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"If at all possible involve a Cow: The book of College Pranks"

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Special Case #2 *Lady Liberty Lights Up Lake Mendota*

"They're taking student government as a joke!"

-Sue Krull, 1978 Wisconsin student

Five days after arriving on the sprawling Madison campus of the University of Wisconsin, Leon Varjian, who enrolled in just one class, was already hard at work-collecting signatures on petitions to change UW's name to the University of New Jersey, so graduates could say they had attended a prestigious Eastern school.

Besides, he reasoned, New Jersey was the only state without a "University of ..." school. It should have one. Wisconsin, on the other hand, already had 26 branches of the University of Wisconsin. It could spare one.

Without doubt many who passed Varjian, sitting at his little card table on the mall, with his droopy mustache and long hair, must have smirked to themselves and thought: "Loser. Nutcase."

Little did they know. Before the school year was out this odd man, passionately pursuing his quest, would gain control of the student government. He would funnel its considerable budget into a whirlwind of pranks, stunts, games, and feats of frivolity. He would bask in the glare of national publicity and form a legend that still glows, radioactively, in Madison to this day.

Varjian did not do this alone. Central to Varjian's story is a person who, passing his card table, did not dismiss him as a mere lunatic. This was Jim Mallon, a tall, thin communications arts junior from Rochester, Minnesota, who was to act as a deadpan counterweight for all of Varjian's unbridled energy. Mallon immediately recognized the beauty of what Varjian was doing. He signed the petition.

"To me, it was great theater," remembers Mallon. "He was treating it seriously as a leftist cause-the card table, the petitions, the maps of New Jersey and Wisconsin-but it had an absurdist premise."

"We instantly recognized each others' genius," Varjian said, at the time. "The melding of two creative sparks."

From a field of pink flamingos to relocating the Statue of Liberty to campus, twice, these two sparks would use their position and access to funds to create something even rarer than a single great prank-an atmosphere of great pranking. A Golden Age.

Working out of the Student Government Association Office-their office-Mallon and Varjian created a prank government called the Pail & Shovel Party, attracted supporters, and carried on the entire charade for two years, despite continuous opposition from grim-jawed Junior, League types.

Varjian, whose manic personality gathered most of the attention, was not your average new student, trembling with anticipation at being freed from the parental overlords.

When he arrived on campus, in the fall of 1977, he was 25 years old, battered from a 15-month stint in the working world.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison was his third holding pen of higher education. At New Jersey's Montclair State, in 1972, he set up the Miss Montclair Steak Pageant, a spoof of the university's beauty pageant.

Graduating with a degree in mathematics, he moved to Indiana University at Bloomington, where he sponsored the Banana Olympics, which included a banana toss, banana relays, banana water races, and the search for a banana hidden in a haystack.

It was at Indiana that his behavior shifted from the merely whimsical to the truly unhinged. At Halloween, he pranced through the streets of Bloomington in an orange cardboard pumpkin suit.

"I think it was the change in the air-it affected my brain," Varjian said during the blaze of publicity that attended his stay in Wisconsin.

Flush from the pumpkin suit success, and others, such as the coronation of a rubber-masked Nixon on the university library steps, Varjian ventured into politics, running for the mayor of Bloomington on his Fun City ticket in the 1974 election.

One can only speculate how the political climate of the country might have been changed for the better had Varjian won. As it was, he pulled 16 percent of the vote, carrying 2 of 15 precincts, and ran third in a field of four. Not a bad showing for a man who proposed erecting a circus tent over Bloomington's municipal building so the politicians would feel at home.

Ironically, Varjian's lighthearted play for mayoral office almost torpedoed his later attempt to submit to the pedestrian working world. After receiving his master's in mathematics from Indiana in 1976, he took a job as a computer programmer with the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in Washington, D.C.

This offended the finely-tuned sensibilities of Representative John Myers, a Republican from Indiana's 7th district. Myers felt that anyone guilty of ridiculing the electoral process shouldn't be allowed to toil at a dreary, number crunching government job. He sent a two-page letter to the bureau commissioner, berating him for hiring Varjian, whose "open mockery of government and his disdain for the system he will be a part of seems to warrant the attention of your personnel office."

