

A Fraternity Brother Speaks Out

By Colin Schlank



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Stand up for what is right. Though it may seem like your voice is just one of many, your words can start a movement that resonates throughout.

I cannot count how many times I have asked the following question amidst the past four years of my life; what can I do to stop hazing? This single question has left me confused, angry, disillusioned, and ultimately inspired to make a difference in the world. I hope that by sharing with you my story, you too will be inspired to make an impact in your community.

My name is Colin, and I am currently a graduate student at the University of Connecticut. I am studying secondary education and history and am extremely excited for my future after college. Four years ago, during the spring semester of my freshman year at UConn, I made the decision to pledge a well-known fraternity. Like most other students who choose to join a Greek organization, I was seeking to meet new people and enrich my college experience. Though my fraternity experience has had many high and low points, I am forever grateful that I made the choice to join.

I began to notice hazing practices within my fraternity on the very first night I became a part of it. On that night, brothers from the chapter gathered my pledge class in the parking lot of our on-campus house and began the first event of the pledging process. Hoping to immediately show who was in charge, two brothers instructed me to sit in the backseat of their car and wrap a tie around my eyes. They blasted loud music and subsequently slammed the gas pedal. I remember feeling like I was on a roller coaster, only this was no amusement park ride.

The brother driving sped up to what felt like ninety miles an hour and shook the steering wheel back and forth; it sent me and the other pledge in the backseat flying. Still blindfolded, we were brought to an undisclosed location and lined up. Brothers then got directly in my face and shouted, "Take your pants off now, pledge!" Though I stayed idle, I heard one of my pledge brothers undo his belt buckle, only to then be yelled at by a brother for doing just that. Heads swirling, we were brought back to campus and officially inducted into the new pledge class of the fraternity.

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After a week of pledging, I began speaking out about the hazing I was experiencing. I knew that something was very wrong with the way we were being treated; it was as if we weren't even people. Throughout my pledge process, I sat down with brothers and posed questions that most had never been asked. Why do you call yourself my brother when you don't treat me like one? What are the purposes of these hazing events? Don't these events contradict the core values of our fraternity? What seemed to me like perfectly reasonable inquiries, these questions unleashed a firestorm within my chapter. It still makes me cringe to think about the texts brothers sent me when they heard about my views. I was called an instigator, a troublemaker, and most memorably, a "cancer to the organization." From what I was told, many of the brothers sought to have me cut from the pledge program. However, with some support within the chapter, this push never reached a vote.

Somehow, I made it through the pledge process and immediately began taking on leadership roles to advocate for change. During my sophomore year, I joined the Interfraternity Council. As leaders of the community, we executed an initiative to remove alcohol from the recruitment process, which at the time served as a major contributor to the unhealthy environment. Though we did not directly tackle the issue of hazing, I deemed this undertaking as an important movement within the Greek system. I am proud to say that we came together as a community to uphold our values by eliminating recruitment parties. During my junior year, I took on the role of HuskyTHON chair within my chapter. As a fraternity, we raised over \$8,000 for the Children's Medical Center

in Hartford, a remarkable increase from the year prior. That year, HuskyTHON raised more than \$300,000 in total. In addition, as a fraternity brother, I continued to speak out against hazing practices within the chapter, but to no avail. After many failed attempts to also seek action from my chapter's leadership, aside from personal friendships, I chose to limit all involvement with the fraternity.

As you may have seen on the news, a student from a sorority at UConn came out publicly last March with her story about hazing. This incident came as a shock to the campus, yet was in no way a surprise to me, as it only reinforced what I had been fighting against throughout my college experience. Upon reading the newspaper, I began posting articles about the developing story on my Facebook page. Instantly, I began receiving overwhelming attention, both positive and negative. Assorted individuals, mostly members of the Greek community, sought to attack me for my posts and accused me of turning my back on them. However, many students and professionals both in and beyond the UConn community praised me for being honest and addressing an issue that had been swept under the rug for too long. A few weeks after posting, Tracy Maxwell, from HazingPrevention.Org, and Mike Dilbeck, from RESPONSE ABILITY, encouraged me to appear on the news network, Al Jazeera to participate in a round-table discussion on hazing. In agreement with the messages from these two inspirational leaders, I spoke about the impact of hazing on college campuses.

I would like to make it very clear that my mission is not to incriminate my fraternity or my brothers, but to raise awareness

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about hazing and promote the positive aspects of the fraternal movement. For those of you who question how hazing can continue to exist, I hope that my story means something to you. If you are a student reading this article, I strongly urge you to use the power of your voice to address this issue in your own community. While some may disagree with your opinion, you will be able to fall asleep at night knowing that you are doing the right thing. In a famous speech recited to students at the University of Cape Town, my personal hero, Robert F. Kennedy, highlighted the need to stand up for what is just. He stated, "Each time a man or woman stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, a tiny ripple of hope is sent forth. And crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, these tiny ripples will build a current that can tear down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance."

Stand up for what is right. Though it may seem like your voice is just one of many, your words can start a movement that resonates throughout. I truly hope that you

find the internal courage to face injustice head on and lend your voice to the hazing prevention movement in whatever way seems most prudent and impactful to you. I am willing to say that the future of your organization depends on you doing just that.



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