

Raven Reunion

A speech written and presented by Nat Gibbs at the Raven Round-Up held at the Berkley Home on Lake Conroe.

CAW – CAW – CAW

Now I'm sure that all of you Ravens know exactly what I just said. And, I'm sure that most of you Ravenettes also know what I just said. But, for the benefit of those of you who don't speak Ravenese, I'll translate for you. I just said, "IT'S SATURDAY NIGHT, LET'S GO TO HILL TOP."

My name is Nat Gibbs. I'm one of the original Ravens that popped out of the egg and jumped out of the nest back in 1948. And I can tell you this: It's been a long time between drinks!

Over the last couple of months I've been trying to remember how it all came about. I'm seventy-one now, so my memory isn't as good as it used to be; but I'll try to recall the events that led up to this great reunion today. If I don't stray from the truth, maybe some of you can jump in and straighten me out.

It was Saturday afternoon in my sophomore year at Sam Houston in 1948. My dormitory roommate was Johnny Elkins. He was good people and a fine drinking man to boot. As the afternoon wore on, our throats got dry. It was then that we decided to make a run over to Hilltop. The place was empty when we arrived. It was still too early for the usual crowd. So after knocking off a couple of beers, we decided to get several cases and go back to the dorm and throw a party. If I remember right, we had just received our monthly G. I. Bill school check, and we were flush with money.

Back at the dorm, we parked at the side entrance and began unloading the beer. It didn't take long for the word to spread and help to arrive. Before long we had the beer iced down in the shower stall and a full quorum of quaffers. Quaff? You know, I like that word, "quaff." The dictionary says that it means to drink heartily. In reality, it's just a polite way of saying chuck-a-lug. Anyway, before the beer had time to fully ice down, we began popping caps. If I remember right, there were about six or eight of us in the room, and the more we quaffed, the bigger the lies became. About two hours later, something was said that led to the formation of the Raven Club.

The topic of conversation had turned to the fact that there was only one men's social organization on campus. That was the Esquire Club. Members of the Esquires considered themselves a cut or two above everybody else. Non-members of their club were considered unwashed peons and unworthy of notice. Now, I don't know whether this was true or just jealousy bubbling to the surface. In any event, that was the prevailing opinion. One of the guys in the room, and I believe it was Johnnie Withers, mentioned that he had been turned down for membership by the Esquires. Of course, this led to condemnation from the rest of us. The fact that one of our drinking buddies could be turned down for membership in a club was outrageous. By then, we had consumed quite a bit of cold beer; so our outrage was in direct proportion to the beer consumption.

I think, if I remember right, at that time I said, "Hell, let's form our own club. To hell with the Esquires."

Everyone in that room agreed with the suggestion. Up till that time, we had been drinking casually, with no particular purpose in mind. Now, the drinking took on a life of its own. We had purpose. We had plans. We

had purpose and plans. Our purpose was to start a new men's club on campus and our plan was to do it now – at least before the beer ran out.

Darwin Gilmore mentioned that we had to have a constitution for the club, so I gave him a notebook to write in. Then everybody started offering suggestions on what to include in the constitution. Talk about a room full of constitutional lawyers – old Thomas Jefferson and his drinking buddies back in 1776 would have been proud of us. Along toward morning, our beer ran out; but we had a constitution. We also had a name for our club - THE CORVINES.

We had originally kicked around the idea of naming ourselves THE CROWS, but we decided that was too common. We needed something with class. Then someone mentioned that cows were called bovines. Bovine was classier sounding than cow; so what we should do it pick the equivalent for crows. So we named ourselves THE CORVINES.

The next day, a Sunday, was spent typing up our constitution for delivery to the dean's office on Monday.

On Monday morning, Darwin Gilmore and I took the constitution to the Dean's office. He agreed with us that the campus needed another men's club; but he pointed out to us that we needed a faculty member to sponsor us. Darwin and I hadn't thought about that; but we quickly decided on Jacob Leichner, our English professor. Mr. Leichner agreed to sponsor us; but suggested we name our club with a noun instead of an adjective. The word CORVINE was an adjective meaning crow-like qualities. He then suggested that if we didn't like the word, CROW, then why not call ourselves THE RAVENS. This name would tie us in with Sam Houston, the original RAVEN. Darwin and I both thought it was a great idea, so we called a meeting and voted for a name change. Along with the name change, we also voted in the officers of the club. Darwin would be President and I would be Vice-President.

So, that was how the club started. Later, we added new members and instituted initiation procedures and activity policies.

We decided that all new members had to undergo an initiation. We, of course, exempted ourselves. So, Darwin and I went down to the penitentiary and spoke to the warden. He agreed to lend us some striped prison uniforms for our initiation. All new member had to wear the prison uniform all day to classes. I'll tell you one thing – that little stunt was the talk of the campus and made the Raven name known by all. Before the day was over, everyone knew there was a new club on campus.

During the year, we entered a float in the homecoming day parade, and sponsored the Raven dance for the entire school. In addition, we threw several beer bashes for Ravens and their dates. I'm sure that we did a lot more, but those events stand out in my memory.

