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BECOMING BY BELIEVING: ONE FRATERNITY AND SORORITY LIFE
PROFESSIONAL'S JOURNEY IN FINDING HER VOICE

A Dissertation Presented

by

Kimberlee R. Monteaux De Freitas

to

The Faculty of the Graduate College

of

The University of Vermont

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Education
Specializing in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

May, 2018

Defense Date: March 22, 2018
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ABSTRACT

While fraternity and sorority life continues to make headlines and is called upon regularly to validate the purpose it holds to remain on college campuses today, many still believe that when fraternity and sorority are done right, it is one of the best opportunities on college campuses today outside of the classroom. Much of their success is due to the efforts and support of the fraternity and sorority life professionals.

This dissertation will offer the first Scholarly Personal Narrative of a mid-level, seasoned, fraternity and sorority life professional working in higher education. Current research shows the average age of a fraternity and sorority life professional is twenty-seven and over half the professionals have been at their place of employment for two years or less. I will explore my own personal journey over the last twelve years with hopes of finding meaning in this uncommon career path and explore where resilience and passion resulted in professional longevity.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedication to those in small towns, with big dreams.

And, to Eloise.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*You will dream and make it.
What you become you've dreamt of before.
Don't fall behind if they don't believe.
For I believe and I am you.
-Kim Monteaux, 1993*

With a full heart and awareness, I'd like to thank those who helped me along the way and helped me believe in the possibilities. To my colleagues, near and far that answered my emails, texts, and phone calls. Or looked up from their desks when I needed a moment to talk, cry or just be seen. To my committee, Dr. Wolfgang Mieder, for nudging me along the way and for sharing his stories and memories about his fraternity experience. Dr. Deborah Hunter, for encouraging me to apply to the doctoral program so many years ago. Dr. Jason Garvey, for providing me friendship, support and inspiration. Dr. Robert Nash, for believing in me when I wanted to give up, for giving affirmation and a way to have my voice heard. To my cohort and faculty members, for cheering me on and encouraging me to remember why I started. Specifically, Dr. Khristian Kemp-DeLisser, Dr. Jeff Bukowski, Dr. Talia Glesner Covert and Dr. Judith Aiken. To my family, specifically my mom for her courageous choices, the beauty of my existence and role modeling unconditional love. To my grads and V, without each one of you, I would not be the professional I am today. The most significant honor is to be called a mentor, thank you. To Kaye, for showing me what mentorship looks like and should feel like. To my Phi Sigma Sigma sisters, "*Your Sphinxhead proud and true...*" Lastly, to my partner, Xavier for believing with me. I love you.

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PREFACE

Who I am and where I am coming from is important. The context of my story and my personal view helps not only me to share my story but assists the reader in the approach I am taking throughout my dissertation. I am the daughter of a feminist and an undocumented citizen. The parental grandparents I grew up knowing were artists and both equally in love with themselves.

Naturally I am a collector. I collect handwritten letters, notes and little trinkets. Tucked inside most of my bags and purses are coins from countries I have visited, pamphlets and postcards that will never be sent. My memories are attached to images, songs that played in particular moments and clothing that individuals wore. I have traveled to find myself deep in the mountains of Guatemala just to realize I was here all along.

Raised single handedly by my mother for six critical years, strength, courage and love for others comes quite naturally. Observing her giving when we had so little impacted my life more than I believe she is aware. I often wonder if she realizes all that I remember and what had contributed to the individual I am today.

All this and more says a bit about my origin and where my story began. As a first generation college student I choose to join a women's fraternity within the first weeks of my college experience. Originally this experience was to fill a gap and aid in creating friendships; today I realize my membership changed my life.

INTRODUCTION

*“In life, there are no ordinary moments.
Most of us never really recognize the most
significant moments of our
lives when they’re happening.”
-Kathleen Magee*

Throughout my career as a fraternity and sorority life professional there are many stories and experiences I have carried like a vessel that have contributed to my personal and professional life. Many that have impacted me, allowing me to grow, question my own identity – question the relevance of fraternity and sorority life and its value on college campuses today. To question the value of something you love so much can be emotionally draining and in my experience, has provided adrenalin to continue going even on the longest of days, during the longest of weeks. Doing this work, I acknowledge I have chosen my career over family on enough occasions – long work hours over personal relationships – and have experienced a sense of guilt around all I have given to a community that many others, even sometimes my own supervisors, do not understand the value of.

How has someone like me, a successful higher education educator at the University of Vermont, found meaning in a career that is so filled with controversy? Where is it I have found hope on days where allegations of sexual violence, hazing, alcohol and drug issues have found their way to my office? Where have I found strength after sitting at tables having administration question the future of my area of expertise? What have I learned about myself and how my identities impact my work? How have I

continued to mentor others encouraging them to enter into this field during a wake of questionable futures for all fraternal organizations?

This dissertation is a piece on becoming a professional, a mentor and continuing to believe. The purpose of these pages is simple; to help new professionals understand they are not alone and to shed light on a topic that has rarely been explored from the advisor's experience and to assist the reader to understand one fraternity and sorority professional's journey. This Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN) will release moments of pain, share discoveries, but most importantly connect others' stories.

I am writing to find meaning in how I became the professional I am today – resilient, courageous and visionary. I am writing with my colleagues in mind, those who entered the field at the same time, those who have stayed, some who have left (the fraternity and sorority field) and those I have mentored along the way (in return mentoring me). I write to become the supervisor I needed most when I started this journey. To advocate for the new fraternity and sorority professional with a shared understanding from the very beginning, to confidently extend a hand when the light at the end of the tunnel is so dim they can hardly see it, and to fan the flames of curiosity and possibilities around them.

CHAPTER ONE

*“Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality.”
-Warren Bennis*

The transition from graduate school to full time professional can be difficult and for some bring up familiar feelings from when they first attended college. Transition is defined as a movement, development or evolution from one form, style or stage to another (i.e., place, subject).¹ Many feel a bit of anxiety, fear and even excitement leading up to the new job in anticipation of the transitional experience. My transition from graduate school at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse to my first full time higher education job as the fraternity and sorority professional at the University of Vermont (UVM). As odd as that is to say, this career choice was something I felt comfortable with and knew that I was choosing something my mentor felt was right for me. I too felt a sense of calling.

Any individuals that choose the area of fraternity and sorority affairs within student affairs or higher education regardless of their education (bachelor, master’s) must understand that despite the inevitable challenges that will come, the professional who advises Greek-letter organizations will have numerous responsibilities and will wear multiple hats throughout the academic years.

The professional must be an educator, advisor, counselor, mentor, role model, programmer, leader, communicator, ambassador, administrator, supervisor, accountant,

¹ Transition defined by Merriam Webster.

and manager². In my experience, the better fraternity and sorority life professionals also have continued to learn years after their formal education and continue to adapt to the trends on college campuses today through using student development theory, learning more about assessment and just engaging in conversations with one another. Successful fraternity and sorority life professionals work quickly to establish relationships on and off campus as they not only are responsible for understanding their host institution, but also keep current and communicate regularly with their member group executive offices/headquarters and the umbrella groups (governing bodies, trade associations, etc.).

Prior to my job search I had attended quite a few fraternity and sorority specific institutes, conferences, and professional development opportunities. These and the comfort I found in my supervisor/mentor helped guide me in the idea of becoming a fraternity and sorority life professional early on. When I chose my graduate school, I chose it because of her, not the academic rigor or status of the program. That alone should tell you something about who I am, foolish perhaps but seeking someone to tuck me under their wing was by far my priority.

Like many graduate students aspiring to be a fraternity and sorority life professional, there is not only the experiences most of us aspired to have, but also those individuals we hoped would extend a hand, a minute of their time and share with us some of their knowledge and perhaps identify us a mentee. To this day I feel very fortunate to have been in graduate school from 2004-2006 when many of the mid level to seasoned fraternity and sorority life professionals noticed a gap and shared their expertise and in my opinion, went out of their way to create graduate experiences with hopes of

² Dennis E. Gregory and Associates, *The Administration of Fraternal Organizations on North American Campuses*, (2003) 215.

cultivating cohorts and contributing to retention in the field that they felt passionate about. Their efforts and programmatic innovation efforts are still felt today. With the support of many I was able to enter into the field feeling encouraged and able to start creating plans and as a visionary start dreaming about the day the “what if’s,” came true. After my first week working at UVM I attended one of the most critical professional development opportunities, the Interfraternity Institute (IFI), sponsored by Fraternity Executives Association³, which I believe to this day is one of the reasons I am still in fraternity and sorority affairs, over ten years later.

IFI was created to be an educational experience specifically for fraternity and sorority life professionals, both those that work at host institutions and individuals working at inter/national headquarters in fulltime positions. The vision of IFI is, “Fraternity/sorority life will be the foremost vehicle for the development of leadership, citizenship, intellect, and positive relationships among college students,” and the mission is, “The Interfraternity Institute develops informed, committed and connected leadership, grounded in purpose and principle for the fraternity/sorority life movement⁴.” While the mission and vision of IFI is inspiring to read as a graduate of the program, I really feel the purpose for me, and many others, that IFI excels at creating affinity space and having an outcome of cohorts that remember one another for years to come.

Group affinity in any organization, not just a student affairs field, has benefit to really personalize one’s experience and build stronger relationships, therefore encouraging continued service and even financial support (similar to a University or even fraternity/sorority member group). Where this really plays an important role is within the

³ Sponsored annually by Fraternity Executives Association and Indiana University.

⁴ Interfraternity Institute Binder, 2006.

specific area of fraternity and sorority affairs. This area can be perceived as cliquey and has many sub-cultures as mentioned in Dr. Peter Magolda's article, "Community, subcultures and organizational change: An outsider's perspective about the 2013 Annual Meeting."⁵

The written history about IFI reveals that in 1970, it was a struggle to find thirty-five students for the first IFI.⁶ Today there continue to be waiting lists and over eighteen hundred individuals are now graduates of the institute. IFI has had positive influence not only on many individual professional's careers but also significant impact on the partnership between campus professionals and inter/national headquarters professionals. Powerful partnerships that have grown from IFI also find their roots in the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors (AFA)⁷, which I will further discuss the importance of in this dissertation.