But Myers's clout was not what he imagined, and Varjian kept the job until he saw what work was doing to his quality of life:

"It was awful," he said. "I couldn't stand it. You get up every morning, get on a bus and go to work with a bunch of pasty-faced commuters, sit behind a desk all day doing nothing and come home at night. I just couldn't take it."

Most people live their lives that way, but Varjian chucked his job in August 1977 and reached out toward the reassuring maternal teat of college life. He chose Madison-at random, he claims-without having seen the campus and with no particular academic program in mind.

He took one credit, to maintain his student status, while working part-time at the school's computer center on weekends.

The germ of the Pail & Shovel Party began as Varjian's brand of one-man street theater. About twice a week, he and his friends put on public displays such as the University of New Jersey petition campaign or snipping off a mattress tag marked "Do Not Remove Under Penalty of Law," then being arrested by confederates dressed as policemen.

One of Varjian's favorite ploys was called the "Blue Light Special." He would go to a discount store and buy \$25 worth of the trashiest, most tasteless merchandise he could find, then hawk it on the street and see if he could get passersby to accept it for free.

Mark Borns, a member of the WSA senate, knew Varjian from his sidewalk performances, and thought he would be the ideal person to fill a vacant senate seat. He asked Varjian to submit his name for consideration.

The student senate debated Varjian's appointment for an hour and a half, finally approving him by two votes. Whatever else can be said about the somber, pre-Pail & Shovel Party student government, at least it had the sense to plant the seeds of its own downfall. No one can say Varjian misrepresented himself—he attended his nomination hearing 'in a clown suit.

Toward the spring of 1978, Varjian and Mallon hit on the idea of a mock campaign for student government, based in part on Varjian's membership in the senate.

While its opponents were to later portray the Pail & Shovel Party as a horde of Visigoths, gleefully sacking the sedate Rome of serious student government, that was not the case. Student politics—then, as always, in Madison, as everywhere else—were adrift in a sea of apathy. Every election, some 30,000 Madison students didn't even bother to vote.

That spring the campaign began with Varjian seeking the vice presidency ("that's where the power is" he said) and Mallon the presidency.

The campaign was one continuing performance-art piece on the corruption of government. They flung mud at their oppo

nents—literally, hurling buckets of wet earth at life-size caricatures of other candidates, which they later turned around and stabbed in the back, using rubber knives.

They built a party platform of Popsicle sticks, and made the usual election promises—to convert the school budget into pennies and dump it on the UW Library Mall, then let all the students go at it with pails and shovels. They would replace parking meters with bubble-gum machines and buy the Statue of Liberty and move her to Wisconsin. They promised to flood the football stadium and hold mock naval battles. They would provide free long-distance phone calls, erect a 50-foot tall Mickey Mouse Pez candy dispenser and change all students' names to Joe Smith "so that professors in large lecture courses would know everyone by name."

The Pail & Shovel Party made no effort to hide what they were all about.

"Honesty, integrity, responsibility. ..." began a campaign flyer distributed that May. "... Pail and Shovel doesn't believe in any of them!"

To their great surprise, they drew a following and, to their delight, opponents.

"Our campaign was just a comedy routine," said Jay Kennedy, a member of Varjian's inner circle. "Slowly we began to realize it was a threat to somebody—the fact that somebody saw us as a threat was funny, to us, and spurred us on."

"The student government at that time consisted of the self-appointed descendants of the superstar leftists of the sixties," says Mallon, today. "They were humorless, self-serving people in various incestuous cliques between the government and the newspaper. It was very closed, very humorless and extraordinarily serious—about as dry and boring and distant from mainstream students as it could have been.... It occurred to us, two days before the election, we might win."

They did win. In May's two-day student election, only 12 percent of the students voted, and the P & S ticket got 33 percent of the vote, enough to beat a field crowded with 10 other tickets.

Simply having the most votes did not guarantee Varjian and Mallon would be able to assume power, however. The candidates they had defeated complained about their unorthodox campaign tactics to the school election board, which held a circus-like hearing to settle the question. Largely owing to the



Geniuses at play.

efforts of an eccentric Madison lawyer named Eddie Ben Elson (see box) Pail and Shovel managed to prevail, marking their success by hanging a banner reading UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT from the Union Building.

