of the night, I managed to cover two thirds of the book but I did get it back to her the next day. I could not believe that the final exam was all objectives and it counted for 100% of the mark. However, I did pass the course. The History course, Ancient Rome and Greece, was enjoyable and very interesting. The professor did a great presentation at his lectures and you knew what his expectations were and how you could achieve success.

Every year during exam time it was always next to impossible to get a quiet study place in the library. The library was filled with students you hardly ever typically saw in the library building. My buddies and I used to try to find an open and quiet room to organize and prepare for exams. There were usually other out-of-town students in the room with us. We would all take breaks and go for a coffee together. I came to realize that most students spent as much time as I did keeping up with the workload.

I did not go home to Bell Island much at this time. I had a lot of studying to do, so I went home less and less. That year I thought I failed two or more courses. I requested six weeks of evening shifts at St. Clare's Hospital so I could go to MUN during the day. I remember my brother and a mutual friend coming to the boarding house with my marks. I passed all the courses. However, I still had to do the six weeks of evenings. It was a rough summer with little social life. I spent part of the summer helping a nurse renovate a house he had bought.

I did meet an attractive girl during my third summer, and we liked each other. However after only a few dates, she got all worked into a steady relationship image, wanting to buy a car together and so on. To me, we were just dating and I was a student who could not afford two or three nights off from my studies each week and I certainly could not afford to make payments on a car. So needless to say, I had to break it off. She asked me to let people believe she broke up with me. I had no problem with that. It was a

small price to pay, instead of the price of a car; and I had no hang-ups about going steady or not going steady.

My fourth year at MUN was enjoyable, the workload was more manageable and my study abilities had improved considerably. My best friend and I lived with an older couple who were awesome; (board was \$20.00 per week, including meals.) Since they were an older couple we used to help with the housework. I did well, passed all courses and graduated from MUN with my first degree; a Bachelor of Arts –Education, with a Major in High School Education, a Major in French and a Minor in English. I invited a third year student nurse at St. Clare's to my graduation. I took part in an interview fair for teachers, had three job opportunities, and was hired to teach in Carbonear at St. Clare's, an all girls school, grades 7 -11, Conception Bay North. Life was enjoyable and it was during that summer that I met Rita, my wife. What a way to end my first four years at MUN!

My part-time years at MUN lasted for the next twelve years. My first part-time course was a VCR video course in psychology, while I was teaching in Carbonear. We would sit in a classroom in one of the high schools, watch videos of a professor giving the taped lectures, take notes, read the text book and study for tests and take a final exam. Over the next summer I got married and the next year we moved to St. John's. For the next twelve years I did courses during the Fall, Winter and Summers to obtain my second degree, a straight Bachelor of Arts (Major in French, Minors in English and History) and then my Masters Degree in Educational Administration.

An added priority in my life soon became my own family, my wife and three children, integrated with full time jobs for both my wife and me. We worked hard and balanced everything together with the children being our top priority.

During those part-time student years, I did courses that I felt would help me during my career. I did additional courses in French, History, Psychology and Sociology. I really enjoyed those courses, especially now, I also had the real knack on how best to study, do assignments, and prepare for tests and exams. From my recollection, all of the professors were also quite good and more approachable. I don't know if it were because I was older and more mature, or if they were actually much better than some of the professors I had for my first undergraduate degree. My life completely evolved around raising a young family, teaching and doing courses at MUN.

During the time of doing my Master's Degree in Educational Administration, I selected the courses and did research papers that most appealed to me and would be the most interesting. There were two options available to me; ten courses and a thesis or twelve courses with an oral exam at the end. I opted for the twelve courses and the oral exam. Going to MUN part-time, I knew it would be a long time before I reached the oral exam. At the end of each course, I kept all my notes and text books but I would summarize each course with four or five pages of jot notes.

I found the graduate courses and the professors to be excellent. I tried to think of the course content as it would apply to reality. While in school I was always mentally assessing the plans and decisions of the department heads, assistant principals and principals in the schools where I taught, as well as what was going on from a provincial perspective. I would then think about whether it was a good thing they were doing or whether I would do things differently. For me personally, it was a great mental exercise every time a challenging situation arose; whether it be about scheduling, the curriculum, school events and activities, parental situations or discipline (positive or negative); as well as critically analyzing what the Department of Education was developing and proposing.

A real challenge arose when it came time for my oral exam which was to cover all twelve courses. I reviewed the material of all twelve courses; and the pages of jot note came in real handy. Many things came back and were now fresh in my mind. The examiners consisted of a panel of three professors. Two of them I knew, since I had completed a number of courses from both of them. The third professor I did not know. He had been away and he was my student advisor for my Masters Degree program. Whenever I needed consultation I went to another professor, Dr. Dennis Treslan, who also happened to be one of my examiners for the oral exam. I had taken no graduate courses from my advisor; however I did do an undergraduate course from him. This bothered me so I eventually got to see him with a copy of the courses I had completed and the grades. He looked at the outline of my courses and the grades and reassured me there should be no problems. The day of the oral exam came. It was real tense for me. I just wanted to get in there and get started.

During the oral exam, things were going quite smoothly. There was a fair amount of interaction. I was responding to all the questions and sub-questions and providing examples with a fair amount of ease. I also requested clarification of questions when necessary. The questions were based on a variety of course content and situations in schools and the environmental educational situation in our province. The exam was gradually coming to an end when my advising professor, from whom I had taken no courses, became more challenging and intimidating, requesting further clarification on answers to questions asked by the other professors. The situation threatened to become tense. Once again in my life, by the grace of God, Dr. Treslan was present. His support for my performance was tremendous. The panel chair brought things back on track and I proceeded to answer the remaining questions with some unease, however. At the end I was asked to wait outside. Finally the examinations panel chair came out and informed me that I passed the oral exam. My head was ready to explode with the release of tension. And that, as a student, was my final experience with MUN.

Many years passed, and I have retired from the teaching profession as a classroom teacher, Department Head, Assistant Principal, Principal, and Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum. I applied for, and was accepted as a Teacher-Intern Supervisor during the Winter Semesters. This turned out to be a fabulous experience for five years, having the opportunity to influence and coach prospective new teacher who were assigned to several different schools. I also worked for The Telegram part time. My position as Teacher-

Intern supervisor ended when my manager at The Telegram suggested I finish what I was doing at MUN and work for them full time. I used my experience, interest and enthusiasm as an educator to develop a Newspaper In Education (NIE) Program for The Telegram. With my education and experience in the teaching profession, that too turned out to be a fabulous second career with some wonderful people. Many staff at The Telegram supported me with adjusting to the technology component of developing the NIE Program, and they continued to support me through the next ten years.

Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador has provided the opportunity for me to have a wonderful career and a second career, thanks to the many tremendous professors I had over those years. Any time I walk the corridors of the buildings where I did my courses, or happen to pass the area where I usually had my locker, I still feel the nostalgia. Life is real good, thanks to my life at MUN.