Attending IFI for me happened at perhaps the best and worst time. As a new professional, I had yet to even work one full month at UVM. I could count on one hand the people I had actual conversations with and really could not count the lady from human resources running orientation nor any of the individuals that sat around me. The culture of UVM and the fraternity and sorority community were still unclear to me. I had yet to identify allies or advocates and knew intuitively from my interview that there were many bridges to be built and relationships to mend as I was coming in four months after a nationally known hazing investigation had begun, years later known as the Broke Back

⁵ Perspectives, Spring 2014 (p. 17).

⁶ Perspectives, Winter 2001 (p. 8).

⁷ Ibid.

Mountain situation⁸. On the other hand, I had very little on my mind. Not one angry alumnus or undergraduate telling me how I should do my job or a new leader reminding me how much they pay to attend the university. My mind was clear to dream and connect with others with similar anticipations.

There I was, a new professional at IFI with one week under my belt. I was excited to have these powerful conversations around fraternity and sorority life. Or, as I had often heard it said, at the conferences and institutes I had previously attended, the fraternal values movement, which was common language used when I first entered the field. I was ready, or so I thought, to dive into these rich discussions, share stories and leave ready to advance our community. While I was never entering the conversation naïvely, I had not quite had the conversation or guidance of where to start, meaning by the end of day one my list of “to do’s” was longer than most by the time the whole institute was over.

Fraternal Values Movement

“To advocate human conversation as the means to restore hope to the future is as simple as I can get. But I’ve seen that there is no more powerful way to initiate significant change than to convene a conversation. When a community of people discovers that they share a concern, change begins. There is no power equal to a community discovering what it cares about.”

Margaret J. Wheatley, Turning to One Another

Not unlike many graduate students I learned just as much if not more about becoming a higher education practitioner by observing my supervisor/mentor Kaye as frequently as possible outside the classroom. It was not long that I learned that she was highly respected in the field of fraternity and sorority life (or higher education in general) and when traveling with her to conferences or even service trips out of the country I often

⁸ <http://www.wcax.com/story/4732717/uvm-fraternity-hazing-investigation>

felt other graduate students, new professionals and even seasoned professionals would vie for her attention.

Kaye had engaged me in numerous conversations about the fraternal values movement throughout my two years of graduate school and had mentored and trained me to understand what questions I should be asking to really get meaningful conversations started around values congruence and change. She had a habit of not just providing me with resources, but often calling the researcher or expert in the field and putting me on the phone with them. She had connections and always put my learning first. This support is something that has stuck with me and contributes to my own philosophy around mentoring. Her ability to make sure I knew I mattered is something I continue to admire and strive to provide for all those that I mentor as a professional.

However, as confident as I felt, once at IFI surrounded by others with more experience than me and being with individuals whose names I knew from publications, presentations, and award honorees, it was as if I had lost my voice. I listened to the large presentation around the fraternal values movement closely, it would be a few years before I realized these individuals are what Robert Nash talks about when mentioning building a village⁹.

- What do you think of when you hear the term “fraternal values movement”?
- What would you say are some widely held fraternal values?
- What have undergraduates done wrong?
- What have alumni and volunteers done wrong?

⁹ Robert J. Nash and DeMethra LaSha Bradley, *Me-Search and Re-Search*, (2011), 42.

- What have headquarters done wrong?
- What have campus professionals done wrong?

I listened, I took down notes as quickly as I could and thought about how I was a part of a think tank, perhaps even action tank, and needed to be as committed to the future of fraternity and sorority life as those that surrounded me.

I had no idea in 2006 that I would be writing this many years later trying to seek some of the same understandings, vying for answers, even solutions that we all were then and were for decades prior. This idea of a fraternal values movement boiled down to meaning all those that essentially care about fraternity and sorority life need to work together putting aside agendas to work for the interest and betterment of the undergraduate experience¹⁰. Yet today, we continue to have the same conversations with our alumni, undergraduate students, inter/national headquarters and even university administrators. Many of us wondering when we will all discover that we all care about the same thing and all while taking turns questioning the relevance of fraternity and sorority life on today's campus.

Throughout the rest of my IFI experience it was critical that I started prioritizing what mattered and thought about where I could start having courageous conversations when I returned to campus. For me I knew that I had more to reflect on than wondering what was the fraternal values movement and my own responsibilities as a higher educational fraternity/sorority professional. How was I going to teach this to others, not just UVM's students but to my supervisor and later putting words to it, managing up and advocating for myself?

¹⁰ Dan Bureau, *The Fraternal Values Movement: Powerful Conversations to Advance Fraternities and Sororities*, 2006.

Healing through Feelings

*Work makes it tough to get out of bed;
you show up dragging your feet, hanging your head.
You fake an illness and practice your phony cough;
reluctantly you arrive, energetic as a sloth.
When you sit at a desk and count the seconds ticking on the clock;
feeling held back like a track star poised on the block.
Afraid to make a change because.... well there is no reason;
You make excuses and tell yourself its not the right season.
You stop listening to your heart for fear of what it tells you;
That you were meant for something greater and to do something that compels you.
One day the stress becomes too great,
you're sick of being average and you decide the work can wait.
So you drop what's holding you down, and you realize you are free;
you now have the courage to finally be.
You chase your dream, and tell yourself there is more to be done;
the work is just as hard, but now you're having fun.
You're standing under the clouds but you feel like you're above;
that because you've taken hard work and turned it into love.
-Taylor Dee*

Recently I stumbled upon this poem written by a professional who has been in the fraternity and sorority life field for less than five years. While I do not know him personally, I know the words he has written well. Returning from IFI in 2006 I had my personal philosophy in one hand and my three- and five-year plan in the other. I came back knowing I had a lot to learn and that small wins would help keep my fire going. I knew I cared and I knew what the future could look like with hard work and dedication.

I look back at that time with fond memories, even though within weeks and months I would be challenged over and over. Change is where I like to believe I found myself, deep in the challenges, the struggles and truths. Hearing the needs of my supervisor, the alumni and the students, I knew I had a long journey ahead but those needs started to create meaning for my role and purpose at the university. In those beginning days it seemed the needs did not all line up and even today, often this remains

the case, which has resulted in learning to be better at negotiating, navigating and advocating.

An exhausting topic that is not unique to UVM is the concern of alcohol use and high-risk drinking. As an eager graduate student, I was well aware of alcohol use and abuse on college campuses; however, I did not research my new institution's specific area of concerns. In addition, I did not realize that my job responsibilities and other duties as assigned would include being invited, which is not really an invitation to sit on various committees to talk about student behaviors, choices and actions around alcohol (and drugs) as often. Early on I felt targeted and did not have the professional confidence to speak up and question other individuals' perceptions. Granted, stereotypes do come from some truth, but at some meetings it just seemed never ending.

In 2006, I inherited a community policy that prohibited alcohol to be present during the first weeks of school at any fraternity and sorority event. While this seemed to be a good idea there was no measure, or teeth, to make sure this was actually being followed unless someone was found responsible and ticketed by the police. In my years at the institution I have found that rarely are tickets given out for even noise complaints and neighbors continuing to call me on Monday and Tuesday about an event held on the Friday or Saturday prior. The first weekend of school gave me a good test of she/he/they said as there were no written police reports yet and everyone seemed to know who had violated this policy. It gave me headaches as I was trying to learn the current state of the community, while gaining trust from undergraduate leaders and alumni. Not to mention my own supervisor.

Autumn was filled with situations that I had either never encountered before or was not prepared for the way UVM would respond and/or react. Coming from a university where the fraternity and sorority community was allowed to practice self-governance and the individuals that oversaw the governing boards were rarely seen or spoken about, I immediately felt we, the UVM administration, governed the organizations, which was a surprise for such an old, quite moderately sized community. With time, I would learn more about the community that I was now a part of and the choices that were made that resulted in harm and the loss of self-governance on many accounts.

My first year was hard, extremely hard. I am transparent about this when anyone inquires or when talking about the job search with graduate students. I do not believe I fully knew what I was getting into and today feel I can say that many fraternity and sorority life professionals may have glorified the profession. I also believe talking with a colleague about this may be the individuals' way to survive. Other graduates and young professionals I have interacted with often think going into fraternity and sorority life will be fun and perhaps without saying it in so many words an extension of their collegiate experience. Individuals who ask me what I do for a living often have a face of disbelief, ask fascinating follow up questions typically on the line of asking if I am a babysitter or party planner or, in some of the rudest situations which I have encountered, I have had to stop the conversation after being asked about keg purchasing. Even my own parents did not quite understand my career path for some time and I realized this when friends, acquaintances and hometown community members would call me a university or college teacher or professor.

Currently the average age of a fraternity and sorority professional is twenty-seven. Sixty-two percent of the fraternity and sorority life professionals have been in their current positions for two years or less¹¹. This does not account for individuals that may have been in the field longer, but just have a new place of employment. In addition, the average salary range of the profession is \$30,000 to \$49,000 compared to the national student affairs salaries, which are much higher for fewer years of experience.

This information, while startling, does not surprise me. In my experience, many fraternity and sorority professionals do not leave the profession because they are bored, but because they are exhausted and have hit a wall and/or burnt out. Additionally, fraternity and sorority life remains an area in higher education where the salary and staffing continue to be a struggle while the job responsibilities continue to have high influence, visible impacts and long hours. I believe that those who stay in the field are not just the ones who love fraternity and sorority life but are the ones able to find their allies and advocates and hold on just long enough to see pieces of their initial vision come true. The national philosophy around what it means to be a fraternity and sorority professional needs to be further explored and questioned as it is not healthy for anyone for the peak age to be twenty-seven years old.

