



The Femme Forum



NUMBER 18

JANUARY, 1969

Happy New Year! Merry Christmas! And a pleasant Thanksgiving to you all! Now that about covers all of the recent holidays that we missed between the last Femme Forum and this issue. I hope that you all were able to go to church on Thanksgiving Day dressed in your Sunday best-dress with all of the trimmings. I also hope that Santabelle brought you all loads and loads of "girlie goodies" that fit just perfectly. Lastly, I hope that you all brought in the New Year by attending an elegant Ball and your lovely formals and total beautiful femme appearance brought oohs and aahs from everyone who saw you. Now, if all of these dreamy things didn't happen to you there's definitely something missing in your femme life and you had better make some big changes in 1969.

Public Relations Report

We have been doing a lot of little things (quite big, actually) as an organization in recent months that you should all be aware of. Since one of our major functions is to educate the public, FPE works wherever it can to accomplish its goals. We probably do a lot of things as an organization through spending what funds we can, that never get reported in these pages and we think it is about time we let you all know what is happening. So of more recent vintage, are four things that got accomplished; some with a little financial help from FPE and some with just our blessings. First, we sent \$40.00 to the Scandanavian group to help defray the cost of printing thousands of leaflets in German which will be distributed in Northern Europe to doctors, etc. Although our dollar contribution wasn't very much, we were pleased to help our friends in Sweden and Denmark with an excellent project. Secondly was Virginia's trip to Alaska with public relations stops in many cities and radio and Television appearances on many stations all up and down the West Coast. This effort didn't cost FPE a dime because Virginia stood all of the expense from her personal vacation fund. Next, was the big open house that the Alpha Chapter sponsored in Los Angeles and it turned out to be very successful with many professional people attending and learning much about FPism. To this project we shared \$50.00 with the Alpha's and the rest was donated by the members themselves. One of our latest projects was carried out by our own Ann 10 M-2 who is our PR Chairlady. Here in her own words is an outline of Ann's report: "I had a fascinating 3½ hour session Dec. 13th in Dunellen, New Jersey, with a Dr. John Oros (PH.D. in Psychology); his wife; a man who was director of vocational guidance and counselling for the

public school system of that county(13,000 students); the Chief of Police of Dunellen; and two Catholic nuns!!! Dr. Oros had written Box 36091 in April after seeing Virginia on the Allen Burke show. Virginia sent his letter to Sheila who answered it and sent it on to me for a further answer. I (not knowing whether his interest was because he was one of us or otherwise) offered to have someone visit him if he desired to tell him more about us and what we're trying to accomplish. He said fine, and this was the first time I had a chance to get together with him.

Well, I opened their eyes, especially re helping prevent suicide, prevent guilt feelings and other hangups, and especially the chief on the tragedy of excess publicity by many police departments to what is otherwise a respectable citizen, and I emphasized the distinctions between the types of TVs as being primarily differences in motivation. They asked many questions, the most difficult of which was "How do you tell if a young boy is an 'eonist or heterosexual TV?" I found this hard to answer and would like the readers to respond with how THEY would answer this question if asked it!!!! It was, nonetheless, a very rewarding evening and I think I put a few more grains of sand in that Lake Virginia says we're trying to fill up a grain of sand at a time!!!!"

Thanks Ann, for another good effort. By the way, Ann stood all of the expense to travel across several states in order to meet with the school officials so we owe her one more debt of appreciation. Incidentally, if any of you care to write your answer to the Eonist vs. TV question, we would be most happy to receive your ideas on the question. How about it? So that's our PR report for this time and it isn't too bad for \$90.00 worth of FPE funds. We are glad to cooperate in any project that will reach the public, so let's have your ideas on this important area!

NEW MEMBERS OF FPE

Since our last report, we have enrolled fifteen new ladies into FPE. Let's all extend our warmest greetings to:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Code</u>	<u>FPE Region</u>
Gail	47 M-4	980
Rita	5 A-10	940
Freida	16 H-1	660
Alice	49 R-2	530
Connie	22 H-3	480
Susan	35 M-6	440
Joann	42 A-1	380
Jeanette	8 C-1	210
Doris	32 G-6	210
Stephanie	32 C-12	100
Betty	21 J-2	60
Susanne	56 G-4	Quebec
Alice	FE-P-3	England
Yvonne	FZA-K-1	Africa
Rosemary	FSA-J-1	So. Africa



A big welcome to you gals and greetings to all of the five countries that you represent.

"Don't complain, it's a begining."

