

## The 1970s: The Road To Disbanding

If my count is accurate, the Class of 1968 had about 43 pledges, the second largest in the history of Kappa Beta. The Class of 1969 had about 31 pledges, the Classes of 1970 and 1972, about 23 pledges each, and the Class of 1971, about 36 pledges, the third largest in the history of the fraternity. Then the numbers dropped precipitously, with the Classes of 1973, 1974, and 1975 having only a few pledges each. About 1974, Kappa Beta disbanded.

Why did this happen?

To start with, the turbulence that characterized America in the late 1960s reached Albany in the 1969-70 academic year with a vengeance.

1. In November 1969 students erected three "Vietnamese huts" on the podium as a political protest. One hut was burned and a student arrested before students agreed to remove the remaining structures.

2. Not long after this incident, a couple of students presented Acting President Allan Kuusisto with a bloody pig's head as he was presiding over a University Senate meeting.

3. Radical Left-wing attorney William Kunstler spoke to 6,000 on campus on March 5, 1970, raised his fist in the "power to the people" salute, and told his listeners that the movement had progressed from a period of "protest" to a stage of "resistance."

4. One week later, students, angered over a tenure decision, smashed windows in the administration building.

5. On March 19, 1970 fifteen students were among twenty-nine people arrested for disorderly conduct while staging a four-hour sit-in, blocking the entrance to the Albany Induction Center.

6. On March 19-20, classes were suspended for two "Dialogue Days." Students and faculty pondered the University's problems in department meetings and workshops.

7. Shortly afterwards, some black students were involved in a fracas in the dining hall at Colonial Quad. Food service workers were assaulted, and the dining hall was vandalized.

8. The turbulence reached its peak in May 1970. On April 30, President Nixon announced that American troops had expanded the Vietnam War by moving into Cambodia. Four days later, Ohio National Guard troops fired on and killed four protesting students at Kent State University. The Albany campus, like others across the country, exploded in protests.

9. On May 4, students entered the Library, threw books off shelves, dumped others on the ground outside and tried to burn them, and broke windows. Two days later, students from Albany and elsewhere marched downtown to the Capitol, protesting both American involvement in Vietnam and the state of American race relations. The march occurred without violence. But that night on campus, Molotov cocktails were thrown at the Administration Building, and fire bombs started blazes in both Colonial and Dutch Quads; the former's Flag Room was destroyed. Students struck in an attempt to shut down the University. (Birr, 155-157.)

Not surprisingly, interest in end-of-the-year fraternity parties dissipated and interest in fraternities waned as students became more and more involved in political and social action.

Let me also backtrack to the late 1960s before trying to answer the question of why Kappa

Beta collapsed, mainly in the words of Kappa Beta brothers who were active during that period.

Martin McMahon '70 writes that although he was active in Kappa Beta for only a short while in 1968-'69, he and fraternity brothers Terry Baxter '69 and Peter Jogo '71 had a Rock and Roll band named the Candy Coated Outhouse which played at many fraternity and sorority parties. This would lead me to believe that at least a segment of the Kappa Beta brothers were in tune with the contemporary campus mood and music.

Mike Hoff '71, a KB member between 1968 and 1971, writes fondly and nostalgically about his years in the fraternity. Some of these memories sound similar in character to the memories shared by other Kappa Beta members from the mid and late 1960s.

