

This Old House

OUR HOUSE IS A very, very, very fine house. With two cats in the yard, life used to be so hard. Now we're in a co-op.



More than 10,000 students each year look beyond the usual housing options of dorms and apartments by choosing to live in group-living cooperatives. Co-ops are nonprofit organizations that provide student housing for about 30 percent less than what it costs to live in a dorm.

During the past decade, more than 1,000 new living spaces have been created by members of the North American Students of Cooperation (NASCO). About 300 of those spaces are in buildings that used to be Greek houses.

There was a co-op explosion in the '60s when a shortage of student housing and an anti-establishment attitude caused students to look for alternatives. Waning interest in the Greek system bankrupted many fraternities and sororities and gave co-

ops an opportunity to purchase their houses.

"The phenomenon of taking over dying fraternity houses was the way we got our start," says Brian Dahlk, financial coordinator of the Madison Community Cooperative at the U. of Wisconsin, Madison.

Since Greek houses aim to house large groups of students, they're logical spaces for co-op members to buy.

"Parts of the house are very spacious, and we have a huge kitchen — two ovens, six burners and a mongo refrigerator," says Keenan Bora, president of Gregory House at U. of Michigan. The house was purchased in 1993 from the Tau Gamma Nu fraternity.

But the similarities between Greek houses and co-ops stop there. Most co-ops accept members on a first-come-first-served basis.

"Each member just has to contribute five hours of work a week — things like cooking, cleaning, shopping, maintenance, finance, neighborhood relations and gardening," says Katie Howenstine, a senior at the U. of California, Santa Cruz, and member of the Zami House co-op.

The sense of ownership keeps people involved in co-ops, says Kristen Nimelli, member of the Sojourner Truth co-op at the U. of Michigan. "Our living situation is directly under our control, and that brings a feeling of shared experience and shared responsibility."

Howenstine agrees. "Co-ops very much take care of your needs. You put in your work, but you get a lot out of it. You feel safe."

Written on a men's restroom stall at Emory U., Ga., "Please Do Not Taunt the Cheez-Whiz" serves as a creative reminder not to harass certain cracker spreads and is just one example of today's college graffiti. Chances of locating such scrawling on campuses are good, so long as you have eyes and a digestive system.



"Washrooms seem to be the place college students most often use to express their views," says Jane Gadsby, who researched campus graffiti for her master's thesis at York U. in Ontario, Canada.

Most students enter the restroom with only their thoughts; others bring a trusty companion, typically a black marker. "I've seen a lot of things you probably can't publish," Gadsby says.

By Lara Taylor, U. of Michigan / Illustration by Steve Tenebri, U. of Minnesota



Who needs Reader's Digest when you've got great literature like this in the bathroom?

The Writing on the Stalls

GENERALLY, IT'S A good idea for responsible college scholars to obey all posted material around campus. This leads to an obvious question: Should you or should you not taunt Cheez-Whiz?

In general, however, she says most "latrinalia" is decent and sometimes even intelligent.

In her study, Gadsby found graffiti ranging from quiet desperation ("I missed a test. What should I do?") to thought-provoking vents. One response to graffiti asking, "Why can't we get along?" reads, "Because capitalistic patriarchy doesn't allow it."

Of course, there will always be graffiti that's downright bizarre. A women's restroom wall at the U. of Pittsburgh reads, "I can't stand the Smurfs. I bet they smell."

Although designated graffiti areas are available at some schools ("Graffiti Rock" at Bowling Green State U., Ohio, for example), most graffiti is still considered vandalism.

"Our philosophy is to get the stuff off and out of sight as quickly as possible," says Bob Bell, associate director of operations at the U. of Florida.

History, however, suggests that more will pop up next week. "Graffiti isn't going away because the need to be heard is essentially human," Gadsby says.

And that may be a good thing. Just think — if you're not already having a good time, you can always refer to the in-stall directory for a list of those who can help.

By Darin Painter, Ohio U. / Photo by Claudia Ashton, U. of Utah
Graffiti compiled by Jane Gadsby at York U., Ontario, and the U. of Hawaii.

Dirty talk

A sampling from college stalls:

- You idiot, turn the other way (opposite wall) You idiot, turn the other way
- If I don't get to ... I think I'll become a Buddhist monk
- All you '80s disco queens and would-be disco studs who listen to today's syntho techno '90s style ... I truly pity you.
- Noah made a mistake letting people on the ark
- Janitor janitor give up hope, I've got more ink than you have soap
- Eat grease. Die young
- I love you girl with the blue hair! But you never notice me. *sigh*
- Sex is Evil/Evil is sin/Sins are forgiven/So sex is in
- Rage + Womyn = Power
- If you sprinkle when you tinkle, Be a sweetie and wipe the seatie!

Women's tennis team, Xavier U., Ohio
Kicks a plaque on the ground before taking the court at home matches.

Drew Maddux, basketball, Vanderbilt U., Tenn. Plays with a Larry Bird trading card in his sock.

Dionne Dodson, basketball, Muskingum College, Ohio Doesn't set foot on the gym floor until it's time for the team to take the court.

Jan Loskot, track and field, North Dakota State U. Walks to the first hurdle before every race, imagines the race and walks back to the blocks.

Ryan Rupe, baseball, Texas A&M U. Believes not washing his leggings brings him luck.

Scott Smolinski, soccer, Central Connecticut State U. Kneels at midfield before the game and stares at the goal.