

10/24/11

Dear Sigma Chi Brothers,

The stars were lined perfectly this weekend. How else does A&M, The Texans, The Cowboys, The Texas Rangers, and U.H. all win in the same weekend? In addition to this, Texas Tech beat Oklahoma!! It was a weekend when our Epsilon Chi chapter of Sigma Chi had our outstanding 50 year reunion! Brother V.J. Harper laid the ground work ahead of time and we all planned for a weekend of reuniting with old friends and fraternity brothers; some we had not seen in 50 years, some we had never met. Of course, sadly, we lost one of our dear brothers, Danny Sudduth, only a short time before. A few weeks before the reunion, my heart was filled with great anticipation and yet some apprehension. One thing we all knew... everything would be planned and done perfectly, because V.J. had taken it upon himself to do so. VJ is the perfect example of a self-starting leader, driven only by the love for his brothers and the ever present desire to do things right. I know all the brothers will share in a hearty "Thank you, brother V.J."!!!

I began renewing conversations with some brothers on the phone, calling people on the list V.J. had given me. I also was able to contact several other brothers that I had not spoken to in years. Mike Smith and I had a nice conversation on the phone a few weeks before the reunion and I learned several things that I never knew before. Mike was from Jasper (which I knew) and when he came to Lamar he was a Chemistry major, but later changed to business. He also worked one semester, I think he said 40 hours/week and carried a 12 hour load at Lamar. ..Hats off to him for that!! He shared his story with me about when he was a freshman pledge. V.J. borrowed someone's convertible for him (must have been about 1960) and I guess it was a double date for homecoming. Perhaps another pledge (not clear on that) and Mike had dates with senior girls. One was Lois Witt (Charlie's sister) and the other girl who was the Lamar mascot (could not remember her name). They thought they were stepping in high cotton; them being freshmen and the girls seniors. I had always wondered what happened to Lee McGowen and I learned that Mike had visited with him before he had passed away. He said that Lee jogged every day, but after his jogs he enjoyed a nip or two. I learned that Lee was a college teacher and had lived in Georgia (?) and Canada. Lee died of colon cancer several years ago. I remember Lee was one of the pledges that was from Beaumont, along with Chuck Paggi, Jack Windlow, Taylor Fuller, Duke James and maybe some others. Sadly I learned that Taylor Fuller had also died of colon cancer. I think they were all recruited by Ross Wilder. Unfortunately, Mike was unable to attend the reunion.

Duke James was playing golf when I called him and his wife gave him the message. He left me a message saying that he was going to see his grand kids that weekend and would be unable to attend. Jack Windlow, also, could not be with us. I never knew why Paggi was unable to be there.

Mentioning Lois Witt reminded me of Charlie and in the conversation with Mike I learned that Charlie had lived in Mike's home town of Jasper after he graduated from Lamar. He married a Jasper girl. Thinking on this, I found Charlie's number and gave him a call. Charlie lives in the Dallas area now. He said he didn't think he would be able to come and I asked was it health, finances or something else? He said a combination, so I offered him the option of staying with me in my hotel room at the Hampton, since my wife was unable to go. He called me back a few days before the reunion telling me that he could not work it out and thanked me for the offer and we agreed to keep in touch. He said to tell all of the brothers hello.

Another brother that I called was Gilbert Easley, a charter member. I left a message and he called me back and left me a message. He and his wife were going on vacation and would not be able to attend. They apparently had their trip planned for a long time. He said to tell everyone hello. Gilbert is a doctor in the Dallas area.

I tried unsuccessfully to contact Joe Norville, whom I had not seen in perhaps 50 years. No luck, but then I saw on V.J.'s list that he was going to be there. Sure enough, Joe was there and had not changed that much, or least I recognized him. Sure glad to see you again Joe!! Joe lives in Bridge City; retired from banking.

