

Your on the Street Reporter Memories Are Made Of This

May 25, 2007

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. As written in previous reports, I spent today touring a Billy the Kid exhibit at the Albuquerque Museum of Art and History. For this evening, I decided to pay a visit to my college campus (University of New Mexico, UNM) and my fraternity chapter house (the Beta Xi chapter of Sigma Chi). In the hopes of reliving past memories, I also decided to stay overnight at the Sig house.

This house on the UNM campus is no longer for Sigma Chis. It has been converted to a long-term-rental motel. We Sigs own the property but the chapter was banned from campus for some pranks that were alarming, even to Animal House groupies.

For better or for worse, I was what then was called "frat brat." And for the full disclosure record--in case I later run for office---I joined Sigma Chi because it was *not* a scholastic fraternity. It was *not* a service fraternity, or a professional fraternity. It was a *social* fraternity. Belonging to a social fraternity gave me more opportunities to explore the world of the opposite sex and the creatures inhabiting that world. In my prurient defense, I held a fantasy no different from almost all young men. (My aspiring political soul has been cleansed, and my born-again redemptive qualities are now available for garnering votes.)

Primal makeup was the starter. But for both sexes, our instincts for having sex were helped along with on-the-job-experience. It was a line item in a resume that is usually difficult to come by for naive youngsters. Thus, in my adolescent days, sexual pleasure with girls was just that: a fantasy. The girls were equally adrift. A grope here, a grope there, with neither boy nor girl knowing exactly how to grope properly, but having fun learning the gropes.

For the next few years I had the blind luck to meet some extraordinary females. As a teen-ager back then, and ignorant of life's requirement for males to sometimes mask our hormonal dispositions, I can say with confidence that these girls treated me with far more compassion and wisdom than I treated them. Almost all of them were wisely...a term I have coined for this piece..."distantly passionate." What fine memories I have of their presence in my life. Dean Martin captures it beautifully:

In the background and throughout the song, keep this verse in mind:

♪♪♪♪

*(The sweet, sweet memories you've given me
You can't beat the memories you've given me)*

*Take one fresh and tender kiss.
Add one stolen night of bliss.
One girl; one boy; some grief; some joy:*

Memories are made of this.

Female or male, I'll wager you are reading this narrative and thinking of your own special memories of those past days of exploration and discovery. I hope so. It is having a full past that helps us to live a fuller life in our older years. The memories of past pleasant times prolong our lives.

Reservations Required

On my way to the museum, I drove through the UNM campus and spotted a sign on the lawn of my fraternity house. It advertised rooms for rent (Figure 1). What luck! I could stay in my old home for an evening. I could go back, if only briefly, to some golden times.



Figure 1. Rooms to let.

The Sigma Chi chapter house was my residence for three years. It was also the place where, as a naive youngster in my late teens, I was indoctrinated into a world of fraternal secrets and the rites of brotherhood. It was heady stuff for a country bumpkin. Of equal importance, it was a place where I could practice pleasure-seeking

acts. Which I did, and which, at this stage of my life, I am happy I did. Now as an old man, if only for a short time, I was going to visit my fraternity house to re-capture and re-live memories of that time.

Friendship and Fraternity

I sometimes wonder why fraternal orders exist. Why not bond with your next door neighbor, whom you have begun to like? Or the cashier at the grocery store, whom you have begun to know? Or perhaps an actual member of your family, say your mother-in-law? Why attempt bonding with a complete stranger? Why pay dues to a lodge? After all, isn't it akin to purchasing friendships?

Perhaps we join an organization, say a fraternal order, because its members bolster our beliefs and allow us to practice them among like-minded people. I joined Sigma Chi because the organization reinforced and solidified my predisposition toward having a good time. Sure, we did a few good deeds. We ran a stunt night of sophomoric plays which raised money for charity. That act was noble, but even more, our stunts attracted girls.

