

Summary

1. Purpose of the Meeting

1. The group gathers on Super Bowl Sunday to exchange memories of sophomore year and record “everyday life” as part of a long-term class history project.
2. The materials will be archived at Cornell and used to prepare a presentation for the 55th reunion.

2. Everyday Life & Cultural Context

2.1 Gender Roles & Social Norms

- Students entered Cornell in 1968, a time with different standards for men and women, including curfews for women and limited co-ed living.
- The group reflects on how drastically norms have changed.

2.2 Impostor Feelings & Academic Pressure

- Several describe arriving as top students at their high schools only to feel academically overshadowed by peers from advanced or elite schools.
- Particularly challenging were courses like organic chemistry taught by foreign-accented professors.

3. Food Memories

This becomes the meeting’s first topic and an engaging source of nostalgia.

3.1 New Foods Discovered

- **Banana bread with cream cheese** at Noyes Lodge.
- **Food trucks** (uncommon at the time): greasy late-night sandwiches, including PMP (“Poor Man’s Pizza”).
- **Hot dogs and beer** at a local off-campus hangout.

3.2 Pizza as a Novelty

- Some students had never eaten restaurant pizza before Cornell.

4. Dorms, Living Situations & Co-Ed Housing

4.1 Introduction of Co-Ed Living: Water Margin

A major theme is the pioneering co-ed residence **Water Margin**, previously all-male, which admitted women for the first time.

Key details:

- Water Margin was the *first* Cornell living unit permitted to become co-ed, seen as an experiment.
- Only **8 women** lived there, placed together on the third floor behind a special door that was to remain closed after 10 PM.
- Administrators added a **bathtub** because “ladies were supposed to need a bathtub,” and required a live-in faculty advisor (Father Dave Connor), though he didn’t interfere.
- Water Margin conducted co-ed “rush,” sending mixed-gender teams to freshman dorms—highly unusual at the time.
- Water Margin’s history: founded post-WWII to promote racial integration; inspired by the Chinese classic *The Water Margin*.

4.2 Dorm Life & Fire Drills

Common memories include:

- Midnight fire drills, confusion, and students accidentally sleeping through alarms.
- Rules requiring residents to check neighboring rooms during fire alarms (though students question whether these were myths).
- Early-morning dorm evacuations causing bathroom plumbing issues due to simultaneous use.

4.3 Sorority & Fraternity Experiences

- Many lived in dorms like Dickson; others moved to sororities mid-year.
- Fraternity life included self-governance, hiring cooks, collecting dues, and minimal national oversight.

5. Social Life, Dating & Campus Dynamics

- The gender imbalance at Cornell made women “a hot commodity,” and underclass men often struggled to date because older men pursued younger women.
- Students experienced culture shock when meeting peers from wealthy backgrounds or elite prep schools.

6. Student Activism & Political Climate

6.1 Vietnam War

- The Vietnam War loomed large over daily life; future sessions are planned to address it fully.
- Some students frequently attended protests and demonstrations.

7. The Straight Takeover (1969)

A major shared memory involves the **Willard Straight Hall takeover**, one of the most significant events in Cornell’s history.

7.1 Lead-Up Events

- Racial tensions, including a cross burning near a Black women's residence, contributed to the climate.
- Disciplinary actions against Black students escalated conflict; appeals moved through multiple university levels.

7.2 Student Government's Role

- Student government had recently abolished itself and transferred responsibilities to a committee overseeing judicial processes.

7.3 Personal Experiences

- Some attended the Barton Hall teach-in; others were directly involved in activism.
- One student left Barton Hall on principle, believing the university’s disciplinary process should stand.

7.4 Outcomes

- When the occupiers left, the university **erased prior discipline**, pledged **increased affirmative action**, and established an **Africana Studies Center**.
- Some faculty resigned afterward.

8. National Tragedies & Their Emotional Effects

- Students recall the assassinations of **Martin Luther King Jr.** (freshman year) and **Robert Kennedy**, and their emotional aftermath.