
Editor's note: On April 4, 2006 Rodo Sofranac, Chi '71 (Cornell University) will celebrate the 50th anniversary of his arrival in the United States. Brother Sofranac's essay, "Awesome Golden Anniversary," and an introduction tied to his Psi U experiences appear on the following pages.

Introduction

As you read the *Awesome Golden Anniversary* essay on the following pages you will notice the theme I express is *being accepted*. Although my story focuses on the United States as a whole, the brothers of the Chi Chapter (Cornell University) of Psi Upsilon were and still are an integral part of my homecoming. A great example of *fraternity*.

For a person who came out of a refugee camp and didn't know English ten years prior, coming to Cornell was staggering. Cornell was loaded with a lot of very bright, financially wealthy, and extremely confident people. I thought I was 0 for 3 on that scoreboard—maybe one out of three at best. How could I possibly fit in or have anything in common with people that had the presence of Peter Coors, the athleticism of Ed Marinaro, or the enthusiasm of Chris Hart? To say I was overwhelmed, would be a classic understatement.

Although I was offered membership in a few fraternities (they must not have known me well enough), I chose Psi U for some of the similar reasons I write about in the essay.

First of all, I quickly found out the brothers at Psi U were very diverse and genuinely accepting. As a psych major, I learned that I really had a tougher time accepting them than they did me. Once I looked beyond the surface, I had many more things in common with these guys than I thought.

Quite a few brothers came from the Cleveland area; although, Ray Pavelka and I were actually the only ones from in the city. A bunch of them were my football teammates—we were considered the smart jocks. Steve Hirst loved old rock-n-roll songs as much as I did. I used the songs to learn English, Hirstie loved to sing and dance along. Bob Block, Chris Gould, and I served meals at Psi U and other fraternities, because every meal we served we received that meal as pay—a great savings for great eaters.

Art Walsh, who was our chapter president 1969-70, not only continues as one of my best friends, but we've guided each other through numerous *rapids on the river*. With a number of others, we continue to maintain the relationships that built our lives.

The Psi U brothers' acceptance of me far exceeded my expectations—just like this whole grand country. Maybe this is a good way to share this message with the brothers of Psi Upsilon. I can honestly say that had it not been for Psi U, my ability to succeed at Cornell would have been lessened, if it happened at all.

Thank you brothers, for taking and keeping me *in the bonds*. I hope you enjoy your gift.



—Rodo Sofranac, Chi '71

Awesome Golden Anniversary

By Rodo Sofranac, Chi '71

“*Dodji! Dodji!*” (“Come here! Come here!”), my mother yelled, in Serbian first. Then she spurred us in German, “*Schnell, schnell, kommt doch hier!*” (“Hurry, hurry, come here!”) Between the two languages, I guess she thought we would listen to at least one.

My sister, Maria, and I wanted our legs to move in response to the thrill, but they were still a little shaky. Our stomachs were also still churning from our long, hopscotch airplane ride. Now it came time to turn in our airplane wings for sea legs. We were in this boat, swaying and bobbing on the water in New York harbor. Just what we needed. It was a ferry taking us from the airport to a refugee intake center. Ellis Island, the long-time Gateway to America, had closed eighteen months prior to our arrival, so we were examined and chronicled at another immigration station.

Our family left Munich, Germany at 9:30 a.m., April 4, 1956, and was admitted into the United States around noon on April 5th. I know it was around noon for two reasons. One clue was that just a bit earlier, on the last leg of the flight, I lost the breakfast I worked so hard to get down. The other indicator was that we were given a sack lunch upon arrival. Inside the brown bag were a

sandwich and the biggest, reddest apple I ever saw. A few days before leaving Munich we were living in a refugee camp in Salzburg, Austria. I don't recall having even a little red apple there.

We flew out of Munich on Flying Tiger Airlines. Back then Flying Tiger was primarily a freight carrier—and maybe that's what we were seen as. It carried us from Munich, to Scotland, to Newfoundland, and finally to New York. Flying Tiger was infamous for some harried flights in the growing air travel industry. Ours was one of them. On top of that, my sister and I were not used to engine-driven motion. We had almost no experience with trains, planes, boats, or automobiles. So, any flight would have been a roller coaster ride to us. The apple would be the first food in some time to stay down.

My sister and I moved across the deck of the ferry as quickly as our stomachs allowed us. We had more enthusiasm than we could muster and more amazement than we could express. But, our timing was just right.

As we came to where my mother and father stood, the bow of the boat began to turn so that we could face and easily see our mighty greeter.

We had seen impressive pictures and heard inspiring stories about America and the Statue of Liberty.



Rodo Sofranac held all of his worldly possessions in a little shoe box while boarding a plane to America in Munich in 1956.

But none defined, portrayed, or lived up to the word of *awesome* like being in her presence.

I don't remember if the air was filled with fog, mist, rain, or tears; but it paused and then seemed to part like an opening curtain, right on schedule, revealing her highness. Truly awesome!

Our legs steadied and our stomachs settled.

As I looked up at that magnificence, I deeply felt the passion described in the words of a song by John Denver that I learned later in life, “*Coming home to a place he'd never been before.*” After four years of fleeing from country to country, it was a relief to come home yet dreamlike when it was to a place we'd never been before.

Sure, we had to learn our third language and our

