Hell_week_1.doc

April 29, 2020

Introduction- Fraternities at MIT, Freshman year (fall of 1957 through spring of 1958)

College fraternities work like this. Everyone who has been initiated into the fraternity is a "brother". Each year the brothers recruit new members, usually from the freshmen class at the college. They decide who they will ask to join their fraternity. Those that accept the invitation are called "pledges". The pledges remain pledges until they are initiated and become brothers. The pledges are essentially going through a trial period and are not guaranteed that they will become brothers. In most fraternities, and certainly in the one I joined at MIT, it is rare for the brothers to refuse to initiate a pledge. I do not recall it ever happening in the six pledge classes I observed in my fraternity. It's also possible for a pledge to decide that they do not wish to be initialed. That happened at least once in the pledge classes I observed.

When I went to MIT in the fall of 1957 roughly 1/3 of the students were in fraternities. Most of the other 2/3rd live in one of the dorms. Some student commuted from their homes in the Boston area and others lived in rented rooms and apartments in the area. The week prior to the first week of classes was designated as "rush week". Actually it was probably more like 4 or 5 days rather than a full week.. All new students were invited to rush week and my guess is that 2/3rds or more came. Of these about ½ (i.e. 1/3rd of the entering freshmen class) ended up pledging a fraternity.

All the pledges lived in the fraternity house for both semesters of their freshman year. The fraternities at MIT at that time each had their own Fraternity house. In most houses all of the pledges and nearly all of the brothers lived in the fraternity house. There were 27 fraternities at MIT at that time and 24 of their fraternity houses were located in the Back Bay neighborhood of Boston, across the Charles River from MIT. Three of the fraternities, including the one I joined, were near MIT, on the same side of the Charles river as the main campus.

I pledged the Theta Delta Chi fraternity. That is to say I accepted a bid and became a pledge. Our fraternity house was at 314 Memorial drive, less than a block from the main building of MIT.

We were one of the smaller houses on campus with around 30 to 35 members, including pledges, most years. However, our house was not big enough for all the members to have beds and desks in the house. As a rule only the freshmen and seniors lived in the house. Though sophomores and Juniors had three meals a day in the house Monday through Saturdays, they went home after dinner to rented rooms, usually in the Back Bay area of Boston. Because the house was on campus the sophomores and Juniors were often in the house during the day when they were not in class or some other school activity.

The pledge class who joined the fraternity during rush week would remain pledges until early in the spring semester. At that point they would go through a few days of "Hell Week" before being initiated into the fraternity and becoming brothers. The purpose of this document to describe "Hell Week" as I experienced it in the spring of 1958. I also observed and participated in five additional Hell Weeks, but my focus here is on the one where I was a pledge and was initiated into the fraternity.

During the time we were pledges there was a very clear distinction between being a pledge and being a brother. The only one I remember clearly was that a brother could ask a pledge to go down to the bar in

the basement and bring him a drink. That rarely happened. There were probably some other upper class privileges but in general there was almost no hazing. There were a lot of friendships between the classes. I had a good friend from Caracas, George Felts, who was a sophomore and I got along well with a number of others. I remember Ralph Coumo taking me to Catholic Mass during rush week and we became friends.

One interesting dynamic at play here was that though social life and involvement with the fraternity was important to all of us, it was definitely in second place behind our desire to (a) survive and (b) get the best grades we could at MIT. My guess is that given a choice between doing significantly better academically and staying in the fraternity, most, maybe all of us, would have left the fraternity. The brothers knew this. They wanted us to stay and become brothers.

Each semester MIT put out a ranked list of the average grades (the "cum") of all the living groups. This was a big deal on campus. Theta Delta Chi had been number one on that list the year before I pledged. The desire for the house to do well was part of the reason why the brothers went out of their way to help the freshmen academically. In addition to the fact that some brothers would help a pledge one-on-one, the house also had organized tutoring by selected upper classmen. Freshmen had a quiz almost every Saturday morning and the house set up tutoring sessions by a selected brother during the week before each exam. The fraternity also maintained a file cabinet with all of the Saturday freshman quizzes from many prior years.

