**Tales from the Trailer**

**Outremont High School**

I spent 3 years in Outremont High School.

Because of my excellent marks in grade 8 I was put in the first math class. This was an elite group of boys; every effort was made so these students would excel. They were assigned the best teachers, the best classrooms and were coached so they would achieve the best marks on the Province-wide matriculation exams; an honour to the school.

I was the only new student in the class in grade 9. All the others had been together in grade 8 and many had gone to the same elementary school. The first day of class I was assigned the last seat in the last row, exactly where I wanted to sit. I was told I would have to earn a place in the pecking order of the class.

There were 25-30 kids in each class at Outremont; mine had only 25. All the classes were either all-boys or all-girls, except for the second math class. In each class there was one or two non-Jewish students.

During the first week of school I went about establishing my place. I asked every teacher every question I could think of. Finally, one of them had enough and sent me to the Principal’s office. Mr. Cook greeted me as a long-lost friend. He told me he did not expect me to be a constant visitor to his office as I had been at Strathcona. He made it clear he would not tolerate my “shenanigans”. When I came back into the classroom I told everyone I was a personal friend of the Principal and that we had a frank and open discussion. I told them he had invited me to drop by anytime I wanted to have a discussion.

I had a “rep” and had earned my rank in my class!

Our grade 9 classroom and math teacher was in a car accident. She was unable to return to school and was replaced by a series of substitutes, none of whom could control or teach us. One substitute had been the teacher of the mother of one of the boys in the class. She lasted one day!

Once, we decided to drive the substitute crazy. We each brought a comb to class. The plan was to rub it against the bottom of our desk, randomly around the room, throughout the 50-minute period. After 5-minutes, the teacher asked us to stop. After 10-minutes she threatened to give the whole class a detention. After 15-minutes she told us we would all get suspended if we didn’t stop. After 20-minutes, she went to the Office to speak to the Principle. She never came back.

One teacher lasted longer than the others. His name was Mr. Milne. After a few weeks he had a minor skiing accident that put him in a walking cast. He got around using crutches. First we hid his crutches. Then someone removed the rubber cap at the bottom of one crutch. This resulted in him falling and our receiving a full-class detention. Finally, totally frustrated, he told each of us what he thought of us. He went up and down the rows berating each boy. When he got to me, he let go with both barrels. He told me I would never make it through grade 9 and that I was destined to spend my life as a garbage collector. He left and didn’t return the next day!

One Friday after lunch, I was going down the stairs. The stairway was crowded and someone brushed against me. I was off balance and fell down the stairs. I hit my head on the wall and the stairs. There was blood everywhere; from my nose, a cut over my eye and a gash on my scalp. Students were screaming, teachers were called and I was taken to the nurse’s office.

Mr. Cook asked if I knew who had pushed me. I was dizzy and didn’t know. The nurse tried to clean me up but the blood continued to flow. Mr. Cook called my mother. He told her what had happened and that he was bringing me home. My mom suggested he take me to the Emergency Department at the hospital to see if stitches were warranted. He said the nurse had checked me and it was “just a scratch”. I guess there was more paperwork required if I was taken to a hospital. When I got home my mom put me to bed. I spent the weekend clearing my head and getting over the shock.

On Monday I went back in school. I was called to the office. Mr. Cook asked if I knew who had pushed me down the stairs. I said I did not know. He told me to go back to class; the issue was closed.

During grade 10 I had a run-in with Mr. Cook, again.

I was not on the basketball team, but several of my friends made the team. I attended all the games to cheer them on. One game, I got to the gym early and was able to get a seat right behind the opposing team’s basket. I had a plan; I would wave a red towel every time a player from the other team was taking a foul shot. Just as he was about to shoot, I would yell. For the first 10 minutes my plan worked great; no foul shots were scored!

Finally, the opposing coach complained to the referee that I was disturbing his players. He said this was illegal! The referee told him there was nothing he could do; I was not on the court. The coach appealed to our coach to do something. He couldn’t do anything; I wasn’t on the team. He said I was just a fan. The coach then told the referee he was going to pull his team off the court if I wasn’t stopped. The referee said he couldn’t do anything. Finally, he stopped the game for 10-minutes to allow him to go see the Principal. Mr. Cook quickly appeared at my back, red in the face and angry that his afternoon had been disturbed. When he saw it was me he exploded. He told me to come with him to his office. He told the referee to continue the game.

In his office, Mr. Cook told me I had reached a new low. Students from Outremont High did not resort to such tactics to win a game. He told me I had embarrassed “his” school, “his” athletes and all “his” students. He gave me a detention for every day during the next week and told me I was banned from all athletic activities at “his” school for the rest of that year.

After the game the players treated me like a hero. Other fans had taken up my towel waving and screaming. The other team, especially the coach, had been upset and lost the game. The coach was thrown out of the game for yelling at the fans. The captain of the losing team was ejected for throwing a punch.

In grade 11, on November 22, John F. Kennedy was shot in Dallas. I was in a chemistry class. Monitors were sent to every class to tell the teachers and students what had happened and that school was cancelled for the remainder of the day. Students were to quietly and respectfully leave the building, and were to return to school the next day.

Our chemistry teacher, Mr. Bill Cook (the Principal’s brother) was speechless. Some of the girls cried. No one joked around or misbehaved.

During grade 11 every effort was made by our teachers to ensure we achieved the highest marks possible on the Province-wide matriculation exams. We rushed through the regular curriculum so we could spend our time after Xmas preparing for these exams. Our teachers had exams from previous years. Our math teacher had them going back over 50 years! Every second class we wrote an exam. We started with the oldest ones and worked our way forward. We would write an exam one day and then correct it during the next class. The teachers kept close track of our marks and posted them. Everyone was focused on getting 100% on every exam.

My final mark on the matriculation exams was 83.4%.

I thought that was pretty good, but in my class it wasn’t even in the top third. The highest average was over 96%! I had taken 4 math courses, algebra, geometry, intermediate algebra and trigonometry. On three I got 100%. I only achieved 98% in trigonometry. I was in the top 15 students in Outremont and in the top 1% in the Province.

Everyone in my class had applied to attend a university. I had only applied to McGill University to enter Engineering. I knew I would get accepted. I hoped I would be accepted into the Honours program. My 83.4% average was 0.1% below the level required to get an entry scholarship into McGill.