

Twice more in the middle of the night, Roy Stevens and Don King talked by phone about the best way to get the couple from the Rochester airport to Alfred University. King came away with the impression that Eileen and Roy would be most at ease having two students from Sayville meet their plane and drive them to campus. Roy thought the students, two girls who knew Chuck, would be accompanied by a university representative—or at least be in a university car. Clearly, Roy and the dean had a misunderstanding—understandable given the late hour and the inherent stress. King insists that he was not insensitive to the couple's needs. The result was that two grieving, sleep-deprived girls met the Stevenses in the only transportation available to college kids on short notice: a clunker.

The conditions of their ride distressed Eileen. After the sad-eyed girls met them, Roy had to get both gas and oil before they could even reach their destination. Worse, the car's smoking condition caused a policeman to pull them over. The officer let them go undisturbed, but the incident only heightened the tension in Eileen.

Like every parent, Eileen had sent her son to college to help him prosper. Perhaps because she had been unable to attend college herself, she wanted to make certain that Chuck and her other children did. She respected people with an education. During her meeting with King, she would be intimidated by his title and stultified by the attractive campus. She had dreamed lofty dreams for her children. Why shouldn't her first-born succeed at college? Chuck had won science awards and belonged to the honor society in high school. His prospects were excellent. "Make that dean's list and get all you can out of college," she once wrote him. "It's an experience you'll never regret, and life holds good things for you."

Each stage of Chuck's growth, every achievement, had signified something larger in her mind. Chuck was independent. He had his own paper route and took on a second during a friend's vacation. He regularly woke up without prompting to ride his bicycle to six A.M. Mass. This kid of hers had ambition, she boasted to his doting grandparents.

Once he returned home from serving as an altar boy at a funeral Mass talking nonstop about the woman he had seen before the undertaker closed the lid. "Her name was Angelina," he said.

"How old was she?" asked Eileen.

"Not so old. Her children cried so hard."

Neither Roy nor Eileen knew the woman, but Chuck brought her to the dining table with him. He cared for people, and he wanted his parents to care too.

A tall, striking man whose hair turned prematurely white in his twenties, Roy Stevens was considered the ideal father by all Chuck's friends. He had worked his way through school, and he thought that having part-time jobs would strengthen his stepson's character. Eileen always referred to Roy as the love of her life. One of Chuck's friends who comes from a broken home says that Roy and Eileen have "the ideal marriage."

Nonetheless, immediately following Chuck's death, Roy went through a period of self-recrimination. He worked fewer Saturdays and became more demonstrative with his children. Having learned that opportunity can be snatched away in a heartbeat, he made saying "I love you" to Suzanne when he left for work a matter of routine. He remembered a time when Chuck had wanted to attend a basketball camp for high-school players. He was a good athlete, but not the natural his younger brother Scott was. Chuck was all hustle and push on the Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) teams he joined; Scott had finesse, grace, and a natural shooting touch. Chuck thought the camp might polish his skills and give him a chance to make a college team. To Roy's everlasting sorrow, he told the boy that he couldn't send him. It didn't help Roy's troubled mind that his family was living paycheck to paycheck back then; whenever the family got a few dollars ahead it was time to pay parochial school tuition.

One of the things he told himself on the long night before they left for Alfred was "I should have scraped that money together and done it somehow."

A sorority woman present at the party with Scott Sullivan coincidentally hailed from Sayville. She phoned her mother to tell her Chuck was dead. The mother called the Vollmers, neighbors of the Stevenses' who doted on Chuck. "You wished he was your boy," says Bob Vollmer. "That's what kind of boy he was." The Vollmers' son Billy, a gentle grizzly, was Chuck's lifelong friend.

As children, the two boys counted on Mr. Vollmer to be their playmate. In winter he hauled out a garden hose and made the boys a hockey rink. In summer he and his wife took them to camp at Moose River, a wild area in northwestern New York state. Chuck begged Roy and Eileen, unsuccessfully, to go there with him. Roy was too busy at the factory; Eileen was terrified of whatever unknown creepy crawlers skulked in the woods. Her idea of seeing wildlife in the flesh was a rugged trip to the Bronx Zoo.