Hell Week

[I am not entirely sure of the sequence of events – so I just put them in a reasonable order. Perhaps some who read this can correct any bad guesses I made]

I was one of eleven freshmen who pledged Theta Delta Chi in the fall of 1957. Dave Drake did not return to MIT for the spring semester and Don Fowles chose to leave the fraternity before Hell Week. That left 9 of us going into Hell Week.

All of the fraternities at MIT held their Hell Weeks at the same time. Though there were some related activities early in the week my recall is that the real Hell Week experience was only three or four days long. I believe it started on Thursday night and ended with the initiation on Sunday. This probably varied a little from year to year.

So "Hell Week" was really more like three days. It began after school on Thursday afternoon and was over by Sunday night. There was some related activity before Thursday, but nothing much. The main experience was fairly intense for the entire three days, but in my mind there were four main events:

The Last Supper
Differentiating and Integrating
The Bean Supper
The Judge's Funeral

I will describe these in some detail. However, before doing that I will try to paint a picture of the strange context that began after school on Thursday and lasted pretty much up till shortly before the pledges were initiated as brothers. This was 60+ years ago for me and I fully expect, and hope, that some readers will let me know where their memories differ from mine.

Though the Hell Week events I remember began after classes on Thursday, there had been some things leading up to this. The main one was that for weeks, maybe months, the pledges had been instructed to collect newspapers and store them in the house. We did. We had well over 100 pounds of news papers stacked up. We had no idea why we were doing this but we got a lot of encouragement.

The second thing I remember was prior to Thursday evening two of the brothers were not getting along. They had arguments and confrontations. There were no fights or anything, but even their relatively mild confrontations seemed strangely inappropriate to me.

There may also have been some increased hazing during the days leading up to Hell Week. On instruction we had each made a fraternity paddle. It was made of wood and was about 30 inches long, 4 inches wide and 1 inch thick. It could be fairly plain or painted and decorated. I think I carved the Greek letters for Theta Delta Chi into mine. Creating the simple paddle probably took a few hours. We got the board, sawed it to roughly the right shape, and then used sand paper to smooth all the edges and finalize the shape. There were ominous implications about how these paddles would be used.

At some point we learned that the only way we could get paddled was to agree to exchange swats with a brother. Entirely optional. A pledge could invite a brother or a brother could invite a pledge, but this invitation could be, and often was, refused. Some people did this but I don't recall the exchanges causing any serious relationship issues. I gathered that not too many years earlier there was some more serious paddling of pledges. I kept my paddle for many years.

Here is a story about paddling from Bill Ross '59:

> . I recall trading swats with Carl Sandin who said he grew up in NH riding on a tractor and had the numbest ass. He would always go first and he brought tears to my eyes. It made me so mad I wacked him and split my paddle length wise.

The Last Supper

We did not know when Hell Week would begin. We were told we would be given a warning notice. Thursday dinner was the warning notice.

During the afternoon on Thursday one of the two brothers who had not been getting along was drinking a lot. He sent a pledge down to the bar for a drink of hard liquor at least three or four times before dinner and seemed to be getting close to drunk. At dinner the pledges were asked to line up on one side of the main table. The two brothers not getting along were on the other side, as was the president of the house, Tom McClimans.

As dinner progressed the two brothers began arguing and things were clearly getting out of hand. At some point one of the seniors yelled at us, the pledges, and told us get things settled down. This made no sense to us, but none the less, we tried to get the arguing brothers to calm down. At some point the president of the house stood up and told one of them to calm down or leave the room. At this point that brother threw the water in his water glass into the president's face. This was astounding to me. I am gullible and believed the world was going crazy.

The president left and went up the stairs. Other brothers began yelling. Bedlam had begun. Brothers yelled at us, the pledges, and told us to go in the kitchen. NOW! RUN! We did. We could hear screaming and laughter behind us, and lots of loud noises. We had no idea what was going on and were not allowed to look. After five or ten minutes we were called back into the room.

What a mess. The entire room, including the ceiling, the furnace room, and all the brothers were covered in shaving cream. What the hell? They had each had at least one hidden can of spray shaving cream and had been having a grand time. Some had more than one.

