

Class of 1968 History
**(an annotated but otherwise thoroughly unreliable history in broken
verse)**

We arrived as freshmen in the fall of 1964

on the 13th of September – to be precise
five hundred nine of us,¹

nearly all just boys
pretending to be young men

randomly paired up and packed into freshly *re*-painted dorms
with such hallowed names as Buchanan, Marshall, and
oh, a “Snake Pit” called Hartman²

hopeful,
though apprehensive
we sized up the cast
of characters expected (and the occasional misfit³)

with barely a clue as to what was in store

A wholly self-absorbed set of creatures we were all

¹ President Keith Spaulding, a man disinclined to exaggerate, “described the intellectual caliber of the new freshman class as outstanding”. . . . [E]ighty-five percent of the incoming freshman rank in the upper two-fifth of their graduating classes, an increase of ten percent when compared with the class which entered in September 1963. The members of this class are probably better qualified and more capable of benefiting from the high Franklin and Marshall standard of liberal education than has been the case ever before in our history.” College Reporter. September 18, 1964 at page 5 (“509 Freshman Enroll As Largest Class Ever”).

The “intellectual caliber” of Class of ’68 freshman remains undisputed to this day, even by the Class of ’67

² By Spring 1965, Hartman Hall was evacuated when its 165 residents moved into the north wing of the new Benjamin Franklin Hall.

³ We all knew who you were.

affecting the pose of East coast collegians
in button-down Oxfords, insignia-ed blazers, tweeds, khakis, jeans,

penny-loafers
without socks was, of course, *de rigueur*.

fascinated with re-establishing traditions⁴, the selection of mascots⁵

an undefeated gridiron squad diverted
suspicions that an epidemic of intestinal infection could be
caused by meat patties like the one nailed to a tree⁶

caught in the vortex of fraternity rush⁷
seeking the acceptance of older role models, like-minded souls⁸

the only student 'demonstrations'⁹ were pep rallies¹⁰ in the Oval.

Freshman life at our all "men's college" was quick to impress

unrestrained enthusiasm for the company of women

⁴ A "growing campus movement" in November 1964 surveyed 150 freshman reported 70% favored the wearing of dinks, 29% opposed; 89% supported the pulling of the Conestoga wagon, 11% did not; 93% wanted to continue the Soph-Frosh tug-of-(pardon the expression)-war, 7% were anti-war; 96% would ban stepping on the college seal on the library floor, 4% would not. An overwhelming 95% favored the learning of the Alma Mater, 5% disfavored learning (it). At the 40th Reunion in June 2008, 99% could not remember whether or not there was an Alma Mater.

⁵ A November 1964 referendum selected the wire-haired griffin as the campus mascot by 41% of the secret ballots cast. The results were immediately challenged for voter fraud.

⁶ The Wood Food Service was absolved of causing the campus-wide epidemic in a November 1964 Statement by J.Z. Appel, Director, College Health Services. The stank wafting over campus (usually attributed to Armstrong Cork emissions) was less noticeable when the epidemic ended.

⁷ In March 1965, the Intra-Fraternity Council adopted a new pledging code: "No activity which compromises the dignity of the pledge or which results in physical or moral abasement will be tolerated." It also forbid "public buffoonery" and the "consumption of food not ordinarily served as standard fare in either the fraternities or the college dining rooms". At its 40th Reunion, the Class of '68 unanimously voted to demand that the College make reparations to survivors who were morally abased.

⁸ On Friday, February 5 at 9:00 p.m., "eligible" freshman (1.5 average) gathered in Hensel Hall to cast "bids," which by 11:30 were accepted or rejected by the 11 fraternities mindful of the College stricture's that the selection process not discriminate on the basis of race, religion or national origin, and not favor "compatibility and congeniality over diversity."

⁹ Students were asked to fast at one lunch "to aid needy Negro families in the Deep South evicted from homes or fired from jobs" in attempting to register to vote. The effort raised \$300.

¹⁰ Football and soccer teams were undefeated in the Fall '64 season, with football squad capturing the Middle Atlantic Conference division title.

not unlike old Ben Franklin's¹¹
and, except for those who remained in the closet
we eagerly signed on for weekly forays and mixers

to meet girls from remote places
like Wilson, Chatham, and Goucher
Hood, Harcum, and... Beaver??

we lured our favorites to campus¹² on the ruse of a concert or show¹³
on Homecoming and I.F.C weekends, and S.U.B.day¹⁴
by The Kingsmen, by Peter, Paul and Mary,
and the Chad Mitchell Trio¹⁵

spending remaining energies chasing townies
a not altogether uplifting pursuit we now insist

as we blamed the monastic life for our maladjustments and stress.

Divisions deepened among those who survived freshman year

some remained in an on-campus dorm

¹¹ Franklin College had an initial class of 78 men and 36 women, but soon abandoned a coed policy. In January 1969, after a 182 year lapse (and a mere 6 months after the Class of '68 graduation), Trustees voted to admit women. Such a deprivation cannot be forgotten or forgiven.

¹² Dormitory living and rules were a persistent challenge to (but did not prevent most) freshmen dalliances. By Spring 1965, the Faculty Committee on Student Conduct had only reprimanded six freshmen, and placed only one freshman on a year's social probation, for violating the dormitory curfew for women as guests. By the 1967-68 school year, the residents of Dietz Hall had denominated the third floor bathroom for use by women only, and women were sharing rooms with some of the residents for weeks at a time.

