

Fifty Years of Brotherhood, Submitted by Brother Brian Bland (ΦΚ)

I was talking to my former pledge father the other day. Our conversation was easy and familiar because we've been having these chats for a half-century. In fact, February 2011 marks an even fifty years since I completed my semester as a pledge and was welcomed into the Fraternity – a Brother in the Bond. In February of 1961, it was almost unheard of to meet a Brother who'd been initiated fifty years earlier, in 1911. But now, thank heaven (and medical advances), there are plenty of us around who can claim fifty years in AXP.

As for our age, some say seventy is the new fifty, and despite the inevitable casualties over the years, most of the Crows I knew then remain in pretty good shape: they bicycle, walk, golf, swim, play tennis and travel. And one of the great things about still being around is that many of the men who shared the AXP house at the University of Illinois five decades ago are still in touch with each other, despite the fact that a number of us live far from our Alma Mater and far from what's generally thought of as AXP's stomping ground. I'm a prime example – I live in Santa Monica, Calif.

So, just recently I had a great phone visit with Tom Litvay, my classmate/pledge father/roommate who lives near Chicago. Also, a few days ago, I chatted with the other Brother responsible for introducing me to AXP, Neal Gilleran, who served a hitch as our Phi Kappa Chapter President. He lives just 40 miles away. But whether they're in Florida, Texas, Arizona, California, Illinois or elsewhere, my Brothers and I stay in touch.

That's really the point of this little memoir. I pledged AXP in a group of about ten, which included freshmen, sophomores (like me) and even juniors. None of us could know then, of course, what our lives would be like twenty, thirty and fifty years later. At that time, we could only peer far enough into the future to visualize that first job or, perhaps, an impending marriage or military duty.

But as good friends do, we optimistically promised that we'd stay in touch. What we may not have fully realized was that the Brotherhood we had experienced in AXP, that Bond that we talked about, sang about at the dinner table, and – most important – had worked on during our college years, would keep us together through the coming decades. Of course, no one was in constant contact with every other man in the house. But the Bond was there – IS there. It's there when I talk with Litvay, Mike Scelsi and Larry Johnson in Illinois, or call Gilleran in Long Beach. It's there when he emails Rick Ruddell in Texas and Rick calls Bill Harant in Arizona and we all get a funny email from Dan Allan in Florida. Fifty years on, it continues.

Brotherhood is why, in 2009, about a dozen of us, most with our spouses, gathered at Brother Greg Leigh's farm near Peoria for some face-to-face visiting. Brotherhood is why, in 2007, Litvay flew to California and drove with Gilleran and me to Tucson where we joined Ruddell, who'd driven in from Texas, to surprise Harant on his 65th birthday. Imagine the look on Bill's face when four Brothers from three other states walked in together!

The message on the statue of the University of Illinois Alma Mater is: "To thy happy children of the future, those of the past send greetings." It's an optimistic eternal message that is perfect for us older Crows to share with younger Brothers from every school. You will always be Brothers in the Bond and brothers to each other. Because you'll always want to be.



From Left to Right, Brothers: Larry Johnson, Mike Scelsi, Bill Welch, Greg Leigh, Brian Bland, Bill Terpstra, Terry Romack, John Lebeck, Tom Litvay, Al Reitz, Dick Schultz and Rich Slater.