



“No problem is so great that it cannot be overcome by brotherhood”

By Dave Westol (Beta Zeta/Michigan State University), CEO and Executive Director

Dear Brothers:

Our Sesquicentennial Celebration is now a memory. The banners have been packed away. The photographs—hundreds of them—are being processed and used in a variety of ways. Letters and notes have been sent to many people within and outside of our Fraternity to thank them for helping us celebrate our 150th Anniversary. We have so much to be thankful for and so many reasons to celebrate Theta Chi Fraternity.

Given that others will provide you with impressions and descriptions of our 150th, I thought an oblique approach to our celebration might be in order.

Two things happened within the past year that caused me to sit down one evening and begin pecking away at a keyboard on a poem.

The first was an extended email conversation with an undergraduate whose chapter was floundering. In one of his messages he asked me why he should be the one who carries the chapter when other members are simply along for the ride.

The second occurred when the family of Past National President George T. Kilavos, Delta Xi/Valparaiso '55, donated several boxes of letters and other items to the Headquarters for our archives. Brother Kilavos joined the Chapter Eternal in March of 2004, and his family kindly gave us the items for display and historical purposes. As most of our alumnus members recall, George was a prolific writer of letters and of poems. I spent several hours one evening sifting through files and reading his work—as his National Vice President for eight years, some of the letters were directed to me and the memories remain bright. The consistent theme throughout his tenure was quite simple: No problem is so great that it cannot be overcome by brotherhood.

Blending those arguably disparate themes together, I fashioned the poem printed below. I borrowed a portion of the theme from a poem that has as many titles as it has hits on a search engine, yet no one has identified an author. It is usually entitled, “The Wrecking Crew.” In other forms, it is used to encourage involvement. I did not write it within the context of Theta Chi, as George might have done, but for all of us from men’s fraternities who care deeply about our organizations.

I offer this not in a negative sense or as criticism, but as a means of thanking those thousands upon thousands of young men, and men not quite so young, who have stepped forward to save, salvage or rebuild their chapters over the years. We would not be celebrating 150 years without them.

The Wrecking Crew

I saw them tearing a frat house down,

A gang of men in a campus town,
As brown dust rose in a blinding cloud,
A cheer went up from the gathering crowd,
As the Greek letters that once hung so proud,
Now lay broken and tarnished.

For generations of men, who proudly declared,
“Our chapter, forever!” did those who cared
ever think that their glorious Mays and Septembers
would end in charterless rubble?

So I yelled to the foreman,
“Are these men as skilled
as the ones you’d hire if you had to build?”
And he laughed out loud as he said, “No, indeed!
Common labor is all we need!”

But I thought to myself as the rear wall fell,
“You had skilled help”—a glance could tell,
The help came from brothers, year by year
Who destroyed the chapter they said was so dear

Viewed from the outside the house looked strong,
Viewed from the inside the chapter was wrong.

“We’re as good as last year” the undergrads said,
As the brotherhood segued from dying to dead,
As hazing and alcohol took center stage
While the posturing continued, page by page,

In the alumni bulletin filled with the bragging
Despite the small voices that noted the sagging
grade point average, behavior, attendance.

Only a few could guess,
Each year there was less
of what made a fraternity, a fraternity.

The sixty percent that they called a meeting,
The alumnus guests, ignored with no greeting,
The bills unpaid, behavior and fines,
The arrogant ignorance that marked the decline,

Probation and sanctions that went unheeded,
Consultants told, “Your ‘help’ is not needed”
Campus and national events unattended,



"We're unique, we're the best, so don't be offended"
 Leaders? A few, who ignored the psalm,
 "All men are pilots when the sea is calm"

The handful of good members who tried and then failed,
 Their courage mocked, their standards assailed,
 "They'll vote with their feet," the members were told,
 And of course they did, a story so old.
 The good guys always leave.

The neighbors continued to watch the demise,
 And they seemed happy and satisfied,
 They laughed and cheered as the walls came down,
 Yelled one, "Now that improves our campus town!"

I wandered over and asked them why,
 they seemed so pleased that a chapter would die,

"Kind sir" said one with a knowing grin,
 "To rejoice in a death may be a sin,
 But that's one less frat filled with overgrown boys,
 Who disturb our peace and steal our joys
 That's fifty less neighbors who will taunt, curse and litter,
 We couldn't be happier! Not that we're bitter!"

In shadows nearby an old man stood,
 Gnarled hands gripping a bench of wood,
 Skin wrinkled and creased, like the suit he was wearing,
 Back bent and round-shouldered, perhaps from the caring,

I saw no expression, he made not a sound,
 As he stood and watched from once-hallowed ground,
 But tears streamed down his grim weathered face,
 As the workers destroyed the fine old place,

And did I see or imagine, for worse or for best,
 The gleam of a badge on his well-worn vest?

And I asked myself, as I walked away,
 Which of these roles am I willing to play?
 Am I the builder, who works with great care,
 Who helps and contributes, heart open and bare?

Or I am a wrecker, slothful and lazy,
 A vertical pronoun, calling good brothers crazy?
 Selfish, a hazer, aloof and profane,
 "Let's party and blaze" . . . let others the strain
 Bear daily and weekly, again and again,
 A taker and thief from my chapter and brothers,

Leave nothing for no one, self above others,

Am I that member who takes things for granted?
 Am I that member whose comments are slanted?
 Am I that member who whines and complains,
 Am I that member who never refrains,
 From sarcasm and blaming and pointing my finger,
 At all other brothers who I claim malingering?

Am I that member, when courage was needed,
 Who never stepped forward, appeals unheeded.

Or am I the brother who is building with care,
 Supporting, uplifting, doing more than my share,
 My goal is simple: that my chapter will be
 Stronger and better because of me.

I looked back just once, at the house now demolished,
 Bronze letters in rubble, broken, unpolished,
 At the crew and the neighbors exulting in gladness
 At the old man now sitting, alone and in sadness,

And it returned to me then from a time long since past,
 The concept of brotherhood our founders had cast,
 With no plan or direction, they built us from zero,
 With no compensation and no one a hero,
 Fraternity, Brotherhood, simple and clean,
 With "Example" the essence and also the dream.

In the final analysis, we have but two choices,
 builders or wreckers . . . doers or voices.
 Not sarcasm or whining or fiery quote,
 But by our example, simple and rote.

Our badges are earned, not once as some say,
 But throughout our lives, each passing day.
 Builder or wrecker—which will you be?
 The choice is yours, you see.
 The choice is always yours.

—DLW July, 2006

My thanks to all of our Theta Chi builders who are running the race,
 fighting the good fight, and keeping the faith. To you our 150 years of
 brotherhood is dedicated.

Fraternally,
 David Westol
 Chief Executive Officer