In the fall student senate election, the P & S took 29 of 36 senate seats, providing the rubber stamp the two would need to implement their policies and fight off constant attempts to impeach them.

The monthly WSA meetings became more interesting. Each one was given a theme. One month was a Halloween costume meeting. Another was a singing meeting, where debate had to be rendered in song.

At a meeting to "air some dirty laundry" P & S members drank beer, wore laundry baskets over their heads, tossed dirty clothes, strung clotheslines across the podium and blew soap bubbles.

Of course, certain quick-witted students were fast to catch on to what Varjian and Mallon were really doing.

"They're taking student government as a joke," pouted Sue Krull, a junior majoring in agricultural education and a member of the senate. "I don't believe that students are so apathetic that they vote people like this in."

One of their early activities involved appropriating \$200 for a "defense fund" to save a broken-down horse named Roberta from the glue factory (or more precisely, to save Senator Roberta from the glue factory, since Varjian and Mallon saw that the beast was named to the student senate).

They also hosted a toga party for 10,000 people, inspired by the movie *Animal House*. The party received enormous publicity and John Belushi called during the middle of the festivities to bestow his blessings.

Critics of Pail & Shovel were not irked by the pranks as much as the maddening belief that they were wasting money. Each student kicked in two bucks a year to finance the student government, and Varjian and Mallon used that pool-some \$80,000 a year, as well as surpluses from previous years-to fund their activities.

The expenditures, breathlessly revealed by the journalism school pinheads at the student newspaper, the *Daily Cardinal*, included \$600 worth of toys for their office, \$100 in personal long distance phone calls, \$125 for a telephone answering machine used for the "Dial a Joke" service, another \$532 for toys for students to play with during registration, and \$11,500 lost sponsoring a Little Feat concert.

If the eager investigative journalists over at the *Cardinal* expected Varjian and Mallon to dissolve into a puddle of shame when confronted with the evidence of their departure from standard WSA budgetary practices, they were in for a surprise.

"Sure we are squandering funds," said Varjian, responding to the allegations. "*Absolutely* true! We squander them on beer. We squander them on parties.... We squander them on all sorts of things. That's what keeps the Wisconsin Student Association *strong*."

Mallon and Varjian also brought less ribald-if equally controversial-fare to campus. They sponsored appearances by poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti, birth control enthusiast Bill Baird, consumer advocate Ralph Nader, along with writers, alternative energy experts, and artists.

In the beginning, their term was quiet. It took about six months for Mallon and Varjian to figure out how to loosen the purse strings of student government. Once they learned how to appropriate and spend money, the fun really began.

By the new year, they were confident enough to begin honoring a campaign promise even their staunchest supporters never expected them to fulfill.

They brought the Statue of Liberty to Madison.

The statue, constructed in a woodworking shop on Winnebago Street, was to have been set up in the dead of night, facing campus, on the ice of frozen Lake Mendota.

In reality, the construction took three days, which mitigated the surprise somewhat, but not the dumbfounded reaction of most who saw it.

Traffic snarled on roads leading to the statue, as gawkers slowed to take a look at the chicken wire, papier-mâché, and plywood mock-up of Lady Liberty, the head, 22 feet tall from the bridge of the nose up and the arm, 40 feet tall from the wrist to the tip of the torch.

"The neat thing was, you could walk right out and touch it," says Varjian, today. "It was spectacular to see, it really was. The pictures don't even capture the essence—the coldness out there, cold weather, cold air, the whiteness around it, and here's this greenish thing, and it's huge, just sitting there."

The submerged view—obviously done for reasons of economy—was taken by some Kremlinologists to be a political statement, à la the last scene from *Planet of the Apes*. This Varjian denied.

He claimed that the statue was purchased from a financially strapped New York City, and the cable snapped while it was being helicoptered into place, sending the statue crashing through the ice



Some are born to greatness, others construct a giant replica of the Statue of Liberty, jutting out of the ice on a frozen lake.

