

**HAZED AND CONFUSED:**

**A review of hazing in our own backyard**

**Written and Researched**

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## **Rush Week**

Having come back to Cornell, half way through rush week, I had no intention of seriously rushing a house, nonetheless accepting a bid to pledge. Rush week is more or less a week for fraternities and sororities to demonstrate their prominence on campus through social events, some university sponsored and others far from anything on which a university would ever stamp its seal of approval. My abbreviated rush week consisted of visiting very few houses, with the bulk of my time spent at Alpha Gamma Phi.

It's hard to imagine a one week rush process being very successful under any circumstances, considering fraternities will rarely offer a freshman a bid unless they have been spending a considerable number of nights partying at their house and getting to know their many illustrious members. Freshmen are unwittingly forced to narrow down their choice to one or two houses by the first day of rush week, and in my situation, involving just two nights to party and acquaint myself with a brotherhood, my options were severely limited. The decision was made a whole lot easier, however, when I advantageously discovered that three of my four best friends from my freshman dorm had already accepted bids from Alpha Gamma Phi, better known as Alpha Gam, before I had even returned to campus.

My first encounter with Alpha Gam included being pick up at my freshman dorm by a junior rush chair in the house, Dave Wyckek, who, incidentally, would later become my big brother. Dave and I instantly hit it off considering he was the captain of the Cornell golf team and had played at my home course in distant South Florida. His dad, like mine, was a doctor and he had Midwestern roots, similar to my family. Well one thing led to another and before I knew it I was being whisked off to the Alpha Gam house with a 40 ounce beverage in my hand and a car full of new buddies. It was a particularly cold winter, and I remember being reluctant to even go outdoors and wait in line to get into some mildly entertaining frat party, but much to my satisfaction they gave me the red carpet treatment that night: I was escorted by two brothers through the back door of the house and made to feel right at home.

It couldn't have been too long before two bisexual strippers arrived who didn't seem to want to leave until they had given every awestruck freshman, male and female, a sultry lap dance. They would later precede to act out with one another the sort of things most teenage guys only get a glimpse of on late

night, scrambled TV. The X rated entertainment was followed up by a rooms party, which entailed being escorted from one room to another imbibing a new mystery drink around each corner. The rest is a little blurry, but I remember lines of freshmen passing out sick on the bathroom floor. I guess one of the most astonishing things about rush week is that you never really hear about students dying from alcohol poisoning, and yet on any given night you will find at least a handful of overzealous partygoers at each fraternity within a couple drinks of meeting their destiny.

Early next afternoon I awoke eager to tell everyone whom hadn't accompanied me to the party about the events of the previous night. To my surprise my story was, at best, commonplace at the lunch table. Apparently every fraternity, even the "tool sheds" by my friends' standards had gone out and found some strippers and other forms of exotic entertainment to draw large numbers of freshmen to their parties. Reflecting on the situation it makes sense that every house would engage in such debauchery, since rush week is the only time of year a fraternity can change their reputation in the course of a night, literally. Of course, one must not forget, as hard as fraternities are trying to prove themselves worthy to prospective pledges, such freshman are also engaged in a shallow act to impress frat brothers enough that they are often duped into offering a bid to some version of a kid they think they have gotten to know in the course of a few nights.

Albeit most houses do make "rounds" towards the end of rush week, which include extremely abbreviated and superficial interviews of potential pledge candidates, there is very little time or effort made by fraternities to truly get to know a freshman rushing their house for the individual that he is. I recall having a couple houses, some of which I was never really certain that I had ever set foot in, come to my room and reintroduce themselves and encourage me to drop by their house that night if I was still considering pledging. Most of these well coordinated "interviews" consisted of a group of 3 or 4 brothers from a particular house asking me if I played golf, a fairly inane question considering my golf bag was visibly resting alongside my bed, and maybe one or two additional asinine questions. This might be of little relevance, however, as I would later be informed that the purpose of hazing during the pledge process is to break down pledges mentally and physically and rebuild them as a reinvented version of their old self that better meshes with the mold of the brotherhood.

Maybe it's not so puzzling that so many kids later come to the realization that they are caught up pledging a house that isn't exactly what they are cut out for socially or physically. Nearly every kid I met during rush week was an all-state quarterback in high school, lettered in three sports or had a dad who knew someone famous or very wealthy on a first name basis. It had never once occurred to me that

I attended such a socially elite and athletically gifted university. Interestingly, most of the kids on my freshmen floor looked like they hadn't ever seen a dumbbell, nonetheless a sporting event in their lifetimes, which were spent primarily studying for classes and playing computer games.

My lackluster high school career actually included lettering in two varsity sports, one of which I captained, but my closest friends were never really of the traditional jock mold. Most, but not all, of my high school friends struck me as the type that would feel in some way above the Greek system, and look down on a group of guys whose idea of a Tuesday night was to funnel beers on the couch before dinner and wrestle each other for their evening entertainment. Somehow that was exactly the type of environment in which I would find myself.

One night after the x rated affair, I received a phone call from Dave, who insisted that he pick me up to come spend more time at Alpha Gam with some of the other brothers. I told him that I appreciated the offer but that I was still feeling the effects of my hangover from the night before and I wasn't much in the mood for another night of hard partying. Whatever else I said to try to dodge his efforts to further acquaint me with the Alpha Gam brotherhood must not have worked, because shortly thereafter I was picked up by a few brothers and taken back to the hazy but somewhat familiar scene of the previous night's festivities. Before I could take off my jacket I was being challenged to a game of Beirut (also known as Beer Pong), a Alpha Gam favorite, which consisted of trying to throw a ping pong ball into one of your opponent's cups that were arranged in a triangular pattern opposite a 6-8 foot long table before he sank a shot into all of yours first. I'm not quite sure if I won or lost most of my games, but win or lose, the job was done: within an hour I had polished off close to the equivalent of a six pack and my headache from last night was starting to fade away.

The opportunity was not wasted, and before I sobered up I had received an invitation to go up to Dave's room with a couple brothers that I had been hanging out with and party some more. Once I was in the room, the door was shut and I was surrounded by about 4 or 5 of my new friends from Alpha Gam. A bottle of Jim Beam was being passed around and if a sip was taken when it came my way I was told I would be joining them someday as a brother in the fraternity. It didn't seem like something that I had been hoping to do but I was having a really good night and I didn't want to offend the hosts, which in that state of mind seemed logical enough to justify accepting their offer. Seconds later everyone in the room began snapping their fingers, something that was an Alpha Gam ritual done to acknowledge valiant efforts and accomplishments by brothers in the house. As a matter of fact that might have been the first and last time I ever would be surrounded by a room full of brothers giving me "snaps".

The next morning, not entirely assured that this wasn't all one strangely realistic dream, I awoke uncertain if it would be wise to go around telling people I was an actual Alpha Gam pledge. Since the extension of bids was a very tightlipped affair at Alpha Gam, not a single one of my friends seemed to have any clue whether I had been extended a bid the previous night. I decided I would keep quite about it until I knew for sure that I had done what I thought I did the previous night, to safeguard against making a fool of myself. Amazingly I managed to wake up with a hangover for the second morning in a row, a feat rarely accomplished in any chapter of my collegiate life.

By my third day back on campus, which marked the end of the bid extension period, I honestly felt like a ninety year old man succumbing to a terminal illness. My head was spinning, my vision was a little blurred, my throat was perpetually parched, and my sense of reality was greatly tarnished by two straight days of endless drinking. To this day I am still amazed at how people live the rock and roll lifestyle and survive to tell about it. I remember sleeping most of that day, not because I hadn't slept for 9 hours the night before, but because all the heavy drinking and partying had led to 48 hours of REM deprived mental activity, or should I say inactivity.

My suspicions were confirmed later that afternoon when I received a phone call from Dave congratulating me for taking a swig of "Jim" and taking a step in the right direction, a direction that I was assured I wouldn't regret. My attendance was requested at a dinner, where the 18 newest Alpha Gam pledges would be the guests of honor. The dinner was a semi-formal affair with a jacket and tie as suggested attire. First impressions go a long way, and that night 18 freshmen were conned into thinking they were becoming a part of something special, a brotherhood that was a sophisticated blend of academia, athleticism, and lifelong friendships. Taking a cursory glance around the room during our welcome party, one couldn't help but feel he was on his way to becoming forever linked to a pretty impressive group of men.

Shortly after the conclusion of dinner, the 18 newest Alpha Gams were asked to file down to the basement where they would be further initiated. We quickly learned our new brothers had different plans for us, as we were locked in the laundry room, packed tightly shoulder to shoulder as the heat was cranked up all the way. Our new friends had some fun plans for us: we had to organize ourselves in a single file line with the lights off without talking as some of our more senior brothers to be pounded on the door with baseball bats and joked that we were going to get our sorry asses kicked. Well, one of the pledges happened to advantageously carry a light on his key chain, which we used to read each other's name tags. This made a seemingly impossible task a ten minute, mindless process. Once our captures

realized we had handled their first challenge with ease, they were so overjoyed they let us further acquaint ourselves with the overheated, cluttered laundry room for another hour, in silence.

Eventually we were released to a dark house in which we followed a series of candles up to the living room, where the fraternity officers awaited our arrival with our official pledge pins. And so just like that our courtship as highly regarded freshman prospects took a 180 degree turn for the worst over the course of a three course meal, and for the first time it occurred to us that we were lowly pledges.

I hustled home through the ice capped trails to call the one upperclassman I knew prior to coming to Cornell, Stacey Goldstein, an old family friend. She was in the Greek system herself and her sorority frequently mixed with Alpha Gam. I was anticipating some excitement on her part, but rather was greeted with something more like “Are you serious? I mean, that’s great. I mean you do realize your not in for an easy semester don’t you?” She told me horror stories of Alpha Gam pledges that lived in her freshmen dorm who would routinely come home at 4 am with tears in their eyes. I remember a bad feeling coming over me as I began to realize this wasn’t fun and games anymore. I was pledging.

### **And So Pledging Begins**

The first official night of pledging involved a phone call from one of my fellow pledges shortly after dinner suggesting that I show up at the house before 9 O’clock in warm attire. To kick off our first night of legitimate hazing we would be going on a scavenger hunt. Sounded pretty harmless to me considering I had already began preparing for the worst. This was, however, unlike any typical Easter Sunday egg hunt: for the next 7 hours, until 4 am we were sent from one side of campus to the other, often backtracking to allow for the longest possible routes imaginable. It’s important to mention that although Cornell has only 13,000 undergraduates, our campus is as massive and expansive as that of most large public institutions with four times as many students plus Cornell is built atop a steep hill. All in all, we were told we walked approximately 20 miles, that is if we didn’t make any unnecessary stops. Unfortunately, our night and early morning was littered with misleading clues and pledge brothers disagreeing over locations of each scavenger on our list. Since we were only given one clue at a time to help us locate the whereabouts of a particular item, we were prevented from shortening the experience and circumventing walking 2 miles to pick up one clue and then turning around and getting the next one from our previous destination. To make matters worse, by 1 AM most pledges were getting over anxious for the whole event to end, and just

to further frustrate us, around the same time our hints started implying we were near the end (a theme that would follow throughout pledging). Contributing to the frustrating atmosphere was about 3 to 4 inches of snow that blasted us as we walked from one corner of campus to another.

### **The Start of Line Ups**

Once pledging was underway we were assigned household chores such as cleaning frat brothers puke from the bathrooms and showers, restocking the cereal shelf, picking up after the brothers, taking out the trash, and cleaning the dishes after meals. And if we were really lucky, we might get off easy with a chore like picking up more condoms or cigarettes for a brother. If the daily chores we were assigned weren't degrading enough, brothers would often contribute to the atmosphere by carelessly, and sometimes advertently, throwing heaps of trash on the floor before us or using excessive amounts of cups and dishes left scattered throughout the house for us to pick up after them. Additionally, we received stacks of pledge manuals and Alpha Gam pledge book which were to be kept hidden at all times from friends and roommates. Each week we would be assigned well in excess of a hundred pages of reading from these books, in addition to having to memorizing trivial information on each brother such as where he attended high school, in what he plans to major, his favorite pet's name, etc.. At the end of the academic week brothers would administer quizzes that include such detailed information from the readings that even a person with a photographic memory would struggle to recall all the minutia on each exam.

We were never allowed to oversee the grading or grades assigned for each quiz that was turned in, but I would later find out that they were never even graded. The fraternity wanted to emphasize that the pledge class was only as strong as its weakest link, so they informed us that we all failed the quizzes as long as one of us failed. Well the quizzes were sufficiently hard so that no one ever questioned the weekly assertion that a pledge failed, and hence we were all "in for it". About the only thing that was taken into consideration on the quiz were hideously wrong answers that were used as a means to further humiliate pledges in front of the brotherhood and their fellow pledges.

Pledges at Alpha Gam were responsible for conducting interviews that were compiled in a "sig book," a small purple book containing each brother's name, in which every brother had to be interviewed and a signature was to be obtained from all of the brothers in the house to verify that the interviews had been conducted. Brothers rarely granted interviews if they could think of any one of

a million things that they would rather do. For example, wandering around the house at night and knocking on a dozen or so doors over the course of an hour typically resulted in only a single interview if any at all. Once an interview was conducted, a pledge was typically asked to perform a task, an opportunity for individuals in the house to haze subordinates, in order for them to receive a required signature from the brother. Tasks included anything from buying *Playboy* magazines to ironing shirts or washing cars. A few select brothers, who were notorious hard-asses, might assign ten page papers or counting the steps in the library clock tower (one I was actually assigned) as a task.

These quizzes, chores, and interviews were complimented by weekly line-ups. We would almost always have an “event” on Sundays and there were always potential wild card events on any given day of the week. Sunday events consisted primarily of “line ups”. A line up meant we would receive a phone call from a fellow pledge telling us we had to trudge through the ice and snow and report to our line position in a militaristic manner usually within ten minutes. Making it to line up in time often involved bruises, cuts, scrapes, and various other injuries one sustains from running on icy trails without regard for one’s safety. Once we reached the house we would have to file down to the basement and take our assigned place in one of two nine person wide, parallel lines, hence the name line up. These infamous lines would shrink and be restructured over time to 6 or 7 man lines not because of any ingenuity on the part of the frat brothers, but rather the glaring awkwardness of not accounting for the fact that our lines were becoming riddled with holes from “pansies” de-pledging.

Making it to line up on time was extra important, because if one of our fellow pledges was running late the rest of his pledge brothers would have hell to pay. Hell usually came in the form of the most painful callisthenic that the frat brothers could imagine or having to hold oneself in an excruciating, muscle aching position until the arrival of the late pledge. Needless to say, being late was a surefire way to gain a great deal of respect and popularity amongst your pledge brothers. Once a pledge took his place in line he was not aloud to make eye contact or communicate with any one of his pledge brothers. Several brothers spelled out A-L-P-H-A in deep purple paint on one of the brick walls in the basement of the fraternity, which we would have to stand at address facing for the duration of line ups. During the line ups we would occasionally have to run up to the purple paint and place all of our noses on one of the letters. I am not sure to this day what the purpose of that activity was other than for the sheer entertainment of watching 18 terrified pledges attempt to pile on top of one

another in order to place their respective noses on one of the five four inch wide letters.

Line ups would not have been complete without a “pledge educator” also known as brother Russell and every four letter word imaginable when behind tightly closed doors. Brother Russell was on the super senior track and working on what I would expect to have been his second or third shot at his sophomore year, judging by his receding hair line and 5 o’clock shadow. He frequently led line-ups, which meant leading hazing activities and traumatizing pledges for the entertainment of his frat brothers. Typically he would deride one or all of us, humiliating us with physical actions and/or carefully chosen words while a group of ten to twenty brothers sat around the basement with a six pack of beer or a joint, laughing hysterically and often throwing rotten eggs or insults our way to supplement the experience.

When Brother Russell wasn’t too busy “educating” us, he often took time out of his busy beer guzzling, competitive belching schedule to remind the pledges about “spook”. Spook was one of the most intellectually degrading aspects of pledging. The concept stemmed from the desire of the brotherhood to brainwash its pledges into allowing themselves to be hazed without spoiling the privilege of being part of an exclusive group who actually knows what goes on behind the walls of the Alpha Gam house. In other words, it was the all important effort on behalf of the brotherhood to try to save their own asses in the event that things went drastically wrong during hazing activities, so that the university or people associated with it wouldn’t catch wind of any unlawful events that transpired that could lead to the demise of the house. Considering the house was already on double probation, something the pledges were unaware of, it is no wonder all of the frat brothers at Alpha Gam took spook so seriously. With a name as comical as the sad attempt at brainwashing the pledges into secrecy, the practice of spook needed to be enforced by intense hazing in the event that spook was “broken” by a pledge. For example if a pledge mentioned to his friends outside the house that Alpha Gam was a hazing house, the pledge class would suffer through humiliation and added pledge “educational” activities at the hands of brother Russell. Ironically, while I never bought into the privilege of obeying spook, it was something that would come back to haunt me.