It turned out that the entire drama was a fake. The two brothers were not really angry with each other. They had been acting. The drinks we took up to the one brother had been passed around the room, no one was drunk. It was a complete fake scenario done entirely for our benefit. It was done every year and guess what. We were told this was our Hell Week warning and it was our job to clean the room. It was the annual cleaning of that room and it took us hours. I remember opening the panels to look inside the upright piano and finding even it was creamed.

This event is known as “The Last Supper” and we knew that Hell Week would begin the next day after school.

The “last supper” experience kind of blew my mind. I am a bit gullible to start with and finding out that the entire evening was a hoax kind of bent reality for me. I remember the next day walking down one of those seemingly endless halls in the main building at MIT and having a somewhat shaky grip on reality. As I passed each person, student, professor, janitor, secretary, whatever, I found myself seriously wondering if they were really who they appeared to be – or were they someone else – in disguise- intentionally deceiving me. It was a strange mental state and it lasted a while. I think the main reason it went away was that the subsequent events in Hell Week took over what was left of my consciousness and then cleared out other rooms like that one.

The Dink World:

After all the pledges were back from classes on Friday, the fun began. We were assembled in the front room, surrounded by brothers, and began our new lives as “dinks”. During Hell Weeks the pledges were referred to as “dinks”.

> “Dink, go down to the bar and get me CocaCola. And be sure to sign me up for the cost.”
>
> “Come over here Dink, I want to talk to you.”

As Dinks we were expected to comply with any reasonable request from a brother. We were not allowed to speak to a brother unless spoken to. We were not supposed to speak to each other – but there was a lot of whispering – and occasional outright violations of this rule.

At this point we were introduced to our “Dinkmaster”. The dinkmaster was in complete control of the dinks and of all Hell Week activity. He could overrule any brother about anything to do with the dinks, and did. He was, it seemed, omnipotent. Jim Denker, a senior, was our dinkmaster and, looking back, I think he did a good job of it.

The first thing we were told to do was to stand in a line facing the dinkmaster and to learn to stand at “dink attention”. This was sort of like U.S.Army attention except that our paddle was held in our hands behind us. Our hands were at waist lever and the paddle pointed down to the floor. We were to look straight ahead and keep our mouths shut. During Hell Week any one of us, or all of us, could be called to dink attention by any brother. The dinkmaster usually addressed us while we were lined up facing him at dink attention.

The next thing that I remember was that we were given our “dink names”. These were utterly absurd combinations of nonsense syllables that we had to know by heart. We all had the same last name:

> Hoffen stoffen vonder blicken steimer heimer kreuner heuter loiter becker

The first names were a trip. Mine was Amonguetuicasixiesegangebomninpipple. That's from memory and others may remember one or more different syllables.

The deal was that we had to be able to say our full names, including the last name, followed by a "sir" (for sophomores and juniors) or "lord" for seniors, and a whistle in under 5 seconds. This took a fair amount of practice and, at least for me, a number of failed attempts when I needed to get it right.

For example, there was mail call. We lined up at dink attention and the dinkmaster (or maybe someone he appointed) would hold up an envelope for a particular dink and instruct him to ask for it. Asking for it began with your dink name. If you could not meet the five second criteria you would have wait to try again later, even hours later. I remember that my high-school girl friend, who was an artist, had sent me a large folded piece of paper that had to be opened in stages. I was required to open this and read it, with the words and water color cartoons appearing stage by stage as it unfolded. . Here is what it said when fully unfolded:

> If you will be my valentine, I will be your concubine!

The final picture was a cute cartoon of a voluptuous, fully clad, woman. I got a lot of teasing about that and I think I still have that valentine.

I have asked fraternity brothers from my era for memories of Hell Week and hear are the dink names I have been sent. I do not recognize all of them.

Tobydurofacdobenshienskicauhamilperinneuppr

Swabsrastpopofftaspaigagotobdebrabveloff

Brungwynluzmlclorbshaishoskovshizzystonslotkow

Dibermeterrumeratorsciepcarugatoheeo

Yowiflickbottumthalpuacthalshovshizzy

Yoweeflicktholpleckholzolzipthee (I don't think so but an interesting attempt!)

Abasbebudyourefofeseruibithlmlaag

Drosphelamelondegastafififormosatchk

Drosophilamelanogasterfififormosachk.

