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Speech to Fraternal Society of Hope College, delivered on October 11, 2002

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I. Reminiscences

A. Joining the Fraternal Society

1. Hope College – 1200 students – veterans – rougher approach to life or non involvement
2. Father was President of the College – as an undergrad he was a cosmo
3. Rushed by Fraters, cosmos, and Emmies – liked all three – 2 sophomores lived across the street from Pres. Residence – Lumsden & Beuker – became friends during my senior year in high school. They were strong influence along with local Frater graduates – the best Fraternity
4. Some good friends and classmates – Guy Vander Jagt and Fred Vandenberg were Emmies

B. The Invitation

1. Is Leonidas a familiar name today? The dog we ate – buried each year to be exhumed for the dining satisfaction of the pledges – William Putnam later worked for me at GVSU
2. Carnegie Gym – scene of torture and humiliations and a taste of Leonidas – spoiled chicken livers
3. Taken to the country blindfolded – walked about 5 miles – cold & wet – 4:30 a.m. hamburger in only 24 hour restaurant in Holland

C. The Frolics

1. Raise money for the Fraternity – four or five performances
2. Do something outrageous to bring in the customers after the first performance
3. At best good satire, at worst I suppose bad satire. Really the risqué or the sacrilegious could become troublesome
4. My father I think sometime wished he could give the Fraters the money and have us discontinue the performances
5. It was a series of variety skits. In my later years I served as interlocutor or MC
6. First year – walk on line – “Alas Alack you withered old sack” I hurled verbally at some grandmotherly person – probably a professor or house mother in one of the residences.

7. Each year the performance would bring criticisms to my father’s attention – he was a good sport, but I know he thought, “I don’t need this.” He never put pressure on me to refrain from participation.

D. The Greater Frater-Emersonian Caper

1. After a visit from some Emmies we noticed our gavel was missing.
2. Invited their representatives to come to our meeting to negotiate. They came but were not prepared to surrender the gavel.
3. We collected ole and some rotten eggs from a hatchery – I believe son in the business had been a Frater or had good Frater friends.
4. Marched to Emmersonian House in mass and began pelting it with eggs – good diversion while an assigned team broke into their basement through a window and took their fuse box switch.
5. Our egg supply depleted, their house darkened, and we in possession of their switch retreated to the Frater House a block away.
6. We now had leverage for negotiations, and as I remember, late in the night they were completed with the proper exchange.
7. Called into Dean of Students office the next morning – have vague recollections of him trying to stifle a laugh as he dealt with the situation – don’t remember if the fraternities had to pay or wash off the eggs, or pay for a broken basement window.

E. Positive Elements of Fraternity life for me

1. Weekly or biweekly meetings -- a serious paper and a humor paper.
2. Usually of fairly high quality -- did not want to embarrass oneself.
3. Students would prepare paper on a subject of major interest -- often relating to his major -- sometimes at major political topic of the day. Veterans wrote on World War II.
4. Humor -- all I remember is often loud and sustained laughter, humor sometimes clever, sometimes ribald -- seldom did papers fall short on good humor.
5. Many lasting friendships -- to this day we get together.
6. Discussions after dates at Fraternity House -- women and existentialism.
7. Nicknames -- Bird Dog Johnson, Numb Nuts, Otto, IJ.
II. The College will assume new responsibilities to guarantee the success of the Greek system.

A. In mailings to applicants describe the fraternity and sorority life and its positive contribution to students who participate

B. In the office of Vice President for Student Affairs place the responsibility for organizing an effective rush program and support for Greek societies in defining and reaching their objectives.

III. The possible functions for fraternities and sororities supported by Student Affairs Office

A. Tutoring of freshmen in the organization

1. Assign person or people to be watchful of each pledge who comes into the fraternity or sorority
2. Help for tutoring from within or without, but check should come from within

B. Program for character building

1. This should be part of promotional materials
2. Outside facilitators and speakers can be brought in to give substance to the program
3. Group and individual projects contributing to building character – service projects, readings, followed by discussions

C. Personal Care Program

1. Brothers being watchful for the mental and spiritual health of brothers
2. Problem of depression is common, and often first experienced in college
3. Possible with close contact with counseling center to be proactive as a fraternity in keeping the group psychology and the personal mental condition of members healthy

D. Alcohol free environment

1. Consider making the fraternity house an alcohol free zone
2. Understand that is true for all of Hope College
3. Understand also that sneaking beer into fraternity houses is common
4. Brothers must commit. It becomes the fraternity rule not just the college rule
5. **Change the image of beer drinking fraternity**

**E. Plan and set house rules to keep living quarters neat and attractive – the Martha Stewart effect**

1. **Be included on tours for men prospective students and their parents**
2. **Make a deal with administration for special financial help if high standards are maintained**
3. **Believe attractive environment makes better life, better students**

Fraternities are about many things, but they are mostly about friendships. Being associated together in a fraternal organization offers many opportunities for each member to make friends. Sir William Osler, noted physical who is the father of the modern medical school curriculum, wrote in his autobiography, “In the life of a young man the most essential thing for happiness is the gift of friendship.” I liked this statement when I read it for the thought was new to me. As I remembered the past, and observed students, I came to see the truth in it. In the years leaving adolescence, reaching for maturity, the reassurance of friendship is a stabilizing force. The sharing, the exploring, the conviviality that accompany friendship, can make the difference between progress and restlessness, confidence and self-doubt, purpose and being adrift, happiness and discontent. The Fraternal Society is where many of us who are now graying alumni formed our college friends, friends to this day. We were so important to each other as college friends. I hope you are having the same experience.