

## Decision

The shock of State U was a fresh wound in the great combat of Dana's eighteen years. He was free of mother, who'd force-fed him English and risked everything to send him to the USA. Dana mastered the language from Shakespeare's collected works in a gold-etched volume bequeathed by his martyred father, along with cartoons, movies and reruns of the Brady Bunch purloined through a computer that skirted the Iranian censors. Now here he was, alone in midwestern America, thanks to a visa procured by an Ohio Senator despite the travel ban that imprisoned his mother in Tehran.

At registration he was sentenced to roommates as alien as Sigourney Weaver's spacecraft companion – Sasha from Brooklyn with an accent like Boris Badenov of Rocky and His Friends, farm boy Frank who was transfixed by how to deconstruct genetically modified corn, and Harry who was just that if you exchanged an "i" for an "r."

Was a fraternity salvation? Would it have the magic of Animal House that he'd watched five times? Travis Hughes' launch of a bottle rocket from his ass at a Marshall U frat house was factual legend. That was disturbing, and Ohio U and Swarthmore had just banned fraternities.

Dana was befuddled, so he resorted to his bard-inspired ritual for inspiration.

To rush or not to rush: that is the question.

Whether 'tis better in the mind to relish

the beer and parties of outrageous bro'hood,

Or to stand fast against the fate of hazing,

And by rebelling pledge not? To pledge, to meet

The many cattle drives the house will host,

'tis a consummation

Devoutly to be wished. To shun: to flee,

Be free, perchance to learn: yet, there's the rub;  
For in that nonselectivity what bubs may come  
When we have turned our back on frat'nal bond,  
Must make pause; there's the respect  
That makes fidelity of life so long;  
For who could bear the whims of duds and duds,  
The randomness, the network's siren song ignored,  
The pangs of bro-hood ne'er, the random clan instead,  
The preference of equal and the loss  
Of frat'nal merit that choice portends,  
When for myself my reputation would be made  
With three Greek letters? Who would deny this,  
To shed and sweat through independent life,  
But that the dread of dorm rooms without friends,  
The bounteous babes the frat house promises,  
The sameness of dear friends, screws up the will  
And lures me to conform to ills we dare  
To have with others within our brothers' lair.  
But conscience does make cowards of us all;  
And thus my freshman drive of masculinized  
Is plastered o'er with disabling doubt of mind,  
And future greatness of my dreams and fortune  
With this regard their draw lets slip its grip,  
And dulls the lurch toward action. Damn you now!  
Fair academia! You, in your horizons  
Be all my fun dismembered.

As for Hamlet, Dana's play did not end here. "Words are easy, like the wind. Faithful friends are hard to find," whispered Shakespeare. "I like not fair terms and a villain's mind," Bassanio countered.

Dana sought advice from the RA down the hall, who gave him two names to call. “Nick Stephen loved it. He’ll tell ya the glories of frat life. Then call Paul Joseph. He was class president when they started a non-selective hall. He’ll give ya the other side of the coin.”

Dana set a call with Mr. Stephen after being screened and scheduled by his executive assistant. A fraternity’s a bridge from youth to adulthood. Belonging forges lifelong friendships, builds a network of power, charts a life of what it means to be a gentleman. And great times. “Unless you’re a total introvert, and if you are you need it even more, Greek’s the obvious choice.”

Mr. Stephen sprinkled fact with praise. Fraternity men are 2% of America but historically 85% of Fortune 500 CEO’s, 76% of U.S. Senators and 85% of Supreme Court justices since 1900. All but two presidents in the past 120 years were Greek lettered brothers, Clinton and Obama the outliers. “If you want to make something of your life, the choice is obvious,” he concluded as though confirming the sun would rise tomorrow.

Dana saw himself in a Greek embrace.

From this day to the ending of the world,  
But we in it shall be rememberéd—  
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;  
For he today that tips his beer with me  
Shall be my brother.

But there was that other name. One call and he would act. Dana phoned Paul Joseph, who shockingly answered directly. “I heard you might call.”

Dana explained, “I understand you didn’t rush.”

“No,” said Mr. Joseph. “We started a hall where anyone was welcome – male, female, a big mix of everything. Some faculty joined us. I got more from that than from classes.”

“Did you have ...”

“Fun? You bet. Star Trek in the tube room, volleyball out back.”

“And ...”

“We had our parties,” Mr. Joseph chuckled.

Dana asked if a fraternity could be the wrong choice.

“Consider facts,” replied Mr. Joseph.

“Fraternity members are three times more likely to commit rape than their non-Greek counterparts. When SAE was kicked off the Denver University campus in 2015, a local paper headlined ‘SAE: Sexual Assault Expected.’

“Hazing deaths occur annually, and fraternity related deaths average more than five a year. Hazing’s part of fraternity culture. It’s reinforced by a code of silence, teaching that the interests of the fraternity are paramount over justice. Some view it as training for mastering cover-ups and group perjury.