***Drosophila melanogaster*-** [Denis Nagy says this is "an early contributor to genetic analysis"]

Brisfyxivertafundaturhabeactung

Amongatuicassixiesegaggebebomnimpiple.

Irritimbraqsymphonquiamquirtuoiopusfungashau Bill Ross

Tamafatuan sibcalsibala absubturk bogdambluff

Probably somewhere in the archives of our fraternity is a list of all the names ever used…or not.

Our life as dinks had a lot of little side stories. We had to memorize particular things to recite when we answered the house phone, or when asked the time. John Miller sent me this:

> Phone spiel (as best I recall):
>
> > "Good evening, sir or madam, as the case may be; greetings from Theta Delta Chi. The garden spot of Cambridge greets you. We humbly hope that we may help you in your every wish and desire. Our ultimate aim is to put you at the mercy of our hospitality. This hospitality is synonymous with the sophisticated character and personality so outstandingly shown in each and every one of the fraters. With whom do you wish to speak?"
>
> Time spiel (again, to the best of my memory):
>
> > "Sir or Lord, I am greatly embarrassed and deeply humiliated that the inner workings of my chronometer are in such inaccord with the great sidereal movement that I cannot, to any degree of accuracy, state the correct time; however, without fear of being very far wrong, the time is approximately ___hours, ___ minutes, ___ seconds, and ___ ticks." For the value of "ticks", we of course always chose to use 69.

We were busy learning our new names, and various other dink behavior rituals. Jim Kee sent me this comment about learning our names:

> For years when I heard the murmur of crowds in restaurants, etc., my first impression was, "They're practicing their names

The Bean Dinner:

The major event that evening was "The Bean Dinner". We did not join the brothers for dinner on Friday night. We had our own special meal, an all bean supper. I think there were three or four bean dishes, including a salad, and several brothers supervised us, encouraged us, and taught us songs for the occasion. Here are the verses from two of them:

> Mmm mmm good, uhh ummm good, that's what Frankie's beans are uhh umm good.
>
> Beans for beans for breakfast, beans for supper, good old beans for tea
> If I could only be a bean how happy I would be-ans for breakfast, beans for supper…[and on and on.]

Strange as it may seems I remember thinking that the different bean courses were fairly tasty.

The desert planned for the end of the meal was talked up by the brothers attending us. We were going to have an extra tasty blue berry pie and we were welcome to have as much as wanted.

Sure enough, out came the pie and it was delicious. I probably had two pieces. At least we got to eat one thing that was not made from beans.

Ahh, now the denouement! I personally had this experience and I have talked with brothers from other years who had almost identical experiences. I was over in the main building of MIT the next day and went into a large bathroom to pee. The bathroom I was in had a long urinal at which 5 or 6 people could line up at once. I was, as fate would have it, on the far end from the drain. I began relieving myself and to my utter amazement, and initially with some horror, saw that, my contribution to the urinal was a bright blue fluid. This fluid flowed down in front of several others standing with me and they were as taken aback as I was. It dawned on me immediately that this was a result of the previous night's blueberry pie.

John Miller's description of the same event was:

> I was one of many, I'm sure, to have visited the upstream end of a latrine at the Institute the day after the blueberry pie dessert and shocked the crap out of everyone peeing downstream.

Differentials:

Probably on Saturday we were assigned the task of turning the many newspapers we had collected into "differentials". A differential was a small piece of newspaper. I think each piece was supposed to be a square about 1.5 inches on a side. We created these by tearing the newspapers into the small squares. There were nine of us doing this and we were closely supervised. Quality control was carefully managed. Tearing all those newspapers into differentials took many hours. I think we worked at it in shifts between other activities. It was a kind of jolly time and it's quite possible that friendly brothers would sometimes help us. We had a lot of papers to tear and everyone wanted it done in time for the next main event. Creating differentials was "differentiation". We had all had one semester of Calculus and had a somewhat basic understanding of differentiation and integration. What we were doing was a powerful metaphor for the process of the same name in Calculus. Next up was… Integration.

Eventually we had many large sacks of differentials. These were placed on the side of the room and at some point in the evening we began integrating. A large table was placed in the middle of the room, a sturdy wooden table about 5 feet long and three feet wide, and we were told we had to stack all the differentials on the table. You had to be there. This did not seem possible.