Looking Back

*“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.”
George Bernard Shaw*

In graduate school, classroom faculty and assistantship/internship supervisors try to prepare you for nearly everything from student development theory, higher

¹¹ Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors, *What We Know About Our Members and Why It Matters*, 2016.

education history, to legal issues, counseling and helping. If you are lucky, like I was, you will even cross paths with faculty members and assistantship providers that make it very well known that they do not support your choice of focus in higher education and with any opportunity they have will relive their collegiate memories of being excluded from fraternity events.

So much learning occurred during those two years as a graduate student. It was almost like my head was opened, brain tickled and information just poured in. It was not until I attended the mandatory Title IX training that I had near flashbacks of my legal class and could smell the textbook, paper thin pages of the thickest book we had during graduate school. Years later, that purple, imitation leather book still sits on my shelf unopened for years but as a reminder of what has happened and what could happen.

I remember our counseling and helping class role-playing and being recorded for a final grade. Preparing beforehand, reviewing, and memorizing policies, acts and federal laws knowing in the back of my mind about the student that harmed themselves just earlier that year. All this and so much more I think back on and how it shaped my experience and the professional I am today. Yet, in those moments it felt like a checklist and if I could go back and talk to myself I would whisper words of caution that I would be encountering student harm, deaths, investigations way too soon and that the one thing missing from my coursework was more transparency around self care and communication.

My first experience hearing about a sexual assault allegation happened before coming to UVM. A friend shared her story with me, and another about her experience

being raped a few years prior. We did not know the alleged perpetrator, but we knew the location very well. She did not want anyone to know and we have not spoken of it since.

The feeling I had as a young adult with the pit in the very bottom of my stomach, the hot feeling in my throat, trying to hold back tears while listening is the very same way I felt the first time a student came to talk with me about an alleged sexual assault. Ten years later, it does not get any easier and I wonder sometimes how I can keep a straight face and why there are never any tears, specifically when I know the individual so well.

There have been times where both the survivor and the alleged perpetrator are members of our fraternity and sorority community. This should not surprise anyone, nor do I think it will surprise many that in my darkest of memories there have been situations where the survivor has been isolated due to other members of the organization not wanting their social capital being affected. These moments really tug on my heart as they are moments where I believe fraternity and sorority have failed.

While my graduate courses tried to prepare me for the moments hearing about sexual violence and making us aware of the policies and procedures that would need to be followed, I never remember a conversation about what to do after all the paperwork is filed out and the police officers have left the office. While I have always remained committed to my students' health and wellbeing first because of these and other experiences that have really taken much of my strength, I have found it invaluable to make sure I too have someone to talk with and in many ways, empty my vessel as I can honor the stories and experiences I have heard without the weight on my own heart every minute of the day.

I have just named one of the most challenging experiences fraternity and sorority life professionals encounter over the years. Most fraternity and sorority life professionals encounter these narratives annually. While sexual assaults, harassment and violence occur on all corners of campus, the relationship built between the collegiate fraternity and sorority life members often result as the “Greek Life” office as a place to have one’s voice heard or seek support.

So too, fraternity and sorority life professionals often give up so much of their own personal time to their students that their own personal lives are put on hold or even non-existent. I am very aware of this lifestyle as I lived it for nearly six years and even today have guilt occasionally that I am not keeping up my end of the bargain when I miss philanthropy, program or even general events. Social media has been a double-edged sword, as I am able to follow up with my students after their events and show in other ways that I care about their experiences. The other end, the sharp end, is a perception I have created for myself over the years seeing my colleagues and other fraternity and sorority life professionals across the nation attending every little event and me wanting to be that #1 advisor, whatever that means. This is all truth telling about the perceived expectations of the field and perhaps contributes to individuals not sticking around.

Satisfaction

*The most beautiful thing
for those who have fought a whole life
is to come to the end and say:
we believed in people and life,
and life and the people
never let us down.*

*Only in this way do men become men,
women become women,*

*fighting day and night
for people and life.*

*And when these lives come to an end
the people open their deepest rivers
and they enter those waters forever.
And so they become distant fires, living,
creating the heart of example.*

*The most beautiful thing
for those who have fought a whole life
is to come to the end and say:
we believed in people and life,
and life and the people
never let us down.*

Otto Rene Castillo

Looking back on how I got here is not the easiest of tasks. To be committed to fraternity and sorority life as a profession, as a career, is almost a club of its own. A club where membership is restricted to individuals that believe not only in the values they subscribed to so many years ago but also to individuals who hope to contribute to the learning of others through their espoused values through meaningful conversations, hands on experiences and experiential learning. In between graduate school and moving to Vermont I traveled to Guatemala by myself to explore my biological father's country and to learn more about myself. During that time, I discovered Otto Rene Castillo's poem, *Satisfaction*.

While I understand that Castillo was a revolutionary poet and lived a life that I will never know or fully understand, the line, "creating the heart of example" has stuck with me for years and has inspired me in moments of reflection and wonder. Castillo transformed his experience around social change into words and one can feel both the

emotion and anticipation of hope in nearly every line of his poem. Read over and over, I find that Castillo highlights change that occurred because of people believing.

Looking Ahead

In Chapter Two, I will introduce you to SPN methodology, created by Robert Nash at UVM. Throughout the past eight years I have reviewed other SPNs and have come to understand that as a chosen methodology writers are able to be creative while expressing their experiences and using the often forbidden “I.” I have enjoyed learning more about this type of methodology and have hopes that each chapter will stand alone and be accessible to all, enjoyable and universal. However, I will use the traditional dissertation outline with chapters to assist with the flow of my study.

In Chapter Three, I will share some of my experiences around crisis, controversies and continuing to believe in the relevance of fraternity. I will also discuss a very personal experience that has contributed to my philosophy around supervising, forgiveness and the influence the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors has played in my professional development.

In Chapter Four, I will share some of the evolution of how my own personal identities have impacted my experience as a fraternity member and sorority and fraternity professional. The intersection of social justice work and fraternity and sorority life continues to play an important role in my career and life.

In Chapter Five, I will seek to understand the unsuspected relationships built through mentorship and creation of a fraternal family. This will be where I delve into the idea of teaching graduate and new professionals so that they are at a place that is better than where I was at ten plus years ago. It has always been my intention to give all I could to others with the hopes of more higher education professionals invested in the fraternity and sorority experience. Additionally, I will share my experiences over the past decade interviewing for new roles and what I learned and hope to take with me.

In Chapter Six, I will answer the following questions.

- How did I become the professional I am today?
- Do I have the knowledge, skills and awareness to be the supervisor I needed most when I started this journey?
- What's next?

In addition to answering the above questions I will offer tips to new professionals with hopes that they can relate to this and realize they are not alone. Additionally I will share areas of research that may benefit the fraternity and sorority life professional and opportunities for research.

It is my hope that by choosing to write the first SPN dissertation on the fraternity and sorority professional that I will not only create a narrative that is easily read and enjoyed, but one that is relatable to the readers. This dissertation is written with intention that I will be vulnerable, committed to the field of fraternity and sorority life and to the reader.

Literature that Matters

Fraternal Movement

Years have passed since I first started this journey to become a fraternity and sorority life professional. There are individuals who have contributed to my learning and there are articles, blogs, videos (YouTube, TedTalk, etc.) and literature that have impacted me. Giving me advice through the pages, sharing experiences and almost as if I was being advised and some days listened to through these artifacts. In order to really paint a picture of the me-search I have done over the years, I think it is critical to give credit and attention to resources that really matter to me.

Inside my oldest copy of the Baird's *Manual of American College Fraternities*, 15th edition, is a pen mark for the library call number in a fine point black pen. This 1949 copy made its way into my hands through Dr. Charles Eberly's donation to a silent auction. Seeing as the Baird's Manual is no longer published, finding a hard copy is rare and I desired to have more than one in our office.

The Baird's Manual many of us know as a big old book sitting on the shelves in our mentors' offices. Yellow, creamy color is the last published copy that most individuals know of. This 1949 copy is forest green with gold embossed letters, making it feel a bit more official. The similarities are, of course, having the old smell and the near tissue thin pages honoring the history of men and women's social fraternities. The book is separated into sections; definitions, histories and a long list of all the fraternities and sororities followed by information on the host institutions. If you are a budding fraternity and sorority professional and have never seen a Baird's Manual I encourage you to try to locate one.

My first memory of the Baird's Manual¹² is from graduate school. My mentor Kaye gave it to me as something to look over and become familiar. I remember distinctly the way I sat down and looked at all the pages and the rich history that was on the pages and is even harder to find on the Internet today. The way I felt in that moment was excitement and deeply engrossed. I feel that way even now as I think about every graduate student who has come to my office and explores the Baird's Manual for the first time and later tells me they cannot find a copy even on EBay to purchase and/or if they can it comes with a steep price.

In 2009 Nicholas L. Syrett published, *The Company He Keeps: A History of White College Fraternities*.¹³ This book quickly became frequently discussed among friend groups and one that challenged many individuals thinking around class and race from a historical and current perspective. Syrette named many things that felt uncomfortable for affiliated individuals and called to question the cycle of membership, the illusion of inclusion and the exclusive nature of fraternal organizations. *The Company He Keeps* focused on masculinity, gender and class makeup of fraternal organizations and the way membership has played out throughout history. By no means was this book written to pat members on the back; it was a book written with a critical eye, highlighting some facts and perhaps connecting some dots around culture, accountability and identity.

Having over ten years of experience at one of the oldest fraternity and sorority communities in the country, many of Syrett's observations could have easily come from UVM. The early influence fraternity men had on a college campus culture, the early

¹² Harold J. Baily, Editor, *Baird's Manual of American College Fraternities*, 15th Ed. (1949).

¹³ Nicholas L. Syrett, *The Company He Keeps, A History of White College Fraternities* (2009).