While the general consensus was positive—the statue was called "beautiful," and city fathers speculated it might become a winter tourist attraction—student government types were again incensed at the tab—\$4,500. Tom Bilodeau, a student senator and third year law student, took Varjian to court, charging that the money had not been approved by the senate, in violation of the WSA charter. A student coalition, headed by former WSA members ousted by the P & S Party, began a petition drive to put a recall referendum on the ballot.

Ironically, Mark Borns, who had brought Varjian into the WSA and started the whole thing, was now one of the P & S Party's chief opponents, collaborating with the *Daily Cardinal* on exposés and rising in the student senate to read the fine print from budgetary bylaws.

Varjian countered that the money had been approved, as part of a general art fund he could spend at his discretion. He offered anyone who didn't like the statue the rebate of a dime—each student's share in the cost. Some 60 students gathered outside WSA offices chanting "We want dimes" and protesting the statue. Varjian eventually complied, writing each a check for ten

cents.

The *Daily Cardinal* had a field day. While it had failed to even note the construction of the statue, the newspaper lovingly recorded the dime incident and other tiny protests that erupted in its wake. After polling 409 students—less than 1 percent of the student population—they reported massive unhappiness about the statue and claimed "only 10 percent said they would continue to support Pail and Shovel."

Mallon and Varjian weathered the storm. The complaint against them was thrown out on the grounds it hadn't been taken first to student court, which was packed with a trio of P & S judges.

Real legislators, apparently without better things to do, took notice. State Senator David Berger (D-Milwaukee) began drafting a bill that would require the university chancellor to approve all student expenditures beyond \$500, but the measure was dropped when student leaders at other campuses complained that it would hopelessly snarl the administration of their own funds.

The dean of students, Paul Ginsberg, froze WSA assets while he examined the books, but decided that no laws or regulations had been violated, and granted the P & S a kind of grudging admiration rarely extended by administrators toward students who step beyond pay-your-tuition-and-get-out conformity.

"It's their money and we're not going to tell them how to use it," Ginsberg said. "The thing about this is, they're not misleading people. They made their platform very clear when they ran. Everyone has a chance to vote in these elections, and if they don't like it, it's up to the students to vote them out."

Ginsberg's words of reason went unheeded, however. The statue was undone by a political process more time-honored than democracy. With the naked hypocrisy of those who talk up good government while in fact craving personal power, the P & S enemies, their legal options exhausted, chose-a, uh, *preterparliamentary* move against the statue—they burned it down.

It happened in the early hours of March 2, 1979. No one is certain who did it, though an investigator hired by P & S pinpointed a certain fraternity. The *Daily Cardinal* was accused of having advance knowledge, since they happened to have a photographer at the scene, in the middle of the night, minutes after the fire was set. In fact, some say the *Cardinal* hired high school students to set the fire, though nothing was ever proved.

The head portion of the statue was completely razed, but the armed survived intact. The *Capitol Times* captioned a picture of the wreckage: "A sad scene on a bleak day—Miss Liberty's head is gone forever." Time would prove them wrong.

The next month, Varjian was dealt another defeat when he ran for a seat on the Madison City Council.

"I wanted to turn Madison into 'Cheesetopia.' After all, Wisconsin is the dairy capital of the nation," reasoned Varjian. "Why not turn Madison into the cheese capital? We could line the streets with cheese. We could build a statue of Elsie the cow to put on top of the Capitol building."

Alas, like Bloomington, Madison balked at such progressive leadership, and Varjian finished fourth in a four-way race.

"I guess Cheesetopia was just somewhat ahead of its time," Varjian sighed.

Varjian's city council defeat failed to dim his and Mallon's confidence on campus, however. Announcing their intention to lead the WSA "for life," the pair mounted a second campaign in the spring of 1979.

This campaign was just as wild as the first. Instead of promising just the Statue of Liberty, they promised *all* the major monuments of the world, and indeed did bring the Washington Monument to the mall—they hired a huge construction crane, from which they suspended a tiny five-inch bronze copper replica of the nation's most famous phallic symbol.

As always, their campaign was marked by a candor rare in politics of any sort.