I think we had to figure out how to do this and we came up with the same approach that all our predecessors, and those who followed us, used. It consisted of creating a small collection of differentials held between two hands and rubbed around so that they were all flat. This unit was then put on top of the growing stack of differentials on the table, or slid into the side of the stack some place it might be needed for support. There was a lot trial and error in this process and there were occasional partial collapses. This went on for hours. There were always quite a few brothers around coaching, kibitzing, and enjoying this festive event.

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Jim Kee sent in this memory of the experience:

> There was also a downside, though. For My major take-away from all that? I recall thinking at one point, “No way in hell we’ll get all of those differentials on that table,” and, “I’ll never learn my name!” But somehow we integrated them all, and I eventually learned three names.
>
> Subsequently, in life, I’ve been hesitant to say that some challenge was impossible. For years, I avoided reading newspapers. And, when I heard the murmur of crowds in restaurants, etc., my first impression was, “They’re practicing their names

So, finally, hours later, we completed our “integration”. Yae! I think it was around midnight. At this point we were introduced to the guest of the evening, an alumni who had been invited in for this special event. He was to tell us a story. We sat on the floor facing the table and he paraded around it telling the story of “Trapper John”. He had a pledge paddle in his hand and he would occasionally wave it near the stack to emphasize a point. The breeze would cause a few differentials to fall and we, with strong encouragement, would pick them up and return them to the stack. It was a long story (maybe someone could remind me what it was about) and as the action picked up he would even poke the stack causing a number of differentials to fall. Repairs were made immediately.

When the story teller finally reached the climax of the story (I think maybe there was a blizzard and Trapper John badly needed to get to the outhouse), he swung the paddle hard into the top of the stack knocking it to the floor. Mayhem took over. The brothers grabbed differentials and began to spread them everywhere they could. I think they had to stick to the main floor, but everything else was fair game. This took a few minutes and we were then instructed to collect ALL the differentials and put them back in the sacks. We were told that if we missed even one differential we would regret it. This took an hour or so and we were very very thorough. However, of course, a brother found a differential. Though we knew it was probably planted – so what – the expression “We can’t complain” was so true for us.

The penalty for our failure to find ALL the differentials was…. To repeat the integration process. Though it went a lot quicker the second time around it still took at least an hour. It was now very late. I think we were then instructed to take the stack down and put the differentials back in the sacks…and.. finally, to go to bed.

I recall seeing a photograph of the fully loaded differential table. Can anyone send me a copy of that? One brother recalled that the stack of differentials was at least three feet high.

Though I have asked TDC brothers to help me, I am not sure of the sequence of events during my hell week. I feel like we had to go through the same integration process again the next day- but I now doubt that. It’s just too much. I witnessed this process for the next five years and my memories are all jumbled together.

In any case there is one more significant Hell Week event to be described.

“The Judge’s Funeral”.

One evening, after dinner I think, we were taken down to the dining room and led, one at a time into the kitchen. We were led in blindfolded and walked over to the sink. Our hand was guided down into the cold water in the sink, and we were instructed to feel around. The year I did it there was a live eel in the sink. Very weird experience. At least I think it was alive. It might as well have been. Others have mentioned that in their hell week they had a fish, or an octopus. I suspect many different creature were used.

Either the eel was dead or it was killed. Our next task was to hold an appropriate funeral for “The Judge”. Why the judge? I have no idea. We were given some time to plan this. I think we put on our ties and jackets and wrote out an eulogy to read at the “burial”. The burial was to consist of dropping the judge’s body into the Charles River directly across Memorial Drive from the house. We sang some chant like songs as our little procession crossed the street. I’m pretty sure we sang “Lloyd George Knew my father” a few times. One of us, Fred Schmidt, was a piccolo player and played while we marched. We solemnly committed the eel’s body to the river and went home. It was an interesting experience – serious in its way – and somewhat meaningful in spite of the farcical nature of the event.

Along with the various activities I could call “the dink theater of the absurd” we also did some work on the house, like repairing things, cleaning, and some painting.

