

THE DEKE HOUSE 60 YEARS AGO

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There it stood at the zenith of Sullivan Lane, a majestic, neo-Gothic, mangle- mangle of stucco, wood and anxiety – the DKE house! Delta Kappa Epsilon, *Excelsior!*

This was the *original* Deke house (destroyed by fire), located across March Field from the present-day, magnificent edifice. Comprising about 25 rooms on three floors, the venerated original, housed 30 plus brothers. Another dozen or so roomed in campus dorms.

The era in reference (1946 – 1950) was directly after the end of World War II. College enrollment doubled in those years, ballooning with returning WWII veterans.

Twelve to 15 pledges were corralled each Fall – many at gun point. At that time, many of the pledges were returning service men (me, too), so the usual hazing and maniacal harassment was somewhat curtailed. Pledges' uncontrollable sobbing and the attendant wetting of tightie whities was minimal.

As to the daily Deke diet, it could be likened to a Charles Dickens' orphanage. Most meals consisted of a bowl of gruel and a growl of gloom . (Actually, the meals were quite good!) The weakly charge for each brother for meals (three a day, week days only) was \$12 . I waited on tables and washed dishes in the house for free meals. Waiters worked at least one hour during each meal – which pencils out to us getting the equivalent of 80 cents an hour! Not a bad deal in those antediluvian days.

Our in-house weekend parties, with dates, consisted mainly of kegged beer, dancing, group singing (old college songs) and just general camaraderie. The basic thrust was to get a little loose and have a good time. Just high – on youth and life!

There were no such things as “recreational drugs” back then. No meth. No coke. No Ecstasy. No acid. No poppy derivatives. No cannabis. (No *cannabis*? *You must be kidding!*) Psychoactive drugs just didn't exist in college life 60 years ago. How naive! How lucky for us!

Back in the day, the house was one of the many party centers on campus. Often on Friday nights we would throw beer bashes in the basement bar. Only sweaty males in those days. No enticing co-eds. What a waste of youthful libido!

Back then there were long weekend parties, dances and picnics -- with each brother importing a date. And let me assure you, all female weekend guests would stay in downtown hotels, mainly the Easton. No in-house overnights for female guests were permitted or tolerated. There was no hanky-panky allowed in the house. Well, maybe a little panky! Certainly some minor-league canoodling took place. But even in the downtown hotels, personnel policed the elevators, barring students from going up to their dates' rooms. I'm *serious!*

The big Fall weekend parties would start on Saturday mornings with our dates arriving by train or car. Saturday afternoon was spent at the football game. A reception at the house followed the game, with numerous alumni in attendance. These esteemed brothers, high on fraternal spirit but hazy on facts, would regale us with Deke history ... like, “D'ja know that Abe Lincoln was a Rho Deke?”

Another alumnus jumped in and said, "Yup, that's right! And Babe Ruth, too!" A third added, "Don't forget Gandhi. Gandhi was a *dandy Deke!*" In those magical moments, they really believed their fuzzy historical facts. And so did we.

Saturday night was often a huge dance in the gym. All students invited. Formal attire was required. So we all rented scroungy tuxedos. Our dates were resplendent in floor-length evening evening dresses. Big "name bands" were hired for these galas. And get this – you danced actually *holding on to your partner!* Honest! Imagine!

The next day, Sunday, was often occupied by a fraternity picnic in a farm field north of the campus. Kegged beer and informal touch football games prevailed with the brothers and dates taking care to avoid the ubiquitous cow plops. Actually, the effort to clear the playing area of heaps of indigenous dung led to the invention of a famous worldwide pastime. You see, as some of the brothers started picking up these round, dried-out cow droppings and scaling them far away, one playful bro caught one of the sailing dung discs and deftly threw it back. Another frolicsome brother caught it and flung it skyward. Almost instantly, the pristine Pennsylvania sky was rife with high-flying cow doo-doo. And there you have it – *the invention of Frisbee!* How it went on to develop into a world-famous plaything, I'm really not sure. But I was there the day *the Dekes invented Frisbee!* That's right! We tossed the poop – and then we just washed our hands of the whole matter. Uh, we *had* to!

