

# "Intellectual climate lacking outside Centennial sphere"

By Deb Gray

For some Centennial alumni, old acquaintance will never be forgot, for the ties formed during Centennial's infancy ran deeper than a four-year education.

Five years ago, Buster Griffing, Terry Wittner, Jim Schaffer and Bill Locke lived together in Centennial. After graduation, the men remained close friends and now have roomed together.

Last Saturday, Schaffer, Griffing, and Wittner discussed the early Centennial College. What it was like working to transfer a learning-for-learning's sake philosophy into reality. The men agreed that Centennial provided intellectual stimulation lacking in most of the UNL curriculum.

Griffing lived at Centennial for three years. Through the Centennial Educational Program (CEP), he said, he associated with a higher grade of faculty and students. The Centennial program also fostered a "healthy skepticism" toward his education, he said, by encouraging an active attitude toward learning.

### More activism

"The people weren't so much of a higher intellectual group, but they were more activist," Griffing said. "There were a lot of people into a lot of different activities. There were some into politics or government, others into tutoring of Indian children."

Wittner said his year in Centennial injected confidence into his performance in other University classes, especially in dealing with faculty.

"Besides the closeness of dormitory living, I gained a lot in terms of a more intimate learning situation. I especially learned to deal better and more comfortably with the faculty."

Jim Schaffer said he joined Centennial his junior

year after disillusionment with his other classes.

### Neglect is easier

"After my sophomore year, I was tired of my education. It was fragmented and boring." But, Centennial, he said, "aroused my curiosity."

"I didn't know what college was supposed to be like before I came here. I didn't have any ideas what college was supposed to do," Griffing said. "But I knew that I was having more fun in my Centennial class than in my geology class with 200 people in the lecture and 50 in the lab."

Wittner said difficulties in Centennial stemmed from attempting educational reform within the established framework of the University.

"It's easier to neglect your Centennial projects. You tend to shift toward your University courses to finals time when you have tests and papers that you have to get in," he said.

During the first years, a crusading spirit characterized Centennial, Griffing said.

### Leading the way

"We sort of felt like it was us against the rest of the University. We thought we were leading the way for everyone else. We maybe thought we were a little better. A little arrogant, perhaps."

"There was also more of a pressure to do something," Griffing said. "To show that Centennial wasn't just a fluke or a goof off."

Schaffer said CEP residents "really felt we had something special."

"A lot of things were happening there that wasn't happening anywhere else in the University at the time. We weren't as constricted as other dorms on campus. We had co-ed dorm. We didn't have hours."

"We had more commons areas within the dorm. It all led to more of a learning and social atmosphere."

### Burden in students

The Centennial philosophy dispels a passive concept toward learning, Schaffer said.

"In many cases you go to class and you have no influence upon your direct education. The curriculum is preconceived. Here the students learn what they will do in classes. The burden of planning the courses is placed on the student. They are a capable part of decision making."

The academic and social atmosphere of Centennial encouraged long-lasting friendships, Wittner said.

"I still keep in close contact with people who are now attending grad schools across the country."

Griffing said it was "pretty idealistic" to compare Centennial to a large family.

"On a large part we wouldn't know everyone that well actively, but we knew something about most of the people. It was more like a family that also includes cousins in Crete and Omaha - you see quite a bit of each other, but you aren't as involved with them."

### No comparison

"There are people I still write to from Centennial that I'll write to as long as I live," Griffing said.

Before he lived in Centennial, Schaffer said he lived in a fraternity. There is no comparison between the tightness of the two groups, he said.

"I've been out of school now for four years. I'm now living with three people who were in Centennial when I was. In that same time I've been in contact with one or two people from the fraternity. At Thanksgiving or Christmas when Centennial alumni get together, it's a group of about 50 or 60 people."

"So in terms of long lasting relationships, the two groups aren't even close. It's something that's continued with us in a big way."



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