“Freshman Laws” and the hierarchy of the college experience. While Syrette does really dig deep into the roots of what we know as historically white fraternities, ironically while most fraternities across the nation were not extending membership to anyone other than whites, Vermont initiated Black identified men as early as 1874-1876 when George Washington Henderson became a member of Delta Psi Fraternity and later a member of Phi Beta Kappa.¹⁴

The Administration of Fraternal Organizations on North American Campuses: A Pattern for the New Millennium was the first fraternity book that I knew I had to own. Thankfully, my mom was able to locate it and gift it to me in 2005. Published in 2003 this remains, in my opinion, one of the best reference books on fraternal organizations and is hard to purchase today. Separated into numerous chapters, this book outlines the histories of fraternal organizations (men’s, women’s historically Black, etc.), roles umbrella groups play, campus management, fraternity advisor role, alumni partnerships, risk, liability and so much more. As I have gained more experience in the fraternity and sorority field I have found value in different chapters of this book. Some are written as tips and tools while other chapters dive deep into advocacy areas such as the right of freedom of association. As someone who has worked only at a public institution this chapter has been important throughout my career and has also provided me with challenging moments to really reflect on what one professional can realistically give a community. Of course, never taking the rights to associate away but creating a personal understanding of what is realistic in support of successful organizations.

¹⁴ <https://vermontcivilwar.org/units/8/henderson.php>

Bound by a Mighty Vow: Sisterhood and Women's Fraternities, 1870-1920

(2004) is a wonderful, historical book written supporting the benefit of women's fraternities/sororities. Diana B. Turk's book is successful in painting a picture of what the campus culture was in the late 1800's while the formation of sorority culture emerged.

Research and Understanding

*Storycatcher: Making Sense of Our Lives through the Power and Practice of Story*¹⁵. This book found its way to my bookshelf through sitting in the SPN course for the second time. While there are many authors that speak to me as a writer and practitioner I found myself intrigued and excited by Baldwin's exploration of story in organizations, which is Chapter 8.

Things I have reflected on, wondered and engaged in conversations around Baldwin put to words as she names the idea of story is ever changing within groups and that values, purpose really, contribute to sustainability of not just organizations, but those who stay. This whole chapter is marked in with red pen, underlines, notes in margins and square boxes around things I did not want to forget.

"One of the most empowering aspects of how story functions in organizations is that anyone can initiate shift and realignment" (p. 175). This statement amplifies my philosophy around leadership.

A more recent book that has contributed to my learning, lifted my spirit and contributed my reflection on my personal journey is *The Invitation to Love*¹⁶. Pierre

¹⁵ Christina Baldwin, *Storycatcher: Making Sense of Our Lives through the Power and Practice of Story* (2005).

¹⁶ Darren Pierre, *The Invitation to Love: Recognizing the Gift Despite Pain, Fear and Resistance* (2015).

writes about finding his inner truth through moments of doubt and his resiliency is inspiring. I have found as a first-generation high school graduate that I struggle with many authors and researchers and sometimes find myself feeling less than. Reading this, Pierre not only reminds the readers to love themselves first but to continue to invite others to the table.

Nearly ten years ago I took a summer class with Corrine Glesne in an older classroom on campus that rarely had air conditioning. As uncomfortable as the class could be, my experience in her class allowed me to explore writing for the first time in an artistic way. *In Becoming Qualitative Researchers, An Introduction*,¹⁷ Glesne speaks directly to me through the pages:

The research methods with which you feel most comfortable say something about your views on what qualifies as valuable knowledge and your perspective on the nature of reality; and you are attracted to and shape research problems that match your personal view of seeing and understanding the world.¹⁸

Not having the best K-12 education, I enter into most classrooms a few steps behind, even today writing this dissertation. The ways I make meaning and understand ways of knowing vary from many of those I have sat in classrooms with. I have hesitated to speak up frequently, volunteer to take public notes due to fear of exposing myself to everyone. Glesne provided me space to think about my way of knowing from a story lens, a poetic lens and for the first time let me know that I too could be valued asking questions differently, observing and writing about how I too come to see the world.

Later in my doctoral studies classes I was exposed to a book that remains one of the most influential assigned readings of my student career. Underlined, pages

¹⁷ Corrine Glesne, *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An Introduction* (2006).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

earmarked, folded and note cards in the pages, *The Character of Leadership*¹⁹ echoed what I longed to hear and gave me language to share that crisis can allow for opportunities and that I had value as a risk taker. Just looking over the pages of Chapter 12 with the turquoise blue pen markings and notes in the margins reminds me of all that I was working through as a young professional. In fact, it brings tears to my eyes. Little did I know at that time that this chapter brought me hope and there on page 125 after the last sentence, written in pen is, “boldness to act.” Looking back into the chapter, boldness to act came from thinking of the strategies to get to the next place, “the stubbornness and relentlessness to persist toward the achievement of goals even when the going becomes rough...”²⁰.

Last but not least, the guides that have in many ways given me permission to write and explore my story in my own way are Robert Nash. *Liberating Scholarly Writing: The Power of Personal Narrative*²¹ and *Me-search and Re-Search: A Guide for Writing Scholarly Personal Narrative Manuscripts*²². These texts continue to provide meaning to me as a student, teacher and community member. The way that I think about research, story telling and writing using the personal I. In Chapter Two I will further explore and share how SPN has contributed to my own learning and leading.

¹⁹ Michael Jenkins, and Deborah Bradshaw Jenkins, *The Character of Leadership: Political Realism and Public Virtue in Nonprofit Organizations* (1998).

²⁰ Ibid., 125.

²¹ Robert J. Nash, *Liberating Scholarly Writing: The Power of Personal Narrative* (2004).

²² Robert J. Nash and DeMethra LaSha Bradley, *Me-search and Re-Search: A Guide for Writing Scholarly Personal Narrative Manuscripts* (2011).

CHAPTER TWO

Finding SPN, Finding Myself

“At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us have cause to think with deep gratitude of those who lit the flame within us.”

-Albert Schweitzer

Dear Kim,

Hope this note finds you well! Just wanted to say thank you just because. I am so grateful to know you and to have you as an impactful part of my life story. Now more than ever I reflect on those conversations we had in your office. Thank you for taking the time to listen to me, value me, and make me feel mattered. I carry your bold compassion with me daily.

Love, Joey

The night before I was recognized for my ten years of membership in the Association of Fraternity and Sorority Advisors (the student affairs professional organization for fraternity and sorority professionals working on college campuses, inter/national headquarters or partner organizations), I was off to dinner with select invited professionals to celebrate the partnership and support of XYZ fraternity²³ on college campuses. This event is perceived as one of the most prestigious, invite only dinners of the whole conference. However, years ago this organization was not necessarily seen in the same light and perhaps in years coming another will be.

We mingled, said our hellos and then were asked to find our seats. You can always tell when people are nervous about what table they will be seated and with whom; however, at this event it is intimate enough and everyone really is there for the same reason – friendship and time with one another in celebration of fraternity done right.

²³ Some names and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.

At my table are individuals I have known for as long as I have been in the field. Individuals that have inspired me in my loneliest of moments and individuals that have lifted me and encouraged me to just go to work one more day. Not far from me is an individual that perhaps has made one of the biggest impacts on my choice to be in the field and pursue a doctoral degree. He tells it as it is, asks if you are really okay and means it when he extends a follow up or resource. Years ago, he really showed me that this fraternity advisor thing meant more and very publically in an awards speech shook up our whole Association with a dose of reality of where fraternity and sorority life was and in many ways still is.

His humor around risk management allows for people to laugh and feel a sense of relief as they lower their shoulders and exhale knowing that they are not the only ones experiencing such “can’t make this shit up” experiences. His controversial points of view around why we should be closing more chapters and/or jokingly suggesting a “good beer only” policy (meaning students would not share or give it to underage students as it would be costly and not able to be drank fast) make people really think, have meaningful conversations and get angry often resulting in more conversations and change.

There is a woman that also sits at the table, who has inspired me since I was a first-year graduate student. Her name is well known and for much more than fraternity and sorority life but for survival for beating cancer twice in her life. Years ago she was a “who’s-who” to me and I mistook her as a stereotypical sorority woman based on appearance and affiliation only to truly listen to her narrative of resilience, confidence and beauty, all while sharing that the diamond ring she wears is an item that is taken out seasonally to pass as those that you may have judged her to be to begin with. It has taken

me time to realize the impact such individuals and stories I have held closely and carried with me daily have had on my professional career and life.

In my office there is a teal box with “Gratitude” painted on it that a student leader made me as a parting gift years ago. In my office at home, there are two craft brown boxes overflowing with thank you cards, hand written notes and items I have received over the years. These special mementos remind me of the individuals and the experiences we shared together. Many remind me of the strength student leaders had to make change, become a better version of themselves or the hardships they may have encountered before getting to the end of their elected term. As I hold these items and re-read the words I am often overwhelmed with pride and so thankful that I had an opportunity to have a positive impact on their lives and that they too had such an everlasting impact on mine.

One of my first loves was art, first drawing and painting as a child, then music throughout middle school, high school and into college. In college, I switched my major from vocal performance to art and design, but both ways of expression remain important in my development and finding my true voice. It is common for me to have an experience, an interaction with individuals and I can remember sensory things over the words that were exchanged. What music was playing, what color they might have been wearing, fragrance or even the location where we stood.

I share this information as I feel it has merit and significance on how I found myself at this place, a place of exploration, learning to lead and trying to find meaning of my career choice in a way that was, for lack of a better word, me.

My memories have many common threads throughout the past thirty plus years. Emerging themes interwoven of learning to lead and the responsibilities that come hand and hand. I have found that confronting challenges and even crisis throughout my personal and professional life can bring comfort. Nash and Murray²⁴ share the idea that, “One person’s terrible crisis might be another person’s incredible opportunity.” Throughout my life I have found this to be true and hope that being put into these situations I have been able to lead with values not for others, but on behalf.