One of our first sorority mixers was a party at our house with the girls of Sigma Tau Sigma. Our older brothers, in conjunction with STS, threw a big party with an 80s theme that was primarily for the pledges of our house and theirs. After a week or two of being hazed, having a party thrown on our behalf, even if we had to clean up afterwards, seemed like a pretty nice gesture. The brothers continued to feed us drinks at the beginning of the party to loosen up the atmosphere a bit. One of

my pledge brothers and good friends, Danny, who was a recovering alcoholic with a family history of alcoholism (a fact I made known to the brothers), was served a 12 ounce cup filled to the rim with vodka. After gulping it down like water, he refilled the cup with rum and proceeded to chug 24 ounces of hard alcohol in the course of 3 minutes, a feat that would probably kill an average college kid. Danny fortunately was a high school football player, who must have weighed no less than 220 pounds. Nonetheless, the alcohol didn't take long to hit him and before anyone could ponder what they had just witnessed, Danny was spinning in circles and starting to wet his pants. I tried helping him out of the basement and up the stairs. As we reached the top of the steps, I was distracted by a brother calling out my name. As I turned away for a split second Danny began to fall backwards. I was able to break his fall slightly by grabbing his shirt just before his head hit the ground. His eyes promptly rolled to the back of his head as he lay unconscious. I quickly yelled for help as he lay their motionless. A couple brothers who were pre-meds came over to check him out and take his vital signs. The first two brothers to attempt to take his vital signs couldn't find a pulse. There was a feeling of panic that came over me as I thought my good friend was dead. His family had been through so much, a divorce, cancer, financial struggles, etc. and this was not something they would be able to handle. I searched for a sober brother with a car who could take him to the hospital, but was rebuffed by a group of older Alpha Gams who insisted that the house couldn't afford to take him to the hospital because we could be thrown off campus. They insisted, rather, that we let him "sleep it off" on brother Russell's couch. Luckily, Danny awoke about 14 hours later, but not before urinating and vomiting on Russell's couch. This was my first encounter with spook in practice.

After reading *Wrongs of Passage* by Hank Nuwer, I was struck by a frighteningly similar story with a less fortunate ending. The story was that of Chad Saucier, a well-liked, sensitive, responsible, athletic kid from Mobile, Alabama. The son of a doctor, he dreamed of being a veterinarian and combining his respect for his dad's occupation with his love for animals. While matriculating at Auburn University, a well known party school where many high school friends, football, and basketball teammates studied, Chad pledged Phi Delt. After enduring weeks of physical hazing and emotional abuse that lead to a back injury from being assaulted during hazing, and as his parents described being "very fearful" for his well-being and that of his pledge brothers, Chad finally broke down and told his parents of some of the hazing he had endured. After writing a letter to the university and IFC, his parents found no actions taken by the school to curb such abusive hazing practices and forced drinking.

Sure enough, a few weeks later, Chad and his pledge brothers were invited to a pre “dead day” Christmas party at Phi Delt to celebrate the end of classes and the upcoming holiday break. Prior to the party Chad pre-gamed, warmed up with shots of hard alcohol, with some of his pledge brothers after being informed that this event marked the end of their pledging. Once at the party, Chad and his brothers began to drink heavily as encouraged by his Phi Delt brothers. They were each given stiff drinks to imbibe from their fraternity big brothers, and Chad figured the faster he drank the less time he would have to spend sipping such a distasteful concoction. As one pledge described, “It was understood that you were there....to drink.” Brothers jeered pledges claiming to have reached their limits early, which further influenced pledges to drink beyond their traditional levels of tolerance to impress their older brothers. Another pledge lamented, “A pledge who wasn’t drinking would have stood out like a sore thumb...[and] when you are an 18 year old college freshman, that’s not what you want to be.”

Before too long, Chad was seen dancing alone and slurring his speech as he staggered from room to room of the party. Just a couple hours later he would be found lying outside next to an air-conditioning unit face down in the mud with vomit streaming from his mouth. His brothers, much like my brothers, chose to put him in one of the frat brother’s bedrooms to sleep it off. They assured nervous friends that he would be checked on every so often. Unfortunately, shortly there-after Chad began to suffer from asphyxia, as his pulse faded and lungs stopped functioning. Despite several attempts by frat brothers and later some paramedics to revive him, he was pronounced dead a couple hours later, to the horror of his loving and concerned family and friends. And though Chad had discussed leaving the fraternity with his mother and father, while home over breaks, they described the fraternity as having some bizarre mind-numbing control over the pledges. Dr. Saucier, Chad’s father, explained that the letter sent to the university warning of such illicit hazing by Phi Delt remained unsigned upon Chad’s request as he feared severe repercussions from reporting his brothers.

Before I left I would have several more opportunities to experience the meaning of spook firsthand. One of which came just a few weeks after Danny’s probable alcohol poisoning. One night members of the pledge class were told to report to the house in nice clothes and wait outside in the snow by the backdoor. As we sat outside in the freezing cold waiting to be hazed, anticipating what kind of events were in store for us, we began to be showered with whip cream and chocolate

syrup, poured on us by brothers hanging out of windows directly above us. As we sat through the shower of food and condiments, we heard what sounded like a rifle shot. One of the pledges noticed that a couple brother were actually pointing a gun at us from a window on the third floor. We knew there were some questionably insane bothers in the house, but we never anticipated anything like this. I quickly jumped up and started to flee to the nearby wooded area as I heard more shots ring out. I soon was able to finger the brother's room the shots were being fired from and recalled that he was a heavy drug user, which made me even more uncomfortable. Fortunately, it turned out to be a paint ball gun and not an actual rifle. Unfortunately, it was so cold that the paint balls were frozen solid and didn't explode on contact. One rock hard pellet caught a pledge in the eye. As he fell to the ground, screaming, and holding his eye, my heart stopped. I saw something drop to the ground, which I thought was his eye.

It turns out he was hit about a quarter of an inch below his eye, and the thing that dropped to the ground was the frozen paint ball which failed to burst on contact, leaving a puffy red welt below his eye. At that point I tried to convince everyone we should leave with our pledge brother who was just shot in eye. Amazingly only about three other pledges were willing to leave with me. Whether the others were so brainwashed that they put the house above their own safety, or whether they were just too shocked and confused to react, it was a really scary and sad spectacle. I thought for sure someone would report the house after that, but amazingly the injured pledge kept quite and so did all of his pledge brothers. I received a phone call from the president of Alpha Gam that night apologizing to me for what had happened and insisting that it was an accident that would be dealt with and that it was important not to forget about spook.

I received another similar phone call about a week later. My fellow pledges and I had reported for lineup on Sunday night only to find crushed glass all over the basement floor. Sure enough as we performed calisthenics over the next few hours, several pledges began bleeding as sharp pieces of glass became embedded in their palms and knees. The president once again insisted that what had happened was unplanned and that nobody in the house intended to hurt the pledges to the extent that some of them were injured. Whether many people received these phone calls or he was only calling me because I was visibly disturbed is still a mystery to me. Perhaps this was a common practice by the fraternity to get a read on whether pledges were going to rat them out, so they can intervene before anything happens. Spook really is a scary practice of silencing pledges with even scarier implications for school administrators who will someday have to answer to parents when one of their

loved ones falls victim to such a practice.

### **Dinners at the House**

In addition to our chores and line ups our status as unworthy pledges was concurrently established by our meal requirement. Cornell is known for its top rated freshman dining facilities and dinners represent one of few opportunities for perpetually busy students to drop their books and socialize with friends and neighbors from their residence halls. Since exposure to people outside the house increases the chance that pledges will realize they can have a social life without the fraternity and increases the chances of a pledge leaking potentially dangerous information about hazing, brothers require that pledges cancel their meal plans and eat all meals at the house. While entering the house to eat their meals and complete their chores, pledges had to enter through a back door that was usually covered in dirt and snow, just to reinforce their second class status.

Dinners were only served to pledges after all the brothers leisurely strolled into the dining room at their convenience and picked over the freshest food. The pledges could only then proceed to pick through the leftovers. While eating such nightly dinners, brothers could require that pledges finish all their remaining food without using their hands, in a manner similar to pigs eating out of a trough. On occasion pledges were obliged to field such requests as singing a particular brother's favorite song or telling sexist jokes, on the steps leading down into the dining hall, as brothers pounded on the tables and threw food at them. Of course the pledges had to pick up all the pie, mash potatoes and gravy, etc. that was thrown their way. One night we were actually served steak with french fries and ice cream only to be asked to finish off a keg of beer in less than ten minutes, immediately following dinner.

### **Probations, Date Rape, and Academics**

One of the biggest mysteries of pledging was the secrecy surrounding the house. Alpha Gam was not widely known around campus despite having a house full of athletic, better than average looking guys, especially for Cornell. All of their parties were underground; in all my time there I never once witnessed a university sponsored party, and such parties are often the most publicized and popular

among undergraduates. Instead Alpha Gams claimed that house mates preferred to just hang out with fellow brothers and play drinking games on the weekends rather than have a bunch of stupid freshmen trashing their house. For some reason that seemed normal enough at the time for the pledges to buy into it with out question. Also it was not uncommon to have a Thursday night sit down with a local Ithaca police officer to inform us of the consequences of date rape or the risks of taking ecstasy (a mind altering drug popular among hard partying college kids). Judging by the extent of drug use in the house and the prevalence of seemingly sketchy guys it was surprising that such frank discussions with local law enforcement agents would be arranged for us by our more senior brothers.

I would later discover that the house was banned from throwing parties and required to hold discussion meetings with local police because it had been on multiple probation in years past for academic problems, date rape, and brawling with other fraternities. The date rape stemmed back to the late 80s when a number of pledges bravely walked out of Alpha Gam and reported the house for encouraging date rape. According to the pledges, they were informed by older brothers to place freshman girls' jackets in their rooms so that the pledges could take the girls back there at the end of the night, once they had consumed a sufficient amount of alcohol, and do as they pleased. Such a policy led to the fraternity being banned from the Cornell campus for several years till the mid 90s when the house re-emerged with a like minded group of young men.

Perhaps the most discouraging part of pledging was witnessing the practice of breaking down pledges mentally and physically and recreating them a brothers "worthy" of being a part of the house. This practice is common among hazing fraternities in order to ensure that pledges will conform to the norms of a house once they are initiated. The prevalent fraternity mentality is that it's better to have a house full of like-minded frat brothers than a group of individuals that compliment each other as friends and house mates. In practice pledges are broken down through the hazing and degradation associated with being a pledge.

It does not take long to see the brainwashing and rebuilding process begin. Within a few weeks of pledging I began to notice pledges using expressions and handshakes and even talking like some of the older brothers. A more unfortunate aspect of such socialization practices stems from increased drug and alcohol abuse by pledges. At a hard partying house like Alpha Gam, many of the brothers experiment with drugs, abuse alcohol, and use smokeless tobacco and cigarettes. When pledging began maybe three or four of the pledges at most smoked cigarettes or used dip (smokeless tobacco),

and within a matter of weeks nearly half the pledge class began using tobacco products on a weekly if not daily basis. Such a transition is probably part peer pressure, part availability, and partially the desire of pledges to emulate their older frat brothers upon whom they have been taught to look up.

Even within the house, after all the thorough hazing and socialization practices taken to unify and homogenize the brotherhood, there still existed a number of cliques or subgroups. There were the true jocks who played sports at Cornell, a group of heavy midweek drinkers, a group of self-proclaimed ladies' men, a small group of academics, and a group of drug users. The drug users were often some of the more liberal brothers in the house, who held no animus against the pledges. As a result this subgroup was the easiest to penetrate for pledges and a no fail way to be accepted on equal footing while bonding with brothers despite one's assigned inferior status. This naturally led to an increase in drug use among pledge brothers.

Although the drug of a choice among pledges was marijuana, a relatively harmless drug, some pledges began reinventing themselves to better fit the role of the prototype "stoner". For example, another one of my good friends in the pledge class, Tarper, was the salutatorian of his prep school back in Colorado and always a polite, polished, and relatively straight-laced guy prior to pledging. I actually witnessed him smoking marijuana for presumably the first time at Cornell and he literally struggled to figure out which end of a pipe to inhale from. By the time he had reinvented himself, about month or two into pledging, I frequently overheard him telling people stories about all the ways he used to sneak out of class in high school and get stoned. Such dramatic re-inventions of oneself were not uncommon during pledging, and, as I mentioned earlier, partially an aim of the hazing to which we were subjected.

### **Drop out, Suicide, Flunk out, etc...**

It is not hard to imagine that drastically recreating oneself to take on a whole new persona must take a significant emotional toll on a pledge. The pressure of having to constantly manage one's impression upon those around him and the perpetual difficulty of acting a part around one's new group of friends to maintain a desired status amongst an in-group leads to a number of psychological struggles. Not surprisingly there were several kids who suffered meltdowns or became depressed to the point of contemplating suicide. This phenomena might stem back to the superficiality of rush as mentioned earlier and the failure of brothers to really get to know a potential pledge before bids our

offered. After weeks of attempting to recreate one's personality many pledges must find themselves wondering who they are or who they have become.

Some pledges successfully circumvent the process either because they already fit the mold of an Alpha Gam before they begin to pledge or because they are too headstrong to allow themselves to be broken down and recreated. Others aren't so fortunate. In my pledge class we had several kids suffer from depression that was either brought on or exacerbated by pledging, and at least one of them contemplated and later attempted suicide. Another one of my pledge brothers ended up in the infamous gorges a year later, only to be found half alive by an early morning jogger and airlifted to a nearby hospital where he was treated for severe internal bruises, several deep gashes, hypothermia, and neurological damage. While he denies remembering the events leading up to the plunge into the gorge and doesn't recall planning to commit suicide, I reserve my right to believe that might have been the case. He had been drinking and alone while out to celebrate his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, with his frat brothers absent in his time of need. Although Danny had other problems prior to pledging, he always had a good group of friends to lean on when need be. In Alpha Gam he had taken on the role of the house drunkard and rowdy tough guy similar to Jim Belushi's character in the cult classic *Animal House*. This new role didn't allow for him to be a sensitive, heart-broken kid with a god given gift of unparalleled intelligence. This pledge brother is a member of the Pi Club of MENSA, the highest level of IQ holders within the organization of geniuses, and used to be one of the nicest most caring guys I knew. In Alpha Gam he became a confused, isolated, depressed kid, trying to cope with his depression through alcoholism that was supported and not prevented by his new brothers. When asked to describe Danny shortly after he was discovered in the gorges, Alpha Gam president Mick Manos said, "He is extremely smart with great grades, an engineer, and a member of Mensa [a society for people with high IQ]." (Cornell Daily Sun, Nov.11, 2002) Nothing too personal from the president who had been one of Danny's "brothers" for over two years at the time of the accident.

Danny might have found himself alone in his struggle with depression and alcoholism, but he was certainly not the only one. Another one of my pledge brothers who admitted to having a family history of alcoholism and depression, but never felt comfortable talking to his frat brothers about his own struggles attempted suicide by overdosing on sleeping pills and needed to be rushed to the emergency room and subsequently institutionalized. This particular brother was a local volunteer

firefighter and very active in the community, but never did seem to feel quite at home among his Alpha Gam brothers.

Perhaps this isolation resulted from this particular pledge enduring some of the cruelest hazing out of all the pledges in his class. Standing at about 5'6" and no more than 140 pounds, this particular pledge was an easy target for the brothers to pick on, and the opportunities were not wasted. As mentioned earlier, Alpha Gam was a fairly athletic fraternity and in such an environment masculinity was the measurement of status, and being small, light, and not very athletic made this pledge an inescapable target for hazing. Certainly, all of the physical and psychological abuse this pledge endured contributed to his attempt to take his own life. Fortunately, some friends and roommates from outside the fraternity were able to find him in time to take him to the hospital where he was later nursed back to life.

General melancholy and constant anxiety were everyday realities for most pledges, who lived in fear of the next line up or verbal assault by their older brothers. There was a look in the eyes of all of the pledges, who had to eat at a separate table from all of the brothers, of paranoia. Meals typically became silent meals more out of the fear of drawing the attention of frat brothers who might decide to turn a routine dinner into another opportunity to degrade their brothers to be. On weekends it was not unusual to see anxiety overcome many pledges as their fears and suspicions stemming from the approaching Sunday line up began to eat at them. Since quizzes and chores assigned to pledges were intended to be nearly impossible to accomplish, it was inevitable that some pledges would have unfulfilled duties and incorrect answers to quiz questions that would soon come to haunt them in the form of an additional 100 push ups and being ceremonially chastised by frat brothers.

In addition to the depression and general malaise experienced by most pledges, grade point averages took a hit for many pledges as well. One would expect that a house on probation for substandard university GPA requirements would be particularly sensitive to the affects of pledging on grades. This, however, was not the case at Alpha Gam. Perhaps such neglect helped land them on probation in the first place. Pledges spent many nights trying to convince our brothers to reschedule a pledging event due to conflicting early morning preliminary exams, and many nights we failed to alter the timing of scheduled events. On at least three occasions I showed up to an early morning exam on two to four hours sleep after being brutally hazed throughout the previous night and early morning.