TRIBUTE TO A LADY

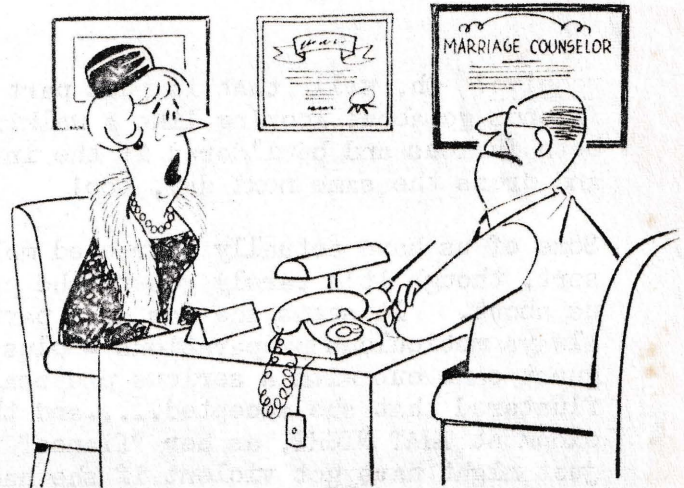
We have many outstanding members in FPE and several who have done a great deal to help in any way they could. But among our membership is one person who in her own way has given a great deal to us all. She lives in the Midwest, is married to a helpful and trying-to-understand-better-type GG. She doesn't earn a lot of money and has to work hard for the income she does receive. She has never asked for anything from FPE or her FP friends, yet she feels that she has received a great deal through belonging to our group. In her way, she wants to "pay back" and has been doing so by donating \$5.00 per month to FPE. She has been doing this for over a year now and we have never had time to thank her for giving so generously to help others. So please know, Cheryl 13 S-7, that we do appreciate your financial help and even more the thoughts and inspiration that you have given. Thank you Cheryl!!

FP STORY ENCLOSED

We had a great idea around Christmas in that Jeri 49 K-3 offered to write a Christmas story for us if we would mail it out. We thought it would be a nice surprise, but time just didn't permit us to follow through. The flu bug didn't help much either. So gals, you will find half of the story enclosed with this issue (postage rates limit us to half) and you will find the conclusion in the next issue of the Forum. We didn't want to waste Jeri's effort, so please consider the story a belated Christmas gift from Jeri and ""all the girls at FPE Headquarters.""

SHELLA IN TV-LAND

Before I forget it again (and get REALLY blasted), there was a very special cake at Kathey's (30 S-6) birthday party for Susanna 3 months ago, with an extremely artistic decoration based on the TVia cover motif. It showed a man's face over-shadowed by a girl's, all in beautiful, living color - Suzy could hardly bear to cut into it! And all courtesy of Kathey's daughter - if the wives-scale can be stretched a bit, a real A-Plus.



"She says I can no longer wear her dresses."

Deanna (20Q-1) sent along a clipping guaranteed to inflame me into some comments. It was a column entitled "Pants Have Got to Go", by Harriet Van Horne. Not, as one might think in this enlightened age, our brother's pants - oh, no, old Hatty is horrified, sickened and filled with forebodings of doom by the GIRLS in pants! It turns out that everybody today is sick in the head except Harriet. She wants to lead a counter-revolution to restore clothes to their "true and proper situation", which means, of course, the one prevailing when SHE was a teen-ager. (I would guess that to have been around 1910) in World's End, Nebraska.) Hereafter, anything Harriet is against, I'm FOR without even reading what it is.....

But, to wring a little good out of evil, she did remind me of one of my favorite day-dreams, which seems almost to be coming true. If we cast forward the present trends in fashions a bit, we can visualize a TV's dream world - or is it? It does seem possible that in about 10 years boys in skirts will be as common as V-W's today - and will we like it? I really don't think so, if they combine



them with long, scraggly beards - or even just a single masculine touch, such as a neat mustache. I'd just as soon wear a sword under my skirt, like Chevalier D'Eon! If the girls are all wearing pants that year, I'll still be doggedly copying them, and the devil take my favorite costumes of 1969! Of course, they might go non-conformist (if girls are capable of such a thing?) and be wearing the whole range of costumes from Honeysuckle Rose to Rosie the Riveter, in which case I'll have to do some close calculations.

The fact is, I'll ALWAYS want to wear whatever the real whistle-bait is wearing, whether it's old Irish lace or vinyl Scuba-suits! That little sentence may cost me half my FP friends, but the other half - the ones who can be honest with themselves - will concede that they, too, want to be ATTRACTIVE in the fullest sense of that word. And then comes the paradox - why do we want to ATTRACT something that we don't in the least want to

"Why didn't we have this FP thing when we were lads?"

receive? Oh, well, that is just part of being a girl; many of my nicest GG friends go about looking like a walking invitation to a seduction, but would be both furious and bewildered if the invitation were taken too seriously..... and dress the same next day, too!

Some of us have actually attracted male attention of an embarrassingly favorable sort, though it's rarely got to the point that Anita (Cover Girl on TVia 9) told us about. It seems she was at a party, and passing VERY well, thanks to her always meticulous preparations - plus a few drinks all around. And then, a male guest came out with a serious proposal of marriage! She was so flattered and flustered that she accepted.....and then had a devil of a time getting out of an elopment THAT NIGHT, as her "fiance" was anxious to get right on with it, and just might have got violent if she had been too truthful. She eloped, all right, out the back door alone - still trembles a little when she tells the story.

Paula 30 P-2 was so impressed after reading her own story in TVia #53 that she took a longer ride dressed than ever before, from up around Albany down to our place and that is about 4 hours. She found a man was following her, and got so bemused wondering what he wanted that she missed her exit and added about 50 miles to the trip. Had he noticed her spectacular appearance in the Thruway restaurant, or was he following up on a dirty look she'd got from the toll-collector? She finally decided his interest was purely professional (he was wearing one of those natty suits New York State issues some of their employees) and drove VERY conservatively and sedately until he lost interest and went away.