¹³ The bill of fare for campus events in 1964-65 was heavy on folk music and its singers, including Nina Simone, Oscar Brand, Dave Van Ronk and Judy Collins.

¹⁴ "for some, S.U.B. [Student Union Board] day is symbolic of social life at F&M. Girls are shipped in from neighboring schools and dumped into a sea of dark blue jackets, fraternity pins, and crew neck sweaters. Some wander around the campus until they are picked up; others wind up the day alongside the same girls they started it with; a few have dates. And for all, the atmosphere remains somewhat like that of a slave market, where each girl is physically evaluated and bought with smooth talk and promises."
-- Oriflame '68.

¹⁵ It was advertised that 500 girls were expected to be bused from various women's colleges for the Chad Mitchell Concert. Afterward, at 9:30 p.m. there was to be "dancing by candlelight" in the Marshall-Buchanan dining hall, where cider would be served.

others eagerly moving off

to apartment or house
curfews and restrictions falling away
limited only by one's regard or one's mates.

many drawn further into the fraternity clans
many steadfast independent

half pre-med,
the other half pre-law,
or so it seemed

some seriously drawn into their courses
the readings, the labs, the classes
the competitions academic
others not

the social
the not so social

those who made pilgrimages nearly every weekend
for the company of a steady girlfriend back home or another school
others staying put so to attend to their studies
or so their story went

but, all still quite self-absorbed, that is now clear.

No one of us can say what caused that all to change
with any precision

but by our last year, that there was a change
is beyond question

in the times

in us.

Was it a realization, slowing growing

that the College no longer
insulated us
isolated us

from a nation, a world

on the verge of exploding?

Questioning the state of things as they were

small groups began picketing
confronting the "systems"¹⁶

"teach-ins" were offered¹⁷
though attended by few

disillusioned with structures
ineffective governing of our lives
a referendum was called
student government abolished¹⁸
a mock funeral held

whatever remained unchallenged, we chose to ignore¹⁹.

¹⁶ By October 1967 the Dean of Students issued a policy restricting the on-campus picketing of military and "war industry" recruiters. The policy was flouted when SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) organized a demonstration in opposition to an on-campus CIA recruiter in November.

¹⁷ Workshops were organized by ad hoc groups styled as the Student-Faculty Committee for Peace in Vietnam, and the Committee to Combat White Racism.

¹⁸ A resolution to abolish student government, said to be "over structured and underrepresented", passed by 85% of those voting in a February 1968 campus-wide referendum. In utter frustration, two "abstention" ballots were cast. Student government officers and members submitted resignations.

¹⁹ Some blamed student apathy on the growing use of "mood altering compounds" In October 1967 the Dean of Students issued a "statement" that "young people faced directly with the need to make certain choices available to them in the larger society, as well as at college, are conditioned by . . . society's confusion and indecision about these matters. Specifically our American society does not take a uniform stance regarding the mood-altering agents".

Some blamed the music. "It is a phenomenon of our own selves, a sound to educe emotions and not simply talk about them a sound which plays on the mind through the senses, a sound perpetrated by groups whose very names are as much a vehicle of the sound, of the philosophy, as the music and the words themselves: Kaleidoscope, Quicksilver Messenger Service, Snaky Jake and the Magi Sam Blues Band, Mothers of Invention. The sound is an art form by itself, electronic, mind-oriented, derisive, and religious." -- Oriflame '68.

As graduation approached, anxieties were rising

an enemy's offensive unfolded
soon to be deemed the Tet²⁰

200,000 more troops to be drafted
threatened our President

frantic searches began for a place to be hiding.²¹

The nation's temperature overheating

from the flames
of our cities burning
as King was shot down²²

we could no longer escape
the country's despair

as the Blacks began raging.²³

²⁰ By the time of the January 1968 "Tet offensive", U.S. military dead or injured were numbered at 93,000. Vietnamese (North and South) casualties (military and civilian) were estimated at 1.5 million.

²¹ By the time of our graduation, alternatives to active military service were limited to enlistment in a military reserve unit (like our current President George "Dubya" Bush), post-graduate student deferments for those going on to medical, law or graduate schools, service deferments for Peace Corps or VISTA volunteers, draft exemptions for conscientious objectors, or asylum as an émigré to a foreign (like Canada). By 1969, a lottery system was instituted by the Selective Service System, and most deferments and exemptions were eliminated.

²² Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee in April 1968.

²³ "There remain only a few hours for you to do a life's work if you should desire to keep any semblance of your system alive; if you desire to have a nation called the United States. For after those few hours the ends of the earth shall come together around your throats and you shall be totally destroyed. No longer do we say to ourselves, 'If there were only another war . . .' For we are now certain there is not other way." -- Statement by the Afro-American Society delivered at the memorial service for Martin Luther King, Jr. on April 5, 1968 in Hartman Oval..

Boys turned to men

as we filed up to the block

for a handshake and grin.

So now we return, after 40 years, almost to the day²⁴

to be in the place
where our lives took a turn
from comfortable complacency
to unsettling concern

to revel in memories
of a time now past
of rare and deep friendships
who knew that they'd last

to reflect on our lives
the chances passed
or taken

the choices made.

²⁴ On Sunday, June 9, 1968, the Class of '68 graduation ceremonies (the College's 181st annual commencement) began at 9:45 a.m.