One cannot comprehend the effects on a pledge's mental state after a long night of physical and emotional distress from hazing, exacerbated by sleep deprivation. Not to mention, the hours each night pledges were required to spend at the frat house doing chores and cleaning up before and after dinner, interfering with precious homework time. Pledges for the most part are walking zombies carrying huge sleep deficits from nights of hazing and late night cramming that was postponed because of time-consuming fraternity obligations. Therefore, it is not surprising that such pledges often suffer through some of their worst academic semesters in their four or more years at Cornell. Needless to say, this does not benefit the pledges or houses such as Alpha Gam that are already on academic probation. And not surprisingly such academic constraints lead to some previously underachieving students flunking out. In my pledge class we had three of the original 18 pledges register GPAs under minimal university requirements for continued enrollment. My first semester I took 17 credits and earned over a 3.5 GPA, but the semester I pledged I had to drop to 9 credits and earned just over a 3.0, by far my worst academic semester in my four years at Cornell.

### **Deactivations Begin After "Woods Night"**

It did not take long for the de-pledging to begin. Our second planned pledge activity involved a kidnapping, in which we were instructed to wait in our rooms with a pillow case over our heads until someone came to get us. Once we were kidnapped we were crammed three or four into a car, it's hard to know the exact number because we were blindfolded and had pillow cases covering our heads. I remember, ironically, being somewhat excited for this activity since a friend had once mentioned to me a similar kidnapping at his fraternity that led to one giant party for the pledge class. My Alpha Gam brothers turned out to have other plans. It felt like we drove around in circles for an hour. I was later told we took such a roundabout path so that pledges would not be able to figure out where they were going or where they had been in case they tried to report the activity to the university.

As we drove circuitously to our secret grounds, our car, in which I was packed tightly with a couple other pledges, began to fill with thick smoke from marijuana. This was not very welcomed by us because one of my pledge brothers had asthma, it was getting really hard to breathe through our pillow cases now filled with smoke, and we were now trusting our lives to whomever was driving us like a wild lunatic, presumably on weed. I encouraged my pledge brother, who mentioned

having asthma, to take his pillow case off, only to be screamed at by our driver, who sounded remarkably like brother Russell.

Once we reached our secret spot, we were told to file out of the car and get in a straight line, in alphabetical order, with the rest of our pledge class. This must have been comical to the brothers because we couldn't see anything, we began tripping on debris and falling face first in the snow as we tried to organize ourselves properly. As one pledge in line fell, more would fall in some kind of domino effect. It didn't take long for me to observe that this was one of the coldest nights of the year in Ithaca. I would later discover that it was indeed about the coldest of the winter, with sub-zero temperatures on top of icy-cold gusts of wind. This made what would have been an incredibly painful night of hazing into a nearly intolerable night.

In line and organized properly we walked hand on shoulder to a specific spot in the woods where we were placed in a circle, where we could easily be addressed by brother Russell. From the sounds coming from the woods around us, it sounded like the majority of the house had come along as well, perhaps to volunteer as drivers or reminisce on such a painful hazing activity that they once endured. As we were humiliated by brother Russell for not doing some of the first things we were assigned to do, we were also being poked and prodded with sticks, etc. from other brothers who were cracking open cans of beer and enjoying the freezing cold night. Russell took time to walk in a line to all eighteen pledges and for at least ten minutes per pledge, proceeded to scream directly into the face of each pledge as he reminded them of their inadequacies. Nobody was spared as he took many low blows and crossed many clear-cut lines. Pledges were subjected to anti-Semitic comments, as brothers laughed and cheered in the background, and one pledge was even told he was the ugliest kid to have been given a bid to Alpha Gam after his severe over-bite, which he later paid to have surgically corrected, was made the focus of several jokes and personal attacks.

The snow was piling up on all of our boots and clothing, and we were not allowed to move or shake any of it off. I still remember vividly losing feeling in my fingers and toes after no more than an hour in the woods. While Russell did his job, brothers came around with heavy cylinder blocks and bricks and demanded that pledges hold them either at arms length or over their heads until they were told they could drop their arms. I personally held both a cylinder block at arms length for what felt like 15 minutes and a brick over my head for even longer. While I was holding the objects I remember my arms shaking from pain and my muscles giving in to the overwhelming pressure being applied to them, all while I was slapped and poked with sticks and other sharp objects and made to

bark like a dog by brothers who were too busy laughing and getting drunk to realize how they were affecting pledges.

Possibly the worst part of the night was when Russell confronted a few of the pledges and then the pledge class collectively for breaking spook. Whether anyone really did break spook this early, two weeks into pledging, was beyond me, but brother Russell claimed to have heard people around campus talking about the hazing that was going on at Alpha Gam. Because we broke spook we were told that instead of being let out at 2am, we were going to go till 4am just so we learned a lesson. Those last two hours were even more intensified in terms of screaming and hazing. Some of the things that were said to the pledge class, and to me personally I would rather not recount. I find myself getting riled up just thinking about that night as I try to translate my memories to paper. For extra irony, when the night was all said and done, some of the brothers' cars would not start in the sub-zero temperatures. This meant that we had to wait around for brothers to make trips back and forth to campus dropping off pledges three at a time. While we were waiting around for a ride, an Ithaca police officer arrived, possibly upon being tipped off that some hazing events were taking place in the area. She must have known what was going on being that a bunch of freshman were huddled together in the back of van shaking from the cold and the horror of having just been hazed. She asked some of us if we had been hazed by our brothers, and no one responded.

After just being hazed for breaking spook, no one was interested in being a hero. We were all too far brainwashed by our brothers to rebel at this point. I remember being incredibly tempted to tell the officer what had just transpired, still fuming from the events of the evening. I knew I would need a ride home from her and an escort around campus for the next four years if I did open my mouth that night, so I shut up and lay freezing piled atop my pledge brothers in the back of the only car at the camp grounds. We were told to rip our pillow cases off of our heads as soon as the cop's lights were spotted coming our way. Had she not turned on her trademark flashing red and white lights, that night would have probably marked the end of pledging at Alpha Gam, but instead the house was spared at the expense of the pledges.

We were later brought over to the house to have a fireside chat with the president. Some of the brothers looked almost as terrified as the pledges. They must have known the timing couldn't be worse. It was only a few weeks into pledging, immediately after the worst night thus far of hazing, and many of the pledges were still probably debating if they wanted to continue pledging nonetheless report the house to the officer from the safety of their dorm rooms. He told us that many

of us would be receiving phone calls from the Ithaca police department in the next day or two, and to remember to always keep spook at any expense, and that the house was on probation and we would all lose out if we were kicked off campus. We were told to inform the police that we were in the woods for a fraternity marshmallow roast as part of a little brother and big brother bonding event. I was pretty sure I would expose the house if I received a phone call and even looked forward to the minute my phone rang with the Ithaca police on the other end. Whether I would have been brave enough when the moment came, I don't know, but I never received a phone call and the few pledges that did were some of the ones too brainwashed or paranoid to talk about what really happened.

Although the house remained on campus and in tact, the damage was done. Two pledges, later the next day, decided that they had seen enough and weren't going to subject themselves to such servitude and degradation any longer. I badly wanted to make a proud bolt out the door with them, but I recall being anchored to the house by my three best friends from my dorm freshman year with whom I chose to pledge. These two brave souls selected the house on their own and had no further connections or friendships that were being jeopardized by walking away, and they felt confident as did many others that they were making the right decision. I recall no one wanting them to leave, but at the same time no one was about to try to stop them either, many pledges undoubtedly unsure themselves as to what they had gotten themselves into. And so the door had been at least cracked open, beckoning me to walk out and join the two brave freshman who regained control of their lives by making a strong statement and making it early. While I wasn't quite ready to leave, the idea was definitely planted in my head from that night on, and it wasn't going anywhere anytime soon.

Thus far I feel as though I have done an adequate job portraying the brotherhood for what it was and probably still is: a hard hazing, sardonic group run largely by a strong minority of violent and aggressive individuals. There was also a flip side to the house, however, that attracted 18 pledges initially and drew plenty of attention from freshman girls and other frat brothers around campus. For example, several of my friends from Mary Donlon, a freshman dormitory, were scared off by the look in the eyes of some of the brothers in Alpha Gam during rush week and decided to pledge Phi Kappa Tau, a new non-hazing alternative fraternity, instead. While I didn't consider these friends any differently at the time, and even looked up to them in a way for being strong enough to admit to themselves that they weren't going to risk being subjected to hazing, after only a couple weeks I could tell that their social status was changing relative to mine.

My friends and I would hang out with some other freshman girls, and a popular question for any

girl to ask a freshman guy was “So what house are you pledging?” I never had much trouble telling people I was pledging Alpha Gam, and that usually only built up my status in the eyes of many freshman girls, but my good friends who were pledging Phi Tau were usually apprehensive about telling girls where they pledged. Their apprehension was apparently well founded, as the conversation would noticeably shift away from them and more towards me and my other Alpha Gam friends once they were exposed. Phi Tau didn’t have a particularly bad reputation at the time, but it didn’t have much of one either, and that was just as bad in the eyes of inquiring freshman girls.

The brothers in Alpha Gam further planted the idea in the heads of pledges that they were superior to just about every other house in campus, and frequently put down rival house as being “pretty-boys”, “fags”, and “tools”. They did this partially because they believed it, and partially as a method of getting pledges to buy into pledging Alpha Gam, as though they were making a decision that would positively alter their lives, if not only their social status, in some positive way. The message was ingrained with weekly reminders that our neighbors at Sigma Alpha Epsilon, my father’s college fraternity, were a bunch of inferior athletes and homosexuals. And in response to several high status Long Island dominated fraternities on campus, we were told that they were pretty boys and fags, and we were in this house because we were better than they were. After a while, even I was partially convinced that the guys in Pike and AEPi, a couple popular houses among Long Island kids, were a bunch of “fruitcakes” and that they wouldn’t have received bids if they had rushed Alpha Gam, although I’m sure this was for the most part completely inaccurate.

In addition to all the ego inflating rhetoric that was floating around the halls of Alpha Gam, having a relatively large pledge class, most pledge classes were not much bigger than 10 or 12 pledges, was a convenient way to establish a social life for oneself almost overnight. Prior to pledging I had about 5 or 6 really good friends from my freshman dorm and a handful of kids with whom I was friendly. Once I started pledging and being hazed, the pledge class began to hang together and grow tight with one another. I was made to feel as though I had 17 new brothers whom would be there for me whenever I needed them and would suffer through the good and the bad times of pledging with me every step of the way, although once again this was completely inaccurate. There were a few kids in the pledge class, as with any house, that just weren’t really friendly or just didn’t fit in, but for the most part I could see myself being good friends with most the guys and this meant I had a big pack of brothers to lean on that would help me get through pledging and be friends long past our years at Cornell.

De-pledging meant turning your back on your brothers and divorcing yourself from the family. You were taught that doing so would make you some kind of a traitor or outsider to the house. After the first two guys left, we condensed the lines to eliminate their positions in lineups and we were told by our brothers that they were still decent guys, but that they just couldn't be trusted to know any of our Alpha Gam secrets. They were on the outside now, and it was important that we kept them on the outside of house events as well, because they have already demonstrated a willingness to go against the house and they could easily take information that is leaked to them and get us into trouble. As mentioned earlier, during pledging all meals must be eaten at the fraternity house, and with the addition of chores, etc. there was not much free time to socialize with former friends or even to make new ones outside of the house. This meant that a pledge's social life was further constrained to the men they found around them at Alpha Gam. Walking away after several weeks of pledging did not mean falling back upon your former group of friends, because by then most pledges no longer had a steady outside group of friends, either because they pledged with all of their friends or because they had more or less cut off ties completely with the outside world. This made it even harder to de-pledge even if one wanted to.

Despite the obstacles, most of which were strategically placed, preventing one from de-pledging, I still managed to announce my decision to de-pledge during about the 8<sup>th</sup> week of pledging. While completing tasks for my sig book, I had been instructed to wash a brother's car along with a fellow pledge, Mike Nester. As we began to wash the interior of a brother's car we decided that we had hit the point where we could no longer respect ourselves if we continued on with the assigned task. While the particular assignment was one of the least degrading things we had done during our entire pledge-ship, it served as the straw that broke the camel's back and concurrently a collision of two independent thinkers determined to leave the fraternity. Prior to the assignment I had not talked much to Mike. He lived on West Campus and I had lived on North Campus, which at Cornell represented two separate social circles that didn't cross much merely because of the mile or two of hilly terrain separating the two sections of campus. Additionally he was pretty quite and angry when he was at the house, because, similar to me, he didn't want to be there.

The two of us just sat inside the brother's car and discussed how we had no business continuing to pledge and plotting our way out. We had witnessed our former friends and fellow pledges become completely brainwashed and subjugated to the point of blindly following the fraternity brothers' commands with no regard for their old values as well as their own safety and the safety of others. It

sickened us that we got caught up in the process and went along with it for that long, but neither of us knew how to nor had the courage to de-pledge on our own. Together we were a group of dissidents committed to a cause much stronger than that of gaining acceptance from a group of brothers we had all but lost complete respect for. We agreed to meet up on the suspension bridge leading over the gorge from north campus to the Alpha Gam house the next night at 9 PM. I began telling everyone that I still knew and was friendly with outside fraternity that I was going to de-pledge because I had learned in a psychology 101 that doing so further commits one to taking an action.

The next night at 9 PM, we met as planned on the suspension bridge. I remember feeling extremely elated walking down to the house with my pledge books and sig books, thinking to myself how proud I would feel for standing up for what was right, for what I believed in, and I secretly hoped that taking a stand against such senseless hazing would inspire others to do the same. When we walked in the front door, a move we couldn't do as pledges, brothers instantly knew something was wrong. Perhaps it was that we didn't look scared coming through the front door and had our stack of secret Alpha Gam books in hand and on display. We marched to the president's room and demanded that he sit down and talk with us.

We were brought to the pledge educator's room where a group of brothers came to sit down and talk to us. We didn't waste any time and informed them of our intention to discontinue pledging. We talked to them about how disappointing it had been to feel degraded by the brothers who we trusted not to senselessly haze us when we had accepted bids to pledge. We further discussed how scary it was to see our pledge brothers losing sight of what was formerly important to them and ruining their lives academically and socially just to become a part of the fraternity and if that's what the fraternity was looking for then we wanted out. In retrospect I can say with certainty that they must have had a planned approach to dealing with potential deactivations. We were quickly surrounded by our big brothers and they began to put us on a guilt trip, telling us they loved us as brothers. This was not going to work for me because I hadn't seen or talked to my big brother more than a couple times since he persuaded me to accept a bid to pledge Alpha Gam in the first place.

During the meeting they strategically addressed us as individuals, a real irony considering all the rhetoric they crammed down our throats about being one and not individuals. They must have known it would be harder for us to take a stand when we couldn't speak on behalf of one other. Despite everything we were telling them, they kept implying that we were struggling with the

physical aspects of pledging, which put us on the defensive because it essentially spun the story around to make it sound like we were leaving because of some sort of softness on our part for physical hazing and not because we were morally opposed to it. Such a strategy prevented us from taking a stand against hazing in the manner that we had planned.

The climax of their “we’re a brotherhood not just a frat” speech came when they brought in a junior, Trent, who spoke to us about how he almost died for the house because he bled purple, our Alpha Gam color. The story, in sum, was that this particular brother suffers from a heart condition and almost went into cardiac arrest one night during pledging, but refused to go to the hospital and quit doing calisthenics because he loved the house and his brothers and wouldn’t want to get anyone in trouble. This attempt to motivate us was exactly the reason Matt and I wanted to leave, and only furthered our desire, which we made clear; to leave any house that would put its own interests ahead of our safety. I also brought up how the house had essentially ruined one of my closest friends, whom I had warned them had problems with alcoholism and had been to counseling.

Despite all of our attempts to explain to them why we wanted out, they just kept telling us how much of a brotherhood this house was and what that meant to one another and how close we were to joining that brotherhood. It wasn’t really about the time we had committed to pledging, which we were forced to chalk up to sunk costs, but more about our commitment to never going through such abuse ever again. Ultimately they told us that they refused to accept that we were de-pledging and were giving us “time-off” to contemplate our decision.

During this time off, Mike, who pledged the fraternity on his own accord, never set foot in the house for the remainder of pledging and never regretted missing a single line-up ever again. My situation was a little more complicated because I had decided to pledge Alpha Gam with three of my best friends from my dorm. The officers in the house seized this opportunity to have all of my former friends from Alpha Gam pledge brothers knock on my door several times a day to see where I stood on my decision to continue pledging. Over the course of the next week, I would receive a speech from each of them about how they only wanted to pledge because I was pledging there, how I would be betraying them by ditching them this late in the pledging process, and to stop being a wimp. It got to the point where I had to lock my door and pretend I wasn’t home just to avoid daily harassment. During this time I received all sorts of emails from my big brother apologizing for not being around enough in previous weeks and how golf season was ending soon and we would hang out and bond a lot more. He told me that I was like a week or two away from the end of pledging

and that I would understand the meaning of all the hazing once I was initiated but he couldn't explain it to me just yet. Members of my pledge class called me and told me they really wanted me to become a brother of the house with them and that it wouldn't be the same without me. Ultimately I realized I didn't have too much of a life outside of Alpha Gam anymore and had no safety net to fall back upon, so I told them I would come back so long as pledging would end in the next week or two.