He writes, "As a freshman living in Waterbury Hall in 1966-'67, I didn't pledge any fraternity. I was introduced to KB when my roommate, Joe LiPuma, and friend, Dave Goldstein, pledged as freshmen in the Spring of 1967. Also, Andy Davidson, a KB brother and RA in Waterbury Hall during 1966-'67, became my mechanic and spiritual advisor. I pledged as a sophomore in the Fall of 1968. Bob Peterkin was my fraternity "grandfather" and Rich Forando was my fraternity "father." Jim Lucy was President and Tom Carlson of Horseheads, New York was Pledgemaster. The reason I pledged KB was simple. KB had the best parties and the coolest guys, including Peter Bice, Phil Fortin, George Habermehl, Chuck Lubochinski, and Don Weyand. KB also had the best jackets, so pledging KB was a no-brainer. My pledge class included my pals, Barry "The Rot" Politik, Howie "The Young Turk" Dobbs, Danny "Bosco" Goldstein, Howie "HD" Dorfman and his dog, Caesar, and Val Kriele. As a pledge, either Rich Patrie or Tom Decker started calling me "Mr. Special" when I refused to obey some particularly degrading order. The nickname stuck. Hell Night was held in somebody's unheated, ramshackle camp on the icy Mohawk River. I would be remiss if I did not mention that Jim Grady was brutal to me on Hell Night, much of which I spent in "The Queen"--a bathtub filled with cold water....The following morning, I set out on my Hell Trip to Long Island with Howie Dobbs and another pledge. We only got as far as Catskill, New York when I fell asleep at the wheel of my grandma's '57 Caddie and slammed into a falling rock zone on the Thruway. Nobody got hurt, but my grandma was pissed."

Mike further writes that "In 1968, Dave Breiter became President, and I became Pledgemaster. We had a great pledge class including Phil Abitabile, Alan "Fat Head" Barocas, Dave "Eggs" Benedict, Larry Rizzi, Joe Amato, Craig Flood, Pete "Sugarbear" Forester, Mike Hartigan, Marty Levy, Elliot Nirenberg, Mike Scott, John Shufon, Frank "El Gin" Susi, Kenny Turow, Alan Zarembo, and Warren Greshes....I was elected President in 1969-'70. I ran against Larry MacDowell, who was a much better guy, but I won on the strength of a very successful pig party I had organized the night before the election. Life was great before we became so politically correct."

So to raise the question again, why did Kappa Beta, which seemed to be thriving in 1970, disband in 1974? Mike Hoff, himself, poignantly and incisively gives his answer to that question in the same e-mail in which he recalls his active days in KB when the good times rolled.

"In my view, the Greek world began to change in 1968 with the war in Vietnam and the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy. The cultural revolution which followed changed people and their priorities with amazing speed. For example, in the Spring of 1968, my old roommate, Joe LiPuma, was a typical "Joe College" fraternity guy. However, after the Summer of 1968, Joe returned to school with long hair, love beads, and bell bottoms, and KB was not nearly as important as it had been just months before. I am not criticizing Joe. He was a great guy before and after the summer of '68. He was just an early adopter (for a Greek) of a political and cultural outlook that viewed Greek life as less of a priority, or not cool at all. As the war continued in late 1968 and into 1969, many of us embraced the counterculture, or at least aspects of it, and lost interest in fraternity life. During this period, schisms developed between KB brothers who had become "hippies" and more traditional brothers. By the time I became President in '69, we still started the weekend on Thursday night at the Albany Muni (a tradition since we had abandoned The Central Arms in 1967), but our numbers began to dwindle. It became increasingly difficult to get a decent turnout to a Beer Party when so many brothers preferred the bong. As "free love" became prevalent, being a Greek became less of an advantage and could be a disadvantage if you were trying to get laid. These social forces began the decline of KB in the late 60s and ultimately led to its demise in the early 70s. Other fraternities at SUNY Albany met the same fate around the same time. I think a few may have survived, but I don't know why. In my egocentric view, KB was the best frat on campus in the late 60s."

Mike concludes in much the same way that so many of the other Kappa Beta brothers have ended their letters, conversations, or e-mails when he writes: "Despite the tumult of the late 60s, the friends...I made during a few short years in KB have lasted a lifetime. I'm proud and privileged to be a brother of old KB."

Gene Auciello '72 comments much more briefly but essentially supports Mike Hoff's view as to why Kappa Beta disbanded. He writes that he was a member of KB from 1969-1972, at a time when membership was high, but that unfortunately, after 1972, fraternities and sororities fell out of favor with college students at UAlbany and elsewhere.