Sometime in the middle of the night, after a police photographer took shots of Chuck's pale, naked body, the undertaker drove the corpse to Cuba Memorial Hospital for an autopsy. The next afternoon, Roy and Eileen Stevens sat grim-faced at the hospital.

The waiting room was tiny, equipped with only seven red chairs for visitors and illuminated by a gold lamp. A rendering of carousel horses by an artist named O'Grady hung on one wall. On another wall was an architect's idyllic vision of the hospital. Stacks of magazines and copies of the *Cuba Patriot* lay untouched on an endtable. Through the window the couple could see a stand of pine trees and a parking lot with a few snow-topped cars belonging to physicians. Down the hall a few paces were a water fountain, an old-fashioned wooden telephone booth, a meditation room, and, somewhere unseen, the morgue where Chuck now lay—minus vital tissues and fluids that Randy Belmont would soon drive to a Buffalo laboratory for analysis.

Eileen paced like a lioness deprived of her cub. Again and again she asked the head nurse if she could see Chuck. Again and again she was rebuffed. She listened idly to the voice of a switchboard operator. Once again she approached the nurse on duty, Debbie Hamilton, to insist—not to ask—that she be allowed to see her son. Hamilton left, and in a short time an odd little man with a grumpy manner ushered the Stevenses into the tiny but soothing meditation room. He introduced himself as Dr. Paul der Kolisch, a pathologist. He said that he had assisted the coroner, Dr. Irwin Felsen, on Chuck's autopsy. Kolisch, in his early sixties, had little hair on top. What remained grew long and wild. He had the sideburns of a Civil War general; wiry black hairs sprouted from his cheeks. With his thick glasses he could pass for the mad scientist in a Saturday morning cartoon.

He warned them that this was not a pleasant thing they were about to see and put his hand on Eileen's arm to steady her. He told them about the unbelievable amount of fluid in Chuck's body. The immediate cause of death was "diffuse pulmonary edema" as a consequence of "acute alcohol intoxication." In laymen's terms, Chuck's vital organs had drowned in all that liquor. The pathologist talked tough yet was anything but hardened. Eileen says, "He was gruff, but he was decent to me—the only one who was that whole trip to Alfred." The pathologist also explained the extent of the damage that had been done to the body in the morgue. He never does a partial "post" because he doesn't want to explain why he did only half the job to some prosecuting attorney in court. "When I get a drunk on the table, I don't fuck around," the pathologist snaps. "I take a piece of the brain." He adds, "I knew these people were devastated. . . . What this woman cannot face and what is probably churning around in her guts is the way she brought up this kid that he would accept this horseshit. . . . This is what bothers me. That people will ask to be let in to a fraternity, much less permit themselves to be abused. . . . You almost want them to climb back into the uterus and tie them to the placenta."

Eileen was unyielding. She wanted to see Chuck. Dr. Kolisch "filibustered" while some hospital aides tidied the body up. As they sat there, Eileen says, the physician told her that what had been done to her son was "manslaughter."

"Obviously a crime had been committed," the pathologist recalls. "A white-collar crime."

Dr. Kolisch and the head nurse escorted Eileen to the morgue. The nurse talked quickly, trying to dissuade her.

Eileen had a sudden fear. She grabbed Roy's arm. "Promise me something," she said.

"What?"

"Promise me on your life that if I faint we won't leave until I see Chuck."

"Eileen—"

"Promise me."

"Yes."

The doctor led the way. She took no notice of the half-dozen aides in green gowns, the tiled walls, the bottles on shelves, the hoses, and a sink—all in a room no bigger than sixteen-by-twenty feet. How she made it to the side of the metal gurney without collapsing she'll never know.

The aides had cleaned Chuck up as best they could. Nonetheless, despite the sheet that covered him, she knew that his whole body had been violated. The room was cold. She shivered. Eileen took her son's limp hand. She had to visualize his blue eyes. The lids were closed forever.

"I love you, Chuck," she said. She kissed him on the mouth and said a prayer. The nurse broke down and sobbed.

Roy stood by, ready to do whatever he had to do.