On the more general level, the "Get Smart" program hit a new note (I learned third-hand). Smart and his boss were off on a "drag-squad" type of mission, which brought about this dialogue:

Boss: "This certainly is a crummy dress you got me."

Smart: "All the costume she had left was that, a miniskirt, and a girl's bathing suit. Sorry, Chief."

Boss: "Where did you get yours, then? It's quite nice."

Smart: "Oh, this is my own."

Boss: "Smart, are you keeping something from me I should know about?"

It seems that Barbara Feldon (same program) claims her sexy look results from not wearing her glasses. This inspired Erma Brombeck, author of the column "At Wit's End" to try the same trick when her husband took her out to dinner, but she was more confused than seductive and retired to the powder room in some haste. She relates:

"In front of the mirror, I rummaged through my purse, rationalizing that a ball-point pen was longer and thinner than a lipstick. Finally, I heard male voices around me. You'll have to forgive me, fellas,' I said, 'but I have this problem. I'm not myopic, just a little astigmatic.' "I know you people are sick,' snarled a man, 'but they ought to lock you up anyway'."

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So many of you got the tale of MY personal adventures out West for a Christmas card that I'll just mention we had a very nice lunch with the brother of Diana 28 C-1 in Las Vegas, but were not able to get together again during our visit. So we turned to other amusements, and both beat the machines - I put in four nickles and took out five, but Avis did even better. She FOUND a dime, and having learned the system by watching me, put it in and took out two.....So then we left for Los Angeles; I guess we are just not the type of people that Las Vegas was expecting.

We missed the open-house meeting of the Alpha Chapter, but stayed overnight with Lucienne and all went over to see Virginia next morning, along with Gisele and GG who were out from Chicago. Virginia is so happy in her new way of life I could hardly pick a fight with her - not like the old days, when most any topic would do for a battleground.....Alpha had a pretty good turnout, though not all they had hoped for. About 35 psychologists, doctors and teachers showed up, with 10 hostesses; the guests were most interested and enthusiastic.

After a few days at home, I was off again to New Orleans. Sally 43 S-5 drove over, and we had a "work-clothes" meeting with Laurie and Helen, plus Lynne who just happened to be down from Washington. It was a lot of fun and we all admired the pictures of the big Texas party a couple of months before. Also present was what Sally had hoped, was a prospective member, picked up from one of the "underground" magazines. He was nice enough, but totally uninterested in clothes, pictures and everything else that makes a TV light up; he excused himself early and left our lives forever I guess. Sally sadly admitted that ALL such contacts had failed to work out, and she is now convinced that I'm right - the winners come via Chevalier, and short-cuts don't pay.

The Texas party will be written up in TVia, but I'll slip in a brief summary here. "Friday evening, Sally, Laurie, Jennifer, their wives and Heather all gathered for cocktails and dinner, with conversation till nearly 3 A.M. Next afternoon the wives had a private meeting on their side of the problem, while the TVs scouted the motel and were joined by Kay for a business meeting. They went home to dress, then gathered at about



"Next week I get to be the girl."

7 P.M. with Diana and Dee. After that, flash-bulbs popping, two movie cameras AND Dee's video-tape recorder grinding away. After a while, they started trading wigs, so the pictures require QUITE a lot of study! It was a most pleasant evening, and everyone, wives included, had a marvelous time. Next date will probably be in Louisiana during Mardi Gras." Thanks, sally for a fine report.

On the way home, I met Avis in Washington and we stopped in Baltimore for the Rho Chapter party. Let Deanna, their President and faithful reporter, tell the tale: "We held our first, and we hope annual, Christmas party on Dec. 14th, at the home of Deanna and Pat. Guests of honor were the FPE Good Will Ambassadors Sheila and her charming wife Avis. Other guests were Jeanette and Shirley, Irene and Nell, and new chapter member, Robin, making her debut in sparkling silver. After the buffet was served, gifts were exchanged even though it was a little too soon before Christmas for (Mrs.) Santa to arrive. Later the projector was set up and pictures of Rho Chapter activities and of Robin's trip to Casa Susanna were shown. And so shortly after 3 A.M. a very merry Christmas in TV-Land came to a close." And an especially merry one it was for me, to see this group in such fine shape after the many troubles that beset its early history. From a good start as one of the first active FPE groups, it went into eclipse just as Robin was joining, and it's taken THREE YEARS to keep the promise I wrote her then, that I'd be seeing her at a meeting in Baltimore.

Dorothy, the faithful editor of Gamma Goodies, reports on that chapter's activities: "We are beginning to pick up new members from the Connecticut area and one of our objectives is to organize regular meetings in that area so that these members will not have to travel great distances to get together with other TV's. It is a real hardship and we will get to this matter as quickly as we can. Perhaps the Christmas party will represent a good opportunity for us to discuss how to get membership activities going in the Connecticut area. We've been extremely active around Boston and we'd like to see other New England areas enjoy the same kind of activities. A recent interesting bit was accomplished by our own Eloise whose brother is a member of the local barbershoppers. They recently put on their own show and Eloise was the only girl in the show. Betsy's and Dot's brothers gave her full support as she went through 6 or 7 costume changes. She did pantomime walk-on's for songs like "The Girl of My Dreams" and "If YOU Knew Susy". It was a terrific performance and the audience asked Eloise's GG, "Have you ever seen him dressed like that before?" Eloise's GG really shaken up by that one, told Dot, "I see more of him that way than I do of his brother." There's a class AAA GG for you."

