

UMN luck and legends

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From the “Tin Man” curse to Goldy’s lucky teeth, this episode unearths the quirky superstitions that unite Gophers on campus.

OWEN MCDONNELL: Hello everybody! My name is Owen McDonnell from the Minnesota Daily, and I’m your host of In The Know, a podcast dedicated to the University of Minnesota.

Many people have some sort of superstition in their life. Maybe you eat a certain meal before your upcoming sports game. Maybe you keep that four leaf clover you found in your wallet for a little good luck. Or maybe you’re like me and listen to Sweet Child O’ Mine on repeat when you’re walking to your final exam. Regardless, everybody has some superstition that they partake in, whether they truly believe in it or not.

But did you know that the University of Minnesota itself holds multiple campus superstitions? As a matter of fact, I bet you do. If any of you listeners went on a campus tour before enrolling at the university, you may remember your tour guide mentioning superstitions, such as the Kellerman statue or Goldy’s teeth.

I sat down with sophomore Fiona Griffin, a campus tour guide and student here at the university, who says the main one most people know is the Tin Man statue on the East Bank campus.

FIONA GRIFFIN: So we have a few superstitions on campus. Nothing too crazy. I think the most well known one, we have our statue, the Kellerman, or like, some people call him the Tin Man, over by like, the engineering buildings. The main thing with that is you can’t walk between his legs or else you’re not going to graduate in four years.

We also tell people on tour there’s two ways to break the so-called curse that you get if you walk between his legs and you can either sprint to our Goldy statue in front of Coffman or you can steal a pole vaulting pole from the Fieldhouse and pole vault over the Tin Man, which is a pretty tall ask because he’s a pretty tall dude.

MCDONNELL: As Griffin mentioned, the Kellerman statue, officially named the Platonic Figure by UK-born Minneapolis artist Andrew Leicester, holds a somewhat uneasy superstition on campus. However, according to the [University of Minnesota Alumni Association](#), the statue originally held a different superstition. It was said that if students were feeling woefully unprepared for a final, walking under the statue granted mystical alien-like intelligence. Griffin also says that there’s not just bad luck charms for students. There’s also good ones, too.

GRIFFIN: Yeah, rubbing Goldy's teeth is said to be good luck for pretty much just about everything. Like if you have an exam or just want to have a good semester, a good year, it's really good to rub Goldy's teeth.

MCDONNELL: Although Griffin hasn't officially rubbed Goldy's teeth for good luck, she and her tour guide friends still use the superstition in some way.

GRIFFIN: OK, I don't personally. I wish I could say I have. I would say honestly though, most of the tour guides have definitely rubbed Goldy's teeth. Not for good luck, but sometimes they do it on tour just to, you know, show off that it's a thing of good luck, but I don't know anyone specifically who actually partakes in these.

MCDONNELL: Those two superstitions, both the Kellerman statue and Goldy's teeth, are fairly well known. However, Griffin says there's a lesser known legend on campus that they talk about on tour sometimes.

GRIFFIN: Kind of a superstition we have that I learned because of giving tours here, we don't say it on every tour. In one of our oldest buildings on campus, Eddy Hall, there is a rumor that there's a ghost that lives in there. That lives on the top floor because the light will actually flicker on and off sometimes even though nobody uses the building ever. I don't know how true that is. It's said to be Goldy's evil twin Maroony.

MCDONNELL: I bet some of you listeners didn't know that fun legend! I didn't even know it myself. As a tour guide, Griffin talks about these superstitions every day to new audiences. She says these charms are important because they give a campus character.

GRIFFIN: I think it can help develop a campus's story, and I know a lot of other schools, too, they have their own superstitions. On other college tours I went on, there was things that they told me I could or couldn't do for good luck or bad luck, but I don't know. I think it just kind of brings another dimension to the U, like, outside of the very strict, like, this is school. These are our buildings. It's just fun.

MCDONNELL: Finally, Griffin shares her thoughts about superstitions as a whole and how much truth they really hold.