I also called Larry Eaves and we had a good conversation, but he didn't think he could be there. Later I saw his name on the "Y" list, but he never showed up as far as I know. Larry was also a charter member and an original Kappa Phi. Larry said that he was originally recruited to play football for Kappa Phi frat football. I remember after one of our Kappa Phi parties; Larry was kneeling and praying before he went to bed. (We all should have been) I related the story to Jack Cockerham (who remembers everything) and he said that Larry would not eat meat on Fridays in his strict Catholic way. Some of the guys, late at night, would ask Larry to go out to a place that served chicken fried steaks and of course, Larry could not eat chicken fried steaks. Jack said that he would order and let the steak set there until it was after mid night, making it officially Saturday. Sure would like to have talked again with Larry.

To speak of anything having to do with Epsilon Chi without expressing a BIG THANK YOU to Jack Cockerham, would be a miscarriage of justice. Jack Cockerham was "the number one" driving force behind Epsilon Chi securing our charter. Without Jack's tremendous efforts, I seriously doubt if we would have ever been Sigma Chis. Jack was president of Kappa Phi and also our first Sigma Chi president. All of the brothers salute you, Jack, for a job well done. Jack lives in Corsicana, a few miles west of that famous city, Malakoff.

Art Lecoq had tried to get a golf tournament going but not enough brothers were interested, and so the tournament was cancelled. Art brought his terrific wife to the reunion with him and of those of you who know Art, you know why I called Tommie a saint!! Ha!! Art, along with several other brothers, apparently made it big in the business world and now have the chance to play golf every day. According to Art, he carries a 6 handicap and you know Art never embellished any story.

Because of the cancellation of the tournament I received an email from my little brother, Gene Cravey, asking if I wanted to join him for a round on Saturday morning. I might not have agreed had known that Gene really is a very good golfer. We teed it up at Babe Zaharias in Pt. Arthur and Gene proceeded to shoot a 1 over on the front nine, and should have had better. Meanwhile, the hacker, lost about 3 or 4 balls in the water and played my usual military golf game...you know.....LEFT....RIGHT....LEFT....RIGHT. After 4 + hours of misery for me and I'm sure for Gene having to bare watching my venture, Gene finally finished with a 79 and I, with....well forget that!!! Anyway, Gene and I had a good visit and returned to the hotel and met back downstairs after showering, getting ready to go to Monroe's. During our conversations, I learned that Gene had worked all during his time at Lamar and had not pledged until his senior year. I had forgotten that he and Steve (Ally Oop) Thompson were both from Bay Town and were roommates while at Lamar. Steve was unable to be with us this time, but I had spoken with him on the phone and he lives in Sugarland, near Houston.

Bob Morgan, Jim Burnett, and Butch Hurley were about to leave when Gene and I got back down stairs. Bob said we could all ride in his pickup if we wanted to, if we didn't mind going first to where his boat was stored. We all piled into Bob's pickup and off we went, destination Munroe's. During the trip I had asked Bob if he remembered the walk that the actives took us on. They dropped us off somewhere north of Beaumont in the middle of nowhere and left us with a dime (yea, payphones took that then). It turned out that one of the pledges, Phil Hall, recognized where we were. We were near his Uncle's farm!! Being in walking distance, we soon were on the road, beating the actives back to the shacks!! Jim Burnett then remembered that he was kidnapped by some later pledges. He was blindfolded and dumped off at the beach. (It turned out that Butch had also been taken on the same trip.) The rest of the story was interesting. Along came a school bus and they were picked up by a girl's athletic team returning (I think) to Lamar. Jim or Butch neither knew who kidnapped them. All of these years and it had been a mystery... until;