Perseverance is perhaps one of the greatest virtues that an individual can have. I have found myself calling to question my own success and abilities around writing this dissertation yet have found comfort and healing in telling my story through SPN writing. The support I have found in the SPN community is one of encouragement, possibility, healing and celebration. To me SPN has lifted me up when I have felt weak, given me space when I was tired, and allowed me to rest when others may have thought I was quitting.

*“There will come a time when you believe everything is finished.
That will be the beginning.”
-Louis L’Amour*

With humility and patience, I introduce to you the first SPN dissertation that identifies fraternity and sorority life as the topical subject. Throughout my time as an educator, mentor, advisor, instructor and student, I was always exploring SPN writing and just did not have the words or language to say so.

²⁴ Robert J. Nash and Michele Murray, *Helping College Students Find Purpose: The Campus Guide to Meaning Making* (2010), 132.

SPN was first introduced to me when I started working at UVM. I did not know much about it other than it was created and taught by a Robert Nash, professor in the Higher Education Student Affairs program. In the Spring of 2008 I was asked to sit on two graduate student comprehensive examination presentations, one an SPN, “Pledging Puerto Rico: The Experiences of a Woman of Color in a Historically White Sorority,” authored by my first graduate assistant, Stephanie “Mo” Moreira.

Mo’s comprehensive exam was beautifully written; exploring a topical area that to this day, to my knowledge, has yet to be further explored. As a woman of color also in a historically white sorority I was able to identify with her narrative and the aspects of questing membership, covering²⁵ and family identity. Mo’s writing reflected many of our conversations and her way of calling me out, while calling me in as a mentor and as a mentee. Easily this heart-touching manuscript stirred me and I was intrigued by this writing style but would not find myself asking more questions for years to come.

Years would pass and I would sit on more comprehensive examination presentations. Opportunities to attend dissertation defenses and even class assignments reading Nash’s articles or books would find their way to me. SPN has a way of truly connecting individuals and in experiences where disaster or crisis has occurred; SPN has a way of helping one find joy in the midst of tragedy. This perhaps is the reason I found myself meeting with Nash seeing if he would take me in after being exhausted trying to fit into other molds, methods and allowing myself to slow down and discover what was there in the moments of despair – my own story.

²⁵ Kenji Yoshino, *Covering: The Hidden Assault on our Civil Rights* (2006).

SPN Methodology

SPN is a methodology where the purpose is to impact the writer and reader, individual and community as discussed in nearly all of Nash's books and articles. It is a newer research method that was created by Nash at UVM.

In *Liberating Scholarly Writing*,²⁶ Nash introduces us to SPN and makes a case for this new kind of writing and research. Nash challenges faculty to value personal written expression...if they (students) choose to do this type of writing, asking for it to be an acceptable (and respectable) genre for conducting certain kinds of research²⁷.

Years ago I took a research class with Corrine Glesne and we used the text, *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An Introduction* that she authored. Ironically, this class was one of my favorite classes that I took as a doctoral student even though it was offered in the summer in a room that rarely had air conditioning. I still have my book from the class with lines highlighted and notes in the margin. The passion Glesne had around research was contagious and her encouragement to be creative was something I had never encountered before. As written in my book in my own handwriting she encouraged us to think about the researcher and the lens they are seeing the world through, therefore writing from. I learned that the research methods with which you feel most comfortable say something about your views on what qualifies as valuable knowledge and your perspective on the nature or reality, and you are attracted to and share research problems that match your personal view of seeing and understanding the

²⁶ Robert J. Nash, *Liberating Scholarly Writing: The Power of Personal Narrative* (2004).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

world²⁸. Glesne really encouraged her students and readers of her book to think about their way of knowing as a way to seek a research method and approach.

While some may try to place SPN under qualitative approach or even more specifically narrative research, SPN researchers like myself find comfort in the discomfort of others, as SPN is a methodology. As someone who took her time finding her way to dissertation writing I have had time to sit with my answers of why I chose SPN for quite some time; however, I had never had to express or explain this to anyone outside UVM, all where people are familiar with the genre.

Recently while attending a conference I had numerous questions about my dissertation writing and as anticipated my choice of methodology. The first exchange came within sixty minutes after landing in Texas during the shuttle ride to the conference hotel. There were already three of us in the shuttle and we were well aware that our van would make multiple stops before even leaving the airport as we were picked up at the last gate exit. We exchanged hellos, the one shared they knew who I was due to their graduate student, we talked about our mutual mentee and generally made small talk while going to the next stop. The next individual that got on the shuttle did not look familiar as he sat next to me, but I could tell that we were of similar age. I introduced myself and he introduced himself. He was very friendly and shared this was his second time attending the conference, his title and his journey to get to this role. We engaged in further conversation around where we both are from and how we got to the universities we both are currently at and our guilt around choices that were not the most favorable of our families (due to location). That is when the conversation went deeper and I learned about

²⁸ Corrine Glesne, *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An Introduction*, (2006), 5.

his struggles, the campus politics, the upper administration all alumni from his fraternity community and then in his words, how the students are now starting to feel the systematic failure.

What he said hit a chord with me. Previously, when things were rocky, for lack of better words, I felt it – the pressure and the backstory. Most recently with the national news and wave of events, even my students were asking when the second shoe would drop. Our conversation continued to get richer and all while supporting one another with words of encouragement, laughter or moments of, “I’ve been there.”

Anne Lamott shares that...

You can’t get any of these truths by sitting in a field smiling beatifically, avoiding your anger and damage and grief. Your anger and damage and grief are the way to the truth. We don’t have much truth to express unless we have gone into those rooms and closets and words and abuses that we were told not to go in to. When we have gone in and looked around for a long while, just breathing and finally taking it in-then we will be able to speak in our own voice and to stay in the present moment. And that moment is home²⁹.

While Lamott is speaking to finding your voice, she also gives light to the way I was feeling in that moment. Together this near stranger and I engaged in conversation, not about how successful our communities are but about the darker, less discussed areas. He shared his narrative around a fraternity, “rage cage,” and how alumni felt nothing was wrong with it as they were not forcing the women to get in it. The “rage cage,” as it was called was a box that women would get into to dance and entertain the other party attendees. A powerful moment in our conversation was where there was silence and we both exhaled in unison. Followed by, his words, I am tired, what are you writing your dissertation on? My response, this, our career choice and why I stay.

²⁹ Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life* (1994), 201.

I took this as a moment of courage to share my chosen methodology, SPN, which was new to him but excited him to hear and learn about as he too was working on a dissertation. I shared that SPN tells the scholar's story, and others' narratives through the work. Unlike other forms of research, "I" is used and celebrated and extends out to the "you" and "they," but with purpose to make it as universal as possible. Universalizability speaks to the necessary function of an SNP manuscript to be able to transcend outward and beyond the writer's individual experiences³⁰.

SPN has four major components, Nash and Bradley call these pre-search, me-search, re-search and we-search.³¹ They highlight major themes and connect the reader to the writer's personal story, with full intention of creating opportunities for the readers to reflect on their own journey while drawing upon the relevant shared research and scholarship in the manuscript.

Later on in the conference I had two back-to-back experiences where individuals asked me about my research. The first was excited to hear these new terms and acknowledged we can really learn a lot from others' experiences and transformations (both the community and as individuals), while learning about our own way of being as the reader. Her points were very similar to Nash and Viray's, when talking about head to the heart, and back again. In Part one of *How Stories Heal*, they express this requires a unique set of technical skills that enable both the writer, and the reader, to arrive at the ultimate goals of self-understanding and self-transformation. Furthermore, they express personal witness means to write vulnerably³².

³⁰ Robert J. Nash and DeMethra LaSha Bradley, *Me-Search and Re-Search*, (2011),104.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

³² Robert J. Nash and Sydney Viray, *How Stories Heal*, (2014) 5.

My next interaction regarding my dissertation was with a professional who prides himself on being a guru of assessment and is also in a doctoral program. Knowing this individual for many years I knew there would be questions of validity and reliability of my chosen methodology. I braced myself for his questions and his uncomfortable way of firing away questions with a smirk on his face. I responded and even though his approach was abrasive I held my own.

I shared that SPN is not for everyone or for every question while I assured him that any research can be questionable. I reiterated that the goal of an SPN is to accurately reflect the experiences of the researcher/subject and that one of the main questions around validity is how can the research be wrong? With this being said it is critical that I tell my whole truth and where opportunities arise allow others to read my manuscript to confirm their own narrative holds true.

While engaging in this uncomfortable conversation, I reminded myself that he was the most uncomfortable and that I needed to release and speak from my heart. I further expressed the long history of story telling and shared narratives and the value around the self-inquiry and truth. SPN really does allow for one to tell a story and in many ways, remove the veil or call to question one making judgment or placing opinion without knowing the facts. As we ended our conversation I may have not fully won him over but I did not really care. I was provided an opportunity to share more about SPN and did so gracefully and knowing he will come back to this conversation.

SPN and Fraternity and Sorority Life

In the 1962 edition of *A Complete Guide to College Fraternity Rushing and Pledging*, John Fitzgerald tries to speak to the incoming Jonny Joiner giving tips and

hints into the fraternity world. While I believe that much of this book today is worth a good laugh there is one strong point that still echoes true, “The advice to be yourself”³³. Fitzgerald tells the reader that no maxim is more often violated than this one.

When I think back to my joining process and the students I see today, this tip is often forgotten. Many students get caught up in personalities, images and what they want to be rather than celebrating who they are, which I later see in the reflections of my colleagues. SPN can be a powerful ally and advocate for fraternity and sorority life. When you look through the research that has been done around fraternity and sorority life you will find research on the use and abuse of alcohol and drugs, hazing prevention, academics, retention and other topical areas. You will not find any to date that really explore the experience from a professional’s personal experience. I hope that this SPN will help fill some of that gap.