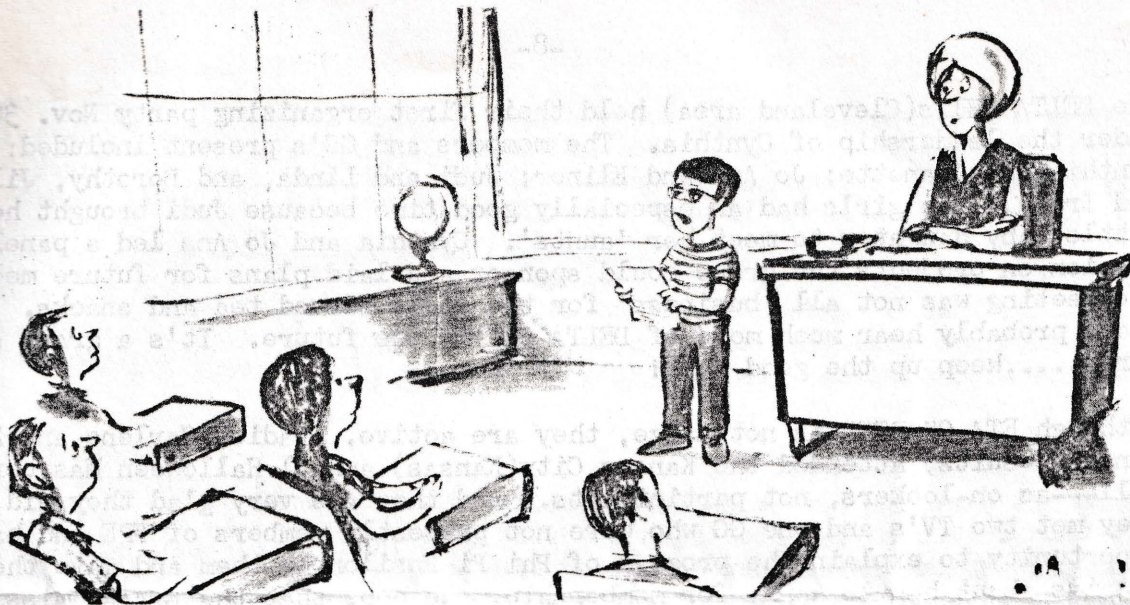


The sick list is too long for words, but my special sympathy to Conny (sciatica), Susanna (bursitis), Dorothy and Sandra (flu). And NO sympathy for the Dodge Boys, whose super-bass voices used to poison my radio listening. They were replaced by a girl with a voice like tearing a fender in half; now SHE'S gone too, before I could check to see whether she was one of the boys who had been altered, either electronically or surgically. Peace, it's wonderful!

And that's 30 from here,

Sheila

"There's an extra nightie if you want to wear it!"



"My daddy has two personalities; one feminine....."

SOCIAL NEWS

Laurels must again go to the dedicated girls of CHI CHAPTER for sponsoring a most successful Christmas Party on Dec. 14th. Members and guests from far and near gathered to share in the festivities. The meeting rooms were jam-packed with 17 FP's, 9 GG's, including one FP mother....and one TV, a 23" RCA color set.....The roll call went something like this: Gisele and Cynthia; Cynthia and Pat; Barbara Lee and Joan; Marryann and Jean; Marie and Vivian; Julie and Darlene; Ellen and Joan; Carla and Cheryl; Marryann's Mother, Irene....and Cheryl (Prs. of Chi), Betty Sue(Sec.-Treas.)' Bertha, Joan, Irene, Mary, Evelyn B., Diane, and Laura. Diane won the award for having traveled the furthest..... from Las Vegas. In addition to renewing old acquaintances, the group welcomed two first-time couples and out-of-town guests. Everyone had a splendiferous time chatting and discussing femme topics interesting to all. A lovely buffet supper had been prepared by Barbara Lee and Joan and their many CHI helpers--to whom all owe a vote of thanks. The highlight of the evening was an anonymous gift exchange. Everyone seemed delighted with their prizes. No femme evening could be complete without a photo session. We were fortunate to have several highly proficient photographers on hand to record the event for our albums. The CHI's are certainly an active, doing group. Wouldn't it be nice if there were many more chapters like this. Thanks girls, for a memorable time!

In the Bay region(San Francisco area) the ever-active ALPHA EPSILON CHAPTER is maintaining their full social calendar with weekly meetings, as well as the more formal monthly meetings and just good fun parties. This year Alpha Epsilon held a Christmas dinner party hostessed by Crystal and her A-1 plus GG, Margie. Those present were: Carole, Jan, Phyllis, Jeanette, Crystal, Erica, Donna, Helen, Irene, and Joan,with staunch GG's, Margie, Martha and Margaret adding their inimitable presence. Guests at the party were: Norma, Kathy, Debbie and Hilda. The dinner featured a delicious roast ham with all of the trimmings and desserts galore. In keeping with the season, the girls drew from a grab-bag of gifts for 'girls-only'. In the midst of the festive mood, the girls managed to make plans for the coming year, including naming a nominating committee for the up-coming chapter elections. The ALPHA EPSILON's really have something good going out there and their example ought to be one all groups, however small, can copy.