When we got back to Munroe's, another one of my little brothers was there: Ron Goodwin. Ron was talking about taking some actives on a walk and Jim Burnett was one of them. Mystery solved after all these years. Ron is now a pharmacist in Woodville and his lovely wife is a teacher in Sharpstown (Houston). They own a condo in Houston and a house in Woodville and travel back and forth. Ron and I had several of the same chemistry courses at Lamar, not at the same time but the same teachers. We exchanged stories, but several that Ron told were worth repeating. When he was in pharmacy school, they had no choice but to take a plant course, in which they had to learn the scientific names of plants. He said it was pretty boring, but he had the good prof that taught the course and his friend had the Ogre. His friend was about to fail for the Ogre and was driving along and saw a plant on the side of the road. He stopped and picked it and carried it to the mean prof, hoping that he would have mercy on him. As soon as the prof saw the plant he calls out the scientific name with excitement in his voice. But, he failed him anyway. Years later when Ron was a pharmacist, he recognized the name of the pharmacist who called him to ask a question. It was his friend who had failed the plant course. Ron yelled out to him the scientific name of the plant he picked on the side of the road. After some silence on the other end, a voice comes back and says, "Who is this!!" A few years after Ron graduated from pharmacy school the mean prof passed away. Ron received correspondence asking for money to build a statue as a memento to this prof. Ron responded that he would buy the pigeons. Another story Ron related was funny but not one that he himself found much pleasure in. Ron said there was a rule in pharmacy school. If you had 3 tests scheduled within a certain time period, you could get one of them rescheduled. Well, Ron had 3 scheduled and he arranged to have one rescheduled. When he showed up to take the test, no one was there. Ron had a "B" going into the final, and he thought he could have made an A on the final. He went to the prof that was supposed to give the test and he told Ron, "Oh, you missed the test!" "What do you mean, I missed the test, I came to the room and the time when I was supposed to!" The prof said, "Well, that was changed to a different time and I posted it on the bulletin board." Of course Ron had not been to the bulletin board, but if he had, he probably would not have seen it. Ron said that in the upper right-hand corner of the bulletin board was a postcard sized note saying that the re-test time had been changed. Ron went to the head of the department, who said there was nothing he could do, but he would see that the F did not hurt him. He had to take it again. Wow!! Ron said he made an A.

Jack Windlow could not be there, but I learned that he and Jim Burnett live within a few blocks of each other in Sherman, Texas. They had not known they were in the same town until Jim Kendrick's funeral last year; although they had both lived there for several years. I had always wondered if Jim married Nancy Simmons, our 2nd Sigma Chi sweetheart and his date during college. He related to me that when he went into the service they had broken up. There was one other interesting thing I learned about Jim. He always wore glasses in college, now he does not. He had an operation to correct his cataracts and now does not need glasses for distance.

My other little brother, Dan Huff was there. He lives near Paris. (Not France... Texas). He and I had some good times when I would go to his house in Beaumont. He had some gigantic speakers and played music that I enjoyed. I think his favorite was Bobby Blue Bland. We also went several times to the Big Oaks and due to the grace of God we made it back OK. Dan was one of our first pledges after we became Sigma Chis. I learned that Dan had taught school in Port Neches high school for a couple of years, which I never knew. He had received a NSF grant to go back to school in Minnesota. He had also taught in college and lived in Colorado, before retiring in Paris. He is our official photographer and it was a real delight to get to visit with him again.

The first person I saw when I pulled into the Hampton Inn parking lot was Butch Hurley and his wife. They live in Tyler, which is 38 miles East of my home town, Malakoff. He and I always are able to relate, not only as Sigs but our love for soccer. We both have coached and refereed soccer; which I consider the best sport.

Immediately after talking to Butch in the parking lot, I heard someone yelling my name. It was Ardis Havard, who had just pulled up with his wife, Kay. Ardis and I see each other every now and then, even though I live about 10 minutes from Ardis. We traveled together last year for the reunion and always have a great conversation. Ardis is from The Groves, and was the quarterback for PNG when they won a state championship. He was an outstanding Consul for the Epsilon Chi chapter and has always been a close friend. Ardis is a retired CPA.

Speaking of Port Neches; Bill McCoy came to the reunion. He has not changed as much as some of us and we were soon able to renew our old friendship. He remembered that I had emailed him several years ago to see if the email address was "the" Bill McCoy. I had looked him up on the internet and found an email that I thought might be his and it was. In our reunion conversation I asked him if he still remembered his Port Neches phone # because I remembered mine. Sure not he rattled off his old number!! We both are still wondering why??? Sometimes I cannot remember my current number. Great visit, Bill!!

Another Port Neches person was Richard Briggs, who was a pledge after I had left Lamar. Richard retired as PNG administrator. Sure glad you were able to be there, Richard.

