

## Back to the Future

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*Author's Note: After 43 years of working with fraternities and sororities, I thought it would be interesting to imagine traveling in time to take a look back at the movement from a unique perspective—our future. The year 2076 would mark the milestone of 300 years since the founding of the first "modern-day" fraternity. I wanted to explore what the landscape might look like from that perspective and offer a sense of the path we may travel in the coming years. I have written this fictional piece as an interview with the oldest living fraternity and sorority members at the time of the 300th anniversary celebration.*

**Reporter:** Good afternoon, Planet Earth. This is Sean Likely reporting for Global News Network. We have a special conversation for you today. Joining us from Williamsburg, Virginia are the oldest living fraternity man and sorority women on the planet. We are here, in Williamsburg, home of Phi Beta Kappa and arguably the point of origin for the modern college fraternity/sorority movement. This is an especially significant moment as the fraternal movement is celebrating its 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. So, let's join our two guests and get the conversation started. First, please introduce yourselves and tell us a little about your background.

**Woman:** My name is Karin Goodfriend, and I am a 120 years old. I was initiated in 1974 and have been deeply involved in fraternity and sorority life since I was initiated. I served for many years as a campus fraternity/sorority advisor and then continued my involvement with my own organization after I moved up the campus administrative ladder. I am still happy to be able to attend sorority events, such as conventions, and enjoy working with the undergraduate students and alumnae as we continue the great work we pursue.

**Man:** My name is Drew Wellbeing, and I am 117 years old and was initiated in 1977. I served as a chapter advisor for a number of years and then became a part of the housing corporation. I have been a member of the national leadership team of my fraternity and served as a faculty member for our leadership school. I stay involved by mentoring undergraduates and writing articles about the concept of fraternity.

**Likely:** That is amazing. Both of you have a rich history with fraternities and sororities and are still involved. I bet you have seen enormous changes in your lifetime. In your opinion what change has had the most significant impact?

**Goodfriend:** For me, it was the exposure of so many organizations' rituals. It all started with the "whistle blowers and Wikileaks" trend back in the first part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Between civil lawsuits and disgruntled people, it was inevitable organizations would have their ritual secrets brought out in the open. It was a sobering period. As people learned the true meaning of our organizations there was turmoil in the undergraduate and alumnae ranks. We faced some very challenging times as communities and campuses started holding us accountable for the oaths we took. Eventually, this did present great opportunities for partnering with outside groups, but it was a difficult several years.

**Wellbeing:** I agree that was a significant change. However, for me, the biggest impact was the shifting public opinion about underage drinking. Back in the day, the battle cry of the fraternity and sorority community was "work hard, play hard." Well, with the endless trail of

tragedy related to binge drinking, people finally began to question the legitimacy of allowing underage people the power to host events with alcohol for other underage students. As more and more community pressure was put on colleges, universities, and fraternal organizations to address the growing concerns of underage binge drinking, decades of normative behavior campaigns were successful in creating a new mantra for the fraternity and sorority community: “work smart, play smart.” Slowly, we shifted to focusing on a healthy appreciation of social drinking and ridding ourselves of the practices that had once propelled the stereotype that our organizations were drinking clubs for underage people.

**Likely:** It is easy to forget that the world we live in is much different than just a few short decades ago. Were there any unexpected changes that you experienced?

**Goodfriend:** Oh my, yes. I don’t think anybody anticipated the impact of the globalization of fraternities and sororities beyond North America. As more and more students studied abroad and took fellowships across the globe, virtual chapters emerged and a global market for involvement evolved. It was challenging to overcome centuries of “tradition” in how we operated, but the opportunities became impossible to ignore. Then, we began to see the significant impact of a global unified student movement making positive changes for the general welfare. In fact, globalization fostered collaboration between groups, which served as a vehicle to translate the ultimate purpose of building a better world into a tangible outcome. There are now tens of thousands of undergraduate members worldwide that respond to any disaster. It is inspirational to watch how quickly they mobilize and provide hope and hands-on assistance.

**Wellbeing:** Yes, those innovations galvanized the fraternal movement. I think back on how the population shifts created a cultural impact that was definitely unanticipated. Back in the day, fraternities and sororities competed for everything. We were hyper-competitive, and some of us had a “win-at-any-cost” mentality. With generations of new students, there was a greater sense of cooperation that developed from campus to campus. Recruitment became more about growing the pie itself rather than each group competing to get a bigger slice of a shrinking pie. Healthy competition became the way of life on college campuses as we found more productive ways to work with each other. This growing sense of interfraternalism is a welcome sight.

**Likely:** That is fascinating. When I think of fraternity and sorority members, I picture students trying hard to make their way through a demanding academic year and still having a chance to have some fun. Do you think current undergraduate students are having any fun now?

**Goodfriend:** Of course! They have parties, dance, sing, meet new people and have all the fun of learning how to get along with people different than themselves. It is messy at times, but that is when the sisterhood comes together and supports each other. The students I talk to are really excited about all the fun things to do and are thankful the fraternal movement continues to thrive.

**Wellbeing:** I think if people were not having fun we would not have survived all the challenges we have experienced over the years. The guys today have so many more opportunities than back in my day. It was beyond my wildest dreams that I could have

visited a chapter in Italy, France or Australia and build personal connections with people all over the globe. In many ways, we are in a new “Golden Age” for the fraternity—different from where we started but still thriving and contributing.

**Likely:** So is there anything you wish had changed but still has not?

**Goodfriend:** For me, it would be the struggle so many of our new members have with growing up. We always try to help them learn that the purpose of the sorority experience is to help them develop into stronger women. But, they still continue to struggle with their newfound adult status and understanding the consequences of their decisions.

**Wellbeing:** I have always believed we should extend the fraternal experience into high schools and prep schools. We could provide these young people with a glimpse of what awaits them should they matriculate into a fraternity or sorority. I think we still struggle with the myths and misguided expectations young people have coming into a fraternity and the ultimate challenge it creates for student leaders to prepare them for the journey that is fraternity.

**Likely:** That is interesting. Certainly food for thought. It is my understanding a big reason you are in Virginia is to participate in the opening of a time capsule as well as to contribute to the next time capsule to be embedded. What are you planning on offering?

**Goodfriend:** I thought a lot about what I would offer, and it was a difficult decision. I decided to share a prayer of love and hope for the future.

**Wellbeing:** I was surprised when I was asked. It is very humbling to think about what I could share of value for the future. I have seen so much, and every day I continue to be amazed at the young people who are part of this powerful experience. I decided to share a candle to represent the light we are all working towards.

**Likely:** Remarkable gifts from the oldest living fraternity man and sorority woman on the planet. Still committed to the ideals and values of the movement and still enjoying the life they have invested in for all these years.