The DELTA CHI's (Cleveland area) held their first organizing party Nov. 30th under the leadership of Cynthia. The members and GG's present included: Cynthia and Jeanette; Jo Ann and Elinor; Judi and Linda, and Dorothy, Jill, and Irene. The girls had an especially good time because Judi brought her little baby daughter to meet her 'aunts'. Cynthia and Jo Ann led a panel discussion on projects the group could sponsor and laid plans for future meetings. The meeting was not all 'business' for the girls served tea and snacks. We shall probably hear much more of DELTA CHI in the future. It's a grand start, girls.....keep up the good work!

Although ETA CHAPTER is not large, they are active. Nadie, Carlene and Edith (in pant-suits) attended the Kansas City (Kansas) annual Halloween Masquerade Ball---as on-lookers, not participants. And they are very glad they did, for they met two TV's and one GG who were not presently members of FPE and had the opportunity to explain the program of Phi Pi Epsilon to them and gave them the details about how to apply for membership. We hope that the ETA's 'missionary work' will be successful.

For Femme Forum readers who read about active groups and wish that they could get something as interesting started in their neighborhood, the first essential is to write to HQ and volunteer to help establish a local chapter. Virginia will forward your letter to your nearest regional representative and she will contact you. Then lend your whole-hearted support and soon you too will have a fuller social life.

Laura 35 S-2

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LITERARY GUIDE - By Jeri 49 K-3

Your literary editor this time must report a distinct drought in the number of noteworthy literary items. Based on some of the things I've included, in the past, you can see how slim the pickings have been.) Would that I too were that slim.)

Two items worthy of mention (and one of them well worth the price): The Bride of Abydos by John Barry is an English spy thriller, cast somewhat in the Len Deighton mode with a rather negative hero. The plot involves the simultaneous efforts on the parts of MI-5 or -6, the CIA, the KGB, and whoever the ChiComs have in the field, plus several free-lance agents and the hero (representing a ban-the-bomb group), to try and locate a poor fisherman who, as a result of bomb test fallout, has reversed sex and is now pregnant. The action is set in South East Asia, involving a kaleidoscope of scenes from pervert bars to "kink" brothels to a traveling freak show. The word "transvestite" appears with a frequency of about 1.7 times per page, although I wouldn't call it a TV story. The biggest problem seems to be determining who is what, when and or where, with the payoff question being why? and how? If that summary seems vague and confused to you, then I have successfully communicated my general impression. Check your local library under "Thrillers", but don't send money.



"Do all dad's dress up to do the dishes?"

A recent sample from the friendly neighborhood dirty-book store is a purported autobiography from a transexual, under the God-awful title of :Take My Tool by Vivian Manus. Having read most of the medical literature, including the how-to-do-it diagrams(if you missed those, there's a set of about 20 drawings in the January, 1968 Journal of Gynecology, Obstetrics and Surgery), I was puzzled by two things: first, the writer dwells so longingly, or lovingly on his/her HO experiences, pre-switch, that one wonders why he bothered. Secondly, the last two chapters are very early in the form of a sermon, advising everyone who has even thought about it, to run out to your friendly, neighborhood sex-change clinic.

CONTACTING OTHERS

A word or two should be said about contacting other FP's. It seems that there is some confusion along these lines which we hope to clear up. First of all, we hope that you will all feel free to use "Contact" via Chevalier Publications. This vehicle has been created for your use and is available to every FPE member. As far as new members are concerned, they are given the address of the interviewer and expected to write to their interviewer so arrangements can be made to conduct the final interview, which must be done before a new member can meet other FPE members. For those who wish to remain anonymous, they may do so by not contacting their interviewer. However, it should be stressed that no actual name or home address need be given but only a mailing address and femme name is necessary. Now, for those who have been around for a while and had no one to contact but find that an interviewer has been appointed in their area, they can certainly write via "Contact" and introduce themselves to the interviewer. For those who are geographically by themselves and do not have an interviewer, it is alright to write Virginia or Fran and ask who we would recommend they write to. We are glad to suggest someone and if that contact shouldn't work out, we will be happy to continue to help until you find someone who will want to correspond. BUT, the main rule to remember is for the members to take some initiative themselves, use CONTACT, or ask for help rather than just sit around and gripe that no one cares!!! The other rule to remember is to stay away from any type of Correspondence Club, because they have all proved to turn up nothing worthwhile and only cause lots and lots of trouble!

MEMBERSHIP CARDS AND ANNUAL DUES

For those of you who were kind enough to pay your annual FPE dues so promptly, you will find your membership card enclosed for 1969. Please consider this card your receipt for dues paid. Thank you so much for your response. For those of you who have not yet paid your 1969 dues, you will find your second and last dues billing enclosed with this issue. We will appreciate your attention to this important matter! Please remember that according to our By-Laws, you will be removed from the mailing list after two notices have been sent concerning dues. So this issue will be your last unless you act quickly. Thank you all for your cooperation in this dues business and for your continued support of Phi Pi Epsilon!