Initiation

Well that’s kind of the last of my memories of Hell Week. Somewhere, unexpectedly, in the process it was all over. We were suddenly treated well. As if by magic we found ourselves, showered and dressed well, in the basement, lights dimmed, at our initiation ceremony. A door in the wall I had never noticed was opened and a podium and other stuff was there. The house president conducted the ceremony. I think there was some ritual and cant recitations leading up to the final part. That consisted of each one of us being called to the front of the group to sit in a chair. Then each brother came forward and put his hands on each side of our head and said “I bless this friendship, may it prove firm, faithful and mutual” (or something close to that). I remember that I recognized each voice. It was, for me, in some ways close to a spiritual experience. It may have seemed a little hoaky for others, but it rang my bell. We were given our Theta Delta Chi fraternity pin and retuned to our seat to witness the next pledge being initiated.

I would call it a good ending.

More (or less):

If you have read this far, congratulations. If you were thinking of stopping, now might be a good time. I’m headed off the beaten path a bit.

You see, I’ve been good. Well maybe not good, but I did not give in to the temptation to stray from the basic story. I’ve tried to stick to “Just the Facts, Mam” as much as possible. I did not try to be poetic, artsy-fartsy, or philosophical. Now’s my time for that.

So why am I so fascinated by and attached to my Hell Week experience? I don't really know, but I have ideas. It was, each year, but especially when I was a dink, a circus, a farcical drama, a giant joke. It was full of humor, and friendship, and trust – and a little betrayal here and there – and a little fear. There was a lot of laughter, not just by the brothers, but the dinks as well. The silliness and absurdity of it all filled the psychological air. Also, the irony, or at least contrast, with the cold blooded, almost heartless institution in which we were all enrolled was stark. Most of the classes and work at MIT was focused on the scientific and engineering paradigm, the "hard" sciences. The softer ones like humanities, art, music, theater, psychology, sociology, were in the second tier of focus. The main focus at MIT was the never ending search for scientific facts, truths, and testable theories. In this emotional desert Hell Week was an oasis of escape into fantasy, imagination, the theater of the absurd.

Alice went down the rabbit hole. So did we. Those we trusted were our oppressors – though with smiles and glee, and a strange sharing of something like the joy of it all. Each new experience was unexpected, unpredictable. There was no physical torture, no alcohol. I did not see sadism or masochism. I saw courage and faith, and hope, and, again, lots of humor.

Hell Week was also a lovely model of what Joseph Campbell calls "**The Hero's Journey**".

> **"a broad category of tales and lore that involves a hero who goes on an adventure, and in a decisive crisis wins a victory, and then comes home changed or transformed.[1]"**
>
> **"A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.[4]"**

This description fits on several levels: The period as a pledge ending with being a brother; the entire Hell Week; the integration of the differentials – especially the final time; and of course the "transformations" from pledge, to dink, to brother. As brothers we were now empowered to bestow the same transformation on future pledges. Joseph Campbell says that in most such journeys the hero is fully equipped with whatever he or she needs to survive and triumph. The hero is not doomed to failure, but is destined to succeed. as, it seems to me, was every dink. It's not that Hell Week was such a big deal in reality, it's that it was, for me, a powerful myth, full of symbolism as well as laughter.

OK, so it's not for everyone. Here is an exchange of emails from this week (April 27-May 2, 2020):

The first email is from a brother who went through Hell Week when I was a senior:

> I don't know if Harry wants some contrary views……I thought the Hell Week routine was profoundly dysfunctional, juvenile and no accountability for whatever

> the damn goals could have been. As freshmen we weren't a perfect team, but we were good enough that we could have whipped lots of peer groups. The brothers more than 70% were jumping on the bandwagon of butt-holes. Throw your character-image in the trash. I had plenty of good relationships with the brothers in advance, they knew I had a long way to mature, but our relationships were OK before the initiation. Relationships with the brothers dropped to the bottom of my priority list afterward. So why do you do stupid shit with people you want to have a favorable future with as your peer, teammate, "brother ". I was really glad that a couple of my friends Dan and Len, pledged or class later and didn't have that worthless experience

And this was my reply:

> I participated as a brother in all the Hell Weeks while I was there. I was as senior living in the house when you were a freshman. After my dink year I saw Hell Week as a fantasy lark and I like to think I had zero tolerance for bullying or any kind of meanness. I thought it should be memorable fun and I hope most who went through it felt that way. Apparently you did not.
>
> > **So why do you do stupid shit with people you want to have a favorable future with as your peer, teammate, "brother**"?
>
> Each of us has our own point of view and it would be interesting to hear the reactions of others. I will give it a shot.
>
> "Why...?": Because I had been through that same stupid shit and come out of it with a treasured memories, full of whimsy, foolishness,, absurdity, and humor. The first "26" and response. The powerful metaphor of Integration and camaraderie and - you are not going to buy this - kindness I felt present. It was a scripted play and we had parts and once we accepted them it was a lark. I don't recall dinks my year, or any year, getting really upset, or feeling like crying. But I admit that I have since been through many situations where I did not see the handwriting on the wall. I do recall some frustration and an awareness that this was not a fair game - but it did not pretend to be. The fact that I, and others, chose to repeat it speaks to me. We didn't have to. If there was a significant push to drop something like the bean dinner, the last supper, or the differential table, or the entire Hell Week, it would have been discussed and voted on. I had the feeling that most of those who had been through it thought they were doing something for the dinks that would be appreciated in the long run just as those making it happen each year had come to appreciate their Hell Week experience.
>
> I think many who went through a Hell Week similar to mine feel positively about the experience. Obviously not everyone felt that way about it.

Re-reading the above statement I would now like to change it to say:

The first "26" and response was an epiphany for me. We, the powerless, could say, loud and clear, “I’ve had enough of this bullshit”. This was a new dimension to the strange reality we had fallen into. Hell week was not like a Nazi prison camp or “The Handmaids Tale”. It was more like “Catch 22” or “Cat’s Cradle”.

Also, full disclosure must include that one of the pledges in my group left the fraternity during the week leading up to Hell Week. Another pledge mate who knew him well tells me that the one who left had already pretty much decided that fraternity life was not for him. Hell Week may have been the tipping point, but, it seems the choice was already made. Another pledge mate went through Hell Week but left the fraternity later in the spring semester. He and I remained friends through life and he recalled Hell Week with as much amusement as I did.

There is no “truth” about our Hell Week to be found using the scientific paradigm. This is the other part of reality, the one where experience and opinion are often each person’s private truth, perhaps somewhat malleable, but impossible to prove wrong.

Other Memories: [Please send me more of these. I will add them here]

From Ralph Cuomo:

At one of the lunches, we had a dead, uncooked eel that was presented on a bed of lettuce on a platter. It was just a ruse - no one had to eat it, but we didn't know that. Ray Ambrogi was the first dink asked what part of it he wanted, and he said he wanted just a small slice of the tail end (which nearly broke me up). Then one of the brethren (It was not Dinkmaster Joe Carty, but I think it was Bill Long) took a sharp knife, and as he sliced through, the blood just ran onto the lettuce. As we all grimaced, the platter was taken away with the statement, 'Just kidding'.

The ‘Judge Lowell’ funeral was for a large dead fish, that had a ‘burial at sea’ (box containing the fish was dropped onto the frozen Charles River.

There evidently were some year-to-year variations, so I would just describe the elements without getting too specific. My class had bean shortcake (cake, beans and whipped cream) as part of the bean dinner. In fact, every course of the bean dinner, starting with bean cocktail, was made with beans and/or bean juice. The blueberry pie, with ‘some added’ blue food coloring (enough to make you piss blue for a while) was on another night’s dinner.

Differentiation and integration, for my class, was a Saturday event, climaxed by two stories: a boiler explosion and Trapper Joe going to an outhouse in a snowstorm.

Harry, it’s interesting. My entire class put up with all the hazing and just rolled with it. Several in your class, starting with Don Fowles who left right after the last supper if I remember correctly, took it far too seriously. Later, when I was an upperclassman, I remember having a discussion with Al Starr that a lot of it was stupid shit, and that it

seemed to be an odd way for us to bond, but he pointed out that it was not intended to be taken seriously. I finally agreed with him.

