

# Jaguar Journal

## Faculty Member Considered Hazing Expert

By Ashley Gibson

**W**hat does it take to become passionate about something? Do you need to have a driving urge to know, do, and help? For Hank Nuwer, an adjunct journalism professor at IUPUI, it took being a student at the same time an athletics-related hazing death occurred to cause him to begin more than 30 years of research and reporting on hazing.

A graduate student at the University of Nevada-Reno and UNR Wolf Pack player, John Davies, died of a hazing related death at the hands of his teammates. As UNR Graduate Student Body president, Nuwer did not know Davies, but knew of the perpetrators from intramural sports and from being involved in student government. So beginning in 1975, he began to immerse himself in what little research existed on hazing and has continued to add to the body of knowledge ever since.



Adjunct faculty member Hank Nuwer on vacation in Paris in January, 2006

"I contacted the editor of *Human Behavior* magazine and interviewed experts such as Irving Janis of Yale, the Groupthink theorist, on why people haze," says Nuwer. "That's when I learned the amount of research on hazing was minimal."

In 1987, Nuwer began research on the first of his four books, *Broken Pledges*, for which he received a Gannett Foundation fellowship. Three more books have followed: *High School Hazing*, *Wrongs of Passage* and *The Hazing Reader*.

Sadly, hazing has created a new image of fraternities and athletic teams throughout America; organizations once thought to be elite groups because of the "chosen ones" who were allowed to join. Because of the many fraternity pledges who refused to keep silent, the truth is known about how cruel initiation rites, ritualized hazing and alcohol abuse go on behind closed doors.

(continued on page 3)



IUPUI

In This Issue....

Find out how some of the School's faculty spent their summer!

Page 2

Public Relations Student Society of America - Get Involved!

Page 7

Preview - Dean's Annual Reception and Open House

Page 6



Student in Action: Joanna Steele Portrays Childhood Idol

Pages 4-5

 Faculty Member Considered Hazing Expert, Continued

Since 1970, at least one pledging or hazing related death has occurred each year in the United States.

Nuwer had only experienced hazing on a mild level—in Boy Scouts, his fraternity and during the year he played first base for a minor league baseball team. The team played “pranks,” which really was hazing when it was imposed upon rookies, but it was “all in fun, of course.”

“I not only wanted to know why people hazed but why bystanders did not take more action,” Nuwer states. “Prior to Davies’s death, I chanced by a Sundowner (an athletic club) initiation in which Everclear was put down pledges lips and then lit so flames shot out of their mouths, searing their lips.”

Nuwer is known in the hazing world and it’s no surprise that he is sought as an expert in the area, but he can’t help every family member of a hazing victim he meets. Even after learning of all the hazing stories, resulting in death or not, Nuwer has to be careful not to cross a line he has set for himself. “I’m a journalist, not an activist,” he points out.

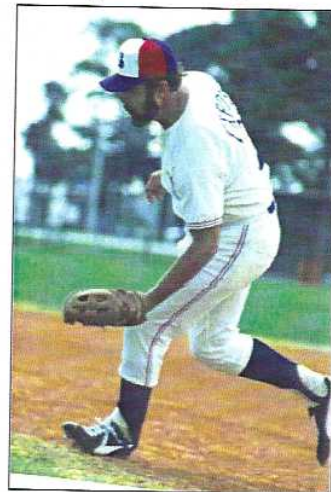
“Most (families) get it. Some get nasty because they want me to be an activist, and my role prohibits me from activism. It hurts me when they cannot understand the boundaries between journalism and activism. I also remind myself that I am a colossal failure in doing what I set out to do, end hazing deaths. But then again, that was an impossible dream.”

He may not be able to end hazing deaths, but he is raising awareness through his research, his books and the numerous national television programs on which he has appeared, including Anderson Cooper on CNN, Bob Woodruff and Chris Cuomo on ABC, and Bob Ley and Stephen A. Smith on ESPN. He has also presented his research during more than 100 speeches at institutions such as Cornell, Dartmouth, the University of Michigan, the University of Illinois, Buffalo State College, IUPUI and Indiana University. During each speech, he always adds his mission statement: “Every student should have a good time but no one should die for a good time while trying to get into a Greek group, athletic team, band or what have you.”

“It is emotionally wrenching to interview hazers who killed a friend, or a pledge they hardly knew. It is even more wrenching to interview the dead pledge’s lover, mother, daddy, kid sisters and brothers,” says Nuwer. “There have been times I interviewed someone about a death and had to go to a fast-pitch batting cage to slam baseballs until my thumbs blistered and bled just to get back my equilibrium.”

Nuwer never intended for hazing to become such a big part of his life, but it has and he almost looks at it as his calling. Yes, it takes a lot of hours and even more dedication to not only stay current, but to try to be the best that he can be as a hazing authority. And he will be the first to admit that “sometimes it has felt like a pact with the devil,” but no one else was bothering to do it before, so it might as well have been him.

“A journalist once asked me what I could have done to have prevented the death of Adrian Heideman at Chico State (College). I now have an answer.” he says. “Nothing I can do as a journalist will prevent a death. All I can do as a journalist is present cautionary tales in story form and get my facts right. The rest is out of my hands.”



*Hank Nuwer makes a catch as a minor league player with the Montreal Expos in 1981. Covering spring training with the team as a journalist, he observed hazing incidents aimed at rookie players. photo courtesy of: Max Aguilera Hellweg*