That's about it from the FPE office for this time gals, Sorry we were a bit late in getting this one out to you, but a big construction job in the home that houses the FPE office has delayed us quite a lot. With workmen running all over the place, it hasn't been easy to keep up with them and you too. In fact, one day I happened to notice a carpenter doing some figuring on the back of an issue of the Forum. With that little goodie, I decided to lock things up during their stay. Well, perhaps we will have him as a member before too long. So forgive us.....for sometimes we know not what we are doing!!!

Femininely,

Fran 49 C-1

Unto You, A child..."

It was announced by the choir director, Mr. Pottinger, that we would present our Christmas Oratorio on the last day before the recess for the Winter holidays. The reason, he pointed out, was very simple: parents would normally be coming to the academy that day to take their sons home, and that way the maximum attendance could be expected. He didn't say, although it was common enough knowledge, that this would also insure that these same parents would then hopefully be impressed further with the quality of Drexter Military Academy, thus justifying the exorbitant tuition.

From what I could gather from my classmates, the latter point wasn't an issue with most of their parents; Drexter was simply a high-class baby-sitting agency, whose cost was to be borne because it kept children out of the way. This would be the real reason for not unduly straining schedules by presenting the oratorio on the last day. The reason I bring this up is to give some idea of the kind of school Drexter was, and the situation most of us were in--the students, that is. Most of us saw our parents only four weeks a year: two weeks at Christmas time, two weeks in mid-summer. Anyway, this has to do with something else entirely: the Christmas Oratorio.

Most years, there was some kind of Christmas program--we might have a pageant of some sort; Colonel winters, our headmaster, would dress up like Santa Claus and give away some crummy candy (guaranteed to ruin your vacation by sending you to the dentist after one bite), and we'd sing some Christmas carols, and gratefully leave. But there has been a change going on at Drexter the last few years (I'm a veteran of sorts; I've been a student here since I was seven, five years now). The main thing is that everything has gotten fancier, showier, bigger (at least in name). One of these is the enlargement of the "Fine Arts" Department. Same cruddy thing as before, just a fancier name for teaching everybody to sing, and play an instrument, and learn how to look at pictures somebody painted a long time ago.

So, like I said, this year the Christmas program was going to be what Mr. Pottinger called an "oratorio." Another big word meaning a Christmas play with singing. But bigger, fancier, showier (at least in name).

The day he announced all this, he assigned all the roles, and was passing out copies of the score. He had written the whole thing himself (although some of the older kids claimed he'd stolen a lot of it from one place or another). Mr. Pottinger was the youngest of our teachers, had very thick black-rimmed glasses and was alright, except he was very, very serious. Anyway, he started reading off names, first the "shepherds"; then the wise men, an angel (a few whistles at this; the kid who was appointed as an angel said, "But I'm Jewish." and Mr. Pottinger said, "So was the angel." That's the kind of guy he was.).... let's see-----the angel, and then the inn-keeper and his wife (boy! did that get some laughs as the "wife" started winking his eyes at everybody), then Joseph and finally Mary. Not so much laughter this time--a lot of the guys are Catholic and they didn't know if they ought to laugh at the thought of a boy playing the Virgin or not. I was just as glad--under the circumstances. In case you didn't guess, I got the role; not surprisingly.

Let me explain why I was not surprised (but I don't think I was necessarily pleased, you understand.) First of all, like many other boys at the school, I still had a soprano voice that had not yet begun to break, as was the case with several of the others. Secondly, I was a little smaller (but not much) than the others. Thirdly, my constant cause of misery at the school was my face--I didn't think so, but everybody else thought I looked like a girl. And, as the choir director told me, I was the logical choice.

The plan was to rehearse each day for an hour, with additional time to be given to the principals. It was during the additional time period when I was being coached through one of the songs that the director told me that Mrs. Winters, the headmaster's wife, was waiting to help me with my costume.

Oh, yes. The oratorio was quite elaborate; although long bathrobes quite sufficed for shepherds, wisemen, and so on, the star was to be given something special. So, at an appointed time, I presented myself to Mrs. Winter. I can't say I was particularly pleased with what she had in mind. But I also should point out that I hadn't any say in the matter, either. It was kind of like an order that I cooperate fully or else in the best military tradition I would be marched out at sunrise and shot. (I do have a vivid imagination, don't I?) Still, I want to point out that I went along only because I didn't have any choice. You see, the problem was that Mrs. Winter had a rather vivid imagination too, and her idea of the proper costume was not along the lines of a long bathrobe. She showed me a painting that had the costume she had in mind. While it was very nice, in the painting, it also certainly stood out in comparison with the others. She announced that that was what I would be wearing, measured me from head to foot, and told me to come back in a few days. When I went back, she showed me a long gown of blue and white satin that was a perfect copy of the painting, along with a headpiece that covered my hair. And she insisted I try it on.

