Early Memories of Wits

I was born in the early 30s and started at Wits in the early 50s, having progressed from Parkview Schools to Parktown Boys’ and across Jan Smuts Avenue to Wits University, where I registered for Civil Eng.

Do you remember:

* The shock and surprise at the size of those big sloping lecture rooms.
* The first lecturer’s words: “Better Never than Late” (Mr Oliver Applied Maths 1)
* There must have been about 300 Engineering students, all white boys, no females. About 20% of us made it to graduation.
* The lawns in front of the Library were liberally populated with ex 2nd World War rectangular Nissen huts.
* One was the cafeteria. The Rag office too, which was home to a never-ending poker school.
* Our Maths 3 lectures were in one hut with a small blackboard which the lecturer quickly covered with scrawled differential calculus.
* The overflow men’s residence was at Cottesloe in “Nissen huts” in a barbed wire enclosed site. I knew an ex-serviceman who had been taken POW at Tobruk and after five years in Germany, Wits put him in “Cot” and he told me he sat on his bed and looked around and said “Hell no” and walked out.
* Remember the bus trips to the Wits gates and racing to get to lectures.
* Running Cross Country. Training runs of 6 or 7 miles after lectures and Wits team races of 10 miles on Sundays.
* Many of the guys wore blazers and ties. There was one girl on campus who wore a see-through top and you could see her bra; all the other girls were horrified.
* Many of us used to go to the pool area to eat our lunch and watch the Physio girls doing their gym.
* In 3rd year the Civils and Miners went and camped near Magaliesberg and did practical survey in the hills. We hired two trucks to get there, one for the tents and clothes, and one for the beer.

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