And finally, Michael Ungerleider '75, who was a member of Kappa Beta when it disbanded, comments sadly and apologetically about its end as an active fraternity on the Albany campus. Michael underlines what Mike Hoff and Gene Auciello have already said, that KB membership was still reasonably high in the early 1970s but that interest in fraternities at Albany was on the wane. He also describes what happened to Kappa Beta in its final few years and what he believes triggered its collapse.

In 1971, the majority of the members lived on campus, housed on the 18th floor of Stuyvesant Tower on the Uptown Campus. The 19th floor was inhabited entirely by freshmen, Michael being one of them. The relationship between the 19th floor freshmen and the 18th floor upperclassmen, all of them Kappa Beta brothers, was like the relationship between old dogs and playful pups. The freshmen were occasionally invited to the parties, sometimes showed up whether they were invited or not, and played pranks on the KB brothers who, in turn, played pranks on the freshmen. As the 1971-'72 academic year moved on, the members of KB came to realize that they had a disproportionately high number of graduating seniors on their roll and

needed to take in a significant number of freshmen pledges or face possible collapse. Kappa Beta in 1971 had become one of the most selective and traditional fraternities on campus. Kappa Beta members were very much involved with traditional fraternity customs, such as paddling and Hell Night, which was an issue, because when the freshmen on the 19th floor were rushed, they agreed to accept fraternity bids only on the condition that there would not be a Hell Night. Some of the freshmen were approached and took a position that fraternities should give bids to all the freshmen on the 19th floor or to none at all. Michael didn't go along with this demand and pledged Kappa Beta, became active during the next two years, and lived in the KB section of the 18th floor during his junior year. Unfortunately, a significant number of the other freshmen pledged by Kappa Beta in the Spring of 1972 never became active members.

A number of graduates from the 1970s who were active Kappa Beta brothers did go on to distinguish themselves after they graduated from the University. In the late 1990s, George Bochetto '75, an attorney, became a leading mayoral candidate in Philadelphia, particularly interested in promoting tax reform and increasing job opportunities, and Charles Brennon '75, served as mayor of a northern New York State community.

Interest in social fraternities and sororities continued to wane so that by 1980 only three Greek organizations were left on campus. Sadly, Kappa Beta declined and finally collapsed about 1974. If KB had been able to hold together for a few more years, it might have survived and prospered, for surprisingly, fraternities and sororities made a spectacular comeback in the 1980s. In 1991, the University counted twenty fraternities and eight sororities whose total membership included one out of every four undergraduates. Some were local, but more had national affiliations (the University had retracted its ban on chapters of national Greek organizations). Some occupied space in residence halls; others operated "unofficial" houses from downtown residences. (Birr, 95-96.)

My own feeling is that although a changing campus culture and distressing national and world events played important roles in the demise of Kappa Beta, the most significant factor leading to its collapse was the loss of its off-campus house in the late 1960s. However grand the newly built, severely neoclassical Uptown Campus looked to many of us who did not have to live, work, and attend classes there, to many students and faculty that had to deal with it on a daily basis it seemed chilly and sterile. It did not fit the lifestyle of a great many students in the late 1960s and early 1970s who could practice free love but were not free to shift a trash can from its appointed location. One of my cousins, a Student Life Administrator at SUNY in Binghamton, told me that the Uptown Campus at Albany had the reputation of being the most vandalized in the SUNY system. Many in student life positions around the state speculated that much of the vandalizing that took place was not the result of anti-Vietnam protests but the result of students who disliked the campus and who felt uncomfortable with it taking revenge on the buildings. With little immediate hope of regaining off-campus homes of their own, Kappa Beta and most other Greek organizations at Albany lost energy and lost their appeal to incoming students.

And so Kappa Beta disbanded about 1974. However, the story is not over.