“Fraternities discriminate. Many had racial and other bigotry in their charters. Those have been amended, but practices persist. Today fraternities don’t report statistics, claiming to be color blind. But check out the reality – or Wikipedia, which reports, ‘there has been a legacy of racism, which has fueled the elitist structure that has negatively impacted people of color.’”

“My skin’s not a problem,” said Dana. “I’m Aryan.”

“If you rush, you might not want to use that word. It could be misconstrued.”

“Got it.”

“Fraternities cost more, so they exclude low-income students and those scraping to get through. 70% of fraternity brothers come from the richest quarter of America, 5% from the lowest quartile. This compounds white privilege and intensifies unequal opportunity.

“Fraternities have personalities and attract people who mirror their self-image. You conform to belong and by belonging you conform. You’ll hone your affinity bias and miss lessons on developing cultural intelligence.”

Dana was silent. “But look,” said Mr. Joseph. “I have good friends who were in fraternities, good people. There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.”

“How to decide?”

“Do you have a pad? A pen?”

“A pc.”

“Ok. Make two columns. Here’s the question for the heading on the left. Ready?”

“Yes, sir.”

“What I want.”

“Huh?”

“That’s it. List what you want.”

“Now?”

“This isn’t for a grade, Dana.”

“There’s a second question?”

“Call me back after you answer the first.”

Dana began bullet points.

Belong

Friends

Network

Babes

A voice from inner left interrupted.

But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?

It is the east, and privilege is the sun.

Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious mob,

Who are already sick and pale with grief

That they, so poor, art lesser so than she.

Be not so made, since she is envious;

Her bro'hood litany is but trick and scene

And none but fools do bear it: cast it off.

He shook his head like a swimmer emerging from a pool. He added to the left column.

Get ahead

Good times

“We’re off to see the Wizard” floated through his brain, as though he were the tin man seeing Oz from the yellow brick road. He added

Learn.

He called Mr. Joseph, who immediately answered.

“Can I read you my list?”

“That’s for you,” said Mr. Joseph. “The second column – type this: What I Should Want.”

“But, sir, your advice?”

“To thine own self be true.”

Dana finished it – “And it must then follow, as the night the day, that thou canst not then be false to any man.”

“What are you studying?” asked Mr. Joseph.

“Theater. I want to write, compose, produce plays and musicals.”

“It’s not in my power to decide such a great dispute between you,” tested Mr. Joseph.

“Not Shakespeare.”

“No, that was Virgil. You come most carefully upon your hour,” said Mr. Joseph.

Dana felt centered once more. “For this relief most thanks,” he said. “But what to do?”

“Experience the cosmos,” said Mr. Joseph. “You’ll never be more free than now.”

“Sir, I have these roommates....”

“Not like you.”

“Right.”

“A good place to start. Your heart’s desires be with you, Dana.”

The right column beckoned. Cassius spoke, “It is not in the Stars to hold our Destiny, but in Ourselves.”

Why the second column, Dana wondered.

“Strong reasons make strong actions,” whispered King John’s Lewis.

Ophelia caressed, “We know what we are but know not what we may be.”

Dana typed:

Cosmos

Open

Search

Deepen

Connect

Diverse

Explore

The one less traveled by

Heart

Frank Sinatra sang from stage right, "I did it my way." No encore for Frank. Fraternities have advantages. Everything has faults. Cassius reassured, "The fault, dear Dana, is not in our stars but in ourselves."

"Live a little, comfort a little, cheer thyself a little," Orlando encouraged.

"Our doubts are traitors," reminded Lucio.

Camillo warned, "unpath'd waters, undream'd shores, most certain to miseries enough."

But the Earl of Pembroke made a point, "And often times excusing of a fault doth make the fault the worse by the excuse."

Hortensio blurted, "There's small choice in rotten apples."

Dana teetered atop a precipice. The modern text of Act 2, scene 3 arose.

"Let's get out of here. I'm in a rush," said Romeo.

Friar Lawrence replied, "Go wisely and go slowly. Those who rush stumble and fall."

The bard himself repeated, "Words are easy, like the wind. Faithful friends are hard to find."

Macbethian drumbeats throbbed in his brain.

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The time approaches  
That will with due decision make us know  
What we shall say we have and what we owe.  
Thoughts speculative their unsure hopes relate,  
But certain issue strokes must arbitrate;  
Towards which, advance my life.

Philip the Bastard uttered the same benediction he'd offered King John, "Be great in act,  
as you have been in thought."

The rest is silence. Time for decision.

[Stage direction – nod and wink.]

If my brethren I've offended,

Think but this, and all is mended:

That we have but lumbered here

While these expressions did you hear.

And this weak and idle prose

No more yielding than my nose,

Literarians do not apprehend,

If you pardon, I will end.

Joseph J. Dehner

For a Budget, November 25, 2019

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