Mike had made the decision not to go back again and he was sticking to it, but meanwhile I hadn't seen him since our meeting with the brotherhood and I was being lured back in for a couple more weeks of hazing. I wasn't sure if they would actually continue to haze me after I had taken a stand, but I quickly found out that such an action would only serve to provoke even harsher, more violent hazing in the following weeks. Sure enough pledging was not over in a couple of weeks and all the lies that were fed to me were just ploys to get me to continue pledging.

Around the same time, one of the pledges, the one who had been called the ugliest Alpha Gam pledge ever because of his over-bite, contracted meningitis. This caused a great deal of alarm to all of us, not just as pledge brothers, but because we had all shared water from a bucket during a hazing event in the week before he became ill. I spent the night in a hospital emergency room, patiently awaiting some Cipro, an antibiotic that can kill some traces of meningitis if it is caught early. Although my pledge brothers and I were able to get Cipro, there was still no guarantee that we wouldn't contract the deadly virus. Over the course of the next week several of my pledge brothers and I contracted the flu, in large part due to the blizzards pounding Ithaca in late winter, and most of us spent time in the hospital terrified that we had contracted the virus.

Fortunately no one else came down with meningitis, but our pledge brother was not as fortunate. He lay in his death bed in a coma for three straight days and the doctors told his terrified mother and sister that it was unlikely he would pull through. My pledge brother Danny and I decided to pick up dinner, a card, and flowers for his family on one of the nights that we went to visit him. When we told the fraternity of our plans, we asked that everyone chip in for the food and flowers which cost of over 50 dollars. The president sent out an email to house list server informing them of our purchases and telling them to give money to Danny and I if they wished. If all 50 or so guys in the house gave us one dollar, our expenses would have been covered. To my surprise, the "brotherhood not a frat" that I had recently heard so many wonderful things about decided that it didn't care enough to chip in anything for the dinner, card, and flowers that Danny and I were

sending to our dying pledge brother's family, and even when we confronted individual brothers no one gave us a penny or even supported the idea. Our pledge brother did manage to make a miraculous recovery and awoke from his coma with no permanent brain damage or paralysis to the amazement of the doctors. A couple days later, and his family bought the fraternity a keg to celebrate and thank them for the dinner and flowers that Danny and I bought.

Within a week everything was back to normal and the fraternity was not going to waste an opportunity for more line-ups and hazing activities and they spared no one affected, not even the pledge who had just recovered from a coma. The hazing activities in later weeks intensified as "hell week", the last week of pledging that leads to a pledge's eventual initiation approached. Brothers grew increasingly violent and disparaging in their verbal assaults on pledges and the number of calisthenics that we were forced to perform increased two and threefold. Notably, while almost every member of the pledge class had contemplated quitting at some point in time, there is very little resistance to the intense hazing in the last couple weeks leading into hell week because brothers continuously remind pledges of how close they are to initiation, a reward that has been glamorized and used as justification for the semester of hazing pledges endure.

### **Hell Week Begins**

For an entire week every brother in Alpha Gam stressed how important our final exam would be and emphasized that if every member of our pledge class didn't pass then the national chapter wouldn't allow any member of our pledge class to be initiated. The final would be cumulative and include all the material that my pledge brothers and I had failed to master on a weekly basis due to excessive amounts of assigned readings laden with trivial information. The academic consequences one would suffer if they actually attempted to pass this exam are simply unconscionable. The final would be exponentially harder than any exam ever taken in high school or college thus far, and would take weeks of preparation to successfully tackle, and not a meager 6 days. Fortunately for me, as I would later discover, I didn't waste more than a few hours studying for the final, recognizing that there is no way every brother in the house actually passed the exam judging by a notably large contingent of chronic academic underachievers that still gained membership in the brotherhood.

We were given two hours to complete the 200 question exam and we were not allowed to

collaborate or talk amongst ourselves. At the end of the grueling two hours our pencils were taken from us and our answers were collected. Most of the pledges looked shell-shocked. We were told to wait in the house library as our exams were graded. While waiting in the dusty old room that was once a fraternity library housing extensive literary collections, we were interrupted by a disheveled brother who said he needed to confront us about some cheating that took place on the exam. He was so irate that he shattered the beer bottle in his hand against the fireplace as he derided us for our lack of preparation for the final and our willingness to violate the honor code that we signed off on before beginning the exam. We were told by this brother that we would have hell to pay and that we had twenty minutes to make it to our dorm rooms and back, collecting a long list of random clothes and toiletries that were to be packed in a duffle bag and brought back with us.

And so hell week officially began that night with the conclusion of our exam. Hell week was the grand finale of hazing events that would entail 20 continuous hours of abuse a day from a variety of brothers. We were assigned a “hell-master”, a brother who supervised and conducted our hazing activities for the duration of hell week. We were not allowed to use the restrooms or ask for a water break, and if we needed one or the other we could pee our pants or pass out, only to be embarrassed by our brothers. The difference between hell week and most other nights is that the hazing didn’t end at 4am; rather it went on till 7 or 8 am only to be halted intermittently for classes. We were not even allowed to brush our teeth or shower before class, and if we were caught trying to sleep in a library, sneak back into our dorms, or get food we would be punished severely. To prevent pledges from sneaking back to our dorms or pretending to have class, brothers collected our dorm keys at the first night and referred to class schedules which we were required to submit in the previous week to ensure that we were only let out when necessary. If we were around the house during breaks in lineup for classes, we had to do a variety of backbreaking chores enumerated on a list provided to us by our hell-master.

To everyone’s surprise and my excitement the Ithaca fire department performed a random fire inspection at 8 am the second morning of hell week and found a number of starved and sleep deprived pledges trapped in the fraternity house basement. To this day I don’t know if Cornell was tipped off by a suspicious party or if that simply was phenomenal timing for the only random fire inspection that I ever knew of in my 12 weeks associated with the house. Either way, the brothers decided it would be wise to end hell week prematurely and initiate us before any further damage was done by Cornell in attempt to close down Alpha Gam permanently. That nightmarish experience

ended prematurely, but not before some pledges stumbled upon a list of hazing activities planned for us by our brothers that were to be carried out over the course of the week. It is difficult to elaborate on many of the activities because they were referred to by nick names that were ambiguous at best in describing any sort of physical actions in which we would be engaged. Other activities were less ambiguous and they included being blindfolded and branded, swallowing large amounts of Tabasco sauce while performing calisthenics, vomiting on fellow pledges, and other disgusting activities involving bodily harm and exchange of fluids.

It would be convenient and easy for school administrators to write off such an experience as unique and uncharacteristic of the Greek system at Cornell, but this is not entirely the case and I lament to say that many such practices are commonplace among fraternities at Cornell and similar schools with Greek systems. While actual hazing practices vary, many are extremely similar in nature and effect. I compiled a number of stories from interviews and research with former pledges of fraternities in the Greek system. None of these individuals pledged the same house as me and any undergraduate that I personally interviewed went by an alias for the sake of maintaining anonymity.

### **Interview with Ex-Fraternity member**

During the course of my research I did get the opportunity to sit down with Jim, a member of a fairly prestigious fraternity that was recently thrown off campus by the national chapter for illegal hazing. His story, although he may not see it this way, is an example of a national fraternity that effectively policed the practices of a local chapter and took action against what it perceived to be inappropriate behavior in regard to the treatment of pledges. Below are excerpts from my interview with him.

Q: Can you tell me about some of the hazing that you endured as a pledge?

A: We always had some line ups, like once or twice a week. We would usually have line-ups every Sunday and we would have to wait down in the basement in line while the brothers watched TV before the serious hazing began. There would usually be things like glass being broken in narrow halls and stuff like that during line ups. The brothers would always invent things that we messed up with, and if it was one person in particular who messed up then they would make the whole pledge

class do push ups and say thank you and the name of the person who messed up as they did each push up.

One time we had line up in the basement and we had to place pillow cases over our heads and we were assigned numbers to wear on our chests. The brothers kept saying that everyone in the pledge class was a disgrace and had been embarrassing the house every time they walked around the campus and people heard they were in Pi Delt. So they said this time we are going to embarrass you and they instructed us to drop our pants. Next thing we know we here chuckles and we realize there were girls in the basement. The girls starting laughing and calling out things like “hey number 16 I can’t believe you can actually pleasure a girl with that thing.” Little to our knowledge they had erected a sort of makeshift curtain to shield the lower half of our bodies, although from what I understand the girls were peeking around it. I didn’t like that event much because they brought outside people into the equation. I thought that was stupid.

There were other instances of bad hazing. Another time a pledge had a pellet gun held up to his head and the trigger pulled. Fortunately it turned out not to be loaded, but it was pretty scary nonetheless. The brother who was responsible for the incident was expelled from the house immediately. And this other time, we were taken at midnight to Goldwin Smith hall, where our keys were collected because we were told that it was important not to make any noise and the giggling of keys might get us caught. There we sat around and told really personal and revealing stories that we would only want a pledge brother to know. This carried on until a little past 2am. We got back to our rooms around 2:30 AM only to find out that they had been completely ransacked. My bed was in the shower stall, my clothes were thrown everywhere, and my side of the room was completely unrecognizable. On top of everything there were crumbs from crushed chips all over my bed and clothes in my dresser.

Q: Did they do anything to create a culture of secrecy or a barrier to prevent pledges from reporting the house for hazing or talking about it publicly?

A: They actually didn’t and that’s why they had problems. I was definitely scared enough and subservient enough at the time that I would have kept my mouth shut if directed to, but they never emphasized that much. As a result I would go around and talk about the hazing that happened and talk about it with people outside the house.

Q: Did you feel like you could have walked out of a line up if you had wanted to at any point in time and would the brothers accept you back even if you refused to engage in a hazing activity?

A: I definitely felt like I could have if need be. It never really got that bad, but I think that most brothers would have welcomed me back and forgotten about it. Definitely a few would have been [jerks] and given me a hard time, but for the most part it wouldn't have mattered much. I definitely wouldn't have left over push ups and stuff, and that was the bulk of the hazing. We actually didn't have many hard core hazing mongers in the house. If a kid wasn't physically able to do the push ups no one would really ride them that hard or anything.

Q: What percent of frats and sororities on campus do you think haze?

A: I would say 100%. Even the nerdy ones still haze in some way, just not as bad as others.

Q: How would you define hazing then?

A: I would define it as any activity that you had to do that you wouldn't have wanted to do. Something that you were forced to do against your will to get admitted to the fraternity or sorority.

Q: Did kids try to reinvent themselves through the rush and pledge process, like recreate their personalities and past histories?

A: I didn't really know a lot of the kids before I pledged, so it's hard to say if they truly reinvented themselves. I know I certainly became a little more big headed and cocky because now I was in a fraternity and not just some lousy freshman. I know that other people, not in my pledge class necessarily, in other fraternities definitely changed completely because of pledging. There were some kids in other houses that I knew freshman year who changed their personalities during pledging. There was definitely some storytelling that was going on between the guys in my pledge class and the brothers in the house, although I personally don't recall telling any whoppers.

Q: You guys were thrown off campus for illegal hazing practices. How many fraternities on campus

would you say haze their pledges as bad as or worse than you did?

A: I would say probably at least ten houses on campus haze their pledges as badly as or worse than we did.

Q: What do you think would happen if the fraternity found out a kid in the house was the one who reported them for hazing to the university?

A: Well it wasn't a kid in the house who reported us for hazing. It was a resident supervisor who was spying for the national and reporting us for all the things we were doing. Basically, our house started out as a nerdy house and got a lot cooler, but most the prominent and active alumni were from the nerdy years and not happy about the direction of the house so they wanted us out. The guys in the house found out about the live-in advisor, and three guys got really drunk and broke down his door, trashed his room, broke his computer in half, threw all his possessions in the gorge, and urinated on his clothing in his drawers. I guess that's what would have happened if it were a kid from the house who had done it.

### **ABC News Special on 20/20**

In addition to the stories I was able to gather from my interviews, I came across another noteworthy letter that was aired on ABC News as part of a special report on hazing that I felt reflected the ills of the practice and resembled some of the tactics of the more athletic houses in the Greek system. The letter sent by a man who pledged an athletic fraternity and came to the epiphany as he was being increasingly hazed worse and worse, that he, much like in my experience, no longer wanted to be a member of such a violent and sadistic group. The special was aired on October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2003 on ABC.

I joined a fraternity my freshman year of college. Because I was a baseball player at the university, the active members of the fraternity thought I was receiving preferential treatment and felt I needed to be taught lessons in submission, obedience, and respect of "elders."

I was continually harassed emotionally, verbally, and they tried several times to abuse me

physically (beating on me with sticks, their fists, etc.) Several times members would get drunk and intentionally force themselves to throw up on my bed, sometimes with me in it.

I was physically able to protect myself for the most part because I was an athlete and capable of fighting them off in small numbers. Many times there were too many to fight off. When I would bring this to anyone's attention the abuse would escalate.

The fact that I did not drink a lot of alcohol also contributed. Many times they tried to "force" alcohol down my throat by holding me down. When it became apparent that I would not conform to their practices, the ridicule became public. I looked into transferring into the dorms but could not do so until the end of that first semester.

All of the abuse came to a close during the initiation week (referred to as "hell week") and subsequent "graduation" to an active in the fraternity. During this entire week the fraternity appointed an active member to follow me to all classes. The active members did not want you to wander away from the frat house during "hell week" except for classes (and baseball practice in my case).

To further torment the initiates, the actives played the song "I'm Turning Japanese" by the Vapors 24 hours a day this week, even during the time we were "allowed" to sleep. Another attempt at brainwashing the initiates I guess.

Food was little and far between this week and the hazing was a regular activity.

The last day of this week turned out to be the last straw as far as I was concerned. Having been "approved" to be initiated for the fraternity, it was now time to go through the official process. Most of it was kids stuff, but it was what happened at the end of the process that proved to be the most dangerous practice that was inexcusable.

The initiates were required to rent a tuxedo for the initiation day. After being blindfolded and brought to the first floor of the frat house, I was told to stand in place facing a certain direction (still blindfolded).

It was then that I heard the faint footsteps of a person running. The steps got louder and faster. The last thing I remember was that someone had "tackled" me by running at me while I was standing stationary and throwing basically a body block into my chest with their shoulder, dropping me like I was shot.

The wind was knocked out of me and while I was gasping for breath, someone ripped off my blindfold while two other members ripped off my shirt.

After exposing my chest, one of the actives took a substance from a jar and proceeded to inscribe

the letters of the fraternity on my chest and then light them on fire (I found out later that the substance was a mixture of Vaseline and lighter fluid).

As soon as it was lit it was extinguished, so there was only a minor burn of the letters inscribed in my chest. While this was going on a member was showing me the "secret" handshake of the fraternity.

It took several minutes to regain complete control of my breathing. As soon as I did, I was instructed to get back on my feet.

It was then that I realized that this whole situation was witnessed by the entire frat house membership. I also saw that the person that tackled me got a running start from about 50 feet away (all the way across the first level of the fraternity).

This exercise alone could have killed someone from the blow that I received (no telling how this affected some of the other initiates). It was after I regained most of my senses that I knew that I would deactivate the following week. I moved out of the frat house into the dorms and deactivated. I continued to see other members of the fraternity throughout the balance of the year and they all looked at me like I was a castoff. I even ran into some members several years later and they still would not speak to me because they could not believe that I would have the "nerve" to deactivate from their fraternity.

Had I known then what I know now, I would have pursued the matter legally. I have never told anyone about it. I transferred to a different school and completed my baseball eligibility at a different university.

### **Interview with Susan Murphy, Vice President of Student and Academic Affairs:**

Q: How would you characterize the problem of hazing and binge drinking on campus, specifically in the context of the Greek system, and do you have any reason to believe that these problems are getting any better or worse in recent years?

A: I guess I would separate the two issues. Hazing has been a problem and I think it continues to be a problem, although I think it is dissipating some over the last couple of years. Statistics on hazing may be misleading because an active definition of hazing has just recently, in the last couple years, been included in the Policy Notebook for the Cornell Community provided by the Judicial Administrator's office. In the past a student might have been charged with assault or harassment or endangerment of another student as a result of a hazing incident, but the records didn't note these

incidents as hazing specifically. We have established a hazing task force which I charged to investigate hazing incidents on campus and come up with a solution to the problem. In fact we have found that there has been a decline very recently in the number of hazing cases, and I think that's been a result of our effort to bring the issue to public attention, and people have begun to realize that hazing is something worth reporting. I think that lead students to report more incidents in the last two or three years and as a result we have seen a decline in hazing cases.

Q: Do you feel that Cornell takes adequate steps to protect students who decide to come forward and report being hazed or witnessing other illegal activities within the Greek System?