Lion Marches. (Do the brothers still have them?) We had them often, usually on party weekends with our dates joining in. Single file with one hand on the shoulder of the person ahead of you and your other hand handling a beer, we'd snake around through the house, upstairs and down, singing "A Band of Brothers" and usually ending up on the front lawn for the three "lion roars." I remember leading one march through the whole house one party weekend – with probably 50 people in tow. Just for chuckles, I led the line into a small first floor powder room. The entire line had to make a U-turn directly in front of the single john – which just happened to be occupied at the moment by a young lady. She handled it demurely by pulling her skirt over her knees and waving to the long line of marchers

Dekes pretty much ran the college magazine, the *Marquis*, 60 years ago. It was a quasi-humor periodical comprised of short stories and cartoons, contributed by students. I was Editor for two years and many of the masthead department positions were filled by Dekes. We endeavored mightily to make the *Marquis* better, more sophisticated than the typical college magazines of those days (like "The Alabama Rammer-Jammer!"). We tried to emulate *The New Yorker* magazine! Anyway, several times a year, the house was frantic – editing, laying out, piecing together and producing issues of the college magazine. Valuable career experience for many of us.

Memorable moments (non-academic). During one Saturday night party in Springtime, we formed an impromptu marching band in the house around 2 A.M. About 20 of us, including dates, managed to find musical instruments (a trumpet, saxophone, trombone, snare drum) and amateur instruments, like pots, pans, cow bells. A few of us were actual musicians so we were able to play some semblances of famous marches. We marched all over the quad, then south of Pardee and through a few dorms. And no one complained!

Early one Sunday morning after a house party, several of us were still awake and feeling slightly frisky. We noticed that many of the living room chairs and sofas were occupied by sleeping male guests. We got the brilliant idea to transport all the furniture—plus the snoozing guests -- out onto the front lawn. No sooner had we artfully arranged all the furniture, replete with mouth-breathing guests, on the lawn, when Dean Hunt, driving by on his way to church, stopped his car in front

of the house. The Dean leaned out of the window and said, very calmly, "Okay, gentlemen, move everything back in the house. Right now, please." Of course we complied immediately. But here's the beauty part. None of the friends napping on the furniture ever woke up during the moves -- out or back in!

Late one school night, I was awakened by a light clamor of voices in the upper hallway. Curious, I went out to discover that a group of the brothers had brought back to the house several female acrobats from a traveling circus – still in leotards and full makeup. The marauding brothers had a plan. They would sneak into a sleeping brother's room, have one of the girls sit on the edge of his bed –and then switch on the lights. "Surprise!"-- the revelers would yell! The startled sleeper would open his eyes to see, inches from his face, a grease-painted dolly in a skintight body suit – and become perplexed, transfixed and transmogrified. This whole delightful charade was captained and choreographed by the late, William E. Simon, who moved on years later to become the United States Secretary of the Treasury.

My frequent date during college years was Lynn Townley of Westfield, N.J., an ever-sweet young buttercup – and *stacked!* She's still my date today, 60 years later. We were married in June of 1950 just before my senior year. We lived in "Vet Village", a row of tawdry, one-story, former Army barracks, renovated into small apartments and located precisely where the present DKE house stands. Lynn worked as a private secretary in Pardee Hall for Professor Eaton, head of the Engineering Department -- for the sumptuous salary of \$30 per week (that's \$6 bucks a day, folks!). Our squalid three- room, barracks-apartment became sort of a Deke house annex. It was one hell of a fun year!

After graduation memory. There was a core group of 8 to 10 Rho brothers that gathered every (almost) Friday for lunch in New York City. We met at the famous Irish pub, P.J. Clark's, in mid-town. It was always a happy gathering, boiling with laughter. This ritual Friday meeting went on for more than *35 years!* The brothers married, had children – and then, grand children. They changed jobs, addresses and several changed wives – but somehow they made it to our Rho lunch meeting every Friday – *for 35 years!*

Alas, the original, revered Deke house burned to the ground in 19??. But today, these many years later, thousands of warm memories still radiate from the ashes.