Before hell week, my freshman class was given various ‘assignments’ during Christmas vacation. Pete Cairns, who was staying with me in NYC to study for exams (the schedule at the time was that ‘reading week’ came right after Christmas vacation, and that was followed by a week of exams), had to return with about 8 or 9 feces samples from specific caged animals, so he and I went to the Central Park Zoo for him to get what he could. Most of the animals were thankfully pretty sloppy about doing their business, and he was able to pick up what he needed from just outside the cages. A few people saw us doing the pick-up and probably wondered what the hell we were doing – some kind of weirdos, they must have thought.

My assignment was ‘somewhat’ easier. I had to come back with a color photo of myself with two redheads and a lock of hair from one of them. I didn’t know any redheads, but I convinced two women to spray their hair with coloring that would easily wash out. One of them also gave me a lock of her hair. The only problem was that the spray material was not a dye but consisted of small particles – intended for women to spray just a lock of hair - and would easily come off on your hands, so I taped the lock with scotch tape onto a sheet of paper. When I brought it back to the house, one of the upperclassmen said to me ‘Freshman!! You didn’t have to go to that much trouble to get the lock’. He said this because under the scotch tape it looked kind of wiry, and he thought it was pubic hair.

From Bill Burns:

I was a Yhaoweeflickbuttumthalpuacthalzalzipthee or something like that. The Yhaowee part was supposed to be said very loudly, like a yell.

I also remember being told to say my first and last dink names together very fast, then whistle, and maybe say "Sir," all within five seconds. With a little practice I was able to do it.

I remember that long before Hell Week we would find the occasional differential from previous Hell Weeks. We had no idea what they were.

From Neil Lupton:

Dink drill

Bizz-buzz

Stocked with candy, gum, cigarettes

Dink song

Calling upperclassmen Lord with an ascending whistle and sophomores Sir with a descending whistle

[Hey Neil, would you like to tell us about more about these?]

Pete Angevine:

As a freshman and sophomore I thought I should endure hazing so I could dish it out in the future
By the time I was a senior I was bored with it. But I did realize that it made our brotherhood more meaningful because we had to go through something together to achieve it. I suppose in these touchy feely days of PC bullshit, that is no longer allowed.

Most of you got it wrong, think of the dinners:

Wed--Last Supper
Thursday -square meal, with blueberry pie
Friday -backward meal
Sat -Bean dinner
Sunday morning initiation

Favorite quote: Bob Arnold '65 "You stupid bastards, beans are my favorite food"

Or maybe Marty Ormond '64 (to Alden Foster) "Speak into the bonerphone, golden boy."

Our project was to strip the walls and re-paper the dressing room. . I was glad I had some skills as I got to help Pete Neal wallpaper when all the other dinks were taking crap. I also washed the pasting brush a lot, taking a big drink each time!

[Pete – can you tell us more about the “square meal” and the “backward meal”?]

From Neil Lupton:

WE WERE TOLD THAT WE WOULD GET 24 HOURS NOTICE BEFORE HELL WEEK BEGAN. THAT WAS THE LAST SUPPER. HOWEVER, IT WASN'T MUCH USE AS WE WERE REQUIRED TO STAY UP ALL NIGHT BUILDING A RUBE GOLDBERG MACHINE TO LIGHT A MATCH AFTER CLEANING UP AFTER THE LAST SUPPER.

THE BEAN DINNER WAS PART OF HELL WEEK. THE LAST SUPPER WAS BEFORE

Did we have differentiating and integrating two nights? Which two nights?

WE SPENT ALL DAY ONE DAY DIFFERENTIATING. THEN, I BELIEVE THAT THE INTEGRATION AND THE STORIES (2 STORIES) WERE THE NIGHT RIGHT BEFORE INITIATIONS.

Other Hell Week events that had a name?

DINK SONG
DINK DANCE
DINK DRILL

BLACK BOOKS PRECEDED HELL WEEK. THERE WERE 2 PAGE SPACES FOR EACH BROTHER WITH "PAGES" ON THE LEFT AND "BLACK MARKS" ON THE RIGHT. ONE EARNED PAGES FOR ANY OF A NUMBER OF OFFENSES. BLACK MARKS WERE QUITE SERIOUS. THE IMPLICATION WAS THAT PAGES WERE PADDLE SWATS AND BLACK MARKS WERE A BLACKBALL. ONE TYPICALLY GOT FRACTIONAL BLACK MARKS.

I am pretty sure that I received other memories in emails. If I find them I will add them here.