THE BEAVER

Some Notes on Student Life

The first weeks of the fall term always had a special
and very pleasant flavor for the Beaver. They were
warm days, and the joyful feeling of vacation freedom
still lingered unshakably in the air. It wasn’t like the
weeks later in the year, when everyone seemed bowed
down by too many problems and too little sleep.

Most of all, each new autumn presented a new group
of frosh, first to be fawned over and rushed, then to be
initiated. There was the interest in new faces combined
with the ego-warming opportunity to display yourself as
a knowing upperclassman—as a wise big brother whose
broad experience at Tech and in life in general would be
devoured word for word by eager new freshmen. A very
pleasant situation, the Beaver decided expansively.

During frosh rotation period, everyone proselytized.
You personally brought the frosh in to dinner, slyly in-
sinuated into the conversation the perfectly obvious ad-
vantages of your particular house, got them dates, bought
them beer, and in short treated them as favored equals.
This was a painful concession for upperclassmen, and
particularly for sophomores, who have all gained un-
told years in maturity since they were frosh.

Rude-Awakening

Past the Beaver’s room shuffled a very wet frosh,
leaving a soggy trail of water from his squishing shoes
to the alley shower. The Beaver put his head out into the
corridor to observe several more clothed and squirming
frosh headed for the showers. He went out to help.

It comes as a stout shock to suddenly become frosh
again directly after the settling of house assignments.
Initiation commences then with a suddenness that serves
to save the wounded dignity of the sophs after the
equality and fraternization of rotation period.

Turning Worms

The Beaver had seen a good many wise and spirited
freshmen though, and he was inwardly amused when their
Fleming component staged an insurrection. The glorious
portrait of Prince Eugene, of whom frosh must humbly
beg permission to enter or leave the lounge, disappeared
the night before initiation. Rising in noble authority,
Pledgemon Sonny Crump informed the frosh they
would eat with only their bare left hands until the
defiled icon was returned. But, behold, at dinner that
evening the entire dining room was mysteriously devoid
of any silverware.

The Beaver was broadly pleased. This sort of spirited
revolt was secretly desired and admired by upperclass-
men. Why not? he pondered, missing his transom with
a carelessly tossed cigarette butt; the frosh are still out-
numbered three to one—no real danger.

The Beaver slipped on old clothes and went out into
the patio, stepping carefully through the slick of water
on the stone walk. A dozen frosh were half-heartedly
singing “Cool Clear Water” in the center, at the loud
insistence of pledgemonsters—and were getting the
community they sang for in great wastebasket gulps from
the surrounding second-story windows. Everywhere on
campus the Beaver saw frosh with green hats or enor-
mous red bow ties, with nipple-capped root beer bottles
hung from their necks, carrying books in suitcases, or
determining pi to ten decimal places by counting the
number of revolutions of a golf ball rolled down a
brick sidewalk.

At every meal the Beaver enjoyed entertainment pro-
vided by frosh who stood on their chairs and sang, or er-
cited or reported—and were “floated” when they sat down
again. Every noon water fights broke out between houses,
patios were flooded, stirrup pumps going at grim speed.
Initiation was, above all, a magnificent way to get ac-
quainted. The Beaver deeply regretted that the grave
and gray-haired powers of law and order had forbidden
the uproarious tradition of measuring the length of a
block of street in downtown Pasadena in unit mackerell-
lengths. Traffic used to pile up like neglected homework
when the frosh set up a blockade and studiously flapped
their dead mackerels down the PE car tracks to measure
the standard length of the city block.

Still, here on campus, enough went on to lighten the
academic intensity of physics and math. The final initia-
tion ceremonies left the stains and smells of molasses,
flour, and eggs on all four houses, but with these the
Beaver also noted a distinct atmosphere of righteous
satisfaction.

Expanding Universe

It was a great adjustment for the freshman. He had
been an academic wonder in his home-town high school.
He had risen to the top of the high school hierarchy as
a senior—maybe a wheel. Now he was suddenly inverted,
at the bottom looking up again. And now he competed
against a whole class who had graduated last June with
top honors. He was swamped with work, staggered with
initiation, and learning to live in a dorm with a new and
somewhat more mature group of men. He lay in bed at
night and wondered in the dark how he would stack up
in the competition, how he would adjust himself to the
nebulous four years that confronted him.

But the Beaver watched them pass their initial crises:
Foster Strong’s first formidable physics quiz; the first
time they were floated in their dining room seats; the
first night they were forced to leave a piece of home-
work unfinished. The Beaver knew these things built
character, and that most of the frosh would pull through
with little more damage than to high school egos. After
all, the Beaver noted with satisfaction—didn’t 1? To
prove which he pushed away the problems he was doing
and wandered down the corridor in the direction of a
phonograph playing hot jazz. He was thinking, some-
body here must have some beer he’d be eager to share.

—Jim Hendrickson ’50

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