Bill Worsham, also a PNG grad, married another PNG grad, Carolyn Mays. Bill retired from Lamar last year after holding several different jobs. I believe he was even the faculty advisor for Epsilon Chi at one time. I had known Bill ever since he was a kid living on the street behind my stepfather's McArthur St. home in Port Neches. Carolyn was friends with my sister Vivien and I always enjoy talking with her. She told me that Vivien had taught her twirling, which I had forgotten. Carolyn retired as a counselor in Nederland, after a long career as an educator. It was great getting to renew friendship with the Worshams.

It was a real delight to be able to meet with Howie Stahl and his wife. Howie was another little brother of mine; In fact, all 4 little brothers that I had at Lamar were present for the reunion: Howie, Gene Cravey, Dan Huff and Ron Goodwin. Pretty neat!! Howie was the student trainer for Lamar's basketball team. Jack Martin was the head coach and Billy Tubbs was the assistant. They had an outstanding team for several years and as you know, Billy Tubbs later took Lamar to the playoffs and also coached Oklahoma to a national championship. Howie retired as a school administrator in Ohio. We were all thrilled to have Howie and his wife travel all the way from Ohio to be with us.

The first night I had seen the bottles of Alien Ale, but did not pay much attention to it. The 2nd night I decided to try some Alien. It tasted a little like Shiner Bock, which is my favorite (I revise that statement now. Don't drink Shiner after Alien, it makes Shiner taste... alien). It also tasted somewhat like Dos Equis Amber Bock; anyway it was good. I learned that a brother from Roswell, New Mexico had brought the brew. Brother Bozarth is a Lawyer there; the home of area 51 and Alien Ale. Brother Bozarth came to Lamar after I had graduated, but I knew him from his name on emails from VJ. Thanks, brother for the six pack of Alien Ale. Brother, you have found it here (an Alien from Malakoff)

When I was at Munroe's I came face to face with a brother who says, "You don't know me do you?" As I browsed the far reaches of my senior brain, I uttered... Stewart... at the same time he said, "Fuzzy Childress" I think "Fuzzy" was there last year and it was great to see him again. I did speak with his brother, Ed, for a short while, remembering that we set together in the stands as we watched the game last year. Ed is Fuzzy's younger brother and is now a vet in Colorado. Fuzzy was one of our early pledges and I don't remember why we called him "Fuzzy" but maybe it was because many of us, including me, did not have "enough" to shave. Of course people like Charlie Witt and Pet Pompolina must have been shaving since they were 12. It was great to visit for a short while with Fuzzy because he never returned any of my calls or emails. Thank you, brother Stewart, for being there!!

Pete Pompolino was perhaps an original Kappa Phi/Charter member, who looked remarkably the same. I could have picked him out perhaps above anyone else. Not only did he look the same, he had that same friendly attitude that I remembered. Great to see you again, Pete!

Either I have shrunk or Brother Bob Morgan grew taller. I do not remember him being that tall. I suppose both could have happened, it's been 50 years. I have seen Bob on occasion over years, so of course we all knew him. He has been a dedicated public servant in Pr. Arthur and one who deserves lots of accolades. Bob is a charter member of Epsilon Chi and has been one of the backbones of our group for all of these years. Thanks for the ride to Munroe's, Bob and thanks for being a great brother all of these years!!

Bob Chase was a brother originally from Pt. Arthur that was a charter member. He now lives in North Carolina and had the desire to travel all this way to be with his brothers. I had not seen Bob since he left Lamar and that's been close to 50 years. We set and talked and revisited and remembered our good times as Epsilon Chis. Time has no bounds for bonds!! Thank you, Bob for making the effort to be with us. I really enjoyed our conversations.

Of course my fraternity visit would never be complete without sitting down for a while with Dennis Hollander. The last few years, Dennis and I have had some great conversations, by email, phone or in person. Dennis is truly a brother and he exudes friendship. Over the years I have come to love Dennis for his genuine sincerity. As with many of the brothers, I have come to respect Dennis on many new levels. I never knew that Dennis was an officer in the armed forces. Dennis also has a flare for writing, as I learned during our conversation. His writing skills are soon learned if you read his posts on the T.J. High school website. If a brother or a friend calls, Dennis will be there for you. Thank you Dennis!!