A: I think we do, although you would probably have to ask the students. When we have a report that comes forward, in virtually every case, if it's going to be a charge against the chapter, then it's going to go to the Greek judicial system and that report is kept confidential. And if it's an individual case, like if I charged you with hazing me, and therefore I go through the judicial system, then it's not confidential because in the campus code of conduct you will read that every person accused [of assault, harassment, etc.] has the right to be confronted by the accuser. While maybe not face to face, you [the accused] still have the right to know who is accusing you and why. We work very hard to provide adequate confidentiality and protection to those students who come forward as a way of saying "look we take this very seriously and we intend to do something about it".....there was one recent case where a student came forward and a chapter on campus was forced to restructure based upon what that student reported. We never released that name [of the student], but I suspect the brothers have a suspicion of who "ratted" on them. There, coming through the process we were very much trying to protect that student, but like I said fraternities might have their suspicions.

Q: What steps has the University taken over the years, and recently to ameliorate these problems? Do you have any evidence that any of these steps has been effective in reducing the number of alcohol or hazing related incidents? I.E. - the new BYOB policy at frat parties....

A: There has been a change in the way fraternity parties are conducted. The fraternity system has had a policy up until last spring that all fraternity functions involving alcohol being served must be run by a third party caterer. Last spring the IFC asked the Fraternity, Sorority Advisor Counsel and

the Administration for approval for bring your own beverage (BYOB) parties for small parties defined as having the fraternity membership plus two or more guests. In such a case you must be 21 to bring alcohol to the party and a sober person would collect it at the door and then distribute it once they verify you are of legal age. The IFC proposed even more stringent penalties if [a fraternity] violates that policy. This spring there are no licensed caterers to host parties on campus that are in existence any more because they have all lost their licenses, so members of the Greek system are feeling frustrated because under the old policy they can no longer legally have parties with alcohol, so they are trying to find a way to legally host events that are larger than just membership times two.....and we have not been able to come up with one yet, so they are kind of in a state of limbo in regard to parties.

Q: One of the things that I have observed in my three years at Cornell is the number of underground parties that have become increasingly prevalent as a result of policies such as mandatory catered parties where Identification is required at the door. Do you think that these parties are going to increase in number as a result of the new BYOB policy or do you feel like this will effectively eliminated such parties?

A: Well, what we noticed with the underground parties is that given the case that the parties were smaller in size and the exorbitantly high fees of the catering system, which could be \$1,200 to \$1,500 plus what is being charged per drink, having a party with only 100 or so people would be outrageous in terms of the expenses. So, a number of the parties that were going on underground were smaller parties that weren't going to caterers. What the IFC said was hey these smaller parties are going on and why don't you allow them on a BYOB basis, here's what the rules are, and here's what the consequences are for violating them. While there's some merit to that argument, my own feeling is that as long as you have a 21 year old drinking age and the majority of our students are underage there are always going to be some ways to party and get around the system and we are always going to be playing catch up with what students are doing, no matter what. Are goal, therefore, is to try to have as much harm reduction as possible, to be as cooperative with the students as possible, to give them alternatives to try to encourage them to develop social, fun activities that are not just based on alcohol.....and I am not going to be [naive] and say that alcohol is going to go away because I don't believe in prohibition. It didn't work in the 1920s and I don't think it's going

to work now, but I also would say to the fraternities and sororities that they need to learn how to have a good time without having a party every weekend so that they can learn how to have fun without revolving their activities around alcohol. Some houses get that and some houses don't.

Q: Do you think that our environment contributes significantly to the problem of alcohol abuse because of our rural location in upstate New York, where we are far from the city lights of New York or Boston, where students can find a variety of non-drinking activities to engage in? For example, Dartmouth also has experienced similar problems and taken measures to abolish the Greek system and they are similarly situated in a rural, isolated environment with little to do outside of campus parties on the weekends.

A: I think there is some of that here and that's why I wouldn't put the full burden on the Greek system, and that's why we have been working with the student assembly toward late night programming and providing them with funding for alternative late night activities. We've put our tow in the water as far as late night movies, keeping athletic facilities open later, but ultimately students are looking to have fun and they are looking to do it away from North campus where they [freshman] spend most of their time for 5 nights of the week. For example you wouldn't want to party in your own house every weekend, and similarly freshman want to go out away from north campus and party with the upperclassmen. Frankly, we have things to learn because students are going to want to go out on Thursday and Friday nights and they are going to look for things to do that aren't exactly in their backyards. We need to figure out what they are going to want to do in terms of what is "cool" to do as far as what the older kids are doing. They [freshman] live by themselves all week on North campus and they want to play where the big kids are, and therefore, is it any surprise that we have a lot of freshman going to Collegetown [an area just off campus where many upperclassmen live and several bars are located]? Increasingly these kids can't get into the bars because the bars are getting tighter and tighter in fear of losing their licenses, and this results in freshman ending up at house parties or annex parties, in collegetown, invited or uninvited. Unfortunately there isn't much within walking distance from our campus, and that's the difference between us and someone like Columbia where a student can walk down the street and there will be a movie theater here and a jazz group playing over there, etc.

Q: Do you think that there is a tremendous amount of pressure on administrators to appease gift-giving alumni who strongly support the Greek system, and how would you characterize the effect of such pressure on eliminating problem fraternities and sororities who engage in such behavior? I.E. - Chi Psi and the incident with the naked pledge found on a leash.

A: What happens in situations like with Chi Psi, they were kicked off campus for a year, but they are still allowed to rent the house and inhabit the former fraternity house because the university does not own that house like it does many others that are thrown off. Again, there the alumni did close the house. We did work with the alums and allowed the house to come back within a year. That was the third hazing incident; however the egregiousness of the incident was low on a scale of one to ten, yet significant enough that they did need to be closed down. There is definitely pressure [from gift giving alumni], but I do have to say that we are fortunate because we have a strong fraternity & sorority advisor counsel that is lead by alumni who have been driving partners behind some of our initiatives. I think in some ways the administration gets caught in the argument that we are not able to get rid of houses or aspects of the system fast enough because in some ways we are under pressure from rich alumni who want to preserve the Greek system. Frankly, we're trying to say that there is a role for the Greek system to play [socially] but they must rise to the level of expectations that as an administration we do have for them, and frankly that they should have for themselves if they are true to their founding values. I frankly would rather have the alumni shut down a house, but if they don't take the initiative when it is clearly necessary, we will intervene and close them down. The basic system is on a self-governance system as opposed to us managing them like we manage the residence hall.

### **WRONGS OF PASSAGE**

According to author and hazing expert Hank Nuwer, who in 1999 detailed hazing and other fraternity practices in Wrongs of Passage, hazing is broadly defined as “any action taken or situation created intentionally, whether on or off fraternity premises, to produce mental or physical discomfort, embarrassment, harassment or ridicule”(Wrongs of Passage, p.31). Nuwer enumerates four ways in which hazing can and does often lead to serious or even fatal injuries:

- 1) Ritual brings out people's innate propensity for violence.
- 2) Members who act aggressively toward pledges may be using them as scapegoats through which to vent their own frustrations.
- 3) Drinking itself has become ritualistic in universities, and is often incorporated in excessive amounts in fraternity rituals.
- 4) Rituals may provoke members who have psychological problems to behave violently.

These four dangerous patterns visible in fraternity hazing practices can contribute significantly to

the detriment of the pledges being hazed as well as increase the danger of the hazing activities being carried out. For example scenario number one and two indicate that violent tendencies may be brought forth in brothers' hazing of pledges due to the aggressive nature of hazing and such pledges may become subjects upon which to vent frustration through violent hazing. When I pledged I can remember some of the angriest, most bitter brothers were some of the same ones involved in the more intense and violent hazing activities.

One brother in particular, who always seemed to be in a bad mood, would assign the most physically and psychologically demanding tasks to pledges in order to get a signature and would be the first to initiate aggressive hazing activities that weren't sanctioned by the house. When such brothers, who have a propensity for violence and dominance, are the same ones who are initiating hazing activities the nature of the hazing can become more violent and consequently dangerous. Often the pledge educators who carry out line-ups are included in this group of violent and insensitive brothers. Nuwer also draws the connection between brothers who have been hazed and children who have been battered by parents in that both groups are more likely to engage in similar violent behavior in the future. This means that pledges who aren't violent or aggressive may become so after enduring a semester of intense hazing, and in turn treat future pledge classes like they were treated, and since people tend to over-exaggerate hardships they endured this might lead to an intensification of subsequent hazing.

The third scenario, when pledges are forced to drink ritualistically, can clearly result in or contribute to many hazing related deaths. On several occasions my pledge brothers and other pledge brothers interviewed were told to finish a keg in a short period of time. Such excessive consumption of alcohol can result in alcohol poisoning, asphyxia, and other alcohol related fatalities. Ritualistic consumption of alcohol by brothers engaging in the hazing of pledges can also result in an increase in the likelihood of such brothers to use violent force or carry a physical hazing activity too far as a result of alcohol impaired judgment.

The fourth and final scenario identified by Nuwer, that psychologically disturbed brothers may engage in violent behavior through organized hazing of pledges, is questionable because of the difficulty of demonstrating that a brother actually suffers from psychological problems and is not simply blood-thirsty. I can testify, however, that our pledge educator did lock himself in the basement at times, in isolation, and blast heavy metal music while consuming large amounts of alcohol as he talked to himself in loud and aggressive tones. Interviewees often recounted stories of

their pledge educators being the most sadistic and irrationally violent members of the house. Once again, whether these brothers suffered from actual psychological problems is a mystery due to the confidentiality of medical records.

So why do freshman subject themselves to such inhumane treatment? Nuwer explains that hazers are like extremists because of their justification of extreme actions that are outside the realm of normal human behavior. He says that people most vulnerable to join extremist groups often lack and desire meaningful relationships and acceptance, and do not necessarily relate to a particular group's ideology, especially people who are lacking friends because of a move to a new location. He draws the analogy to fraternities, which often recruit freshman males who recently arrived on campus and are distanced from their friends, family, and significant others and are in need of new meaningful relationships and a feeling of belonging or acceptance. To such people the pain and trauma of enduring a semester of hazing certainly beats the loneliness and emptiness of being lost in the shuffle of a new surrounding (Nuwer, p.38).

But once they are hazed as pledges how come they don't leave? Nuwer accounts for pledges unwillingness or inability to bring themselves to de-pledge because of a hunger for group identity that leads one to condone attitudes, behaviors, and group mores that they would normally find repulsive (Nuwer, p.40). For example, the boy in the mail room trying to work his way up the ladder in a company is not likely to be critical of company executive's behavior and values if he is trying to gain acceptance, and might be inclined to suppress his own values in the process. So pledges, once they assume a pledging mentality of subordination and servitude, rarely muster the courage to revolt or quit. Making the matter harder is that most pledges and brothers uniformly share the belief that someone is either a member of a group or an outsider, since the whole idea behind fraternities revolves around inclusive and exclusive group membership. This leads others in the group to view pledge class dropouts as misfits and outsiders, and pledges observe the seething looks, harsh language, and occasional threats that such dropouts endure (Nuwer, p.41). Such an environment builds an even greater barrier to exit from the fraternity.

Also of significance was the fraternity's systematic suppression of rebelliousness. Nuwer notes that every pledge class has its rebel, but brothers typically punish and reprimand an entire pledge class and especially dissidents who attempt to defy orders and engage in other forms of insubordination that are counterproductive to the fraternity's ability to successfully haze pledges. During my experience as a pledge there were instances when a small contingent of pledges, myself

included, refused to participate in certain degrading activities or showed up late for line-ups as a subtle form of rebellion, only to be chewed out by fraternity brothers and our pledge brothers. In such instances our pledge brothers were often made to do increased numbers of calisthenics, particularly painful ones, until we arrived at lineup or suffered enough punishment to be forgiven for our failure to complete given chores. Additionally, brothers would really get on a pledge's case and assign him harder chores and sig book tasks if he seemed like he was being rebellious and not allowing himself to be completely domineered by the brothers. And if pledges still aren't too afraid to rebel against hazing, methods such as sleep deprivation, alcohol and drug abuse, and mind control tactics are used by brothers to reduce pledges judgment and energy to revolt (Nuwer, p. 42).

### **CULT LIKE BEHAVIOR**

Dr. Scott Saucier, whose son died in the tragic drinking accident at an Auburn University fraternity party described earlier, identifies behavior of hazing fraternity chapters resembles cult like behavior. He observed that hazing chapters employ "coercive persuasion" and "systematic manipulation of psychological influence" as described by psychologist Edgar Schein and cult expert Margaret Thaler Singer, respectively (Nuwer, p.45). Singer goes a step further and lists several cult-like parallels between hazing fraternities and typical cults:

Fraternities, like cults, "trumpet their exclusivity to potential recruits, promising to solve pressing problems or to meet needs. Just as cult members tend to think that they have the one true answer, so too do many hazers arrogantly claim to have special knowledge, telling pledges that the abuse will makes sense once they become members." I can attest to this practice because I was told that all the hazing I had to endure would make perfect sense in the end and that it would be well worth the suffering. Since the pain and inconvenience was so great, my pledge brothers and I began irrationally thinking that we would be given cars, money, and other riches once we were admitted in order to justify our experiences.

Like cults, hazing fraternities expect members to be extremely honest and forthright with all those inside the group and tight-lipped and in many instances outright untruthful to those outside the group, including parents, friends, the university, the national chapter, and the press. To accomplish this means the pledge educator is typically made into an absolute authority. Pledges often become more concerned with impressing and not disappointing him, more so than their own parents and

friends (Nuwer, p.45).

I can recall pledges, who placed such an emphasis on academics, who were extremely excited to have gotten into a top academic institution suddenly losing sight of their priorities and letting their grades slip drastically while bending over backwards to impress the brotherhood. Also many of my pledge brothers proudly boasted that they had lied to their parents and friends back home, telling them that they hadn't been hazed or mistreated during pledging, as if they were showcasing their new unflagging loyalty to the house.

Also like cults, hazing fraternities often “monopolize pledges’ time, restrict their movements, strip them of power, introduce fear and a feeling of dependency, and symbolical or actually replace their belief system with new attitudes and values inculcated by members. Pledges find that they are not welcome to criticize or change the system. What was once unthinkable becomes normal,” according to Singer. My stories demonstrate a dependency that the house created between the pledges and the brotherhood. We had to cancel our meal plans and eat all of our meals at the house, we had to do time consuming chores that further monopolized our time and restricted our ability to spend time with friends and acquaintances outside the house, and we became drastically desensitized to violence and acts of dominance and aggression associated with hazing. Further we were not allowed to criticize the pledging process because we knew such rebellion would only result in a worsening of the very actions we were trying to speak up against.

And notably hazing fraternities, like cults, “make it clear to pledges and followers that there is but one path. Cults tend to have special secrets published in a book that amount to some revealed word,” according to Singer. Fraternities often have numerous publications that are tightly guarded such as pledge books that detail Alpha Gam history and rituals. My pledge brothers and I were told to keep our pledge books covered with blank paper at all time so that no one would know when we were reading them and we were told to never have them visible in public at any time or for any reason. Further, they used “spook” to ensure secrecy in regard to any rituals or hazing activities carried out in the house. Also one of the pledge educators liked to remind us of a line from a Robert Frost poem, “...no way out but through”. This line was repeated many times to the pledges during hazing activities as a means of reinforcing the mentality that we had no escape from hazing and did not have a choice whether or not to engage in such activities.

One theory behind the motivation for membership in a fraternal organization is that America lacks rituals to celebrate and acknowledge the coming of age when a college freshman makes the

transition from high school boy to a college man who has reached full sexual maturity (Nuwer, p.53). Such ritualistic initiation into manhood is lacking and often desired by many youth, who yearn to redefine their position and status in a new and unfamiliar environment. Since fraternities offer such a ritual, a means toward become a man, many freshman are drawn into to pledging out of a desire for ritualistic fulfillment.

I can remember having many discussions with friends from freshman year that broached the subject of social and physical advancement in the college environment. In high school every year is a defining part of a young man's life: freshman year he gets a taste of high school life and receives a permit to practice driving; sophomore year most high school students have a sweet sixteen and obtain a driver's license and perhaps a car (a significant measure of independence); junior year is marked by status as an upperclassmen and the pressure of preparing for the SATs or ACTs; and senior year is noted for the trials and tribulations of the college admissions process, senior privileges around school, and the passing of the social and academic torch to underclassmen.

College, however, is one giant heterogeneous melting pot, where seniors are mixed with freshman in the same lectures and attend the same parties, but the freshman are housed separately and have no significant social connections to upperclassmen and are often lost in the shuffle. Most high school classes don't have more than 400 kids, so popularity, notoriety, and other forms of social hierarchy are easily defined and achieved, but college classes can have anywhere from 1,000 to over 10,000 students and social distinction is often non-existent or hard to come by. For this reason I believe many freshmen are drawn to the Greek system where seniority and class status, vividly defined by pledge classes, are clarified and a social rite of passage is offered through the endurance of a semester of hazing and then a ritualistic initiation. One can then define himself within the context of the house and to outsiders as a member of a particular house.