Receiving the news that your son is dead, over the phone in the middle of the night, is clearly one of life's worst blows. Almost as bad is having to make such a call to a parent. After phoning the university's public relations head to give him what scraps of information he knew, Don King left the Klan house sometime after twelve-thirty A.M. on February 25. From there, he took a short drive along Main Street to his office in the administration building to look up the home telephone numbers of the dead youth and the two stricken pledges.

King says that the whole affair was an ordeal for him. He feels he became a scapegoat. "I happen to be a very sensitive individual," he says. "For me to have to get on the phone and call a mother to tell her that she lost a son . . . is not anything that anybody wants to do or wants to be put in a position to do. Once [I did] that it was a natural progression that she blamed me for it happening."

King has severe critics at Alfred University, but no one charges that he is an unfeeling man. Gary Horowitz, now Alfred's director of alumni/parent relations and occasionally one of King's critics, tells a story about an injured football player. King not only called the boy daily but also helped him graduate on time by getting his assignments. The player, says Horowitz, thinks there isn't a nicer guy on this earth than King. "You hear time after time about the willingness of Don King to be there," concludes Horowitz. "He cares about the kids. He grieves when something happens, he really does. The guy is not a dispassionate person by any means."

Much of the criticism directed at King centered on his inability—and that of the Alfred administration, including President Rose—to deal with the Klan Alpine tragedy from a public relations standpoint. “Everybody on campus said that,” says Horowitz. “The first rule of public relations is that you tell everything—everything.” After phoning the Pennsylvania family of one stricken Klan pledge, King never followed-up, according to a letter the boy’s father wrote Eileen. The Stevenses too charge King with being insensitive in their time of sorrow. If he had bent over backwards to help her in the days and months following Chuck’s death, Eileen says, she would never have sued the university.

“I doubt that,” retorts King. He says that from his very first conversation with Eileen Stevens, he had the perception that she planned to sue.

Don King is at his best with good students and loyal employees. With them he is good-humored, solicitous, and warm. He shows a different side under pressure—not a bad side, but irksome, perturbable. During an interview, he’s his affable and charming self, but ask him the wrong question and his normally steady gaze starts to shift. His eyes dart, and he appears uncomfortable. When he considers a question too personal or impertinent, he can give “that look,” as Ron Sember, a former Klan Alpine president, calls it.

King’s eyes maintain contact when he discusses the Stenzel death. The pain and misery in his expressive face appear to be genuine. Accusatory letters, three hundred of them, that he received after Chuck’s death had a devastating effect on his wife, children, and secretary, as well as on him.

King feels at ease with the Greeks because he is one of them. He talks with affection about his days as a fraternity president at Morris Harvey College (now the University of Charleston) in West Virginia and credits that office with helping him overcome shyness and self-doubt to get him where he is today.

King’s fraternity was the Gamma Mu chapter of Alpha Sigma Phi—one of the most tradition-loving of traditional fraternities. The Morris Harvey group received its national charter on April 2, 1960. Founded at Yale University in 1845, Alpha Sigma Phi is one of the older fraternities. Its rolls number celebrity alumni such as television weatherman Willard Scott and actor Vincent Price.

A mystic ritual, in which all members—presumably including King—had to participate came to light in 1985. Fiery residue from a lit bowl placed on a coffin seeped onto a nineteen-year-old member. Martin Badrov, an Illinois Institute of Technology student, suffered severe burns to his arm, leg, chest, neck, and face during the ceremony, which members called the “flambeau.”

Nothing quite that controversial occurred during King’s days as a pledge and member. In the spring of 1963, Alpha Sigma Phi gave bids to forty-two of fifty-nine men seeking admission to the Gamma Mu chapter, including King. “So what if you have to get up at 6:30 for an early-morning coat-and-tie breakfast?” said a taunting blurb in the school newspaper.

"Well, just wait a week or so, pledge. You'll be lucky to get in bed that early. And smile when I say that."

During King's pledge period, Alpha Sigma Phi was involved in a flap. A sorority member blasted the group in the student paper for holding "an unchaperoned, banned playing-band dance" in violation of rules set by the Interfraternity Council (the fraternity governing body whose president at the time was an Alpha Sig). "It seems that the Alpha Sigma Phi fraternity is a little unethical, might we say?" wrote Sandra McKenzie. "Just as surely as birds of a feather flock together, so do unethical people."