I was a little uncertain about appearing before her wearing only my underwear, but she told me, rather sternly, to cease all foolishness--so I meekly stood still while she fussed around with the gown. After she had made a few alterations, by pinning it here and there, she decided it was alright, but she wanted Mr. Pottinger's approval. So I waited while she called him, and stood there like an idiot, wearing the gown and headpiece, while he pursed his lips and nodded his head up and down. "Mrs. Winter, I think it's simply lovely. Perfect." (You must understand he was talking to his boss's wife.)

"One thing I'm not sure of," said Mrs. Winter. "Do you think he should have a bosom?"

Mr. Pottinger pursed his lips some more, and finally said, "Perhaps a modest fullness?"

"My thoughts exactly," she replied.

WELL, that changed everything. I mean, a costume was a costume, right? So there's no problem there, but I knew that I was going to really catch it from my classmates if I showed up wearing the gown plus whatever "a certain fullness" was. Not only that, but before they were done, they decided I should wear long white stockings in the slippers I was to wear on my feet. And all of this meant that I had to stand still for wearing a suspender belt to hold up the stockings plus a brassiere that Mrs. Winter provided for me.

They both approved of the final effect--and I have to admit, I looked like the picture Mrs. Winter was using as a guide--but I wanted no part of taking the costume back to the dormitories.

Both of them agreed that the costume would be safer left in Mrs. Winter's care for the time being, so I was spared that problem, that is, I was spared until they decided to have a dress rehearsal two days before the end of the term. Not only did I have to put on the costume, I had to stand still while Mrs. Winter made up my face. The other guys were lucky--they all got crepe-hair beards glued on them, but not me. The only thing that helped was the "innkeepers wife" who was dressed a little more extremely than I was, and ran around like a nut until Mr. Pottinger told him to stop. He thought it was all great fun and so, most of the kidding that went on was pretty good-natured.

Well, it finally was time for the big performance. Nearly everybody's parents were there--even my mother, who usually simply sent a car for me. I must say, that really surprised me--and to be honest--made me very happy. The knowledge that she was actually in the audience made me want to do the best I could; for the first time in my life, I was absolutely sure that she would notice me, at least for the time I was on stage, and I wanted to be sure she would remember it, if there was any way I could.

If I do say so, the whole affair was a very big success. Everything went smoothly, nearly everybody got all their lines right, and the singing surprised everybody. I sang like an angel.

Really, that's what everybody kept telling me afterward, as all the parents came up to congratulate their children. It's nice to be the center of attention--under those circumstances, I mean, where everybody approves of something you've just done, and I was floating on a cloud. I found myself in a group of people consisting of Mr. Pottinger who was smiling foolishly(why not? He had scored pretty big on his production.), Col. Winter who was smiling benignly(why not? He had impressed his clients--the people who paid the tuition.), Mrs. Winter, who smiled because she was the Colonel's wife--and my mother, who was smiling at me!! Not only that, but she had her arm around me, and was holding me very close to her side, while she talked with everybody, and to me. I can't tell you how happy I was.

But while we were standing there, Mr. Pottinger was saying over and over again how he had never coached such a fine voice, and Colonel Winter was saying what a credit I was to his crummy school, and Mother was asking Mrs. Winter about the costume. Mrs. Winter modestly admitted she was to blame, and Mother said, "But it's perfectly beautiful. You should be proud of yourself--" and all that sort of thing. Then Mother wanted to know if it would be possible to take it with us when we left, because she wanted to get me photographed in it, and Mrs. Winter said, "Of course....."

Well, I was still so excited at the unusual treatment that I didn't see what was happening. Not then, and not for another day, but I could have guessed. I should have guessed when she suddenly said, "My goodness, I didn't realize it was so late! We must fly!" and she bid the Colonel and company goodbye, telling me not to bother changing, that my trunk was already in the car she had rented, that the driver was waiting, and that there was no reason to delay our departure any further. And so, I rode all the way home, wearing the costume.

The ride home--if I had been happy before, I was delirious now. We got in the back seat, Mother told the driver to start, and she pulled the curtains across the partition between the seats, and we rode together, side by side for five hours, closer than we had ever been in my life.

I should explain something here, although I don't quite know how. My father had died when I was very small--I don't remember him, although his pictures were all over our house. I don't know if things would have been different, but even when I was very small, my mother was not very demonstrative toward me. She dealt with me very matter-of-factly, and while she didn't make me feel unwanted--she was never cruel to me--she also didn't make me feel very wanted. By the time I was twelve, I pretty much accepted this. For a long time, I thought that was the way people acted--I was embarrassed for the kids whose parents hung all over them, you know, the way some parents do. But then, I didn't know what I was missing. Not until that ride home.

Mother didn't let go of me the whole way, and at any given moment, one or the other of us was crying about some silly thing. The one thing I remember more than anything else was her saying, "I have so much to make up to you!" I wasn't sure what she meant, but I was pretty sure whatever it was, I was going to like it a great deal.

We arrived home, finally; Mother dismissed the driver, and we went in. Olive, our housekeeper and cook, wasn't there, and Mother took me out into the kitchen, made me a light snack, and sat, holding on to my arm while I ate, even though I was really too excited. Since it was pretty late by this time, I went up to get ready for bed, with Mother with me the whole time, although she left the room while I undressed. But she came back in the room, turned the light out, and sat on the edge of the bed for a while, not saying anything, just sitting there, looking down at me. I don't know when she left, because in a surprisingly short time, the excited feeling slipped away, along with everything else.