Benny Beauchamp was a brother that I had never met until VJ's retirement (of course he did not really retire) in Houston several years ago. Since then it has been a delight to get to know Ben. He is a true brother and a friend that you can truly count on. He said that he is finishing his extra room at his retirement home somewhere close to Brenham and that it would be available in the near future for a get-to-gather. Looking forward to it Ben!!

Any correspondence that did not send a hearty: "Well, done!!" to Brother VJ Harper would be indeed inappropriate. Thank you, VJ, not only this year, last year as well. How you do it is a tribute to your true "Jordan Standard". The food was excellent and plentiful, the drinks were great and the presentation of the awards was outstanding. The award presentation was a complete and great surprise for me and I'm sure for all of the brothers. It was indeed an honor to receive the Semi Century award. I thank you VJ, not only for the reunion organization, but for your work on getting the awards from National. This was the frosting on the cake for a great weekend. Outstanding job, brother VJ I also would like to thank your lovely wife, who greatly impressed me with her smile and enjoyable attitude. On a side note, VJ has a house on the 16th fairway of the Babe Zaharias course in Pt. Arthur. I was asking him exactly which one it was. Gene and I had passed his home when we played Saturday morning, but we did not know which home was his. I learned that it was near the green and on the left side going toward the clubhouse. The interesting part is how he and his wife chose this house over another. They had looked at another house they were interested in. The house they now live in had only been seen from the outside. His wife called him while he was working in Louisiana to say, "You've got to see this house!!" VJ said he knew this was the house; immediately when he saw it. The other part of the story, it was owned by a minister, who had buried a bible in the foundation. He said, "This house was built upon the word." Pretty good foundation for a Sigma Chi. VJ, may the word shine upon you and your family and may God continue to bless you.

Lud Davis drove in from Nacogdoches and was one of the few "younger" brothers that I had really interfaced with. VJ had given me a phone list last year and Lud was on it. He came last year and expressed to me at the time, how he thought our group, meaning the Charter members and the early guys were closer than his group. He thought one of the reasons the chapter had failed was that national had not looked kindly on some of the 80's pledge group's academic requirements. Lud said that there were some pledge recruits that were in technical school and not enrolled in regular college classes. National was not pleased with this. During our conversations I learned that Lud is the owner of an AC company in Nacogdoches and his wife is a voice teacher at Stephen F. Austin College. Lud originally came from San Augustine, where his parents were in the school business. Sure glad you came to the reunion again, Lud.

Brother Dick Burns attended our Friday night get together with the message that national was interested in getting a Sigma Chi group back on Lamar's campus. He spoke at length about how several groups had recently lost their charters or had been put on probation. He spoke of the number of well-known Sigs that are in either business or sports. I personally never knew that the owner of the Texans was a Sig. Dick wanted to encourage the strong establishment of the local Alum group in the Golden Triangle as a priority in reestablishing a chapter at Lamar. He felt that national would look favorably upon Sigma Chi returning to Lamar. He told us that there are four groups of Alums in the Houston area that are very active and he belongs to 7(?) different groups. Dick is the Sig Ambassador for this area. He sure is a hard working guy who loves our fraternity. Thank you brother Dick Burns!!

There were several brothers that I met and recognized from last year, and I probably will know them if I see them again, but for the moment I have forgotten. I do remember and want to thank brother Munroe for his great BQ and outstanding Boudain (not sure how to spell that cooney name). Thanks also for allowing us to watch the Lamar game (yea, right, I saw every minute of it.....NOT)

Well, I've rambled on for almost 7 pages, but it was about things that I found extremely interesting and fun. I hope everyone who attended felt as I. Time has become more precious to us all and our memories mean everything. Relationships are the most important things in life, not only with our God, but with our friends and family. May God grant each of us the ability to understand how important these reunions are and may the white cross forever unite us in the fellowship and kindred of the Sigma Chi brotherhood.

In Hoc Signo Vices,

Albert (Don) Henderson
Epsilon Chi '62

The history of "In Hoc Signo Vices"
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/In_hoc_signo_vinces