One indication of the severity of King's pledge period is that only thirty-one of forty-two men made it to the traditional ceremony held at St. Matthew's Parish House on May 12, 1963, at two P.M. King and his fellow initiates were given an official Alpha Sig pen and the fraternity flower, a talisman rose.

Hazing was regarded as a problem at Morris Harvey College. Student antics caused locals to give the school the nickname of Harvey High. One administrator—Director of Freshman Admission W. J. Briggs, Jr.—wrote an editorial for the school paper (while Don King was a student) to attack the custom:

The time is long overdue for the fraternities to discontinue the ancient role of serfdom for their little brothers. There is no doubt that the wide-eyed neophyte doesn't realize what an ogre the bright-eyed, hand-shaking, back-slapping, tooth-smiling brother can become after [the pledge] has signed his pledge card.

The role of the fraternity member is to aid his little brother, not to break down his health (both mental and physical) and . . . lower his academic achievement no matter for how short a time. I realize fully that the fraternities have a difficult time policing their own brothers; there are sadists in all groups, but I also realize that if the tactics of the group were reported to the national officers, they would all be placed on suspension . . .

If I were a college freshman, I would think more than once before signing a pledge to any social organization under the guise of a brotherhood organization founded for friendship that would force me to be subjected to public humiliating treatment and abuse, and subject to terms that would affect my academic average and in fact endanger the very reason for which I enrolled—a college education.

So let's get with it, Morris Harvey College fraternities. Let's get on the band wagon and march toward our real goals—Brotherhood—Scholarship—Friendship.

* * *

On December 15, 1964, Don King was elected president of Alpha Sigma Phi. On a positive note, under his direction, his chapter announced in May that it had modified its pledge program to eliminate hazing and had substituted "Help Week" for Hell Week. A photograph accompanying the school paper's article, however, contradicted that announcement. It depicted Alpha Sigma Phi's pledges standing at attention in a lineup. The photograph buttresses Eileen Stevens's contention that King is against only hazing that meets his personal definition. What distresses her is that even today he quibbles that Chuck did not die by hazing because the death occurred at Tapping Night, which was only an entrance into pledging.

That argument might satisfy King's conscience, but it wouldn't satisfy the Fraternity Executives Association, an organization of national fraternity heads. That group defines hazing as "any action taken or situation created, intentionally, whether on or off fraternity premises, to produce mental or physical discomfort, embarrassment, harassment, or ridicule. Such activities and situations include paddling in any form; creation of excessive fatigue; physical and psychological shocks; quests, treasure hunts, scavenger hunts, road trips, or any other activities carried on outside the confines of the house; wearing, publicly, apparel which is conspicuous and not normally in good taste; engaging in public stunts and buffoonery; morally degrading or humiliating games and activities; late work sessions which interfere with scholastic activities; and any other activities which are not consistent with fraternal law, ritual, or policy or the regulations and policies of the educational institution." According to this definition, Chuck experienced hazing from Klan Alpine when his big brother played a mind game on him in the dorm room, when he was given a bottle of booze with the implied or stated expectation that he should drink it, when he was put in a trunk, and when he was expected to partake in drinking games.

Since Klan Alpine is a local fraternity—meaning that it is not one of the fifty-nine member fraternities in the National Interfraternity Conference (NIC)—unless King, or the university, accepts a broader definition of hazing, Eileen Stevens insists, there is nothing to prevent another death from occurring on some future first night of Alfred pledging. Ironically, according to Eileen, Alpha Sigma Phi is and has been tough on hazing perpetrators. Many national fraternity executives regularly and strictly enforce their organizations' policies against hazing. Local fraternities have no such executive intervention.

King, well-intentioned though he may be, perhaps still sympathizes with the traditions he took part in as a pledge and brother. He doesn't think paddles should be outlawed and disagrees with educators who have said paddles can't be sold in bookstores because they represent beatings. "Paddles can be explained because it's part of the tradition, part of the mystique of fraternity life," says King. "It's a symbol." He does not specify what meaning that symbol has for him.