Christina Baldwin discusses the idea of reclaiming one’s story in order to become the storycatcher. Which as shared being a storycatcher is being an individual willing to share their stories, listen to others and learn³⁴. She asks questions that really speak to me around mentorship, life’s purpose, courage and crisis. In her book there is a very powerful chapter, “We Are the Ones,” that I have read quite a few times as it really confirmed that SPN was right for me as the power and possibility of story in organizations is often not shared in a way to truly lift and amplify others’ experiences.

For me by using SPN as my methodology my story offers a solution to many and offers the reader opportunities to shift and change the fraternity and sorority professionals experience in the future. Baldwin asks how far back into the history of

³³ John Fitzgerald, *A Complete Guide to College Fraternity Rushing and Pledging*, (1962), 100.

³⁴ <https://peerspirit.com/writing-and-story/what-is-storycatching/>

organizations do we have to go to understand the choices that brought people here?³⁵

This is something I will be reflecting upon as I move forward acknowledging the history of fraternal organizations and the historical development of the role of the campus fraternity and sorority life professional.

As already mentioned, Nash and Bradley offer four components of SPN, pre-search, me-search, re-search, we-search. I would like to extend an invitation to think about these four components and how they will be used as guides to write this dissertation.

Pre-Search: How Do I get Started?

Over the past years I have taken multiple classes about different research methods and have also taken SPN and additional elective courses with Robert Nash. I have had the privilege to engage in various conversations in spaces with advocates and allies of the SPN style. With this support and with listening to my gut I have been able to identify my audience, my support system (village), scholarship that contributes to my subject area and my self-confidence to start.

Me-Search: What is my Personal Narrative Regarding the Ideas Emphasized in my Writing?

As the voice or as the narrator, my role as the researcher and the subject must be done in an ethical and meaningful way. I must write from the inside out as Nash often shares in his classes and as Baldwin reminds the reader, story told to inform-inspire-activate becomes an act of citizenship³⁶. As I continue to bring my voice to this topic,

³⁵ Christina Baldwin, *Storycatcher*, (2005), 176.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 226.

more of my own values and perspectives will naturally come through not only for myself but for the reader.

Both Nash and Baldwin talk about structure in their books. Finding and listening to my writing voice and acknowledging the themes will help narrow down the experiences to share and help the reader be able to identify them as emerging themes all while getting to the core of my writing.

Re-Search: What Scholars and Researchers have informed my Writing?

Throughout this dissertation I will weave in primary and secondary scholarly sources that support and ground my theories, ideas and suggestions. Additionally, I will be given the freedom to express my research in creative ways through poetic transcriptions, poems, quotes and photography. All of these items add to the shared scholarship and confirm that my story matters.

We-Search: What are the Implications for my Profession, or Field of Study, That can be Generalized from my Scholarly Personal Narrative?

As mentioned prior this will be the first dissertation written using SPN discussing the fraternity and sorority life professionals' experience. This writing offers an opportunity for individuals to have a closer look, or have their own voices with similar experiences heard to an audience that may not have heard it prior. I hope that I am able to convey my experience and how I have found meaning while offering support to the new professional.

I have included some additional SPN reflective thoughts Nash speaks about vigor and defines it as a personal intensity or strength that calls for a writing style that is

risk taking, out of the ordinary, forceful, full of energy and personal³⁷. I like to think about this when thinking of my own personal validation of my voice, experience, intuition, choices, finding my way and trust. It is critical for all SPN writers to write with vigor and take a risk and write. Write into discovering; I already know what I do best is fraternity and sorority life advising. Now I write to understand.

Dear Reader,

I sit here looking out my window, wondering if I know the view as clearly or as well from any of my home windows. Looking around my cluttered space I know where everything is and belongs. The left over t-shirts, buttons and flyers that for some reason I have yet to recycle, holding onto them like some item that needs to be preserved for students yet to come through my door. My desk is covered with sticky notes reminding me of things I want to remember, do or just a way to keep an idea fresh in my mind. I don't remember the last time I had a grocery list or any lists as much as my sticky notes for work reasons.

Sometimes I'm fearful that I have given my all to this field and might not be good at anything else. Other times, I'm ready to take on the world or anyone who will just listen about why I have the best job in the world, why when I was in the hospital in labor with my daughter I still was connected virtually to my students answering questions about recruitment events and social event policies.

When I see you, so full of excitement and joy for your new career, something that feels so comfortable and so right, I want to pull you aside and tell you to go home

³⁷ Robert J. Nash, *Liberating Scholarly Writing: The Power of Personal Narrative* (2004), 82.

more nights than you stay in the office. Join a community organization and have friends who do not have an .edu email. Tell your supervisor you have a dog that needs to go to the bathroom and that you must be home by 5:30 pm, even if you don't have a dog but you have yet to see the sunset in your town that you've now lived in for three years.

However possible, get thick skin quickly. Media has a way of following not only your community, but you. I promise, you will be written about, spoken about and not liked by all. You will be asked for interviews, you will be wrongly quoted and you'll quickly learn how to turn around a public records request in 24 hours. Know and remember, if you are doing your job correctly it is likely that you won't win over all community members as change has a funny way of doing that.

Always take time to think about the what if's and try to be prepared for the worst news tomorrow and the day after as it seems, "when it rains, it pours." Know that by the time you learn a protocol or have a good understanding of the policy it is likely that it will change. Show your frustration with a smile, while expressing your concern behind closed doors.

Your allegiance to the fraternal movement will be tested over and over again. There may be days you are reminded you work for a college or university for their betterment, not the fraternities and **this will hurt**. For many of us our own affiliation and love for our fraternity lead us to this seat.

Controversies, crisis and deaths...never get easier and can be as painful as students that leaves their organization because they really did believe in the espoused values of the organization, while the other members would rather have a social club.

CHAPTER THREE

*“Don’t ever confuse the two, your life and your work.
That’s what I have to say.
The second is only a part of the first...
There are thousands of people out there with the same
degree you have; where you get a job, there will be
thousands of people doing what you want to do for a living.
But you are the only person alive who has sole custody of your life.
Your particular life. Your entire life.
Not just your life at a desk, or your life on the bus, or in
the car, or at the computer.
Not just the life of your mind, but the life of your heart.”
-Anne Quindlen*

As mentioned in Chapter One, there have been many moments where I chose my career over my personal life including relationships and family. In this chapter I anticipate my head will fight a bit with my heart as I share critical experiences that have contributed to who I am today and who I continue to become. Being fully transparent, this chapter has been the hardest to get onto paper and in many ways forced me to think about the time that has passed and come to terms with the dark side of my chosen career and some of the shadow sides of leadership. There were choices made along the years and a fork in the road, where I had to admit I was not proud of where the fraternity and sorority industry was headed, almost like the curtain was pulled and even colleagues I had once admired seemed to have removed their masks.

In Brené Brown’s book, *Daring Greatly*³⁸, the introduction felt like it was directed to me. Challenging me to think about my moments of vulnerability and how she has had to be a mapmaker and a traveler. I love the visual of creating a map for one’s

³⁸ Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent and Lead* (2012), 16.

own journey and having the opportunity and responsibility to change the course. When I think about how I have continued to question how I fit into the profession of fraternity and sorority life I like to believe that I have taken new routes and by doing so have invited different individuals along.

Success Defined

For many individuals success is defined differently. For some, it is measured easily and for others it will continue to be ambiguous and momentarily. For fraternity and sorority life professionals, past success can help guide decisions that further shape the community they are working and with good intentions can set up one for professional success in advancing one's career. For me, success has meant being able to sleep at night knowing I tried my best. In the earlier years of my career it might have also been quantifiable by number of attendees at an event or how individuals answered a survey. Now I can tell you, numbers do not necessarily equate success and with surveys, if all the results are in your favor you likely did not reach far enough.

In order to make change, success has meant getting thicker skin and understanding not everyone will be happy all the time. Unpredictable experiences have provided me learning moments to reevaluate what success means and how to get up in the morning and try once more. Success also has meant really digging in and learning from not just the success, but also the challenges and the experiences I hope that I will never encounter again and that are often the memories that bring tears to my eyes.

Bonds Broken

Many days even I struggle with wondering if what I do as my profession even matters. Does this even matter? Am I making a difference? Are we, fraternity and

sorority professionals, making a difference? In the controversial book, *True Gentlemen: The Broken Pledge of America's Fraternities*, fraternity culture is not sugar coated. The factual culture of hazing, sexual violence and racism are named with actual events identified. Names of individuals that I personally know are quoted and in moments it feels surreal to be reading this all in one text. While I do not agree with the whole book, I did read many parts a few times over including this sentence that with the current climate of our country just speaks to me. "With their history of segregation, racial hostility, and misogyny, these distinctive organizations embody many of the unresolved conflicts still plaguing the United States"³⁹.

The choices and actions of making steps forward are abruptly interrupted constantly. All you have to do is turn on the news, national, local or even grab a school newspaper. Fraternity and sorority behaviors and actions are rightfully being questioned and sadly, fraternity and sorority professionals – both campus professionals and headquarters professionals – continue to remind undergraduate members that the average individual does not know the difference between one organization to the next. Therefore, we all feel it, every single time.

The benefit of joining a fraternity or sorority depends on where that university/college chapter and or community (system) falls on the spectrum. Some chapters are deeply connected to philanthropic/service endeavors and academic success along with social, while others only the latter. Additionally, where many professionals may stumble, others, including myself, may think they want to change. They meaning, the undergraduate and even the alumni members. Some chapter environments sadly just

³⁹ John Huchinger, *True Gentlemen: The Broken Pledge of American Fraternities* (2017), 249.

have dangerous results and in other situations individuals are not held accountable perpetuating how organizations are, “failing to live up to their words”⁴⁰.

I have not been naïve; I realize that joining a fraternity or sorority for good or for bad (i.e., access to alcohol, hazing) still creates a sense of belonging. For years I have thought there was a clear intersection between fraternity and sorority life and social justice. Robert Nash shares, “If there is such a thing as universal, ‘core values,’ then it will be the responsibility of each of us, both as individuals and as groups to construct them together, and these will always be up for grabs, always in process, and always flawed, as we engage one another in the cooperative construction of stories”⁴¹. While in this text Nash is speaking to the idea of moral conversation in the margin of the book I have an arrow out saying, “fraternal organizations.”

