

Remembrances of the last SKUNK President

My name is Tom Smith, and I was the last Brotherhood of Rooks SKUNK president; our pledge class had members from the Classes of '63, '64 and '65.

The first time I heard the word “Rooks” was during a conversation with Mr. Guglielmi (Ralph was already a star at Notre Dame) and my friend at the time, Scott Anderson, lived next door to the Guglielmi’s. It was 1953 or 54, I guess and Mr. Guglielmi was always bragging about his son and somehow the name Rooks was brought up. My cousin, Patty Pope was an LAL and I asked her what the Rooks were and she told me they were a fraternity at Grandview. Fast forward to 1957-58 and my all-time best friend, Larry Snider’s, brother Fred, was running for Student Council President (or something) and whole bunch of his buddies were down at his house with their Rook shirts on and I thought that was pretty cool; I was in the 7th grade.

In my freshman year 1959-60, a few of my classmates (Larry Snider, Chuck Penzone) that were legacy and even though just transferred in from St. Chris were “rushed” by the Rooks. I knew them and few others well enough to hear some of the great and usually funny and always cool stories about what the pledges had to do or eat or whatever. I started working at the Big Bear my sophomore year and through my junior year. During that time, I remained friend with many of the Rooks and many of my close friends, Barry Dowdy and cousin Mike Pope were rushed. I had “wheels” and went to the “House” many times in 1961 and 1962; but was not asked to join. At this time, high school fraternities and sororities were outlawed and (it seem to us) that Grandview was leading the crusade; if you wanted to be a Rook you knew you would be or could be dismissed from athletic teams and all school organizations. Many people that the Rooks would have wanted to be in the B of R did not want to take the chance and the people that did join knew what could happen. This “underground” group of rebels still boasted Captains of the football, basketball and wrestling teams; the Most Valuable Player (Charlie Malowney) on the 1962 football team and a couple of State qualifiers in wrestling. I believe, to the man, that they enjoyed being just a little bit “outlaw”.

During the summer of my senior year, 1962, I was finally rushed along with about 15 other guys (a pretty big class, I think they needed dues money). Without much supervision and being underground “Hell Week” started the first day and ended on the last day nearly 3 months later. But I would not trade it for anything –

- Being at Oxley Field and asked by an Active “who put up the antlers?” Then getting to the House as fast as possible running down the steps, facing the east wall with your thumbs in your ears and doing 3 modified jumping jacks

while saying “Herb Decker” 3 times. Many times, “Putting up the Antlers” saved me from much uglier duties.

- Singing “the Rook fraternity is the best fraternity that ever came over from old Germany, there is the Highland Dutch and the Lowland Dutch the Rotterdam Dutch and the Goddamn Dutch, glorious, glorious a whole keg of beer for the four of us; glory be to God there is no more of us, because one of us could drink it all alone, drink – drink – drink”
- Rush summer 1962, a number of Actives and Skunks went up to UA where they were having a talent show and dance. One of the Actives told us go signup for the talent show; we did and made total asses of ourselves.
- My SKUNK class elected Eddie Hamel as our leader and President; but Eddie was very busy with work, singing and not a great organizer. After about 3 weeks the Active President, Larry Snider, called the pledges together and made me the President and Ron Cameron the VP of our SKUNK class.
- Standing in height order in front of the roaring fireplace (I was lucky being one of the tallest I missed the center of the fire) when they pulled your pants legs forward the back of your legs felt like they were on fire. And if you puked or look like you would they put a bucket around your neck that you wore until somebody else needed it.
- During one night, 13 pledges with their little “SKUNK” ties on were standing in front of the fireplace; the temperature was about 70 outside; but they had the fire cooking. We hear a knock on the door and a woman (maybe 30 years old and new to the neighborhood) selling something (Avon?) enters and asks “is your mother home?” and of course somebody says yes I think she is down stairs and yells “hey Mom somebody wants to talk to you”. This lady didn’t take too long to size up the situation and got out pretty quickly (she probably tells this story from her angle).
- Halloween was always big at the Rook House and the 1962 was no exception, sheets were laid over couches and the kids finally arrived at the coffin that had the candy along with the President laying in wait for the unsuspecting child. Funny for us; made nightmares for them.
- I may be bragging; but I believe my pledge class ate more “shit” than any other class. Many times we had to run down to Lawson’s and use our own money to buy the most god awful things we could find. The “Vultures” of the Actives (Hanesworth, Malowney, Pope) delighted in finding the sickest (raw chicken guts packed in lard) and the hottest stuff they could find. Caught smoking – eat a cigarette’ rules were short haircuts, no smoking, no drinking and no sex; the last was the easiest for most to give up.
- My Dad was a very good handyman and I volunteered him to mount the new front door and cut the Rook pentagon into it; it took him quite awhile to do it; but it is still on the 1347 Elmwood door today.

- On the last night as SKUNKS, we arrived at the House early; Dowdy Stew was on the stove; super hot with anything they could find or catch in it (too bad that some of the SKUNKS really liked it). Swallow a fish, too easy. Bite it in two (very bitter) and then chew it up. Strip down to make sure you didn't have any money. Blindfolded and put in cars and taken 30 miles away to try and find your way back.
- Two of our original pledges, Tom Egelhoff and Jim Brown) dropped out or were "black balled" followed the cars to the drop off point and we got back to the house before the Actives, who stopped for breakfast. One of us geniuses thought a "lock out" would be a good idea, it wasn't, and the entire pledge class came very close to being "black balled".
- And then we were Rooks, Brothers forever!
- The annual Rook campout (I think I am glad I only attended one) – we had a friend from another school, name Cinimo, who liked to hang around with the Rooks. When we were discussing where to go on our annual campout; he said his uncle had a farm near Gallipolis we could use. And use it, we did. 30 guys headed south after school with too much 3.2 beer and some hard liquor – driving without your lights on to sneak up on another car; eating and throwing up; spilling beer in the uncle's kitchen; sitting on the family graves watching the stars and drinking; going into town and buying "cheery bombs"; using the same "cherry bombs" like hand grenades and starting a small fire; getting paid to put out the fire; getting everything out of the farmhouse when it looked like it might burn (it did not) and putting in the trunk along with the keys to the trunk.

I feel like I could go on forever; but I plan to send this to my Brothers of that era and challenge them to add to my remembrances and correct me where time has clouded the memory.

After I graduated in June 1963, I got up to the House a few times; but OSU was calling and I was soon to be married and a father. So I didn't get to see the very end of a GREAT era when the House was finally closed and the last Active Rooks walked the halls of Grandview High School.

The truly last Active Rooks were from the Class of 1965, Eldon Brown, George George, John Harker, David Niswonger and Dick Reiterman (who is deceased).

It was a wonderful time during a wonderful time!