King was a fraternity man at a time when doing awful things to pledges wasn't thought of as hazing. "We just thought it was part of tradition," he says. "I had never heard of anyone getting hurt. We used to

get paddled and do stupid things—nothing of a malicious intent.” His chapter “kidnapped” pledges and dropped them off in isolated areas of West Virginia. They poured unpleasant things all over initiates, sent them on scavenger hunts, deprived them of sleep, and, in general, treated them like plebes. “Some of it was degrading, but we didn’t relate to it as degrading,” says King.

The Stenzel death made headlines in New York state from Buffalo to Long Island. The initial headlines saddened Eileen and Roy because they felt Chuck was made to look entirely at fault for his own death. They blame King because he told the *New York Times* and other papers that the youth’s death “was not a hazing” when he was interviewed less than twenty-four hours after the event. Roy and Eileen feel that King’s comments put the burden of responsibility on their dead son. “Of course there is the question of peer pressure,” King told the *Times*. “There was extensive drinking. . . . It is an unfortunate tragedy and one that is difficult to justify. . . . But certainly these things do occur when people get together drinking at these kinds of affairs.”

It is not uncommon for administrators to downplay the incident after a hazing death. A spokesman for American International College in Springfield, Massachusetts, made the same claim after James E. (Jay) Lenaghan, Jr., died in February 1984. Dean of Students Blaine Stevens (no relation to Roy Stevens) said that early indications were that Jay had choked on his own vomit after drinking alcohol during a pledge dinner. “Whenever something like this happens, an antenna goes up and people suspect a hazing,” Stevens said. “But we at the college don’t condone or allow anything like that.” The university was later embarrassed when the “pledge dinner” was revealed to be tiny amounts of spaghetti that all the pledges ate while chugging stupendous quantities of wine. Like Chuck Stenzel, these pledges were expected to fill designated trash cans with vomit.

The barbarity of these Greek-letter society customs is shocking. But even more disturbing is the institutional insensitivity alleged by survivors of victims. When six-foot, 220-pound Steven J. Call died from hyperthermia in 1980 after performing calisthenics required of him by Delta Kappa Phi members, a University of Lowell spokesman gave a statement to the *Boston Globe* that trivialized the 108.6 body temperature suffered by the pledge. “Apparently the boy had been doing thirty minutes of exercises, nothing extraordinary, as part of his initiation when he became disoriented and very hot,” said University of Lowell spokesman Oliver Ford. Ford stressed that Call had been subjected to “ordinary harassment”—a revealing oxymoron. Ford also rejected any possibility that hazing had occurred. “The only thing we found that is even reminiscent of the old days of hazing is a bit of paddling that was done with a piece of carpet,” said Ford. “The paddling is routinely applied. There is a certain amount of indignity involved but that’s what being a pledge is all about. It’s nothing compared to the horrible days of the past when fraternity pledges went through Hell Week.”

When administrators have a limited definition of hazing, deaths and injuries that might be called hazing-related are labeled "unfortunate accidents." Unless university administrators are compelled by the public to call a hazing incident a hazing incident, many deaths and injuries will continue to go unrecorded, says Eileen Stevens.

It is impossible to make an accurate count of hazing deaths because universities tend to cover them up with euphemisms of every stripe. Newspapers reported forty-five to fifty deaths between 1978 and 1990, probably an inflated figure since it includes not only recorded hazing deaths but also deaths of Greeks from sundry causes, such as accidental deaths (including the increasing number of falls from fraternity house roofs) and suicides.

A young fraternity man named Mike Moskos keeps a partially verified list of deaths as a public service. Moskos's photocopied list has kept hazing in the consciousness of many national fraternities and sororities, but, as its disclaimer states, "Some of the information here may be wrong." Moreover, many alcohol overdose incidents involving hazing are never reported as hazing—particularly if the victim recovers. Nor are schools and fraternities required to report instances of hazing. Many Greek-letter societies are disciplined by their advisors or the nationals for hazing, and these incidents never make the papers—particularly in cases where there is "only" mental hazing and no bodily injury. Physician Mark Taff, the co-editor of a 1985 study of hazing deaths and injuries for the *American Journal of Forensic Medicine and Pathology*, says that reported hazings are only the "tip of the iceberg." Unless media and public pressure is brought to bear on colleges and other groups in which hazing is common, administrators will continue to call hazing by any other name.