As long as I have been a member of my fraternal organization, years before becoming a fraternity/sorority professional there has never been a time where all members constructed the story together. Even today as I think about my experience as a campus professional and member of the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors (AFA) I struggle to come up with a list where all voices felt heard and when I do it is limited. At the most recent fraternity and sorority professional’s annual conference, members struggled to even have conversations with one another regarding voting. The Business Meeting was far from healthy, members speaking over one another, elected leaders’ choices around social media and our future professionals, the graduate students, confusion around what was happening. Just like years ago, we as professionals in this

⁴⁰ Ibid., 254.

⁴¹ Robert J. Nash, DeMethra LaSha Bradley and Arthur W. Chickering, *How to Talk About Hot Topics on Campus: From Polarization to Moral Conversation* (2008), 42.

field cannot even agree on if inter/national headquarters professionals should be able to be elected to the role of AFA President. Watching the business meeting from my seat with my mentor behind me and dear friends surrounding me I observed the meeting unfold and the lack of trust become more and more visible.

Belonging is not always healthy and my experience as an AFA member has not been either. While I have found comfort and deep friendships I have also found moments of exclusion. I have been in spaces where colleagues do not agree on things like hazing prevention philosophies and sexual violence reporting and as a new professional I questioned if my social status was valued more than my contributions to the field. Recently while reading *Braving the Wilderness* by Brené Brown I found myself wondering more about what experiences we have as fraternity and sorority members and/or professionals that shape our trajectory or leadership. Brown shares her own devastating story of not making the high school drill team. While you may think, drill team? The story really does connect to the fraternity and sorority experience, I promise.

Brown is honest and shares, “To this day, I’m not sure I’ve ever wanted anything in my life more than I wanted a place on this drill team”⁴². She calls it the holy grail of belonging, sharing she would have a big sister and continues on about the social opportunities, sleepovers and locker decorations. She describes in detail how she practiced, knew all the steps and lost weight for the weigh in. As I am sure you can tell already, she does not make the team. While Brown was more prepared than some that did, she did not, “have the look,” as she was told.

⁴² Brené Brown, *Braving The Wilderness: The Quest for True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone*, (2017), 10.

Similar to many that attend fraternity or sorority recruitment and may be looked over, Brown did not have the knowledge about how she would be perceived showing up not wearing the school colors, hair done and makeup on. This story is something that is relatable to many. While it may not be the drill team, the idea of not belonging to something you have your heart set on is universal. When Brown wrote the chapter in her book she sobbed, as not belonging even years later still hurts and as she identifies, "...has the power to break our heart, our spirit, at our sense of self-worth"⁴³. While Brown has a moment of thinking she may owe her career to not belonging I paused and wondered how belonging has had an effect on fraternity and sorority professionals.

Unwanted Experiences

Be the light. Focus on what you can control. Those words have echoed in my head so many times. From phone calls at 3:00 a.m. dealing with parties being busted to homophobic slurs being shouted at brothers. Mornings being woken by tears on the phone of mistakes to supervisors telling me the DEA just knocked on a fraternity door. Afternoons with police reports on vandalism, theft, hazing and sexual violence. Wondering where is the reward in all this. All this, is this where I should be? Is this what I am meant to do?

Amy

I recall being in a hotel suite at a conference receiving a phone call that would forever change the way I think about fraternity and sorority membership. Sitting on the corner of the bed it was shared with me that Amy⁴⁴ left her organization. While leaving

⁴³ Ibid., 14.

⁴⁴ Some names and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.

an organization happens more frequently than any of us want to draw attention to (for reasons across the board – financial difficulties, fit, time commitment etc.), she belonged.

I knew something was wrong. I could sense it, call it a gut feeling, and Amy just was not quite herself. As a student leader, I had worked with her in various roles and she had taken my class, meaning I saw her at least once a week. When I think back on my tenure at UVM, she rises to the top for coming into my office just to chat, ask what if questions and laugh. We always laughed. However, something was off, perhaps her sparkle, the way she held her head, just the way.

Right around the same time I started noticing something was off, a group of us went to a conference in the Midwest, including Amy. With attending conferences with students there are always a few things you can count on. They will be excited when you share that all food is on you and that without a doubt you will grow closer to them. In my experience the bonding between professionals and student leaders at conferences, institutes and leadership retreats is really special.

During our trip we were able to see some of the city, shop, have some great food and see a drag show. A first for many that were with us and something they looked forward to experiencing. However, during that trip more hints were dropped and/or alluded to. I found myself in a conversation with my graduate advisor, where they too thought something had happened. Knowing that timing is key in having conversations around sensitive topics we did not bring it up while we were away from home. However, once we returned home it was within days that her own internal alarm went off and there Amy was sitting on the stool in the corner of my office.

*I listened. My tongue touching the top of mouth (something I heard kept you from crying), whispers in my head.
You can't help if you cry.
You can't.
Listening, her words falling onto the floor and washing away with her tears.
Listening so closely so I could hear over my heartbeat.
Theme party. Invite only. Costumes. Glitter.
Time had passed.
She had no idea what happened.
His face in her memory or was it just because she was told.
His costume. The Captain.
Since then, taunting, jokes and laughter from his fraternity brothers.
They seemed to know more than she.*

The whole story fell from her lips. I continued to listen to who all knew, who was there and kept thinking about how this was someone's daughter. I watched as her emotions shifted while telling the story and felt her anger. I explained to her, what she already knew and what her options were for support and asked her if she wanted to make a report to the police. In my years she remains the only student that had no hesitation. Which is not surprising, as we know underreporting is sadly the norm.

Minutes later, in the conference room, I sat there as her support listening again to her experience. This time in the company of an officer sitting across from the table from her while I sat in the corner. By no means was the story any easier to listen to, nor was it any easier to keep the tears from falling. After the report was submitted, the police officer extended resources, explained what would happen next and asked if there were any questions. The officer left and shortly after Amy went home.

I closed the door to my office and the tears fell immediately. I never felt so lost, I never felt so helpless, and I felt anger in a way I never felt before. As a professional I knew sexual violence happened on our campus and in our fraternity and sorority community. However, there was no way to prepare me for an experience of a student I

worked so closely with and having the violence occur not only on our campus, but also within our fraternity and sorority community by another leader.

Weeks would pass and interviews occurred. The fraternity member was not happy and his fraternity brothers stood by him that nothing happened between the two. Many called her a liar, blamed her costume choice and even questioned if she was sure she did not consent. When members of her chapter eventually found out, the lack of support shocked me and quite frankly disgusted me in a way that it was hard to not have bias towards their leadership.

The fraternity would have members that stormed into my office and demand to know what I had heard and what she reported. I had to share over and over the legality of what was happening and whom they could talk with for more information and support, as I had nothing to share. To make the situation even more disturbing during the weeks that followed, our office would notice a very popular leader in same fraternity as the alleged perpetrator distanced himself and showed up with friends from another fraternity over his own.

Months later he would share that during that time he chose to leave his fraternity and/or felt the push to leave as he supported the alleged survivor and challenged his fraternity for their actions following the allegations becoming public. His loyalty to the fraternity was no more; therefore, many made it clear he did not have a place in the organization.

Many sisters of her sorority were afraid this accusation would affect their social capital with the fraternities and impact their ranking in the sorority community perceived by the fraternities and other social organizations on campus. She eventually left her

chapter as the bonds of sisterhood and support, her reason for joining, seemed to disappear in moments of discourse. I wish I could say this was the last time I experienced such events and I wish I could say it will never happen again but I know better. Sadly, that experience changed her life forever and in a different way, my own.

Continues

Through the whole experience, stretching out to a whole academic year and trickling into the fall, I had no idea who was there for me. Hearing about sexual violence takes a lot from someone and in order to continue the work, I felt my vessel needed to be emptied. Looking back, I can share today that I needed a mentor and/or a supervisor to ask me how I was taking care of myself. Did I need someone to talk with? As a new professional in any field the impact of hearing about crisis and being in the mist of so many controversies at any moment can really take a toll. I look back at that time and see fun weekend pictures, big smiles, laughter and fancy drinks. During the week I was educating around healthy alcohol and drug behaviors and on the weekends I was the definition of binge drinking. I was getting so lost in my work, long days and the weekend, I got broken. Broken in the way I took care of myself, broken in the carefree lifestyle and whom I spent time with.

These choices were not isolated to just me. I have had friends share similar stories around pouring nearly every hour into their career. I have found that when opening up about the unhealthy choices that I have made in a group of fraternity and sorority professionals, the conversation will eventually lead to the culture of the AFA annual conference. Why is it that at a professional fraternity and sorority conference that I have seen a new professional throw up in the lobby from drinking too much? Why is it

that we struggle with the idea of ever opening up the conference to undergraduates, is it because individuals would have to make different decisions?

Today as I write this I am mindful of how this might read. I am not trying to shame any individual for being social, I just want us to think about the theme of belonging and when it becomes or continues to be harmful. For me, I think about how my sense of belonging as a new professional came from long hours, bragging rights of the hours and the numerous committees I was on. How I chose a career that was miles and miles away from my family so even if I did have a weekend free I was never close enough for it to matter.

How I could observe and listen to the numerous human stories of sexual violence, like Amy's story, and the alcohol and drug violations, the stories that I often joked were, "job security." Spanning from underage drinking, cocaine dealing and stories that you just cannot make up, like personal kegs, parents and families' calls to administration that we were ruining their students' undergraduate experience. Does this sound familiar?