GRIFFIN: I think with all superstitions that can have an effect, like people that are superstitious in general, like if you see like a black cat, like it's bad luck, I think. And I guess, like, maybe there is some kind of a subconscious. I would say, like, more a good example, like, if you are really nervous about something and then you go and rub Goldy's teeth, maybe it'll give you an extra boost of confidence that you need to get through whatever it is that you're wishing for good luck for, whether it's, like, an exam or a project or just life in general.

I think maybe that will give you an extra boost of confidence. With the things like, "Don't walk under the statue or else you're not gonna graduate in four years." I mean, I don't know, like, I guess I don't, like, really think about it every day. Like, "Oh no, if I walk under there, I'm not

going to graduate.” But, like, I still avoid it.

MCDONNELL: Of course, Goldy’s teeth and the Kellerman statue do not really hold some, you know, magical power. However, that does not mean there are not a plethora of stories that back up their claims.

As I was researching the Kellerman, I came across stories on Reddit about people’s personal experiences with the statue’s bad luck. One user wrote about how only after they walked under the statue’s legs did they realize they wanted to drop out. He never graduated. Another talked about how they transferred out of the U the next semester after walking under the legs. Heck, even in my own life, one of my friends walked under the legs, and he’s not graduating in four years. He is graduating in three!

Regardless if any of these stories are true, what is true is that the stories resonate with students all around campus. I went out on campus to talk to a few students to hear what they had to say about the stories. Aaron Hong, an economics major here at the U, said he and his friends partook in the tradition of rubbing Goldy’s teeth.

AARON HONG: I did like, the first day I came here, like, I met some friends and like, told me, if I touch the statue’s teeth, I got a good luck and can graduate easily.

MCDONNELL: Have you ever done that?

HONG: Yeah, I did. Right away.

MCDONNELL: Another student on campus, Benjamin Leahy, says he learned about the bad luck superstition of the Kellerman statue freshman year.

BENJAMIN LEAHY: I know the superstition. All the freshmen are introduced during orientation, but if you walk underneath it during your first semester, you’re doomed to not, you know, graduate. That’s the superstition, and I have unfortunately walked underneath. So hold on, fingers crossed, it doesn’t happen to me.

MCDONNELL: Although Leahy knows about the superstition and has walked under the legs of bad luck, he still thinks that it won’t have an effect on him.

Do you believe like, deep down that you will actually not graduate in four years or just kind of something that’s fun to think about?

LEAHY: No, I laughed at it. I know hopefully you graduate. I don’t believe in it all the way.

MCDONNELL: Leahy also says how campus superstitions can help students connect with each other.

LEAHY: It unites us, at least for the engineering group I was part of. It definitely united us. You know, we were talking about how hard physics and calc and all that kind of stuff would be. And we're like, we had this together. We laughed together. We're like, "Oh, hopefully no one, you know, go underneath it." But it brought us together. We got a good laugh out of it. No, the morale brought us together.

MCDONNELL: Leahy's orientation memory really shows the power of a well-known story. A group of incoming freshmen who know little about each other find commonality and bond over a silly campus story. It goes to show just how much more we have in common than we might think. And hey, maybe the real superstitions were the friends we made along the way.

All jokes aside, there is something to be said about how stories like these can affect a campus's identity, and more importantly, campus memories. Running through the legs of the Kellerman after a long night out with your friends or rubbing Goldy's teeth with your random freshman roommate can net some of the most memorable moments as a college kid. I know they have for me, at least. So next time you're walking on Scholar's Walk and see the big Tin Man hawking over you, or see Goldy's statue outside of Coffman, take a second to appreciate the culture it brings to our campus, and the memories it has most definitely created.

This episode was written by Owen McDonnell and produced by Kaylie Sirovy. Thanks so much for tuning into this week's podcast, and as always, feel free to send a message to our email inbox at podcasting@mndaily.com with any questions, comments or concerns. I'm Owen McDonnell, and again, thanks for listening.