

Frank Challant (Iota Phi, 1968)
Parsons College
By Br. Shane McGoey

“I pledged for 38 years!”

That was my introduction to Frank Challant at the Alumni Reunion of Iota Phi in Houston, Texas, this past fall. My reaction was one of wonderment and a sense of comic relief. “This has got to be some kind of bad joke,” I thought. Scott Carlson, CEO of Alpha Chi Rho, had forewarned me before I left for the Reunion. “Beware the handcuffs!” “Handcuffs,” I said. “Yeah” was the only response I got back. So I had prepared myself for almost anything. Almost anything did not include meeting a man who pledged for 38 years. But I learned quickly that this man was very special to his fellow Iota Phi Brothers and had an amazing life story to share.

Before you start worrying, Frank was finally initiated in 2005 in Las Vegas, Nevada, at the first Iota Phi Alumni Reunion. Yet the road to Las Vegas led Frank from his hometown of Swampscott, Massachusetts, to two colleges, to work in the NFL and NBA, and after retiring from athletics he worked for an office products company for thirteen years, and now in his retirement years he enjoys working in estate jewelry.

“I grew up in a bedroom community, Swampscott, which is about 7 miles north of Boston. It’s known, even to this day, for its great fishing and lobsters,” offers Frank. Playing sports was a very big part of Frank’s childhood. His father had a strong influence on Frank playing football. “I was a center so I would go down to the basement during the off season and practice snaps for plays and punts. I had set up a bulls eye in the basement and practiced hitting the center of the target every time.” Frank also enjoyed playing ice hockey and running track. “I couldn’t hit a baseball to save my life, so I decided to do the 110 high hurdles.”

Frank’s athletic prowess led him to enroll at Springfield College where he was the center for the football team. Springfield College, at the time, had the best physical education program in the country and that is what Frank wanted to study. However, after one and one-half years Frank was asked to settle down and come back only when he was ready to study. “I spent most of my time learning the game of Gin rather than hitting the books.” After five weeks at home, Frank’s father met a representative from Parsons College. “My Dad set up a meeting and the next thing I knew I was enrolled for the Spring Semester at Parsons,” Frank says.

“I was placed in a quad-housing complex at Parsons that included fraternities so I got to know a lot of guys from Alpha Chi Rho. We always ate together and hung out. I liked Alpha Chi Rho because they didn’t discriminate. They had already made the change to allow blacks and Jewish Brothers. That was important to me as there was so much going on related to the Civil Rights era at that time.”

While Frank was meeting new people and assimilating into the campus community, there was an obvious drawback to playing football at Parsons – the team’s size. “They were huge and I knew right away that I couldn’t play with them. So in order to keep my scholarship, I became the Assistant Athletic Trainer and was responsible for football, basketball, and baseball. I worked 40-plus hours per week as a trainer plus going to school,” Frank recalls. “I tried to pledge twice, but I could not make the time commitment work with my work and school responsibilities. I was able to remain close with the guys over the years though. One of my biggest lifelong regrets was that I did not finish pledging Alpha Chi Rho and become a Brother.”

As Frank graduated from Parsons and began pursuing his career, Parsons College came under scrutiny due to a Life magazine report on activity related to the curriculum at the College. The scrutiny was too much for the College to withstand and the school was forced to close in the early 1970’s. No matter what the Life magazine reported, Frank believes that he and his classmates received the best education they could get anywhere. “All of our classes were taught by full professors, some of the best in the country. The curriculum required that you meet minimum requirements in order to graduate, and incorporated theory with practical application,” offers Frank.

Upon graduating, Frank became a physical education teacher at Chelmsford Elementary in Massachusetts, as well as serving as the athletic trainer for the high school. In the summer of 1971, he was hired by the New England Patriots as their first athletic trainer in the history of the franchise. “I was married with a new baby so this was a great opportunity for me. Jim Plunkett had just been drafted by the Patriots and there was excitement about the possibilities,” Frank admits. In a time when trainers were still unknown, Frank was one of the best. It wasn’t long before the Boston Celtics offered him the job as the athletic trainer for the team. “Red Auerbach called me in to meet with him about the job. I told him that I had just taken a job with the Patriots. Red wanted me anyhow.” Upton Bell, the general manager at the time, of the Patriots was none too happy, but Red Auerbach smoothed things out and by the fall of 1971, Frank, age 25, was working for the Celtics where he stayed for 10 years.

While Frank owns two NBA Championship rings from 1974 and 1976 seasons and he can tell you great stories about players like John Havlicek, Dan Nelson, Paul Silis, Dave Cowens, Don Chaney, JoJo White and Tom Sanders, he confides that the job took its toll. “The travel was horrific! I was away from home 150 nights each year; that translated into 50 months I missed seeing my family.”

In 1979, Frank tendered his resignation from the Celtics and went into the office furniture and products business. “It was a booming business during the 1980’s,” offers Frank. “I stayed in that industry until I retired 13 years later.

Throughout the years, Frank had stayed in touch with his classmates from Parsons College, particularly the Alpha Chi Rho Brothers. “In 2005, Bill Canfield (Iota Phi, 1966) called to say they were thinking about having a reunion. They wanted Lou Sinini (another pledge who had not been initiated) and I to come to the reunion and be initiated.

This was my opportunity to fill a gap that was missing in my life.” Over 40 Iota Phi alumni and spouses made the trek to Las Vegas including Frank and Lou. However, there were some hurdles that needed to be addressed. “A couple of weeks before the reunion, I received a phone call from Bill Canfield,” Frank begins, “he tells me that I will be receiving a pledge book and a Postulant pin in the mail... and there’s this small matter of a test I have to pass.” Frank was sweating bullets as he describes all of the anxiousness he was feeling. “I didn’t know what to expect! What if I don’t pass, I asked Bill. Bill simply said you will. Don’t worry.”

Frank passed the test with flying colors. Of course, his Brothers made sure he did! “Here we are 59 to 60 year old guys, and I felt like a teenager again. Lou and I went through the ritual and were initiated into the Brotherhood. It was very emotional for me to see these men I had known for years stand around me as I was initiated into Alpha Chi Rho. I was speechless. To this day, when I sign a letter or note Fraternally or Your Brother, it means a lot to me.”

Frank lives with his wife in Massachusetts and has 2 grown children and 3 granddaughters. A current passion is having been a Trustee of Thompson Island Outward Bound for over 12 years. For more information on Frank’s career with the Boston Celtics you may visit www.celtic-nation.com/interviews/frank_challant/04_06_2005_frank_challant_page1.htm.

Oh, and the handcuffs! They were kept at home this reunion. “I couldn’t figure out how I would explain handcuffs to the TSA agents at the airport,” offers Frank with a wry smile.