### **If Hazing Isn't Bad Enough.....Alcohol Abuse Is Rampant!**

The Harvard School of Public Health released a report in 1998 that uncovered through research that four out of five fraternity and sorority members engage in binge drinking, which lead to high risk sexual activities, irresponsible behavior, and declining academic performance (Nuwer, p.57). By 1998, a number of U.S. colleges had embarked on initiatives to ban the use of alcohol on campus and many others made their residence halls dry, alcohol free (Nuwer, p.65). MIT, in particular,

announced a campus wide alcohol ban after it had come under national scrutiny for its Greek system and notably the alcohol related death of 18 year old freshman Scott Krueger, a Fiji pledge, who died after drinking excessive amounts of hard alcohol at a Fiji party (Nuwer, p. 65). Nuwer notes that the decision by so many schools to ban alcohol, outright, is an indication of their inability to persuade fraternities to use alcohol in moderation and party responsibly. He also recognized the failure of state statutes regarding under-age drinking, public intoxication, and driving under the influence which he attributed to some administrators' "concerns about how their institutions will be perceived if the fact that these things are problems on campus is brought to light."

While Cornell has taken the approach of instituting alcohol free dorms and regulating under-age drinking by mandating that fraternity parties must be university sponsored and catered, this policy has been visibly, from a student's perspective, unsuccessful. My former fraternity, which I mentioned had been on multiple probations and wasn't allowed to throw parties, still managed to have a number of illegal parties, unrecognized by the university, such as the one at which my pledge brother Danny was almost killed. What happens, in effect is that underclassmen who aren't of legal drinking age learn to avoid catered, university recognized parties where proper identification is required in order to obtain alcohol. They do not, however, forgo partying or engage in more alcohol free university sponsored events. Instead freshmen learn to seek out the many illegal parties thrown by a handful of fraternities on any given Friday or Saturday night, where kegs and hard alcohol are abundant and caterers and sober security monitors aren't present. While such an initiative might have helped to destroy the popularity of some of the more well known and university recognized frat parties, it has also created an opportunity for fraternities to sponsor smaller unregulated parties.

James Arnold, an Indiana University doctoral student, lived with a high status fraternity on Indiana's undergraduate campus and researched what actually happened behind closed doors and used his finding to write his dissertation entitled *Liquid Bonding*. The fraternity that he studied was regarded by school officials as a model house that was law abiding and non-hazing, when in actuality, behind closed doors, they were anything but. He found that pledges were viciously hazed, alcohol was free-flowing and served to underage students, and university rules were frequently broken. Arnold also notes, "the heaviest, most frequent, and most problematic drinking in college is done by fraternity members. This is the case despite strongly worded policy directives, issued by national fraternity executives, information about risk management from house corporations, lectures about personal and group responsibility by university officials and chapter advisers, and espoused

group purposes.”

Also of concern to Arnold was the “monstrous gap” he uncovered between what actually occurred at the local level and what school administrators and national fraternity chapters thought was going on. He lamented that the office of student affairs would engage in a method of game playing with the fraternity, in which they would announce in advance upcoming house visits, allowing the fraternity to prepare an image of compliance with university policy and register a good general impression with university administrators. Further, officers of the fraternity boasted that they commonly signed off on forms required by their national chapter that swore that they never served underage students any alcohol, that their parties didn’t provide alcohol to anyone in attendance, and that they didn’t haze. Arnold noted that the house officers took amusement in their ability to deceive the national chapter about the nature of events that actually took place during parties and pledging.

Arnold writes that fraternity members are “quite simply being dishonest” if they actually claim that dry rush is indeed dry. He discovered that if fraternities do indeed obey a policy of dry rush and not serve alcohol to potential recruits, they often show slide shows or movies with images of brothers getting intoxicated or partying with cans of beer and other alcoholic beverages, as brothers cheer and laugh as the images are displayed. By doing so, he says that houses effectively convey the message that fraternity members like to get drunk when they party, and defeats the objectives of dry rush.

Unfortunately, there is not much universities can do policy-wise to effectively eliminate alcohol use within fraternities. Rita Saucier, the mother of Chad Saucier (who died at a Phi Delta Theta party at Auburn), insists that taking alcohol out of the fraternity houses will only serve the interests of the fraternity by mustering public support of the Greek system and lowering insurance costs for houses. She insists that brothers will still find ways to drink in the houses, and notes that University of Alabama brothers in Phi Delta Theta insist that such a policy could be circumvented because no house will institute a rule banning brothers from stumbling home drunk from off campus bars, apartment parties, etc. (Nuwer, p. 71).

Sadly, Arnold determined from his study that fraternities that take progressive approaches by not hazing pledges and not providing alcohol to underage students are frowned upon by members of the Greek community and often have very low status among students on campus, whereas hazing fraternities tend to be more popular. Also troubling is Arnold’s finding that such progressive fraternities tend to have very short life spans. This happens not because the chapters wither away

from lack of membership, but because once the founding brothers graduate, many younger brothers want to improve the status of their house and adopt hazing practices and throw keg parties open to underage students in an effort to mimic the more popular houses on campus. It will be interesting to see how progressive non-hazing houses at Cornell, such as Phi Tau, evolve as they become more social and more popular on campus.

Arnold interestingly notes that universities have largely failed to help combat hazing and alcohol abuse. Part of the reason for this is a faulty approach to dealing with such issues. He cites bringing in outside experts or authorities to talk to fraternities about the dangers of substance abuse, mandating a dry rush policy, and trying to externally influence the cultures of houses, three common university practices, as examples of poor attempts at achieving reform. Rather than use such tactics, he suggests attempting to induce cultural change from within the fraternities by holding brothers, in local chapters, personally responsible for such change. In other words the university must create an understanding between frat members that they are expected to positively impact the culture of their houses through symbols, manipulating their house's image in a good way, and changing the way that new members are brought into a group through pledging and initiation (Journal of College Student Development, p.333).

### **Where did hazing come from?**

Around the time of the middle ages the practice of "fagging" emerged at elite British schools. Under such a system, which lasted till as recently as the 20<sup>th</sup> century, older students were assigned "fags", new or young students, that could be made to do chores and other subservient tasks in the dormitories and on the cricket fields. Such a fag could be beaten for insubordination or failure to perform his assigned duties (Nuwer, p. 99). Flagging grew rampant in English public schools because educators often placed an emphasis on obedience as a schoolboy's most important virtue. An 1896 article in *The Cornhill Magazine* read, "Before it is possible for a man much more for a boy, to rule, it is a maxim as venerable as our copy books, that he must first be taught to obey; and it is this invaluable lesson that our fag system teaches, better perhaps than any other method of instruction inculcates it." (Nuwer, p. 100)

Such a system may have first been introduced at American Universities when Harvard's earliest students in the 1650s came from abroad, several of whom were from British schools such as Oxford,

although the first student officially punished for hazing wasn't until 1680s. At that time the president of Harvard expelled Joseph Webb for hitting first year students and requiring them to perform acts of servitude (Nuwer, p. 100). According to Nuwer, by the 1700s servitude became an inescapable part of every freshman's life at Harvard. Hazing customs were published by the Sophomores and passed out in chapel to all of the freshman so that they knew what was expected of them: they had to wear white hats when addressing a senior and were forced to run errands for upperclassmen. Whether a system of fagging died out by the 1800s or simply evolved into more vicious forms of hazing and pranks is subject to debate, but the concept of servitude and hazing of underclassmen clearly lived on (Nuwer, p. 101).

Hazing had begun to grow out of control at Harvard by 1860, and consequently Harvard expelled eight students that year for the abusive hazing of their peers (Nuwer, p.103). While it was clear that hazing had caught on and begun to be closely linked with prestigious academic institutions, the exact origins of hazing in the context of the Greek system is still not known. Several theories behind its origins claim that Ivy league societies engaged in hazing and harmful pranks that carried over into their Greek systems and others upon their formation. While other theories claim that military school dropouts and transfers brought with them their strict practices of seniority based hazing and mandatory servitude when they enrolled in academic institutions in the 1800s.

Some of the first documented hazing deaths ever recorded were at Cornell University. Although the first two hazing related deaths occurred at the Franklin Seminary in Kentucky in 1838 and Amherst College in 1847, the accounts of the incidents have largely disappeared from records. A hazing death at Cornell University in 1894, however, remains well documented and one of the first of its kind to be recorded by historians. The events are as follows.

In 1894 a class hazing incident led to the death of a food server and cook, Mrs. Henrietta Jackson, after she fell victim to a horrible class prank pulled by a group of sophomores trying to get even with the Freshman class for beating them at sporting events. The pranksters released chlorine gas into a room filled with freshman, attending a dinner function at the Masonic Temple in Ithaca, NY. The tube used to release the gas accidentally entered the area of a kitchen stove, instead of the dining room. The carbon monoxide mixed with other chemicals emanating from the stove to create a poisonous gas similar to the phosgene, a deadly chemical agent used in World War I. Members of the sophomore class who might have had knowledge of the events remained tightlipped about the incident even when questioned by detectives assigned to the case, and no one was ever punished for the incident. The case in addition to two other Cornell fraternity deaths

around the same time, however, did draw national attention and were the focus of articles in the New York Times (Nuwer, p.105).

Over a century later hazing still exists and runs rampant at Cornell and other prestigious schools with Greek systems. One theory that I have come up with as to why the practice of hazing has been able to thrive and survive in an underground setting within the Greek system is the secrecy surrounding the nature of the hazing activities and the difficulty pledges face in breaking that secrecy and turning in a fraternity to the university. While many non-Greeks would happily turn in a ruthless hazing fraternity, very few such people really have any access to or knowledge of what happens at line ups and other hazing activities, and the people who do keep their mouths shut out of fear of repercussions, support of the practice, or because they are brainwashed into secrecy. As a pledge, I sincerely thought that I would be jumped and beaten up for reporting the house and I would expect that brothers would have gone out of their way to make my experience at Cornell particularly miserable. The story of the live-in advisor who reported the fraternity in one of my previous interviews was put through a tremendous amount of pain and discomfort because of his determination to report hazing. I would imagine that he probably got off easy too, because he was an adult and could move off campus or pursue matters legally more easily than a student who is committed to living on or near campus and has little time to spend testifying in court cases, etc.

Nuwer notes that in the 1930s hazing practices began to disappear from the mainstream Greek rituals in which pledges participated, which was attributed largely to the a number of influential undergraduates at various universities who began to take a stand against the practice of hazing. What existed in the 1930s that doesn't exist now? In the 1930s the country was experiencing economic depression and the emergence of the Nazism in Germany and the atrocities associated with it. Perhaps such an environment was more conducive for widespread feelings of sympathy for any form human suffering.

In recent years there have been a few individuals who have attempted to take a stand against fraternity wrongdoings, specifically hazing, and they have often been met by fierce resistance from dubious alumni of a schools' Greek system as well as current members that were subsequently targets of university and legal investigation. I had a rare and very special opportunity to contact one such individual who decided to take a stand against hazing, despite being the president of a football players' fraternity at Cornell University that widely supported many forms of intense and often revolting acts of hazing. My interview with him revealed many of the difficulties that one faces

when making a conscious effort to expose the evils of hazing against the wishes of one's fraternity members.

### **Interview with Brian Strahine, Anti-Hazing Activist and Former DU & IFC President**

Q: Would you briefly describe the nature of events that lead you to take a stand against hazing and expose DU as a hazing fraternity at Cornell?

A: My first hazing experience occurred during my freshman year as a DU pledge. Naive, immature, scared, and brainwashed, I accepted the things that happened. No one else on campus seemed to make a fuss about hazing so I kept my mouth shut. Not only were my grades extremely low, but I witnessed how hazing could destroy the mental, emotional, and physical stability of a student.

I felt that the only way to make a change was to become president of DU and lead by example. As president of DU, I spent most of my time trying to protect the new members from extreme hazing. I was a junior, and the seniors in the house told me that my decision to eliminate hazing was not an option. They would do it regardless of what I said. Few, if any, brothers supported my efforts and I ended my term extremely upset and frustrated.

As president of the IFC, I decided to make hazing my primary concern. I opened discussions with alumni, faculty, and administrators and found them to be very supportive. I don't want to mention the things that I witnessed at DU or the other chapter houses, but they were unacceptable and illegal!

Q: What were the main obstacles that you faced in making your decision to come forward and share information about what really was going on in your fraternity with university administrators?

A: The main obstacle I faced was a lack of support from the other fraternity members from DU and the other chapters. Very few members wanted to admit that hazing was wrong, and most of them actually believed that hazing was effective and necessary. I sacrificed many relationships because they didn't agree with what I was doing. I finally decided to be specific about the hazing practices going on at my house because I felt it was the only way to get the attention of the administration and alumni. Hazing is supposed to be secret but DU is a non-secret fraternity and there was no reason for me to keep quiet.

Q: Why do you suppose that more undergraduates who were hazed against their will don't come forward with their stories and expose the people who hazed them?

A: Many young men believe that hazing is good. Some of our new members actually asked us to haze them more!! This is crazy. Freshmen are brainwashed to believe that hazing is necessary to become a man. The primary reason why young men don't speak out is because they think that the current members and their pledge brothers will think of them as cowards and therefore ostracize them from the group. Freshmen want to "fit in" and be accepted by the group. I was told several times that if I couldn't handle the hazing then I wasn't "man enough" to be in DU. The real man in this situation is the one who has the courage to walk away-- not to stay, and continue to be degraded in every possible way!

Q: What repercussions did you face as the result of your courageous actions (threats, confrontations, etc.)?

A: As a result of my actions, I was ostracized. I no longer speak to any of my fraternity brothers except my best friend, who was the only one to support my decision to stop the hazing at DU. I was told that after the brothers found out that the house was going to be re-organized, many of the brothers went to the bars with t-shirts that said, "F--K Strahine, DU Forever!"

Q: As IFC president, did you notice a large disconnect between university administrators' knowledge of what goes on in the Greek system at Cornell and what really takes place?

A: I believe that Cornell's administrators knew about the hazing but they didn't realize how bad it was. As I mentioned, fraternities do a great job of keeping things a secret. Suzy Nelson is an amazing woman and I know that she knew many of the things that I addressed, however, she only hears rumors and it is difficult to prove a hazing allegation unless she actually is there to witness it. Since few freshmen speak out, it is hard for her to accuse a fraternity unless someone like myself admits to the hazing. The system needs more people to take a stand against this barbaric behavior! This is why I have decided to earn a masters degree in higher education administration so that I can

continue to address these issues as a dean or president of a university.

Q: Finally, what steps if any do you think can be taken to effectively reduce the number of hazing incidents on campus?

A: We need strong student leaders!!! If college campuses do not have students willing to stand up for what is right then hazing will always exist. As a high school teacher in a former communist country, I see how a lack of young leadership can have on the growth of a country. Romanian students do not have opportunities to be student leaders and they are not empowered to make a difference and to change their country and the world. I was very fortunate to be surrounded by amazing administrators and professors who empowered me, believed in me, and supported me. It really made the difference and I hope that I can do the same for college students some day. administrators and faculty members need strong student leaders just as much as strong student leaders need supportive administrators!!!!

### **Talk with Tim Marchell and Gretchen Poulos**

My talk with Tim, the Cornell Director of Alcohol Policy and Initiatives, and Gretchen, his assistant, was lengthy and we frequently wandered off the topic at hand, so rather than reproduce the interview I am going to attempt to summarize the main points.

Tim Marchell is a clinical psychologist at the Gannett Health Promotion center at Cornell University. He is also a graduate of the class of 1982 and a former brother in the fraternity Delta Upsilon. Tim was a lacrosse and football player as an undergraduate and he pledged Delta Upsilon knowing that it was an athletic frat with many other varsity athletes. He was subjected to harsh forms of physical and mental hazing as a pledge, which he rebelled against at times, but continued on to complete the pledge process and become a full-fledged brother in the house. While a brother, on the other side of the hazing, he often spoke against the type of hazing practices Delta Upsilon utilized, and went so far as to warn pledges in advance of upcoming events to downplay the fear that often paralyzes pledges, who would otherwise speculate about irrationally terrifying forms of hazing that they were going to endure. While Tim was never successful at uprooting hazing he fought

vigorously against it, sometimes at the expense of long held friendships, and eventually deactivated from his fraternity because of a moral opposition to such practices. Ironically, Delta Upsilon (DU) was recently thrown off campus for hazing and Tim's office overlooks the former DU house where so many horrific events were to take place, in his time at Cornell and later.

Gretchen Poulos, who was also present at the interview, first became involved in combating hazing through a class project, in which she worked with her professor as well as Susan Murphy to try to come up with a solution to hazing problems at Cornell. Although she admits to failing to come up with an adequate solution to the problem, her research that she conducted and the hours that she put into the project lead her to really dedicate herself to the cause and eventually, after she graduated in the fall of 2003, take a job at Cornell as an alcohol and drug counselor as well as an anti-hazing campaign leader. Gretchen informed me that she is working with Tim on a direct mailing campaign to better educate freshman about the ills of hazing, and instruct them as to how they can remove themselves from a future hazing situation in which they might be placed. She also hopes her information pamphlets and newsletters will help freshman stop hazing situations that are afflicting them or anyone that they might know. It is their intention to mail these brochures to every single freshman in the spring through a series of mailings that will include definitions of hazing, ways to report it, and other useful contact information, etc. that is yet to be decided.