"Are you nuts enough?" read a campaign flyer from the second election. "A year ago you turned over the reins of student power to a couple of mindless clowns. Now we are asking you to

go for it all. We are asking you to reelect Mallon and Varjian, who started it all, the two who made wackiness, nuttiness, irresponsibility, craziness and self-motivation household words. Are you nuts enough for that?"

The answer was a resounding "yes." In May, 17 percent of the students voted in the election—close to a record for enthusiastic participation. When the dust settled, Varjian and Mallon had won, despite wistful polls in the *Daily Cardinal*, with a 37 percent plurality, beating their closest opponent by 600 votes. That fall, Pail & Shovel senators kept 26 of 36 senate seats.

MORE CLOWNS, MORE MUD FOR WSA, mourned a headline in the *Daily Cardinal*, which marked the event by reversing their masthead to white letters on a black background, an old journalistic symbol for extreme tragedy.

"They hadn't done that since the invasion of Cambodia," says Kennedy. "Here we are, a group of clowns winning the student election, and it's equated to the illegal invasion of Cambodia."

In the fall, Pail & Shovel hit the ground rolling. The first day of classes, students were welcomed by over 1,000 pink plastic flamingos planted on Bascom Hill, the quadrangle in front of the dean's office. Students gaped in wonder. The birds may have been "blown north by Hurricane David," Varjian speculated.

The flamingos were a wonderfully ephemeral prank. They had been set up at eight in the morning, and at first formed a uniform field of pink—people said it looked as if Pepto-Bismol had been poured over Bascom Hill.

Almost immediately, however, the birds started disappearing. People would stop, admire the hill, and grab themselves a flamingo. By 2 P.M., the entire flock was gone, *though* individual members were spotted around campus for years to come—in windows of fraternities, on the roofs of dorms, everywhere.

"It was a fitting end," says Varjian.

Pail & Shovel again provided toys for students to play with during registration. They raised money to send "Vern the Mouse" to Iran to rescue American hostages. They ran an ad touting the WSA's pending first-strike nuclear capability, and for an organization called "United Alcoholics of America."

Toga II was even a bigger blast than the year before, forcing the university to relocate an appearance of the Dalai Lama for fear he would be swept up in the festivities (*which* included a Dalai Lama look-alike contest). At the evening's end, Mallon and Varjian discovered they had \$20,000 in one dollar bills in "big leaf piles" at the Pail & Shovel office. Not knowing what to do with the money, they stuffed it, uncounted, into grocery bags, which they jammed into the night depository of their bank.

They also tried to take control of the *Cardinal* board, running a slate of P & S candidates who would, presumably, take the bile out of the reporting of their fanatical enemy. The *Cardinal* shrieked about press freedom, and the P & S slate was defeated.

In early February 1980, the P & S Party reprised their Statue of Liberty success of the previous year. They had at first planned to place something even more controversial on the ice. In November, the WSA had approved the concept of building a replica of the Chappaquiddick bridge in Madison. "Going along with the idea of bringing these famous monuments from the East Coast, I thought, 'Why not Chappaquiddick?'" said Tom Sontag, a P & S Party senator who thought up the idea.

But when the lake froze over the chance of striking back at the statue arsonists proved too great. Chappaquiddick fell by the wayside (sorry Ted) and plans were set in motion to build another statue.

This one cost even more—over \$6,000—and was assembled by a crew of about 50 people in the Old Music Hall on the UW campus. To thwart arson, they claimed the new statue was fire-

proof. (It wasn't. Carved out of Styrofoam, it would have burned like a glob of Sterno). The P & S Party provided guards to protect the statue, and hawked postcards, which are sold in Madison to this day. Great plans were harbored for the statue. Jim Mallon said eventually they would create an entire New York skyline to go behind it, however "these things take time."

The statue remained in place until March 5—when the Department of Natural Resources regulations required that "fishing shanties" be off the ice. It was removed to Barnevillle, Wisconsin, where it supposedly remains.

By the time the statue was taken down, a war of sorts had broken out.

Earlier on, a P & S Party official, sergeant at arms Stu D. Baker, had taken to sending postcards to various campuses across the country, declaring "war" on them. In February 1980, hostilities erupted between the governments of the University of Wisconsin and the University of Missouri, which had elected its own absurdist student government.