We had a prize-winning float during the homecoming day parade. We got a large flat-bed truck and erected a teepee on the back. Next, we built a fire outside the teepee so we could send smoke signals. Then we all stripped down to gym shorts trimmed in buckskin, or at least our idea of buckskin. We decided then we needed some war paint. After all, what's an Indian without war paint? So--- we smeared red lipstick all over ourselves. About that time, James Edwards mentioned that we needed a tom-tom to keep time for our war chants, so he came up with an overturned wash tub and a couple of good sized sticks.

I guarantee you one thing. You've never seen a crazier, half-naked bunch of idiots during a parade. Even long after the parade was over, we continued to circle the campus and drag downtown, all the while sending up smoke signals, beating on the tom-tom and screaming out our war chants.

One particular event stands out in my memory. About six or eight of us Ravens had gathered at the Hilltop Tavern one Saturday night to quench our thirst. About ten o'clock at night, we decided to visit Stephen F. Austin College and paint up their campus. We piled into cars and took off.

Since it was about 80 miles to Stephen F. Austin, we agreed that midnight would be the ideal time to arrive. About 15 miles down the highway, we decided we needed a refill of our beer. So, we stopped at a honky-tonk near Lovelady. Later on, about twenty miles from Stephen F. Austin, we stopped near Alto for another beer break. At both of these beer stops we were loud and boisterous about our plan to paint up the campus. That was our downfall. People in the beer joints were calling ahead and alerting the Stephen F. Austin students about our intentions.

We arrived at the campus shortly after midnight and cruised around it a couple of times. We could find no one walking the streets or on campus. There was no one in sight anywhere. We parked at the curb in front of the main building and talked among ourselves a few minutes, and finally decided that we had caught 'em by surprise. We got out, opened the car trunks and divided up the paint, then headed up the sidewalk toward the main building.

It was then that all hell broke loose. People started standing up behind bushes, jumping from behind trees and dropping down from lower limbs. Cars raced in from nowhere blocking our cars at the curb. In a matter of minutes, we were surrounded by hundreds of Stephen F. Austin students. We had been captured.

Our first stop after being taken prisoner was the school's gymnasium for a haircut. Electric hair clippers took it all. A few minutes later, instead of Ravens, we looked like bald-headed eagles. Next, we were brought before the school's cheerleaders and taught the school's football cheers. Later that morning we were introduced to the rest of the students at a pep rally. Of course, we had to lead the cheers.

One of our gang, Rusty McCarney, had been a student at Stephen F. Austin the previous year and was well-known by them. While we were leading cheers, the woodwork class was building a cage with bars for Rusty. They shipped him back to Sam Houston locked inside the cage on a flat-bed truck. The cage had a sign reading, 'A BEARCAT CAUGHT IN LUMBERJACK TERRITORY.'

Something needs to be said in order to sort of balance out our behavior. We all enjoyed college life and lived it to the fullest. And even though we played hard, it should also be noted that we studied hard. We all kept our grade averages up to normal or above normal. "A" averages were not uncommon among us. In fact, "A's" were probably quite common. This love of an active social life, coupled with good grades, produced outstanding adult community leaders.

I know of Ravens who became outstanding teachers, athletic coaches, school administrators and student counselors. I know of Ravens who reached upper management and even Chief Executive Officer of large corporations. I know of Ravens who formed their own companies and built them into highly successful

leaders in their field. The banking industry has its share of Ravens. I know of Ravens who are bank presidents, and one who is the Chairman of the Board of a chain of banks. I know of Ravens who carved out successful career in government. One in particular, becoming comptroller of the largest city in the southern states. Other Ravens have distinguished themselves in the military service, attaining high rank and honors. One even went into broadcasting and became world renown as a CBS anchor man. And yes, even turned out OK. I'm a retired sea captain. While active, I was Captain of the *Michigan*. – one of the largest ships in the world. I don't know of any Raven who did not make a success in life.

Now, I'm not saying that you have to be a Raven in order to be successful. I'm only saying that, apparently, it helps out.

You know, I've thoroughly enjoyed being at this reunion. It's a great feeling seeing old friends after such a long time, and meeting new ones who share a common tradition.

About a year ago I talked with Darwin Gilmore. I mentioned that all the Ravens that I've had contact with since college days had turned out to be successful, well-respected men in the communities. He said something that was SO true. He said that we started our organization with good people, and only invited good people to join us in membership. This led to our success.

Each and every one of you Ravens here today can take pride in being members of this elite organization and knowing full well that you were invited into membership and knowing full well that you were invited into membership because of outstanding qualifications that you possessed and displayed during your formative college years. Personally, I feel honored being a member of this fine organization, and equally honored knowing each of you as a friend.

In conclusion, I leave you with this thought. If you ever see someone wearing a striped prison uniform swaggering down the sidewalk as if he was God's gift to mankind, don't call the police. He might be a Raven. And if you see someone half-naked on the back of a flat-bed truck beating on a washtub, for God's sake don't grab a butterfly net and start chasing him. He just might be a Raven.

And now for my final thought. CAW – CAW – CAW!