But I still had the same feeling the next morning when I awoke, and I excitedly dressed in a pair of slacks and a shirt, and I literally ran down the hall to my mother's room, to wake her up. I was anxious to see what this new day--this whole new way of life--was going to bring. I shook her by the shoulder, whispered "Good Moring!" as she opened her eyes, and watched her expectantly.

She looked at me a moment, then closed her eyes again, not saying anything.

"Mother?" I asked.

"Yes." she said flatly. "Why don't you go downstairs and ask Olive to get you some breakfast." She opened her eyes again, looking at me, and I could almost see a screen or shutter drop over her gaze. "Run along."

Yes. I ran, ran back to my room, feeling--I don't know what--I only knew that there was something terribly wrong. I couldn't figure it out, but just stood for a while, my head against the cold glass of my window, looking out on space, while I tried to understand what had happened. All I knew was that nothing had changed. I wanted to simply shrivel up and die, but after a little bit, I discovered that the sharp pain in my chest had been replaced by an even sharper pain in my stomach. Being twelve years old, hunger took precedence over the other things--for the moment at least.

Old Olive was our housekeeper and cook. I call her old, but she really wasn't very old. She had been with the family since my mother was a little girl, and while she herself must have been young once, I never knew her to change in any way, but always stayed the same age.

"Welcome home, Chris!" she greeted me with a hug, like always. "I'll bet you're hungry."

"Yeah, I guess so." I said.

"You don't sound very excited about it--and don't shrug like that. You always shrug when someone is talking to you. There! you did it again."

I didn't say anything, but just sat down. Olive gave me a plate and I started eating while she talked to me some more. "Say!" she said, "I hear you had quite a big affair up at your school yesterday."

"Yeah? How'd you know?"

"Your mother--it was all she could talk about all week long--about how she wanted to see you in the play or whatever it was."

"Really? She said that?"

"Yes. Didn't she say anything to you about it?"

"Yeah." I sighed. "But this morning she didn't seem so excited."

"Oh?" Olive considered this information, then muttered something like "I guess that figures."

"What's that?"

"Oh, nothing. Just thinking out loud." She changed the subject then and wouldn't say another word.

A short while later my mother came down and had her own breakfast. We didn't talk to each other, but Mother started telling Olive about the oratorio the day before, and in only a few minutes, she was almost as excited as she had been when we came home. "Olive, you wouldn't believe how sweet he looked!" she said. "You really have to see it to believe it!"

"From what you say, I'd like to." Olive declared.

"Well, Chris did bring the costume home with him--listen--" she turned to me---"why don't you run up and put it on, so Olive can see you."

I wasn't all that eager, but she asked me again, and I could see Olive nodding her head, so I went up to my room, and after a few minutes struggle, managed to put it all on again, except for the makeup. As I came into the kitchen, the skirts of the gown making a swishing sound, Mother got up from her place and took me by the arm. "You see?" she said to Olive. "What did I say? Tell me, isn't that a real sight?"

Olive was wringing her hands in front of her chest and making little bubbling sounds of approval. Well, that's what it sounded like. Both of them pawed all over me for the next few minutes until Mother said, "Best of all, you should hear him sing! Come, we'll go into the library and I'll play the piano and Chris can show you how well he does."

She excitedly herded us into the library. I was surprised to hear her play the music from the oratorio (so maybe it wasn't original--and anyway, Mother is an accomplished musician, so maybe she remembered it that well). Anyway, I sang for a few minutes, until the telephone rang, and Olive left to answer it, coming back to tell my mother she was wanted. She gave me a quick squeeze before she left.

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"Your mother--it was all she could talk about all week long--about how she wanted to see you in the play or whatever it was."

"Really? She said that?"
"Yeah. I didn't say anything to you about it?"
"Yeah," I sighed. "But this morning she didn't seem so excited."

"Oh?" Olive considered this information, then muttered something like "I guess it's funny."
"What's that?"
"Oh, nothing. Just thinking out loud." She changed the subject then and wouldn't say another word.

A short while later my mother came down and had her own breakfast. We didn't talk to each other, but mother started telling Olive about the orchestra the day before, and in only a few minutes, she was almost as excited as she had been when we came home. "Olive, you wouldn't believe how much he looked!" she said. "You really have to see it to believe it!"

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"Well, Chris did bring the costume home with him--I'll see--" she turned to me--"why don't you run up and put it on, so Olive can see you."

I wasn't all that eager, but she asked me again, and I could see Olive nodding her head, so I went up to my room, and after a few minutes struggle, managed to put it all on again, except for the shoes. As I came into the library, the girls at the table all got up and Mother got up from her place and for a moment, "You look like Olive," she said. "That's what I say! Tell me, isn't that a real sight?"

Olive was wiping her hands in front of her chest and making little bubbling sounds of approval. "Well, that's what it sounds like. Both of them patted all over me for the next few minutes until Mother said, "That of all, you should hear him sing! Come, we'll go into the library and I'll play the piano and Chris can show you how well he does."

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