

Shanty Experience Remembered

Eric "Wacko" Walker, a junior philosophy/communications major gives a personal account of his last day of staying in the shanties in front of South Building and the events that led up to the day the shanties were destroyed. The shanties were erected as a protest against UNC's investment in companies in South Africa.

Special to the Ink

Monday, April 7, 6:00 a.m. The twenty-three of us who spent our last night in these shanties are up gathering the last of our belongings and moving them so the approaching workers aren't forced to take them too. Half-awake, we make jokes about going to class for a change, and having to become re-acquainted with our roommates. However, the jokes don't change the mood. We all know that in an hour, it's all going to be over. We're going to be moved.

6:15 a.m. Kelvin Nivens, Laura Azar, Cathy Cowan, and I sit and reminisce. It's been weird out here. It's been kind of fun too. We came out here almost a month ago as rebels with a cause. "We're building these shanties, we're going to live in them, and we're not leaving until the university divests!" we thought.

After negotiations with Chancellor Fordham, we were permitted to build our three shanties and leave them standing for one more week. Well, it was a start, anyway.

That night, we got the first of what was to become four nights of the worst weather Chapel Hill had faced in three weeks. First, it started raining. Two of the three shanties leaked terribly. One, made of cardboard of all things, collapsed after about two hours. Because of the rain, the temperature dropped. So we've got about thirteen very wet, very cold, very mad people trying to tell lousy jokes to keep everybody's spirits up. Somehow or other, we made it through the night, and the next couple of nights. Someone then had the bright idea of taping the shanties with plastic. An anonymous donor sent us a kerosene heater. We built a literature table, had teach-ins, and debated non-believers. People brought their boxes out and we listened to reggae music. We even got around to building a few more shanties. Things were going good, and we felt strong in our purpose and our goals. We should have known something was about to happen.

The weekend came, and for the first time (but by no means the last) we discovered that when certain individuals have a little too much to drink, their confidence increases drastically. We spent much of Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights dividing our time between debating opponents and trying to keep people from taking the shanties down. Not fun. The shanties then started getting negative press. It seemed that everywhere we turned, somebody had something bad to say. "You're just making fools out of yourselves," or "If you only knew what an eyesore you're making for the university," or even, "It's obvious that the only reason you're doing this is because you didn't get enough attention when you were young," were among some of the comments.

However, for all that went wrong, more things went right. More and more people everyday came out to our teach-ins, and picked up information concerning South Africa. The chancellor granted us an indefinite extension on leaving the shanties up. We started to get positive comments, both in person and in the media. The Tin Drum Theater helped us with programs. The biggest threat, our philosophical opponents, the UNC College Republicans and Students For America threw at us, the "Berlin Wall," which turned out to be the biggest joke this side of Wake Forest's basketball program.

Mary Berry, co-founder of the Free South Africa Program in Washington DC, came and spoke with us. Harlan Ellison, an internationally reknown science fiction writer and activist, said UNC's protest was the "best protest I've seen in three years, and I've been speaking at a lot of colleges."

We were pulling news coverage from all over the state, both wire services, and even some national papers and news teams were sending reporters down to talk with us. We were flying high. But alas, all things must come to an end. Chancellor Fordham, with a little encouragement from the Board of Trustees said that everything had to go. Which is where we are now.

6:35 a.m. People are starting to arrive in bunches. We're really impressed, because we didn't think this many people cared. As one of the facilitators, I'm outfitting people with their arm bands of solidarity, reminding them that we don't want any violent outbreaks, so they should just let the police and workers do their jobs. All the media is here—print, TV, and radio. We're still making jokes, about the Board of Trustees, about the College Republicans, about how stupid people look at 6:30 in the morning, but fewer and fewer people are laughing. This is the real thing.

7:00 a.m. Right on time, the police and physical plant workers arrive and start to tear the shanties down. There's so many spectators, we have to form two circles around the shanties to accomodate everyone. We do a couple of chants, sing a couple of songs, endure a couple of right-wing insults, and soon, only the



Protest shanty

Photo by Tammi Foust

last shanty remains. Inside are five of our members refusing to leave, even if it means arrest. It does, and our comrades are led away to face the charge of trespassing. Kelvin Nivens, who has by now become one of the more visible members of the group, reads a statement proclaiming that this is not the end of the movement, rather, the beginning. We will continue to escalate our efforts until UNC involvement in South Africa is no more. Dale McKinley, another leader, takes us to the steps of South Building to chant "Let our people go!" and "Divest Now!"

I look back, past the 300 screaming people, past the reporters and cameras, and see the area we just left. It's really weird. You get kind of used to seeing them there, passing them, sitting in front of them, playing football around them, living in them. Three weeks is along time. It is time enough to get used to just about anything. And it hurts when somebody takes it away. I fight back a surge of emotion and wonder back to see what it is I already miss about these shanties. I look up to see Laura, Kelvin, Cathy, Mark, Paul, Margarete, Brenda, Marty, Rob, and Linda. Almost everybody has tears in their eyes. Behind us, the crowd's still going wild chanting "South Africa must be free!" I see the same questions in everybody's eyes. *Was it worth it?* Was it worth enduring the rain, the cold, the eggings, the drunks, the missed classes, the ruined social lives, being labeled as a lunatic fringe? Was it worth doing this to prove a point? Even now, I really don't know. I do know I feel better about myself, and about the people who rolled out of bed to be with us, even about the people who didn't and don't give a damn. But *was it worth it!* I wonder? But, I'd definitely do it again.

The nominating committee of the Black Greek Council, composed of one representative from each black greek chapter, selected recipients for honors from nominations presented from each chapter.

Most Spirited Greeks	Tammy Gilliam Fred Tindal
Most Outstanding Neophyte	Sherie Evans Dexter Tucker
Most Outstanding Greek	Bob Willis
Most Progressive Chapter	Xi Gamma Chapter of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc.
Most Supportive Chapter	Xi Gamma Chapter of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc.
Best Service Project	Theta Pi Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.

The newly elected officers for the Black Greek Council for the 1986-87 school year:

President - Dexter Tucker, Phi Beta Sigma
Vice-President - William Lawrence, Kappa Alpha Psi
Secretary - Crystal Redding, Delta Sigma Theta
Treasurer - Cleveland Lewis, Omega Psi Phi