We humans are joiners. Since ancient times, we have been joiners. In the old days, joining into groups fostered physical survival and growth. In these modern times, I like to think it's for the reward and pleasure of mental gratification and growth. After all, "No man is an island." Even better, "Nor is a woman." Enough philosophy. To matters at hand:

First Impressions

The first stage for my visit was set as I dialed the phone number displayed on the sign. I wanted to make a room reservation for the night. The conversation went along these lines:

- Person at Sig House, "Hello."
- Reporter, "Hello. Any rooms available?"
- "Sorry. Booked up."
- "Too bad. I'm a Sigma Chi alumnus and was hoping to visit my old home."
- "I see. Well, we've a room, but it's not ready for rental. I'd need a few hours."
- "No problem. I'm spending the day at a museum. I can come by later today."
- "Okay. I'll fix something up."
- "What's the rental fee?"
- "For a Sig, don't worry about it."
- "Really? Thanks. I'll give the bellman a tip."
- "Whatever. See you later."

Off I went to visit the museum and write a Billy the Kid report. Upon my return to the UNM campus:

Memories Are Made Of This

I left my car in the parking lot and walked toward the house. As I approached the front entrance, I thought of my past times there: joking with fraternity brothers, dancing with sorority sisters. I was pipe-dreaming about those past times. But why not? While growing up, we humans unconsciously store experiences from which we later conjure up memories. As I approached the Sig house, I harkened back to those past days and nights. One evening is shown in Figure 2 of the front entrance to the Sig house.

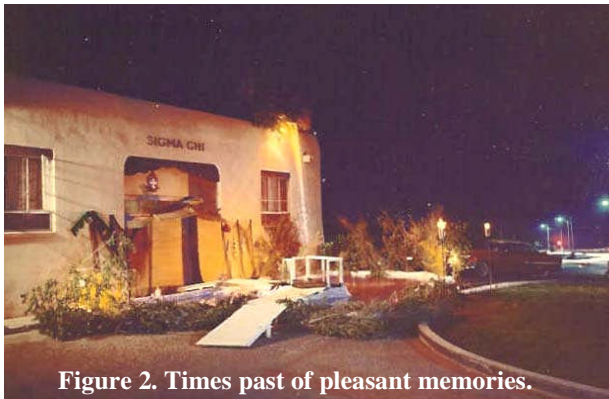


Figure 2. Times past of pleasant memories.

The Sig brothers had decorated the front of the house with a Hawaiian luau theme for our annual Black and White party, the only affair of the year in which we tried to act with a modicum of class. Black and White meant all of us---guys and girls---wore black and white clothes: tuxes, gowns, dinner jackets. The atmosphere was one of subdued, yet stilted refinement, at least for the early hours of the evening. Toward midnight, late teen-age humans, guys and girls alike---resorted to the

ancient human ritual of adolescent exploration of the mysterious bodies of the opposite sex. At least we attempted to play-out our instincts, usually clueless to what made the other sexually tick. It did not matter that we knew Masters and Johnson. Our DNA took us through those rites of passage. Genes aside, and in keeping with the name of this narrative, Dean Martin captured the idea well:

*Don't forget a small moonbeam.
Fold it lightly with a dream.
Your lips and mine.
Two sips of wine:*

Memories are made of this.

Back to Reality

After the museum visit, I returned to the UNM campus. I approached the Sig house and noticed the Sigma Chi icon and lettering had been removed from the entrance. (See Figure 2, compared to Figure 3). The proclamation of SIGMA CHI above the door had been replaced with COME CHECK US OUT!!



Figure 3. Former Animal House.

OUT!! Another sign assured renters of alternative Tuesday evenings of entertainment that awaited them. What was I expecting, a time warp back to the 1960s, with secret handshakes as I entered the building? Of course not. I did not expect any of this camaraderie. Perhaps naively, I was coming to this place to rekindle memories of past camaraderie.

I entered the house and found the person who had agreed to provide me lodging for the night:

- "Hello. You the old Sig?"
- *Watch your mouth.* "Yep. I called about the room."
- "I had trouble freeing a room, but I've got you fixed up."
- "Thanks. I'm looking forward to prowling around."
- "Sure. Make yourself at home. You're in room 4, down the hallway here."
- "I remember this hall. We had a bulletin board right here, where we put up notices. Ah! It's still here."
- "Yeah, we use it to keep everyone informed about anything going on."
- "Really? Are the occupants in a fraternity?"
- "No, things like no hot water. Keeping the sleeping rooms locked. Stuff like that."
- "Just like the old days. I had to keep my room locked because I sold bootleg Tijuana booze on Friday afternoons. Once, I forgot to lock my door when I left for the evening. I came back and my booze locker was empty."
- "That so? Your own fraternity brothers swiped your liquor?"
- "We were a social fraternity, not Rotarians."
- "Ha, here's your room," as seen in Figure 4.



