

HERE WE GO AGAIN

IT'S ABOUT A WEEK before the beginning of school and the student houses are recovering from their summer stupor. Noise in the courtyards, lights in the hallways, disorder in the lounges, are sure signs of returning life. First back are the football players and the summer residents, who lived on campus all through the vacation period. This group really appreciates the solid stoniness of the houses after the wooden emptiness of the Old Dorm.

Soon others return, and the nightly mass excursions to local restaurants begin. Everyone's glad to see at least some of his schoolmates, and conversations are long and lurid with summer experiences. Speculation runs high on one topic: the entering freshmen. What will they be like—neat guys or trolls? Past experience gives the edge to trolls, say the upperclassmen.

Then the freshmen begin to arrive. Of course they're not all neat, and they're not all trolls; they're a tremendously varied group, from all parts of the country and from almost all social classes.

The few days before Freshman Camp present a weird social scene. The upperclassmen are friendly to the point of strain. There's a good reason for this; later each freshman will choose a house, and the houses will choose the freshmen they want. Naturally, each house wants the best of the crop, but in these first days it's hard to judge, so everyone tries to be everyone's friend.

The freshmen react differently to this enforced friendliness. The loud ones get louder, since there's no one to shut them up. Each seems to know a thousand bad jokes, and tells every one of them. There are always a few well-trained upperclass laughers around to prevent embarrassing silences. Most of the under-confident frosh get even more shadowy as they see their aggressive classmates seemingly win the approval of the upperclassmen. Freshman Camp comes as a relief to all concerned.

Up to the mountains go the frosh, a group of faculty members, and a collection of 25 "upperclass leaders." The air is clean, the nights are cold, and there's nothing to do but meet people. This lack of escape is the main advantage of Student Camp. Informality is determinedly enforced, as the faculty members attempt to undo a year's aloofness in two days. While the professors try to prove they're human, the freshmen try to prove they're professors. The upperclassmen just try to be neat.

Speeches during the day provide a pleasant break between volleyball games. At night Dr. Feynman plays his bongos and there are more speeches. President DuBridge's talk on "Your \$900 Bargain" is the best given and the best received by the frosh, though upperclassmen who remember "Your \$750 Bargain," and "Your \$600 Bargain," are less enthusiastic.

Meanwhile, the ASCIT board is going through the difficult and self-designated process of choosing first-term freshman class officers. The board members rush about, trying to meet everyone. Naturally they can't, so they concentrate on the people who look good on their "activities sheet," filled out the previous summer. Caltech probably attracts more Math Club presidents than any other school in the country. Math Club presidents don't get chosen. As the final hours of camp approach, the Board is left with about twice as many names as it can use. From this point on, a wrong smile or a misplaced word can eliminate a freshman from the running. At last the new officers are decided upon, announced, and everyone goes home.

Beginning of classes is also the beginning of formal rotation. The freshmen move from house to house, eating lunch and dinner for two days in each. Naturally, there are speeches, but the main influencing work goes on at an individual level—for by this time the houses think they know who's neat and who's not. Groups of upperclassmen form continuously around a desirable frosh, while the less-neats and trolls are left alone. The houses really are different, but the desirables seldom get a chance to find this out in the sop of all-surrounding friendliness. It's the less-neats (but not the trolls) who generally go into the house that's best for them. Later, some of the less-neats turn out to be the really-neats.

With rotation over and the freshmen sorted into the various houses, initiation begins. The upperclassmen are no better at sustained meanness than they are at being universally friendly, so the freshmen have to initiate themselves. This they do with water fights and curse-shouting sessions. Finally initiation ends, too, and the freshmen are left alone to mature into upperclassmen. Within a few months they'll be fully ready to greet next year's freshman class with fine fake smiles and misleading information.

—Brad Efron '60