Tensions began rising when the Missouri Student Association sent out questionnaires, nationwide, seeking information on student governments. WSA responded with "a vicious letter."

A flurry of derisive, frequently obscene letters were exchanged between the governments--UW was called "sewage-sucking swine" and "toenail-chewing imbeciles."

"I guess they got tired of answering all our surveys, so they sent us a nasty letter and we sent them a nasty letter," said MSA president Garth Bare. The MSA officially declared war back on the WSA.

The war of words turned into a war of, well, shit, when a quartet of MSU students slipped up to Madison and spread 500 pounds of manure on the steps of the Memorial Union on Sunday, February 24.

"BOOM. Consider yourselves nuked," read a note, accompanying the waste. "Compliments of the four saboteurs from Mizzou."

"We just wanted to prove to Mallon and Varjian that they couldn't push us around," said Bare.

But just as a good prank is, by nature, a fleeting thing, so the P & S Party could not keep going forever. Even though Mallon and Varjian were still declaring themselves in office for life in March, in April they announced they would not seek a third term.

They offered no public explanation, at the time, but now say they both realized the joke had run its course.

"It was time to do something else," says Varjian, simply.

"It was a moment, those two years," says Mallon. "We had all reached the end of our senior years-I had two senior years. We couldn't spend our lives being student government leaders. There was no money in it. It pretty much kind of ended. Also, it was more legendary to go out big and mighty rather than let it wind down."

To the end, the *Daily Cardinal* was in the dark. In a brief editorial titled "Clowns Step Down," the newspaper summed up the Pail & Shovel reign with "In addition to wasting thousands of dollars from student fees on toys and other worthless indulgences, the Pail & Shovel regime is known to have a sizeable slush fund due to a health insurance fraud."

A variety of parties, including the Badger Party, the Great Expectations Party, the M & M Party, and the Campus Reformation and Appeasement Party tossed their hats into the ring. But serious student politics began creeping back, and as it did, the Wisconsin Student Government rejoined that great realm of things which no sane person cares to know anything about.

Sic transit gloria mundi.

EDDIE BEN ELSON

The Pail & Shovel Party would have never survived the blizzard of legal challenges leveled against it were it not for the good offices of Eddie Ben Elson, "the Looney Lawyer" of Madison, Wisconsin. A local legend, Elson campaigned for mayor in 1969 on a platform that included painting police cars psychedelic colors. He lost. The next year, he ran for Dane County district attorney. To show he had nothing to hide, Elson announced his candidacy in the nude, from the stage of a strip club called the Dangle Lounge. He lost again.

His motto during the campaigns was "Only Obey Good Laws," and posters bearing the slogan have become collectors' items.

Despite his antics, Elson had a serious side. An early defender of the rights of the mentally ill, he had a hand in overturning Wisconsin's involuntary commitment law in 1972, and was constantly testifying at Congressional inquiries into the subject.

Taking on the cause of Pail & Shovel was a natural for a man who, among other things, defended the attorney general's Irish Setter for running unleashed (among his various defense strategies was threatening to demand a jury of the dog's peers-12 other dogs-and requesting that the dogcatcher identify the dog from a lineup of Irish Setters).

"He was directly responsible for our success," remembers Mallon, who said after their first election, those still in power in the WSA tried to invalidate the election. Elson represented them at a hearing before the student board in UW's Great Hall, which was packed with close to 1,000 students.

Elson walked up to each of the five board members and screamed that each was personally liable for the actions they were about to take, and if they illegally invalidated the election then he, Eddie Ben Elson, would personally sue each of the board members, tying them up in court proceedings for years and ruining their lives. They voted to uphold the election

results.

"He won the victory we had already won," says Kennedy. "They could have just said the election was invalid, and that would have been the end of it." Eddie Ben Elson's own tale ends tragically, however. He killed himself in 1983. Over 500 people attended his funeral.

DAD GINSBERG

Paul Ginsberg was dean of students at the University of Madison for years, and oversaw the safety of hundreds of thousands of students. None of them gave him more trouble than Leon Varjian, who called Dean Ginsberg "Dad," since it was Ginsberg who signed their allowance checks. During their first meeting, Ginsberg who speaks slowly and deliberately, took out a pipe, lit it, stretched his arms over his head and said: "Hello Leon."

