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CENTRAL MICHIGAN INSTALLATION – November 10, 1985

I'm not really sure what the genesis for the creation of this chapter was. If I were to guess though, I would put my money on the idea that it was the fact that Ron Helman was such a good dad. Certainly, it had to be some powerful motivating factor or force to encourage Randy to undertake this task. I first heard about this 'scheme', or that's what it seemed to me when I first heard about it in 1981 or early 1982. I got this phone call at work from someone my secretary identified as Randy Helman. Well, I didn't know a Randy Helman and so I'm on the phone and he identifies himself as Ron Helman's son. Now Ron was the Administrative Secretary of the General Fraternity in Oxford when I was a senior down there. He always treated me with great courtesy and kindness, so I at least had an obligation to talk to his son. He told me what he wanted to do and I have to admit I was sitting on the phone, and just couldn't believe someone would really try to do something like this. But, I wished him well, and then he told me that was really not what he had in mind, wishing him well was not enough! He suggested I be the colony advisor. Well, that was of course, a different sort of a proposal altogether. We had a couple of lunches together, dinners, and at least one with some staff from Oxford. Randy then decided to give it a try.

I think that the General Fraternity approved a provisional colony sometime in 1982; then at the Convention in the summer of 1982, they were given full colony status. It is my recollection that at the start GMI was the supervising chapter, but later, by 1983, MSU had taken that role. They provided, I think that all the brothers would agree, wonderful support. I think that Andy Prentice and Kent Dow just were the tip of the iceberg, what with the support and friendship and guidance that the local chapter received. There is no possible way without their friendship and help that we would be a chapter today. We might have made it someday, but it would have been a long effort.

Initially, Randy Helman lived over on Douglas Street in a junky house. And that first fall he persuaded, I think it was the fall of 1982, his housemates and a couple other people to pledge the fraternity, or at least talk about it. It turned out to be not a very good group. I think one of them had even stolen some of Randy's money or clothes or something, and within a few weeks, all but Randy and another had given up being pledges.

So then we moved on into the spring of 1983 and Randy tried again. Now we catch up with the fact that it was more of a sure thing. They had some success with their rush, Matt Baad, Tom Bussineau, Steve Swindell, Rob Bartz, Greg Compton, together with Randy became the moving force of this colony. I can remember meeting those five fellows with Randy for the first time over on Douglas Street. It was snowing (it always seems to be snowing) at least that was the right time of year, that was February. They were living all over campus and we agreed that the colony would not have a chance of making it, just not have a chance, unless somehow we could find living quarters together.

About that time I had a friend who had an old junky house, just about as bad, on Main Street. It was about the right size, and it was available, so we rented it for the 1983—84 school year. Now there was only one problem with this house, it was practically uninhabitable. The roof leaked. Now it just didn't leak in 1983, or in 1984, it leaked right up until last May. They would try and fix it and it leaked more. The floor in the kitchen was caved in. Whoever had lived their before had honestly broken some joists. There was no heat in some of the upstairs bathrooms. Now that's OK in September, but in February it's really cold. I don't think one of the bathrooms ever worked. They didn't have adequate parking for zoning. I still don't know how it was licensed.

But it did have one thing... it was ours. And that made it special. I can remember coming back, driving by in September, just after school started and there was the Beta Theta Pi sign out front. I was really, really proud of them. It was really special that they were starting to do something as a group. And it gave them something to improve on. You could actually see some of the improvements. And they did improve it. I can remember visiting the house just before final exams that first semester. They had curtains, and furniture! I'm talking about some real improvements. The place was clean; they had a Christmas tree, and my gosh, it actually felt like home. It looked really spiffy. And periodically, intermittently lets say, it looked pretty good over those years.

I think the most important thing that occurred during those first two years while they lived on South Main, was that they started to have some pretty successful rush periods. Each semester they seemed to pledge a few more people, a few more than the semester before, gradually they got to where they could pick out some people that seemed pretty good. Even after the graduations took their tolls, we started this year with 20 brothers, 20 good people on campus. That's really quite a success story.

During these years the colony took active roles in a lot of university and community activities. I think that it's hard, unless you've been in a fraternity, to appreciate the time pressures involved, because there are a heck of a lot of time pressures. Now, it's one thing if you're down at State or when I was at Miami, where you have 60 or 70 other people to play football, or basketball, or sing, or try and organize parties, or keep the house clean, or rush. You can spread those responsibilities out. But when you have seven guys, I mean everybody has to do everything. Seek a job, date some girl, I don't know how they did it, because they really seemed to accomplish a lot of different things with very, very few people. They deserve great credit for that. I think though, that one of the things I'm most proud of, that goes to my role as being a hard nosed on academics, is that two of those four semesters, I think that they led the campus fraternities in grades. I think that's something they should be very proud of.

But more important than any of that, in my perspective, is that it looked like they made some really good friends. I think that's mostly what it's all about. I want to tell you that the last few days, as this process has been going on, at my house the other day and last night, I was really proud to see the affection and kindness you all showed to the people that came back, to your alums. I'm really proud of you.

I'm sure there are hundreds of other anecdotes that brothers out here who have put up with 701 South Main could tell. I think though that the first thing that persuaded me that maybe they had a chance to become a chapter was sometime during that first year, I was over to the house at dinner time, I walked in and there was this woman, this young pretty coed, and she was cooking for them. They had co-opted, persuaded, beguiled, this young girl into coming over and cooking for them. I figured that anybody who could do that, could probably overcome the burden of just being a colony and make it to chapter status. And obviously, they did. And I'm really proud of them.

I probably should sit down now, but this is a rare opportunity that I have. I'd like to give a pep talk to the brothers and the pledges. From my perspective as a member of the fraternity for twenty years, it's a special institution, and I think you all should be proud to be part of it. I'm sure it's special for a lot of reasons for a lot of different people. But, I think its special mostly because of the members and because of the values that Beta Theta Pi gives to you. There are a lot of talented, talented members of our fraternity and they provide us all with something to shoot for. But I think maybe more importantly, apart from that talent, they're really nice people. I know a lot of them; a lot through my fraternity situation; and as I think back, most of them I'm just delighted to get to know, and to meet all of you young people. The one's that I've gotten to know better make me proud to have you as a part of this organization.

I also, believe that the institution is special because of the values it encourages in each of us. One should be proud to try to be ones best, to be successful. There is no glory in mediocrity. Being generous, being honest, they're good guys. I don't mean to be too sentimental about this, but I think that our fraternity demands that of each of us, not just while we are undergraduates, but forever. We should try to act more maturely, to be one's best. I'm proud that my fraternity stands for that. I think you should too. But, I must admit to you that I think the pride goes both ways, I think that our general fraternity should be and is proud that you young men here, part of the Epsilon Gamma Chapter, are now part of our fraternity.

I think you really are a special group of young people, I know you've worked hard. I think we have an opportunity here to create an environment that will provide friendship and good values to young people of this campus for years to come. How did you say it this last summer on your gold cards, "The Choice of Generations"? I love that. That's what we have here: a chance to create an environment for the choice of generations of this campus. I know you all can do it. I'm really proud to have watched you do it, and I know that over the years I'll be delighted to continue to see you be successful in the future. And I congratulate you. Thank you.