Many students refer to the iconic freshman dorms as “prison cells,” in reference to their barred windows and white, cement walls. However, these disease incubators marked the beginning of each of our chapters here at the University of Miami.

Dr. David Ake, a 1983 UM alumnus and current professor and Chair of the Department of Musicology at UM Frost School of Music, lived in Stanford for his first two years at UM and in Hecht as a Resident Assistant during the next two. He said his best memory was having a shared space where he got to meet different people.

“In those days, everyone had record players, and we were all musicians, so everyone had a stereo— a loud stereo,” said Ake. “And you would put a record on, and we would go around checking out different people’s music. It was a way of learning new people and sharing who we were. That sense of building community is what I will always remember.”

Rori Kotch, former Editor-in-Chief of Distraction who graduated in 2016, said that she “made some of [her] closest friends in the dorms, some that [she] still [keeps] in close contact with today. The dorms are a great experience, but they were just never really clean,” Kotch said.

Dr. Ake agreed, saying that “it wasn’t the most ideal situation when you were sharing a bathroom with 40 people. "That was a little funky, but in general, it was my home," he said.

2019 UM graduate and President’s 100 member Scott Murnick had nothing but positive things to say about the residences. Murnick expressed feelings of nostalgia that his old home and all the memories hidden inside its walls would be torn down.

“It’s like moving out of your hometown or moving away from your first home that you grew up in—you really do get that connection back to it,” said Murnick. Every time I go back, I won’t see those features. It’s going to be weird, I guess you could say, just knowing that it’s changing and evolving. It’s kind of sad.”

Freshman and current Hecht resident Robert Macnamara had the opposite reaction. “This is the worst place I’ve ever lived in my life; I would be so happy for it to go down,” Macnamara said.

Other Hecht residents are more sentimental. Jessica Day, a freshman at UM, said that she’s sad about seeing the dorms torn down because of all the memories she’s already made in her first year. I will never forget living in the dorms for the rest of my life,” Day said.

Fifty-two years after their halls first flooded with eager freshmen in turtlenecks and knee highs, Stanford Residential College will be torn down in the summer of 2020, with Florence Ruth Hecht Residential College following soon after. According to the Miami Herald, the towers will be replaced by a $260 million “Centennial Village.”
Current freshman and Hecht resident Gal Dardashti—who had the privilege of waking up one day to a cockroach on her face—will also never forget living in the dorms.

“One morning, I felt a slight tickle on my face, and I thought it was just my roommate messing around, so my eyes were closed, and I was like, 'Brielle, stop!' then that woke Brielle up, and she was like, 'What’s your issue?' and I was like, 'You’re touching my face,' and then I put my hand on my face, and a giant cockroach was on my cheek. To say the least—that did not leave a happy impression in my mind about the dorms,” Dardashti said.

Hecht resident and current freshman Ella Wayne vividly remembers her floormate waking up with a baby lizard on her head. “This girl on my floor who lives two two doors down from me just woke up from her nap, and she went to the girls’ room whose is next to mine, and they screamed,” said Wayne. “She was like, 'Why are you guys screaming?' and they were like, 'There’s a lizard on your head!’

For a week, Wayne’s neighbors unknowingly harbored a stray lizard in their room after it hid itself behind the girls’ mini-fridge. When they finally found it, Wayne decided it best to set the lizard free, but for her floormates, they said that “naps will never be the same.”

Although many students complain about the conditions, the Executive Director for the Department of Housing and Residential Life, James Gordon Smart, said that the residences have received numerous upgrades over the years, including the addition of cable, Ethernet and WiFi, along with fire prevention and detection systems.

The common areas of the building were also renovated extensively in the mid-1980s when the complexes were converted to residential colleges. “They have now reached the point of functional obsolescence and are being replaced,” Smart said.

An article written by Mike Piacentinto, the school’s manager of marketing, communications and development, clarified that the Centennial Village will “provide resident students with a living...
and learning environment that enriches their overall on-campus experience.” Piacentinto also included detailed plans for the village’s many new amenities. “Totaling 522,000 square feet, Centennial Village will showcase its lakefront location along Lake Osceola and feature more than 1,700 beds for first-year students, indoor and outdoor spaces for academic and extracurricular activities, a learning hub, meditation room and apartments for faculty and staff,” Piacentinto said.

Hecht and Stanford, our most beloved and detested pair of vintage dormitories, may not be able to compete with the amenities that the Centennial Village will have to offer, but the history of the residency halls can’t be erased. More than 50 years of UM alumni have created lifelong memories, holding their roommates’ hands from across the room and fighting for shower space in the communal bathrooms. And though these mold-covered memories will not be forgotten, a slew of new, much more sanitary experiences eagerly await the next class of ‘Canes.

According to the Miami Herald, “A new path along the lake shore will connect to the Eaton residential college and the Student Housing Village, which comprises 25 interconnected buildings and includes retail space, a “launch pad” for student businesses, a 200-seat auditorium and a flexible “curated warehouse” space.”