Varjian, without missing a beat, leaned back in his chair, pulled out a bubble pipe, stretched his arms over his head, and began blowing bubbles.

"He realized we were going to be more difficult to deal with than he thought," says Kennedy, who was there.

Despite the difficulty, Ginsberg became a supporter, in fact an admirer, of Pail & Shovel.

"I took to the Pail and Shovel because they brought smiles to people and they gave people permission to look at the world and say it's *crazy*," says Ginsberg, now living in retirement in Madison. "They frustrated the hell out of some people, and me at times, but they didn't hurt anybody."

Ginsberg, who refers to Leon Varjian as "one of the brightest minds I have ever encountered," added that one of the few souvenirs he keeps from his days, as dean is a plastic pink flamingo.

OTHER SMARTY PARTIES

The Pail & Shovel Party was neither the first nor the last to tweek the inherent hubris, futility, and pointlessness of student government. Among other noteworthy prank parties:

1. Dead Beet Party. Just a few years after it was created, student government at the University of Illinois-one of the first schools to pretend to give power to the students-was already an object of apathy and derision. In the spring of 1874, no less than three joke tickets ran for office-the Reporter, the AntiClique, and the Dead Beet parties-as compared to just two earnest parties. They did not wield power, but the student government collapsed anyway, under the weight of student ambivalence and the festering belief that student officers acted merely as "Faculty spies." Which in fact they were. Before the end of the decade the attempt at government utterly failed, the faculty admitting that student government was "an agency chosen by us for the accomplishment of the disciplinary work incumbent on us as a Faculty" and had always received "a constant though generally silent supervision."

2. Gumby Party. Running under the slogan "Reason as a last resort," MIT juniors Kenneth H. Segel and Kenneth J. Meltsner were elected president and vice president, respectively, in March 1982. One of the most noteworthy events of their administration occurred in April, when the MIT Undergraduate Association passed a resolution granting Harvard College colonial status-based on its demonstrated inability to govern itself and named an MIT sophomore as colonial governor. The following fall, during his speech to the incoming freshmen, Segel was kidnapped by "Commando Hacks" protesting Harvard's subjugation, and a banner FREE HARVARD was unfurled.

3. Monarchist Party. The University of Maryland at College Park not only elected James Risner, "King James," as he liked to be called, to the presidency of its SGA in the fall of 1988, but gave his Monarchist Party a majority in the university legislature. Risner, who sometimes attended classes in an ermine robe and a crown, promised during the election to build a castle behind the main library and surround the campus with a beerfilled moat. On his first day in office, he commissioned a cost analysis to study the feasibility of the project, which included refrigeration units to keep the beer cold. He also announced plans to restore the university to its agricultural roots. "What we'd like to do is bring the cows back," he said. The student body, including the newspaper, generally supported the Monarchists, voting to change the school motto from what Risner called "something in Latin which no one understood" to "I'd rather be studying."

4. The Who Cares? Party. At the same time the University of Maryland was in the hands of monarchy, the University of Utah in Salt Lake City was in the grip of apathy. The Who Cares? Party leaders, a pair of longhairs named Mike Kaly and Grant Sperry, campaigned on promises to raise money by "panhandling, running strip bars, raffles and prostitution"-an unusual platform for a college that is 50 percent Mormon. They won an astounding victory, if you consider the 90 percent of the students who did not vote as supporters. The feat was compounded by the fact that Kaly and Sperry spent only \$6 on their campaign for colored chalk to scribble campaign slogans-as compared to other candidates who spent more than \$1,000 in their unsuccessful campaigns for the offices, which not only controlled a \$500,000 student budget, but included free tuition and a personal stipend of \$250 a month. For their inauguration, the Who Cares? candidates rejected the costly traditional ball in favor of a simple Indian ritual.

5. Dow Jones and the Industrials. Chris Clark was a physics major at Purdue University. He also played bass with a band called Dow Jones and the Industrials. In the spring of 1980, they began to cut their first (and as it happened, only) album, and the question arose of how

to promote the record.

