

Author Mary Beth Ellis took an unusual route to her college degree-through a Catholic women's college. At Saint Mary's College of Notre Dame, IN, she faces her first date, first roommate, and first drink. An amusing, engaging literary memoir.

Drink to the Lasses

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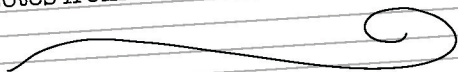
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Drink to the Lasses

Notes from a Women's College Womb



Mary Beth Ellis

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chapter one
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Tunnels

There were tunnels beneath my school, subterranean veins through which only students and the mostly-female staff were allowed to flow. It was dark down there, and drippy, but ninety percent of the time this was preferable to the South Bend weather aboveground.

Our brother school had the Good Year Blimp seven Saturdays a year, but we had this, the ability to walk below tree roots and emerge squinting in the weak winter sunlight. The tunnels connected dorm to bookstore to library, and the roaring stuffiness was sometimes so intense around the hot water lines that often when I emerged land-side to take on the last few hundred feet between me and the classroom building, I stepped into the biting outside air bareheaded, sweatshirt sleeves pushed up and carrying my stadium jacket through the falling snow.

Some artistic souls took to decorating the tunnels; murals, club advertisements, class signatures. So every fifty yards or so would go like this: Grey grey grey *enormous blue French Cross*; grey grey grey *quote from former College president*; grey grey grey *Look! Multicolored wrestling worms! It's Art!* grey grey grey...And there were spiders anyway.

Some said the tunnels were haunted. The only ancient spirit I experienced was that of an aged nun's. I was caught behind her

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at a shaft in the system in which the tunnels were too narrow to pass; I trailed her all the way across campus, underground, weaving behind, room keys clicking impatiently against my backpack. Her ankles were fiberoptic thin, spaghetti strands in support hose. I stared at the backs of her sensible shoes as I tailgated her in my tattered sneakers. Move! Move! *Move!* I was eighteen! With *things* to do!

She reached the end of the corridor, touched the door, turned back to smile at me, then slid past and walked back the other way.

The tunnels were glorious stealth, an echoey form of transport. We liked walking unseen. It could be midnight, one AM, four; we were still able to glide silently through the campus without the night ever knowing about it.

We laid our honor down before the tunnels. Parietals, we snapped with the ease of a Pixy Stick. There was an... understanding about that; we felt it was a stupid rule, and so we massaged our actions around it, when necessary. Man In the Tunnels, there was an understanding about that, too. Dates were rarely taken for a tour.

The administration shut down the tunnels soon after I graduated. Security risk, they said; codes, and regulations, and all. When I read the news, I sat back in my big-girl, real-world chair, sorrowing. The students who have since taken my place wear their jackets all the time now.

I bet that nun's still down there.

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