

The Road Less Traveled

BY MARIUM MOHIUDDIN
Staff writer

ookies with Eleanor Roosevelt, discussions with Kenny Rogers, friendships with the likes of Bob Newhart — not many can boast of a life ranging in politics in Washington, D.C. to showrooms in Las Vegas. But all of the above are just a few of the experiences in the life of Charles Murray, director of the Faculty Club.

Mr. Murray Goes to Washington

Charles Murray was born and raised in the political heart of Washington, D.C.
"I went to a very unusual high school," he said. "The members of Congress and the Cabinet send their kids to his high school so they can go back to their district. I say, 'My kids go to public school.' The average teacher there had a Ph.D. My English teacher's husband is an ambassador to the United Nations. One of my professors had written eight books, and my homeroom teacher drew the plans for the Colt .45, which is a handgun used in the military."
Murray said his father was a political consultant, so he was able to meet many distinguished people.
"I was very young when I knew the Roosevelts," Murray said. "I knew Presidents Truman, Johnson, Reagan and the Bushes."



DEREK DEMERE/THE BATTALION

Charles Murray, director of the Faculty Club, has dined with the Bushes and Kenny Rodgers among other celebrities.

In the Army Now

Murray left Washington at the age of 17 and spent 20 years in the military. He was in the Air Force for 12 years and the Army for eight years. During his time in the service, he began his career in club management.

"I will never forget the day I got into the club business," he said. "I was 17 years old and in basic training. We were assigned guard duty. We would guard statues and trash cans, because they were teaching us how to do this."

"It was a freezing day — the kind of day where the rain would freeze on you. The bus pulled up in front of the officers' club, and I was assigned interior fire watch."

Murray said he was excited because he had a chance to come in from the bad weather.

"The manager [of the officers' club] came up to me and asked what I was doing. I said I was checking for fires, and he said, 'They have fire alarms and an excellent sprinkler system. If there is a fire, then they will go off.' So I then started checking the doors and windows, and he asked what I was doing now. I said, 'I was checking for burglars.' What did I know? I was only 17."

Murray said the manager invited him for dinner and from there began his career in club management.

Overseas

Murray later had a big club business in Vietnam, but he said he had to give it up because of problems with the Khaki Mafia.

"The Khaki Mafia was a group of seven guys who ran the army club system in 'Nam," Murray said. "They were in charge of all the entertainment, alcohol and the food. They were wealthy. They were skimming 30 percent off the top of everything. They were making about \$11 million a month."

"I went there to run the club system. My friends told me not to get involved because they were looking for a fall guy for the Khaki Mafia."

"They were discovered and investigated by Congress. The Sergeant Major of the Army, the top enlisted man, was prosecuted and convicted. They got him for tax evasion."

From Vietnam, Murray went to Okinawa, Japan. He said at one time, he had 26 clubs in Okinawa.

"I was able to meet many stars," Murray said. "They would come to the clubs because the record companies would send them to the Pacific."

We're Coming to America

When Murray left the military, he became involved in the club system in America.

"I used to travel from Japan to Cornell [New York]," Murray said. "On my way there, I would stop in San Francisco. One year, San Francisco was fogged down, so we had to land in Reno, Nevada because it is the next closest stop before the mountains. We got off the plane,

Charles Murray has experienced life from the white pillars of Washington, D.C. to the neon and glitter of Reno. He now shares his life experiences with students, staff members and a couple he calls "The Bushes" at the Texas A&M Faculty Club.

and they divided us according to hotels.

"Because I was in the business, I began checking things out, and I was very impressed. I sat down at the black jack table, and there was an old man sitting beside me. I started telling him how impressed I was. He left and this other man, named Mondo Ruda, who became a great friend of mine, came and asked if I would have dinner with the old man. I was not doing anything else so I said, 'sure.'"

"I went up to the restaurant and told them who I was. He took me down this hall and waved his hands, and the whole wall split apart. There stood Bill Harrach's, owner of Harrach's Las Vegas," Murray said.

Viva Las Vegas

Murray said he learned the club business from Harrach and was able to build a fascinating relationship.

"Bill was married six times, but had no children," he said. "He kind of adopted me as his son. So whenever I would fly through there, I would stop, and he would take care of me. Through him, I got to meet a lot of people."

Murray said he became the head of the showroom at Harrach's hotel and met Elvis Presley, Frank Sinatra, Ben Vereen and many other celebrities.

"John Davidson was one of the great stars at that time," Murray said. "He was singing in the showroom on Christmas Eve. I had come early that day, and security told me they could not find John Davidson. We had all five shifts of security looking for him. We found him

in the lettuce room, which is the third floor underneath the hotel, passed out drunk on a box of lettuce."

"The show was going to start in two hours. We poured cold water on him and forced him to drink coffee to make him sober. We ended up tying him to the stool and told him he better lip synch very well. He got through that, but Bill was there, and he knew that it was fake."

Murray said when he was the head of the showroom, companies and people would be generous with their tips in order to get good tables.

"I would get boxes of t-shirts, a washer and drier and a lot more," Murray said.

Murray said after his time in Vegas, he worked for other companies as a vice president and as a consultant. However, his attitude toward life changed when he was working at a club in Brownsville, TX.

"I would smoke three and a half packs of cigarettes a day, drink 36 cups of coffee and eat a steak a day," Murray said. "I ended up in the emergency room with people pushing nitroglycerin pills down me. In the corner I could here people saying 'Do you think he will make it?' I thought to myself, 'Is this it?'"

"My friends have become alcoholics and gamblers and they are in debt," Murray said. "Mondo is still in the business. He is the same age as me, but when I see him, I know he is not going to be with us for much longer. People get caught up in this lifestyle. Once you get stuck in this lifestyle, there is no way out. I have traveled around a lot and have lived in the fast life. I have seen how quickly things can go up and how quickly they can come down."

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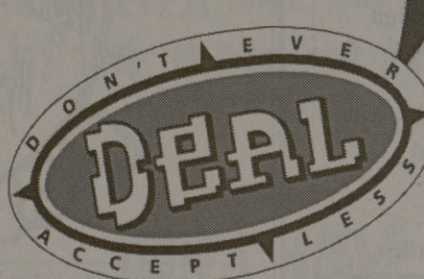
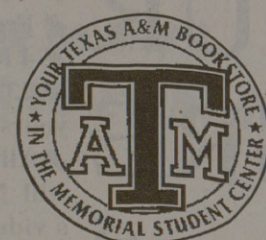
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