As luck would have it, Purdue was gearing up for their student government elections at the same time, and Clark decided to run for SGA vice president as a way to tout his band.

Running on a platform borrowed from Pail & Shovel (his two major issues were "getting my hand in the till" and "arbitrary government," though he also promised to dress the football team in florescent pink-and-green) Clark was swept into office by a heavy turnout of voters.

Once in office, he hired his band as much as possible and held government sponsored beer parties and a "Jamaica Ganja Giveaway."

As with Pail & Shovel, some people were caught off guard by all this.

"We had promised to drain the treasury and blow it on fun stuff," remembers Clark, now a computer consultant. "People were surprised, toward the end, when the budget ran into the red."

While the highlight, "as described in chapter three, was holding "Vegetable Awareness Week" to coincide with a visit by Ronald Reagan, they were also able to sell 5,000 albums and hold countless gigs, typically at some Prat, where they poured invective on the brothers, who happily boogied to their music while oblivious to their message.

"The whole time we were bashing frats; we would just abuse the hell out of them, and they loved it," marvels Clark. "What could be more fun than finally having a platform to expose and ridicule people you really hate?"

Even Leon Varjian came down to bestow his blessings. Dow Jones paid his expenses for a weekend trip to Lafayette, where he presided over the "Win a Date With Dow Contest" and partied to his heart's content. .

6. Silly Party. Northwestern. A descendant of the Pail & Shovel Party, since founder Andy Mozina is from Wisconsin and admitted being inspired by the goings-on up in Madison. The Silly Party's five officers were swept into power in April 1984, on the promise of making student government more fun. High points of the party's lone year in office were bringing a penguin to campus in February (fulfilling a campaign promise) and sending a pair of frogmen, in full wet suits and tanks, to several classes to mark April Fool's Day. Mozina, who also edited the NU humor magazine, Rubber Teeth, could also be counted on for a stream of bons mots. "I stand on my record," a campaign poster read, "and jump up and down."

"BOJ MOI! ETTA OTTAWA!"

Like Madison, Carleton University in Ottawa is situated on a lake. Well, really no more than a bulge in a canal, but they call the 10-foot-deep body of water "Dow's Lake." In the late 1970s, Carleton architecture students capitalized on the current concern about Soviet submarines (one had become trapped in a fjord in Sweden) by creating their own sub scare. Constructing a large-sized submarine conning tower, they anchored it offshore in Dow's Lake one night, causing considerable surprise the next morning.

CODA-LEON AND JIM

Mallon and Varjian hovered around the periphery of campus life for a number of years. In the early 1980s, they produced a locally-popular cable show four nights a week, "The Vern & Evelyn Show," featuring comedy sketches hosted by a pair of mice, who spoke in falsetto voices provided by Mallon and Varjian. The CBS affiliate, WISC Channel 3 in Madison, featured a sanitized monthly version, "The Best of The Vern & Evelyn Show" and the pair assembled a 13-show package they hoped to sell into syndication.

But success proved elusive, and their friendship ruptured over disagreements about how to proceed with "The Vern & Evelyn Show."

There was one swan song prank. On April Fool's Day, 1982, Varjian led a squad of high-stepping, red-jacketed, giant radio-toting marchers in the "First Annual April Fool's Day Boom-Box Parade" through downtown Madison. There was no second.

Mallon pursued a career in television production and directed a low-budget horror movie he called Muskie Madness. It can sometimes be found in the grade-Z section of certain video stores titled as Blood Hook. Today he produces the much-acclaimed comedy cable show "Mystery Science Theater 3000," and, reprising his Vern & Evelyn days, supplies the voice of one of the puppets.

Varjian returned to his native New Jersey, cut his hair, and now teaches mathematics at a high school in Midland Park. Describing himself as "a retired public official," he insists he has no regrets about leaving Pail & Shovel behind and, in fact, says most of his friends do not even know about that chapter in his life. Still, he is proud of what he accomplished at Madison, and feels the experience made him a better teacher. "Getting up in front of a group of people and speaking, getting their attention, putting on a show," he says. "Isn't that what the best teacher you ever had did?"

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"If at all possible involve a Cow: The book of College Pranks"

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