

Movin' on Up: Miss Dennis Goes to Ottawa

By Catherine SWEET

Oh, the places you'll go. Dr. Seuss' words were never truer when it comes to UPEI's former Student Union President, Cynthia Dennis. It's amazing what can happen when you volunteer to show what you've got for your university. After holding the position of Speaker of the SU for the year 2000-2001, Cynthia was elected into the executive. She held down the fort last year as the Union brought (polite but firm) demands to then-Education Minister Jeff Lantz, staged a march and a camp-out on two of the coldest days in PEI history, represented our Uni in Ottawa with the Canadian Federation of Students (along with now-SU President Chris Power), and spoke on the steps of Province House when a huge number of students marched on the legislature to secure a tuition freeze. All that and oh, she said goodbye to the Barn in style.

She must have impressed someone because after the countless hours of work she put in being a mouthpiece for the UPEI student body, she's now impressing people working on Parliament Hill in Ottawa. Cynthia graduated from UPEI in May and worked at The Dunes in Brackley Beach this summer and then planned to wait tables in Charlottetown to save up enough money to go travelling next spring with her boyfriend (the talented Lennie MacPherson).

"Then I get a call saying, 'Listen, we have a 6 month position available in Ottawa...' and after he contacted me and knew I'd be interested I had to get him my resumé." This was two weeks before she had to be there. Now, a month and-a-half later, she says she's still recovering from the rush of it all. "I arrived here on the last Tuesday of August and started work on the second of September."

She had known Shawn Murphy, MP for a couple of years. "He knew me from my visits up [to Ottawa] and because when you're on the SU you meet with your MP at the beginning of the year. I had gone to lunch with him last September a year ago, just to kick around what the issues were, what our position was and what

we wanted him to do. There was that, and then I attended some community forums, and would see him at events, and knew him through CFS [Canadian Federation of Students]."

Now, as Executive Assistant to Shawn Murphy Cynthia is in charge of making his day run a lot smoother. She organizes his travel plans, researches issues for his interest, and looks after his Cable 10 addresses that are aired here on Fridays. Along with that she looks into individual Canada Student Loans and Immigration cases and answers the correspondence from Mr. Murphy's constituents on his behalf. "I see a lot of crazy stuff from the constituents," says Cynthia.

I asked her what it was like working for an MP on Parliament Hill (the office of to the left of the Peace Tower, she explains). "Shawn's a really great guy to work for, he's fairly easy-going but at the same time, he's a really hard worker. He works really hard, so it keeps me busy." And how about getting hired on to work in the midst of all the politics? "I never had any political affiliation at all, and I respect him for that. He knows where I stand on a lot of issues and he knows where I differ with him on issues but he says that's great and we want free thinkers and people who have ideas of their own."

On the topic suddenly living in the nation's capitol, Cynthia says she is staying away from the more touristy attractions and sticking to art galleries, museums ("I can see the Museum of Civilisation [in Hull] from my window!"), and independent movie houses. "People ask me if I'm hanging out with lots of new people, and I say, actually, I've been seeing a lot of old friends!" She's met with Caolan Moore, last year's Student Union's Executive VP who's attending classes at Carlton University's Norman Patterson School of International Affairs, and she's been running into people from home with whom she attended UPEI and High School. As for big events, her mother tried to get her to go to the Enrique Iglesias concert last month, but she would hear

nothing of it.

I asked her if she could pull some strings for UPEI's Rude Mechanicals, Cynthia answered, "I'll do what I can, but I think Wade's got

that covered." Clearly, President Wade MacLauchlan is still the big man on campus if the feds don't want to step on his feet.

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