

When the rumors become reality

by Sunni DeNicola
College Press Service

For 19 year-old Matt Garfalo, Big Brother Night was supposed to be among the first of many parties at the University of Iowa fraternity he had recently pledged.

It was the night when Lambda Chi Alpha told new members which older ones would act as their "big brothers," the guys who would guide pledges through their first year in the house.

"The big brothers were getting the little brothers totally smashed," Kelly Hirsch, a Northwestern University student who attended the Sept. 7 party at the lambda Chi Alpha fraternity, told "The Daily Iowan."

But what was supposed to be a celebration, a new beginning, for Garfalo and other members by morning had turned tragic. Garfalo was found dead by his fraternity brothers -- a victim of acute alcohol intoxication.

That same night, members of Northern Illinois University's Sigma Chi fraternity decided to celebrate after an initiation ceremony of their new members.

"They apparently had participated in formal initiation and then later headed to a field to take part in an informal fraternity ritual under the stars," says Melanie Magara, NIU's Director of Public Affairs.

At 3:30 am, Michael G. Simpkins, a NIU junior, was killed when the car in which he was a passenger went off the road, into a culvert and flipped. Simpkins was thrown from the car and died a few hours later at the hospital. It was just two days before his 20th birthday.

The driver of the car, a 21 year-old Sigma Chi member, has been charged with two counts of felony DUI.

By chance, the death of both students occurred the day before Harvard University's School of Public Health and Social Behavior announced that fraternity and sorority members drink more heavily and frequently than non-Greeks, according to its nationwide survey.

The survey of more than 17,500 students at 140 colleges and universities showed that 86 percent of men and 80 percent of women living in fraternities and sororities are binge drinkers. (Binge drinking is defined as consuming five consecutive drinks for men, or four for women, one or more times during a two-week period.)

These numbers are nearly double those of the overall student population, where 44 percent report binge drinking.

The study, which calls many fraternities and sororities

"functional saloons," recommends tougher sanctions against them when alcohol policies are violated.

"The national organizations must be held accountable for serving underage students in their frat houses and providing an environment where binge drinking is the norm," says Henry Weschler, director of Harvard's College Alcohol Studies Project.

Binge drinking has been linked not only to hangovers and missed exams, but to increased incidents of unprotected sex, violence, hazing, date rape and even death. The same Harvard study calls binge drinking the No. 1 public health hazard and primary source of preventable morbidity and mortality for college students.

Alcohol is linked to nine out of ten campus crimes, according to a 1989 study by Towson State University's Center for Study and Prevention of Campus Violence. On average, universities report three violent crimes per year, 430 property crimes, eight hazings or hate crimes and many other alcohol offenses.

"We can no longer dismiss binge drinking as young people's games, because a significant number of students get involved in serious problems," says Wechsler.

The death of the two fraternity students, both on the same night and in separate incidents, served as a grim reinforcement to the Harvard study. The deaths are being investigated, and the universities have suspended both fraternities pending the results.

In Garfalo's case, toxicology tests indicate he had acute alcoholic intoxication, with a blood alcohol level of .188, nearly twice the legal limit for driving while under the influence.

"Apparently, (Garfalo) was participating in an evening where they (pledges) were identifying who their big brothers' might be and after that there was some celebrating, and alcohol was consumed," says Jonathan Brant, executive vice president of the National Interfraternity Conference (NIC). Brant says his information on the incident came from a report submitted to NIC by Lambda.

"Early indications are that the chapter was following their risk reduction policy," he added. They wouldn't let him drive home; they got him into bed and stayed up with him. Later they fell asleep and they found him the next day in that condition.

Unfortunately, these tragedies are just the latest in a long list of similar episodes. "It happens all over the country," says Wechsler.

"These incidents are really regrettable...they are the unintentional result of alcohol abuse."

Many national fraternities and sororities are cracking down and would prefer their chapters go alcohol-free. The National Interfraternity Conference (NIC), with 5,500 fraternity chapters, has developed risk-management programs and moved to a non-alcoholic rush. They also are encouraging the growth of substance-free housing.

"All of these incidents, and the research, continues to build a mountain of evidence that we must continue to be concerned about alcohol use and abuse on college campuses," says Brant.

"Fraternities must continue to stiffen their policies to try to reduce access to quantities of alcohol and to provide more positive social activities."

"It's clear that as many as one-third (of fraternity members) would prefer not having alcohol in the chapter house, and we're hoping that group will grow and help change attitudes among students that alcohol is not necessary in social settings."

Sex shunned in China

Students face expulsion

BEIJING (UPI) -- Chinese college students have discovered the joy of sex -- and the agony of getting kicked out of school, triggering calls for tough punishments to reinforce the tradition of virginity.

"Those involved in sex without marriage will be forced to quit school or be expelled," warned an official Sept. 22 at Fudan University in Shanghai.

if the girl becomes pregnant, both parties will be placed on probation but expelled if an abortion is refused under the strict behavior code adopted by the school.

A survey by the Beijing Youth Daily revealed, however that harsh regulations are not thwarting campus sex, even in dormitories where six undergraduates often share a room and sleep on bunk beds.

"Strict rules are not a magical solution," the newspaper said, noting sexual impropriety are only brought to the attention of authorities if a third person tattles.

At East China Normal University in Shanghai staying overnight in a dormitory for members of the opposite sex is

grounds for expulsion. A range of disciplinary measures, including ouster, are meted out to Qinghua University students in Beijing who "illegally cohabit" or indulge in "illicit sexual behavior."

During the 1966-76 Cultural Revolution rumors of carnal exploits by the nation's leaders were rife, but public petting and holding hands were outlawed.

The opening to the West launched in 1979 and accompanying capitalistic-style market reforms have helped thaw marxist frigidity and fertilized the

sexual renaissance now sweeping China.

There are sex shops, radio hot-lines and ongoing campaigns against prostitution and pornography. While virginity is still a priority for a bride in the countryside, urban youth are more open to pre-marital experimentation, particularly on campuses.

The trend has sparked a booming business in contraceptives in shops near schools.

"Not only teachers, but also students come to the counter to buy family planning devices," said a clerk in a pharmacy near Qinghua University, regarded as China's top engineering school.

"Only a few years ago, students were very shy when making such purchases," she said "But now they're realized and unhurried."

Purchasers no longer must submit proof of marriage.

"Things are different now," said a Beijing University coed. "When students fall in love, it's

not surprising to see them purchasing birth control" items.

With China at risk of an AIDS explosion, the State Education Commission is implementing a pilot program teaching university students for the first time that the use of condoms to prevent the disease's spread.

The project, initially launched in Shanghai and central China's Henan province, will be extended nationwide later this year or early in 1996.

The program marks a turning point for China, where basic sex education is still not part of the school curriculum and many institutions carry materials that still say only foreigners carry the AIDS virus.

The spread of AIDS remains a sensible subject in China, where 1,550 people are registered as infected with the HIV virus. At least 43 have the disease and 23 have died, according to official figures.

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