In addition to the mail campaign, they will be working with the Cornell Daily Sun, a student run newspaper, on a series of articles that will be dedicated to educating the campus on hazing and how to stop it from happening. Tim and Gretchen will also be creating a website, [www.stophazing.cornell.edu](http://www.stophazing.cornell.edu), which will have all kinds of information on hazing, such as key links, educational material, etc. They hope the website will serve as a centralized mechanism through which people who have been hazed and want to report it or learn more about what they can do can come to the website and do as they please. Gretchen emphasized several times that the website was not just something for people in the Greek system to use, because hazing goes on everywhere outside the Greek system as well such as athletics, musical groups, etc.

To supplement the media campaign, a series lectures, training programs, and audio conferences with top administrators, is being used to educate university leaders about hazing issues and how to deal with them. They have also been working to try to secure more funding for the outdoor education, a non-hazing alternative that can be used in pledge events. They also hope to orchestrate some kind of inoculation, like a program to discuss some of the control mechanisms that will be

used to prevent pledges from leaving or talking about hazing. They solicited my advice about such a program and even asked if I would be willing to help them stage such a discussion series with prospective and current pledges this spring.

### **Talk with Suzy Nelson, Robert G. Engel Associate Dean of Students**

Q: Can you describe to me the new chapters of excellence program?

A: Well, [Alpha Gam] is actually one of nine groups that are members of our “chapters of excellence” program. The whole point of this program is to work more intimately with nine groups in a proactive way and specifically focuses on the new member education programs of these houses [pledge programs] to make sure that these chapters are not hazing and that they are not standing out there by themselves without any kind of support. We’ve hired a director who used to work for Cornell Outdoor Education, and one of the tasks she is going to take very seriously is reviewing everybody’s new member program. Quite honestly, the policy of this office was to build a trust based relationship with the houses: come tell us your goals, tell of your troubles, and if you run into anything along the way come in and talk to us. The sheer size of the Greek system here made it impossible for me to act as an advisor for all these houses, and consequently that job was left to the alumni. We therefore came up with this program so we could work more closely with at least the nine groups.

Q: So are these same alumni, who are in charge of advising also in charge of closing down a house when something goes wrong?

A: Well, we hope that in a self-governed system that if you screw up and you’re a private organization that should be running your own business aligned with the institution [Cornell] and recognized by the institution. There’s hazing like there was in Delta Upsilon and Zeta Beta Tau, and recently Sigma Nu and Chi Psi and Pi Kap, the national and the alumni should close down the house, and [in a few instances] they did shut them down or reorganize.

Q: Going back to when I was a pledge, I knew a Cornell and [Alpha Gam] alumna who received various news letters that talked about [Alpha Gam’s] dry rush and non-hazing new member education program that included various philanthropic activities and bond building outings like

going to the ropes course (none of which ever took place). I am also aware from my research and past experiences that house officers typically sign off on papers for the university and national chapters saying that they don't haze when they indeed do so. How can you reasonably expect the same groups of people, whom chapters have gone to great lengths to deceive, to be able to know enough about what goes on behind closed doors and intervene or close a chapter down when necessary?

A: Well what's amazing about what you are uncovering here is how chapters are going to such great lengths to engage in such duplicitous behaviors to preserve their cultures of hazing...it would be really helpful to maybe share this information with fraternities so they can recognize the dissonance between who they say they are and what they really are. It's like what Hank Nuwer says, that there is this whole duplicity, this silent kind of collusion, where we build a force field between what people think we are, and what we actually are on the inside. There's some real dissonance between the real and the portrayed.

Q: How would you characterize the pressure that Cornell is under to appease gift giving alumni who were involved in the Greek system here, and in many cases still are, and don't want to see their houses thrown off campus? For example, you mentioned Chi Psi earlier as being a house that was engaging in illegal hazing activities, and I had the opportunity to talk to at least one senior in the house last year who described the incident that led to them being kicked off, but informed me that the house had many wealthy alumni who didn't want to see the house kicked off campus and were working with the university to resolve the problem. Whether this really happened or not, I don't doubt that keeping wealthy alumni happy has some influence on the outcome of the university's decisions made or actions taken in regard to reprimanding a fraternity for breaking a university rule?

A: That's a really good question....yeah that's my life. That's the political environment in which I work. I will tell you that there were a lot of alumni of Chi Psi that had a lot of money who also wanted to kick them out completely, kick them out of the universe. What there was discord on their alumni board in that some people felt that they had behaved inappropriately but could be forgiven and there were others who felt that what happened was not only an inappropriate action but they wanted to throw them off like instantly. The same angry alumni felt that this was the thanks they

had after raising \$2.4 million for the house for renovations, etc. In this particular instance I didn't get the impression that alumni played a big role in preventing the house from being disciplined. It was more like they were at a disagreement as to what the disciplinary action should be, so they just kind of muddled about with out taking any sort of action. Susan [Murphy] probably alluded to this, but she basically told them look your organization has grossly violated your mission, values, purpose, all of that, what do you do? If you are really an organization worth your salt then you close down. That's the position that Susan takes; if the chapter won't do that, then the university will sever ties, meaning we will no longer recognize them.

Q: Well, that's interesting. I don't know of any cases where fraternities are operating underground after being kicked off, but I know that Hank Nuwer seems to think that throwing fraternities off campus only leads them to operate that way. This implies that fraternity practices such as senseless hazing would go completely unregulated since houses would no longer have to answer to the IFC, you, or Susan Murphy. Do you feel that no longer acknowledging a house for senseless hazing, will really deter them from operating underground and hazing just as viciously, if not more so?

A: Well that is a problem and I suspect that it happens a lot. From my perspective after doing this for many years, about 20 actually, you have really broken down diplomacy if you cannot reach some kind of outcome where the alumni are going to support it. At Cornell what they do very well that they don't do at other institutions is to use the alumni to their advantage. These are volunteers that run all these places. They don't have a fiscal staff like the residence halls. The alumni should be our friends; we should all be working on the same page and working toward the same goals [ensuring that fraternities obey university orders]. It's just that sometimes that is a real art because even the alumni perceive the administration to be anti-Greek.

Q: I remember to when I was a pledge and I had to sign a piece of paper saying that I would report any hazing activities that I witnessed. We talked about the culture of secrecy that surround such events and how hard it is for many pledges to overcome that barrier. I would be shocked if that piece of paper really is successful at motivating pledges to report any forms of hazing, and just getting pledges to the point where they feel comfortable enough to report hazing incidents is even more difficult. Is the university aware of this and are they taking any measures to help students get

to the point where they feel comfortable coming forward and reporting wrongdoings on the part of their fraternities?

A: That's an interesting point. As you saw in the policy notebook we have come up with a working definition for hazing, under which we can take judicial action against hazers. Hazing is like child abuse or domestic abuse in that it's a dirty, ugly, fat part of the fabric of our society. You are talking about Greeks and their social issues, but if you were talking about my home town you would be talking about substance abuse, poverty, and violence in the home. It's the same thing, and people don't run around and say that they beat their wives because they are ashamed of it, and that's what adds to the secrecy. We did recently discuss possibly opening a hotline where students could call anonymously and report any hazing or other illegal activities that their fraternity is involved in. What happens right now is I get a lot of reports, a lot of them from students who are being hazed. They don't want their chapter to get in trouble or be closed down, but they want someone to intervene so that their chapter can be reformed. Imagine what you experienced and me intervening in some way without doing something that would kill the organization but made them change their new member program.

Outside the interview Mrs. Nelson interestingly told me of a report that came to her desk about Alpha Gam, the year that I pledged, which indicated some hazing had taken place. A member of my pledge class had reported to some guests at a dinner held by the red carpet society that he was tardy because he had been locked in a closet as part of a hazing activity and couldn't leave. I don't know who in particular reported such an incident, but the university failed to investigate the allegation thoroughly and uncovered the veracity of the pledge's account. Mrs. Nelson informed me that the fraternity was questioned, all brothers I presume, and the allegations were denied vehemently and no further actions were taken. This story took me by surprise and shocked me, to say the least, because I would imagine that the university would follow up such a claim by interviewing members of the pledge class who could verify the story. In this instance, we were locked in the closet on one of the first nights of pledging, before anyone was brainwashed enough by spook and similar thought control programs to keep quiet when questioned about Alpha Gam hazing activities.

She also told me that in the past she felt the local police had been pretty nonchalant about investigating hazing incidents or attempting to catch fraternities red handed. She indicated that

police previously carried the attitude that boys will be boys, and such activities could be chalked up to horseplay and the real issues were those of substance abuse and underage drinking on campus. I was told, however, that the Cornell and Ithaca police have recently been taking hazing more seriously, investigating any reports that come in to them, and sharing information with the university. Interestingly, she noted that the fraternities and sororities account for 1,500 beds on campus that the university relies on for student housing. It would seem as though such a dependency would lead the university to be overly lenient with suspect houses in the same manner that judges might be more inclined to reduce or drop lesser charges when local prisons are already overcrowded. Reducing such a dependency might be one step toward correcting more wrongdoings of the Greek system and uprooting more of the particularly bad chapters.

### **Cornell Task Force on Hazing, Memorandum**

The task force on hazing consists of 16 members comprised of university administrators, professors, and student leaders. The group met in the fall of 2001, charged by Susan Murphy, Vice President of Student and Academic Services, to investigate and report on hazing practices at Cornell and determine what can and should be done in response to the problem of hazing. Their mission was defined as identifying steps the University could take to promote a culture among students, faculty, staff, and alumni that does not tolerate hazing (Memorandum, p.1).

The New York State Education Law, Article 129-A, mandates that the Code of Conduct have a provision banning hazing, or “any action or situation which recklessly or intentionally endangers mental or physical health or involves the forced consumption of liquor or drugs for the purpose of initiation into or affiliation with any organization” (Memorandum, p.2). Although the Cornell Code of Conduct does not specifically use the word hazing, it borrows the language of the Education Law in prohibiting such actions in Title II and III. Because hazing was not defined in the Code of Conduct in 2001, actions resulting from hazing activities were referred to the judicial assembly and parties were charged under section H Endangerment, I Harassment, or G Threat of Physical Force (Memorandum, p.2). The task force suggested that the Code of Conduct, Title III Regulations for the Maintenance of the Educational Environment, specifically define the action of hazing under which students could be charged. The task force wanted the definition to include “any action taken or situation created, intentionally, whether on or off the University premises, to produce mental or physical discomfort, embarrassment, harassment, or ridicule. Such activities may include, but are

not limited to the following: use of alcohol; paddling; creation of excessive fatigue; physical and psychological shocks, quests, treasure hunts, scavenger hunts, road trips, wearing public apparel which is conspicuous and not normally in good taste; engaging in public stunts and buffoonery; morally degrading or humiliating games and activities; and any other activities which are not consistent with academic achievement, fraternal law, ritual or policy, or New York State law and Cornell University policies and regulations” (Memorandum, p.3). The task force wanted such activities regulated outside the Greek system as well, and noted their prevalence in athletics.

Of further import to the task force was for the university to consider jurisdictional issues pertaining to regulating hazing behavior and activities off campus as well as on campus. While the regulation of off campus activities would have significant implications as far as overstepping the bounds of local police and expanding the university’s jurisdiction, the task force wanted to ensure that organizations simply could not operate off campus in order to avoid repercussions. The task force suggested that every organization on campus have a clear and written reporting process, so that members could report any illegal hazing.

In addition to regulating such activities, the task force suggested that a policy be put in place that ensured that a coach of an athletic team would be required to report any hazing activities to the Athletic Director, who in turn should be required to turn such information over to the Vice President for Student and Academic Services, Susan Murphy, and appropriate action could be taken. It was also suggested that an education program be designed so that students in select groups as well as all first year students can be taught about hazing: how to avoid it, what to do if you are hazed, and the consequences for hazing. Such a program would target individuals as well as groups.

It task force purports that the aim of the educational programming should be to foster an environment in which hazing and the secrecy that often accompanies it is not tolerated. A campaign similar to the one used to prevent and eliminate DUI, driving under the influence, and public smoking in restaurants, etc. should be used to achieve this aim. In order to promote such a culture, the task force recommended that the definition of hazing be provided to all students and widely publicized and emphasized by residence hall advisers and other community development leaders. They also noted that the message must be articulated that a neutral stance as far as not reporting hazing that is going on is not acceptable or neutral at all. Alumni could also be used to promote such reform and opposition of hazing. Consequences, like the definition of hazing, must be widely publicized and understood.

It is important to remember that not all hazing takes place in the context of the Greek system.

According to the memorandum from the task force on hazing, 80% of NCAA athletes that were anonymously polled responded that they were hazed as part of their team initiation (Memorandum, p.9).

Similarly, the task force recommended that it would be wise to train and educate groups other than freshman in regards to hazing and its consequences. For example, teachers, parents, community development leaders, and alumni should all be educated about hazing, how to identify it, what can be done, etc. Also shortening the pledge period was recommended as a response to a Syracuse University study that indicated that pledges grades decrease significantly while pledging a Greek letter organization (Memorandum, p.9).

Finally, the memorandum recommends that chapters work to develop a non-hazing list of activities that can help to establish pledge class bonding such as ropes course activities and other outdoor education programs. Similarly, chapters that make such an effort to incorporate non-hazing activities into their pledge processes should be recognized by the university. And lastly, a website should be created through which students can learn about hazing and report incidents, interactive theater should be used to demonstrate hazing activities through role play, and resident advisors should be notified of each hall member who is pledging a fraternity so that the individual can look out for signs of fatigue, injury, etc. associated with hazing and subsequently report any suspicious activity.

### **Not Just a Fraternity Problem**

While many people are under the impression that hazing is a result of boys being boys, they are significantly failing to consider that sororities practice hazing too. Researchers Alice H. Eagerly and Valerie J. Steffen's psychological comparison of aggression in men and women uncovered no single area in which women were as aggressive as men, and discovered that women were less likely to inflict pain or injury on another (Nuwer, p.158). While sorority hazing is not as physical in nature and not as widespread it is, however, fairly common and can be just as damaging to its victims as the more physical hazing of male fraternities. One disturbing aspect of sorority hazing is the relatively small amount of information regarding such practices compared to the volumes on fraternity hazing. I encountered a great deal of difficulty uncovering stories of sorority hazing and abuse. Fortunately, I was able to get three sisters in a very prominent sorority in the Ivy League to discuss some of the hazing that they experienced as pledges. The sisters did not wish to be identified and asked that their sorority remain confidential as well. The story of the three girls was condensed into one via email

correspondence. Below is an excerpt from our open discussions.

*Q: Describe the type of hazing that you experienced as a pledge?*

*A: Nothing physical, it was more that we were required to attend events every day and night and they were very tiresome and wore us out. We were required to memorize personal information about each of the members of the house and if we didn't know something when asked, they would yell at us. The hazing was a lot of mind games, nothing serious, but it would upset some of the girls. During the week before our initiation, we weren't allowed to wear any makeup and weren't supposed to shower, but most of the girls did anyway. One night they told us that we were eating a goldfish, but in reality we were eating a peach and tuna.*

### **A Defense of Hazing Practices from someone who knows**

While most people who I interviewed for my paper were in support of ending senseless hazing, there were others who didn't think hazing was so senseless. One of those people is the former president of a prestigious fraternity at a Midwestern school with one of the largest Greek systems in the country. He shared with me a valuable and interesting perspective on hazing. While he didn't see eye to eye with me in regards to eradicating hazing, I felt that his attitude and opinions were important to note because they are probably widely held and somewhat representative of numerous members of authority in the Greek system on a local and national level.

Q: How large is the Greek system at your school?

A: We're one of the largest in the country, I think #1, and approximately 25% of the students are Greek.

Q: Can you describe some of the worst hazing practices that you had to endure as a pledge?

A: Most of our activities involve mind games that teach pledges valuable lessons about our brotherhood and what it stands for. For example, at lineups we pour shots of water out of vodka bottles and have 2 pledges take the shots...then they tell the rest of the pledge class that it was just water. This teaches them to have faith in the brothers. Other activities are demeaning such as getting ice thrown on you. Most of these practices involve house traditions. We make the pledges clean a lot to ensure that they can endure a heavy load of responsibilities that comes with becoming an active brother. A major aspect of our

pledge program is pledge flag football; not only is this a strong tradition in our house, but it also creates a great opportunity for the pledge class to really bond and work together as a team to accomplish a common goal. However, we do not cause any physical harm to our pledges.

Q: Being a brother in the house, and presumably continuing to haze freshman the same way you and your brothers were once hazed, do you now see the point of what you had to endure?

A: Again, our hazing often has a specific point or lesson. The overall idea is perseverance and testing the pledge's ability to commit to his brotherly obligations. A lot of it also has to do with tradition. For example, I can talk to an alumnus from the class of '45 who went through many of the traditional "hazing" that we did. It truly links generations and creates a unique bond.

Q: Can you briefly provide a defense or justification for the hazing practices that the house utilizes or simply hazing in general (as a means toward an ends, etc.)?

A: The ultimate goal is to mold pledges into "good" brothers. By this I mean brothers that can commit to the values that we stand for and put his heart into a common goal, whether it be serenades, philanthropy, or a brotherhood activity.