Figure 4. Room to let.

I thought back to his statement, "*Well, we've a room, but it's not ready for rental. I'd need a few hours...*" Maybe I should have given him a few more hours.

- Reporter, "Pretty Spartan. Actually this was my room my junior year in college. I recall it had a desk."
- Slum landlord, "You get what you pay for."
- "Which is?"
- "As I said, room's free. And I'm looking around for a pillow."
- "Good idea. How about a towel?"
- "Hmm. Not sure about that."
- "Okay, any chance of a chair?"
- "Just pull one in from the living room."

Those of my readers who know me personally are aware that I am not a snob. My origins are about as blue collar as they come. My dad was a cattle rancher, a horse breeder, and a sod buster. I've stayed in low-rent places in my travels around the globe. That stated, I wish to make a minor point that with the exception of my stays in Japan, all the motels and hotels in which I slept had bed frames for their mattresses. As best I can recall, all had at least one towel and a pillow as part of their inventory. With the exception of the cells in a couple jails I stayed-in during my earlier (read *care-free*) days, all rooms came with a blanket. I recall one of those cells even had a chair. It was bolted to the floor, but it was still a chair.

Anon once said, "The more things change, the more things change," an observation sufficiently obtuse to make sense to poets and philosophers. Anyway, I had changed. Once, as a wannabe Roger Miller vagabond, I would have tossed my bag on this bed, headed-out for the next adventure, and later in the evening...returned to this mattress without a care in the world, and definitely not a care about furnishings.

- Reporter, "Do the other rooms have towels and pillows?"
- "I suppose so. The renters furnish their own stuff. How would I know? The doors are locked"
- "Okay. I understand. I'm not here for four star lodging. I'm going to look around now."

- "Help yourself. You're not our typical renter---just trying to help out."
- "No big deal. Here's something for your effort."
- "Thanks! Eh, I'll find a chair for you."

What happens to us as we grow older? Sure, we become softer, but it seems we also want a softer life. Somewhere along life's highway, I adapted the philosophy of *living well is the best revenge*. Revenge against what? The loss of a soft life? Infirmity? Loss of memory? Parkinson's? Alzheimer's? Reliance on pills? Loss of physical prowess? Death?

All of the above and that's the rub. As we become less self-insulated to life's goings-on, as we become more frail and vulnerable, we have a wish---perhaps a primal need---to place insulators around us. As I grow older, I find myself making these substitutions.

For all of us, young and old, perhaps life's pleasures can somehow be heightened if we say to ourselves, *living well is the best revenge* as we sometimes engage in self-indulgent pamperings. Perhaps our statement serves as a defiant proclamation against the inevitable on-rush of old age.

I've come to learn that I do not know much about anything. The more I think about "anything" the more I understand I've no answers. I have opinions, but no real answers. And that's what makes life interesting. With all our wisdom, we can't even come up with why gravity works---other than to keep us from drifting-off to Mars or losing a coin when we flip it up in the air. That's fine by me. I like the mystery of our existence.

For this night, I spent a few hours walking through the Beta Xi chapter house of Sigma Chi. I relived hundreds of moments. They were past times that might be more appropriately recounted to my old fraternity brothers, but maybe these recollections will also bring back memories to you. Not necessarily about a fraternity or sorority, about anything that gives you pleasure.

As I walked around my college hang-out, as I thought about the many dances, parties, laughs, and experiences I shared with like-minded comrades, the final verses of Dean's song came to my mind. Yes, things change. Peter Pan notwithstanding, we can't stay at our fraternity house forever. But we can go back, if only in our memories.

*Then add the wedding bell;
One house where lovers dwell;
Three little kids for the flavor.
Stir carefully through the days,
See how the flavor stays.
These are the times you will savor.*

*With his blessings from above,
Serve it generously with love.
One man one wife, one love through life:*

*Memories are made of this.
Memories are made of this.*

Adequately stocked with memories, I abandoned my single-sheet mattress, and headed for the nearest hotel for the night.

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