Q: Do you think the same sort of ends, such as unity and deference (etc), could be achieved without hazing and, if so, how?

A: Without unique pledge activities, you lose out on the exclusiveness of the fraternity, and the fraternity would just be some social club. You also risk initiating pledges who cannot fully commit to the house and will shirk their obligations.

Q: Do hazing houses at your school tell their national chapters that they are non-hazing, sign off on papers saying that they don't haze or serve alcohol to minors, and what was your experience with having to engage in such deceit as president?

A: We never signed any papers or documents that claimed we were a non-hazing fraternity. The national

constitution says we are a non-hazing fraternity, but the definition of hazing is ambiguous. Additionally, the representatives on nationals most likely all went through some hazing, so they too have an idea of what's really going on.

Q: Do you think hazing will ever be eradicated at your house and in general (from the Greek system)

A: No, fraternities are too deeply rooted in tradition, and there is not enough monitoring to shut it down.

### **What About Future Generations?**

While many people involved in the Greek system continue to view hazing as inevitable and a valuable part of a pledge's education upon entering a house, there are additional reasons for university administrators to be alarmed. Researchers from Alfred University recently questioned 1,541 high school juniors and seniors about hazing defined as "any humiliating or dangerous activity expected of you to join a group, regardless of your willingness to participate." Nearly one half (48 percent) of the 1,390 students who belonged to an organized group reported being subjected to hazing (cnn.com, Education News 9/21/00). Hazing is on the rise in high schools, and it's not just boys being boys, now girls are starting to do it too. Recent headlines have captured the alarming rate at which hazing has been occurring at the high school level. High school students are very young and impressionable and if they are learning such behaviors in their pre-collegiate adolescent years, then they are even more likely to accept such practices as normal and bring accepting attitudes toward hazing with them when they go to college.

While it would be easy to chalk up recent events to several unruly, non-college bound high school delinquents making trouble for some of their peers, two of the most recent events occurred at middle class and upper-middle class suburbs on Long Island and in the Northern suburbs of Chicago, where the overwhelming majority of such students are college bound. Many of these students are presumably even bound for elite academic institutions like Cornell. First in May of 2003, in the affluent suburb of Northbrook, Illinois a powder puff touch football game between high school junior and senior girls grew out of control. Caught on tape were the beatings of numerous junior girls by a larger group of seniors. Several girls remained sitting on the ground in a circle as some of the senior girls, and a couple guys, threw objects at them that included large buckets, urine, animal feces, fish guts, and mud. Some of the

girls reported being forced to eat mud, many had vinegar and Tabasco sauce poured in their eyes, and one girl reported being strangled with a pig intestine that was wrapped around her neck. In the end five girls had to be treated at an area hospital for related injuries (cnn.com, 6/7/03).

More recently in the news, hazing incidents were alleged to have occurred in late August during a Mepham High School varsity and junior varsity football retreat to a four day training camp in Pennsylvania. Mepham is located in Bellmore, a suburban Long Island community. The accused players, some 16 and 17 years old, are alleged to have sodomized some younger junior varsity boys over the course of the four days. The victims reported being sodomized with broomsticks covered in mineral ice, pine cones, and golf balls. The mother of one of the victims was quoted as saying that she knew that hazing went on at these football camps, just not the extent of it (ABCnews.com, 10/17/03).

Incidents like these are merely the ones that actually get reported and catch fire in the national media; however, there is reason to believe that such hazing stories are not as uncommon as many people would like to think. "There is a lot of pressure on males to be tough, stiff upper lip — a lot of people still believe that," said Richard Sigal, a professor of sociology who began studying hazing after the much publicized death of Chuck Stenzel in 1978, that resulted from fraternity hazing. "They want boys to take the pain and shut up about it. The attitude is what happens on the bus stays on the bus. You don't tell anybody outside the organization." (ABC News, Schabner, 10/17/03). In addition to this prevalent attitude of toughness and silence about pain and suffering at the high school level, Dr. Nadine C. Hoover, a hazing expert, uncovered some unsettling information in a recent high school hazing investigation (CNNnews.com, Education News, 9/21/200):

-Hazing is not just prevalent in gangs and sport teams, but also musical and church groups.

-Students reported being yelled or cursed at, being told to skip school or not associate with certain people, and being made to eat disgusting things. The researchers categorized these activities as "humiliating behaviors." Forty-eight percent of boys and 39 percent of girls said they had been hazed in this way.

-Students also reported being forced to drink alcohol or smoke or use illegal drugs, categorized as "substance abuse hazing." Twenty-four percent of boys and 18 percent of girls reported this type of hazing.

-Other students said they had been forced to vandalize property, steal or cheat, or engage in sexual acts classified as "dangerous hazing." Again, boys were more likely to be involved in these activities: 27 percent reported them, compared to 17 percent of girls.

If high school students, who live at home and are supervised throughout the day by school administrators, coaches, siblings, and family cannot be kept from engaging in such gruesome behaviors, just imagine how they will respond to the added freedom of the college lifestyle. This new batch of incoming college freshman might very well be even more desensitized to hazing, and even more accustomed to it and, therefore, willing to condone it. This past year a survey of 736 Cornell University students found 38 percent of fraternity and sorority members reported being hazed, and that percentage increased to almost 82 percent when the researchers considered responses to specific hazing activities. In the student body overall, one in three students reported participating in hazing activities (Post-Standard, 11/2/03). These numbers are alarming and they might only be getting worse. This poses a major challenge for university administrators charged with overseeing the activities of the student body. Fortunately, I was able to brainstorm after analyzing the findings of my research and come up with a number of solutions that can potentially help administrators respond to these challenges.

### **Recommendations to the University**

According to the Annual Report to the office of the Judicial Administrator, 2002-2003, “philosophically and from an efficiency perspective it made sense to treat minor, first time offenses less harshly, but to impose stricter sanctions for more serious or repeated misconduct. Furthermore, research about deterrence supports this approach. According to Dr. Timothy Marchell, Director of Alcohol Policy Initiatives at Gannett, research about DWI cases suggests that the perception of a high likelihood of being apprehended for DWI serves as a greater deterrent than the perceived severity of the punishment that might result. Extrapolating to Cornell, the fact that students are referred consistently to the JA serves as a better deterrent from future misconduct than a severe sanction for minor misconduct,” (Annual Report to the office of the JA, p.13). Such a suggestion can be applied to the Greek system as well. I mentioned earlier that hazing and underage binge drinking is prevalent in the Greek system, and while penalties may be severe if a house is actually caught engaging in such activities, the frequency of houses being caught is very minute.

Because there exists little chance of being caught by the University for engaging in such conduct, I suggest that harsh penalties, such as placing a house on probation or revoking a house’s charter, are ineffective in preventing the behaviors that university code’s aim to prevent. Rather than carrying the threat of shutting down a house, the university would be better advised to more actively uncover such

violations of university standards and levy punishments such as community service and fines to a large number of students involved in orchestrating illegal events, rather than merely adjudicating a few token students for indiscretions.

As far as educating freshman about the ills of hazing and what can be done to prevent it or escape it, the university is on the right track but needs to take a more proactive approach. I propose that the university should establish groups of students who have experienced senseless hazing first hand, who could talk to freshman about what they can expect as a pledge and what they can do if they are being hazed. When I was in high school, my principal chose to air several videos before our school's homecoming dance about the dangers of drunk driving. The videos contained graphic images of people who were killed or gruesomely injured in drunk-driving accidents. While the grotesque images were seared into the back of our minds, very few kids that I encountered seemed to be deterred from driving after having a few drinks at or before the dance. I believe that the feeling of invincibility that young students tend to carry lead many of them to disregard the message as scary but unsuited to the reality of their daily lives. Tim Marchell told me that he has discovered through alcohol awareness research that students tend to disregard stories of extreme repercussions of alcohol abuse such as alcohol poisoning and death, because they perceive them to be extremely unlikely to happen to them. He said students, alternatively, are more inclined to take to heart stories of alcohol dangers that are common to many or most abusers of the substance. I take from this that the university would be wise to establish groups of students that could lecture to such targeted groups of freshman about typical hazing, thought control, and intimidation practices that pledges of hazing fraternities often encounter.

During the course of my research, I have spoken with Tim Marchell, Gretchen Poulos, and Suzy Nelson about establishing such a group and actually taking on entire pledge classes or potential pledges in candid discussions about hazing and ways around it. Our initial plan is for me to head a small group of students, who have pledged themselves and been hazed, and talk to groups and individuals about what they are going to experience or are experiencing and provide them with mechanisms for defeating hazing and reporting any activities to us with full anonymity.

Although I am a senior and graduating this spring, I suggested to Tim and Gretchen that they compile a list of students who depledged or deactivated from a fraternity or sorority and contact them about joining the group, provisionally called SASH, students against senseless hazing. Such students are more likely to have been hazed, and being independent of the house that hazed them, more inclined to oppose hazing and help take a stand against it. As Hank Nuwer and I both described, hazing victims, like victims of

domestic abuse, are often embarrassed that they were abused or let themselves be abused, and feel weak or dejected from the experience. Since these individuals are not likely to come forward and discuss their stories openly, contacting them and providing them with an opportunity to express their feelings or frustrations with people who shared their struggles and want to use their experience to positively affect others might be the most effective way to expand membership in the organization and allow it to survive.

Another recommendation that I have for Cornell is to eliminate the dependence on the Greek system for housing. Cornell currently relies on the Greek system to offer housing to approximately 1,500 students every semester, which helps reduce the cost of constructing new, expensive dormitories. While the financial incentives are obvious, the mere fact that the university depends on the Greek system to house so many students implies that there exists a disincentive for the university to reprimand a problematic house, and act too leniently in instances where a house should be completely removed from campus. Duke University houses members of their Greek system exclusively in their on-campus dormitories. Perhaps the gift giving alums who support their fraternities can be influenced to help build a wing or floor of a dorm that can house fraternity members.

While the university has a relatively fixed annual budget fluctuating with the size of its annual endowment and its payout rate, the school has always prioritized certain expenses over others. I feel that currently, because of cost saving benefits of Greek letter houses, administrators are reluctant to cut into educational spending and money that could potentially go toward increased faculty resources, and are failing to increase alternatives for on-campus student housing that would free them of their dependency on fraternities and sororities and allow them to act more critically and independently when disciplining houses. The west campus initiative is currently underway, and housing alternatives are going to be improved. Hopefully the new and improved west campus suites will be an attractive alternative to off campus housing for many upperclassmen, but if it fails to reduce the number of students living in fraternity and sorority houses, it won't be successful at achieving this goal.

As mentioned in the memorandum of the hazing task force, pledging has many negative emotional and academic affects on students seeking admission to a hazing organization. While athletes, band members, etc. do not officially pledge to gain acceptance to their respective organizations, pledges in the Greek system do. Pledging has become for many, if not most houses at Cornell, an opportunity to subjugate freshman and force them to perform humiliating and sometimes traumatic acts. University of Maryland noted a reduction in academic shortcomings of pledges after they reduced the number of weeks

fraternities had to initiate pledges new members from 10 weeks to 8 weeks to 6 weeks (Memorandum, p.9).

A similar reduction would likely have similar results at Cornell, where rigorous academic curriculums often surpass those of other elite universities in terms of hours of study required and difficulty of course work. Reducing the length of the pledge process would also allow less time for fraternities to brainwash pledges into submission and secrecy. Often the most intense and dangerous hazing takes place in the last few weeks of the pledge process, and if the process were shortened drastically, then hazing fraternities would have less time to brainwash pledges and would have a harder time engaging in some of the most repulsive acts of hazing with assurance that pledges won't turn them in to university administrators. A reduction in the pledge period would only be effective if the university makes a conscious effort to ensure that all pledges are initiated by the end of the allotted time period. In my experience pledging lasted well beyond the mandatory date of initiation, and the university made no attempt to investigate whether my fraternity had complied with the mandatory initiation date. Perhaps resident advisors can be informed of deadlines for initiation and who from their floors is pledging, so that they can report any suspicions of houses failing to comply with university orders.

One of the most effective ways to get people to do engage in unpopular behavior for the good of an institution is to create an incentive for doing so. In America, we offer bounties for capturing or assisting in the arrest of wanted criminals and reward citizens for reporting crimes with honorary plaques or stipends. Reporting a hazing fraternity is difficult for students to do because such fraternities are often the most popular, socially, among the student body, and there always looms the threat of ostracism or retaliation. Undergraduate students are much better informed, collectively, than university administrators about hazing practices and other illegal activities that take place in the Greek system. Getting them to come forward and report such practices is, understandably, very difficult and often times not worth the social troubles that might ensue.

It does not make sense to me why the university doesn't offer a cash reward in the form of a tuition reduction or spending money to reward students for courageously reporting illicit behaviors. College students are frequently given scholarships for leadership potential, for their ability to impact change among their peers or the culture of their school, so why not reward students for actually taking a stand and helping to eradicate social ills that plague this university and others? As Brian Strahine said, it takes a true leader among his peers to take a stand against an issue like hazing, that is so widely practiced and condoned by students at universities with large Greek and athletic systems. The threat of having nearly

ever student at a university actively policing the social practices of Greek and athletic groups could go a long way toward uprooting some of the social ills that currently plague such groups. Also the threat of a costly public relations disaster resulting from national media scrutiny covering a hazing event gone awry, as has happened at many schools in recent decades, should be enough incentive for the university to provide such an award to students who help uncover senseless hazing practices.

All houses should be required to post university policies regarding hazing and definitions of such actions in their fraternity houses at all times. It would be especially wise to require fraternities to keep such posting in their basements, where the majority of line-up based hazing takes place. By simply posting rules of conduct prohibiting hazing and providing pledges with a number to call if they wish to report such evils, the ability of fraternities to successfully and fearlessly haze their pledges would be greatly diminished. Random inspection by Cornell police or representatives from the judicial administrator's office could help to ensure that signs are posted and visibly displayed at all times to anyone inside the fraternity or sorority house, and punishments can be levied to houses found in violation of such a mandate.

As I discussed with Suzy Nelson, requiring freshman to eat their meals at fraternity houses is one of the biggest opportunities to haze pledges and monopolize their little free time that they have to be social. At Cornell, where freshman are often overwhelmed with the heavier than usual workload, meals are opportunities to socialize with friends and acquaintances from classes or dorms, outside the fraternity. By ensuring that freshman still have this opportunity to maintain outside friendships if not create new ones, it will allow some pledges, who are being hazed against their will, to walk away from a hazing house when they otherwise would be afraid to do so because of a lack of social connections outside the house. When I was pledging, I ate an unusually large number of meals in the freshman cafeterias with old friends from my dorm, and eating with them helped me realize that what I was going through was not a necessary part of socialization at the collegiate level.

The university should compile an annual list of fraternities who have been found guilty of hazing practices in recent years. Such a list should be widely published and made available, if not directly distributed, to all freshmen who are looking to pledge a fraternity. As my story and others indicate, hazing fraternities and sororities often lie about being non-hazing houses and the trials that a pledge will face during the semester he or she chooses to seek membership. Because of such a policy of dishonesty and secrecy, many freshman, such as myself, who have no intention of being hazed, find themselves in an abusive situation as a result of being lied to during rush week, etc. An effective way to combat hazing

and create a significant disincentive for houses to risk being caught hazing is to publicize which chapters have been found guilty of hazing pledges in the recent past. If students had a copy of such a list or report, I would be willing to guarantee that houses found guilty of hazing would be much less popular among freshman looking to pledge, and fraternities would be forced to reduce or eliminate incidences of hazing if they wished to survive.

Last, but not least, an alternative to the previous recommendation is to prohibit houses that have been caught hazing from accepting bids to pledge from freshman. Rather than kicking them off campus or identifying them as hazers, which clearly would not deter all students from pledging, they could be forced to only accept sophomore pledges. Such a policy would have the effect of hurting a house's chances of recruiting freshman, since they will be tempted to pledge elsewhere as opposed to waiting an extra semester just to pledge a hazing house. This will serve as a deterrent to fraternities who consider hazing their pledges, and will allow for some of the older, hazing brothers to graduate from the fraternity, which will only ease the cultural transition which will need to ensue if the house successfully makes the transformation to a non-hazing pledge process.

It is important that houses learn that they can be exclusive without hazing. For example, if they want tough or athletic guys than they can only give bids to athletic or physically fit freshman, as opposed to hazing pledges to make them tough. Perhaps getting to know freshman better before they pledge a particular house can allow brothers to ensure that they are accepting a pledge who will fit in with the brothers and share common interests and values. By doing so, houses will be significantly more unified than they presently are. Having genuine common interests and values is a much more solid foundation for brotherhood and friendship than merely having experienced the same hazing as a group of randomly assembled guys.

All of these recommendations, taken together, would effectively help Cornell and other universities with hazing problems weed out particularly bad members of their Greek system and identify individuals who are violating acceptable standards of social conduct and endangering fellow students at the risk of the university's reputation. Hazing is an axe of degeneration that chisels away at the foundation of academic success and social responsibility upon which modern day institutions of higher education were built. The great intellectual Charles F. Kettering once said, "the world hates change, yet it is the only thing that has brought progress." It is time for progress.

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