Somewhere along the way the "irony of loneliness"⁴⁵, as rupi kaur writes, helped form my extended family. The loneliness I felt as a fraternity and sorority professional in the beginning years was now connected to other professionals across the country. When the fraternity "rape survey" as it was coined made the national news and our past fraternity of the year was closed, it was other fraternity and sorority professionals that reached out to make sure I was okay. Even now as I think about that time in my career my eyes tear up. A situation so unpredictable and so impactful left me feeling so

⁴⁵ rupi kaur. *the sun and her flowers* (2017), 73.

disappointed. Disappointed in the students who I thought were leading our fraternity community and disappointed in myself for not seeing it coming. It was not my biological family that reached out, I am sure even today they have no idea that this occurred. Nor was it my colleagues on campus that checked to see how I was doing. To make the situation harder, many jumped to conclusions and additionally others publically went to, “close the fraternities.” This experience was one I became too familiar with.

What I know is one day, I woke up and I was not a new professional anymore. My voice was heard in a different way and my responsibilities shifted. When crisis and bad situations occurred, I could predict the next steps and the moment when someone would say, “close the fraternities.” However, I had not been provided an opportunity to share with them all why I believed in fraternity and sorority life to begin with and why I would not trade it for all I have learned. Lastly, how success was taking on a new feeling and how I started to realize, for me success was finding my confidence, as I became a more seasoned professional and mentor for the next generation of fraternity and sorority life professionals.

Finding North

*But if these years have taught me anything it is this: you can never run away. Not ever.
The only way out is in.”
-Junot Diaz*

The first and last time I physically ran away from home was when I was five or six years old. The disagreement that led to a stubborn younger me packing up and heading to Granny’s house was simple, I was not allowed to wear my new clothing until school started. Thinking back I did not even make it to the main road in our small town before heading back. Of course, I cried when I saw my mom and she held me and cried as well. Now as a mother, I think of that image and know that watching me pack up would have made me laugh; however, watching me make it a block out the window would have made me nervous and then having me return and joyously return to my arms would have made me shed tears as well.

So much comes up for me when I think about that experience so many years ago. The privilege of having a loving home and without question knowing I belonged. *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose and Faith*, helped me understand home. Parks shares, “...home is the most powerful word in the English language. It is where we start from. It is what we aspire to. To be at home is to have a place in the scheme of life—a place where we are comfortable; know that we belong; can be who we are; and can honor, protect, and create what we truly love”⁴⁶.

⁴⁶ Sharon D. Parks, *Big Questions Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith*, (2000) 34.

I have had a long journey to where I am today and my identities have further become a part of who I am and how I have found confidence to use my voice. At five or six years old I had no idea what challenges I would see in the next ten, twenty even thirty years. However, I knew that I would always find comfort in the arms of my mother and just knowing that as long as I was trying my best, she would support me along the way. I also knew that being home would bring a sense of grounding that could not be found elsewhere. It was in my small town that I was provided numerous opportunities to explore, learn and participate. Parks questions an ancient question, “Who am I under these stars?” And shared it is becoming, “Who am I among these stars”⁴⁷.

Working with college students time and time again proved that my upbringing ironically set me up for success in some areas. When you go to high school with sixty kids, I never felt that just because I was not good at something I did not belong. However, I did feel a sense of awareness of how to maximize my strengths as part of the team and or community. Where my small home town did not necessarily set me up for success is just with navigating the unspoken rules of attending college and later dealing with a wider gap of the have and have not’s.

*“the greatest gift sadness gave me
was the motivation to transform”
yung pueblo*

Over the past handful of years there is one experience I have pushed deep into the halls of my memory and have done everything possible to not think about that moment. While SPN writing has proven time and time again to provide opportunities to write

⁴⁷ Ibid., 36.

personally and narratively in a way that is “transformative and healing⁴⁸” for each individual, I have in many ways avoided sharing one of the most impactful experiences I have had due to the shame and hurt it brought out in me. I have found myself asking, what am I waiting for? Why have I not shared? The answer was fear.

Those Who Don’t Know

The green on campus has always been a place of solitude for me, even in the most humbling of moments. As beautiful as Vermont autumns are, not even the most vivid oranges and reds can make that fall memory any better. My heart felt torn out, left with crispy brown leaves and decaying smell.

On the other end of the phone was a familiar voice as I was requested to come to the Affirmative Action & Equal Opportunity (AAEO) office. Being summoned anywhere is never a good sign, and the AAEO office leaves you with a warm feeling from the top of your head to the pit in your stomach. The AAEO officer greeted me as warmly as possible, a mother of one of my student leaders we knew from another campus. There she sat me down, and shared with me that there were allegations involving me around sexual harassment. The moments that followed have left my memory like they never happened. Looking back, I imagine I teared up, listened closely to the next steps and thanked her.

From there I remember sitting on a bench in the green feeling broken. Scanning my memory trying to remember what could have happened to put me in this situation. Next thing I knew I was in my supervisor’s office, crying and trying to fully understand all the moving pieces. While the weeks and months to follow would be some of the

⁴⁸ Robert J. Nash and Sydnee Viray, *How Stories Heal: Writing our way to meaning and wholeness in the academy*, (2011), 7.

hardest days of my personal and professional life, I would learn quite a lot about myself and my philosophy around supervising and policy education and practice.

The next seven weeks I would take a leave from the University while the investigation would be going on. While this was not my suggestion, nor did I first agree to this idea initially, listening to the reasoning and learning what other parties were involved in this situation, I realized very quickly it was the right choice. There was no reason for me to be around to provide any notion of retaliation or favoritism of other organizations.

Since I am writing this now and have remained employed you can put together that I was not found responsible and/or removed from my job. However, I would like to share a bit about what I learned through those months off and re-entering my place of employment that left me with scars, but also strength.

First, I learned my place of employment had become a home. My role, my colleagues, even the building I had an affinity with. I looked inward a lot during that time on what this meant for me and thought about how, due to the situation, I was unable to be transparent with everyone I cared about. Feeling that even in that moment, I was more worried about taking care of them, than myself. Sharon Daloz Parks shared the philosophy around home from her own research and experiences, “A part of becoming at home in the universe is discovering our place within it...not so much a matter of leaving home as it is undergoing a series of transformations in the meaning of home”⁴⁹.

During this difficult time in my career, I was personally struggling to figure out if this was a sign. Was I supposed to leave the university or even the field? I felt like I was

⁴⁹ Sharon D. Parks, *Big Questions Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith*, (2000) 51.

the little girl again running away from home, but just like years ago while in my head I thought it over just as I hit the road, I would turn back around. I was not going anywhere, I just needed to welcome the growth and use the pain to figure out what was next.

Second, I learned that when some individuals do not like change sometimes they would do just about anything to stop it. Change is hard and with fraternity and sorority life professionals not necessarily staying at one college or university for an extended time, sustaining change can be challenging. In my own personal experience, I was the first fraternity and sorority advisor to wear the hat of only that advisory role to stay at the university for more than two years in quite a long time. My dedication to change and assisting, even pushing the fraternities and sororities to reevaluate their purposes, was not welcomed with open arms. This taught me so much about the different types of change and how, even in the 1922-1923 Vermont Handbook, where it clearly read, “Eliminate your prep school past⁵⁰...” was present today. I had to work hard to learn and try to understand the differences around privilege in the fraternity and sorority community that could not be more different than my own undergraduate experience.

Lastly, I had to learn to forgive. It is still a vivid memory, sitting in the chairs at the round wooden table. Me listening as I am told how they – my supervisor and the student – met and shared the process on how to file the report on my alleged actions. When I asked why they did not encourage us to meet and talk to see if there was a misunderstanding, I was told, very shortly, that the student said they had tried to reach out.

⁵⁰ A.S. Peterson (Ed.), *The Vermont Handbook*, (1922), 13.

I have thought about that meeting for years and have tried so hard to heal and to understand. What could I learn from that situation that would help me be a better supervisor one day? How would I have handled the situation differently? Why am I still so angry? Having taken the time to look at the research around supervising, I have found many themes around setting expectations, being transparent around management style and coaching. Keehner expressed, “A supervisor needs to candidly consider certain questions: Have I done enough to assist this staff member through training, support, motivation and potential partnership?⁵¹” Reluctant to speak up at the time and being so fearful of the power that they had I did not know what to even ask for in that moment around what support would I need, while in my head the vision of them taking a vase representing my very being and smashing it on the floor is how I felt.

The answer of how I learned to forgive is simple and perhaps complex. In December of 2016, while attending a national conference, I attended a session called, “How We Made Lemonade!” The abstract read;

The old adage says, when life gives you lemons, make lemonade. The presenters will share personal recipes for making lemonade after some major life transitions-job loss, miscarriage, and death. Each person has had their own personal tragedies, but ultimately it is what you learn from it and how you move on to achieve a healthy balance. Participants will learn coping skills when difficulty circumstances, both personally and professionally, impact your life. Participants will understand the importance of a support team during times of challenge and uncertainty.⁵²

⁵¹ Robert L. Ackerman, Editor, *The Mid-Level Manager in Student Affairs: Strategies for Success* (2007), 118.

⁵² Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors 2016 Guidebook.

During the session, seasoned professionals, legacies in the fraternity and sorority profession, shared their gut-wrenching stories. The vulnerability left us all speechless and there was not a dry eye. The powerful storytelling of these individuals as they dug deep and retold things I am sure they wish they had forgotten, stating it was the first time they shared so publically was liberating. The theme of resilience, courage and belonging just spoke to me. After the session I found myself verklempt⁵³, so I went to my room, hopped in the shower and cried.

So many answers came to me. The loneliness I felt as a new professional was no longer there. Even when I felt alone, I was not. Through the years I had become a part of this family, another home of fraternity and sorority life professionals which included the numerous graduate students I had poured every ounce of energy I could into. Digging deep I realized I was still upset about my supervisor so many years ago because she chose their word over mine.

Just when I thought I had it all figured out, I wondered if I was waiting to forgive them or myself? Was I ready to acknowledge they had provided me with perhaps all they knew? Was I ready to acknowledge that if I could go back and tell them how deeply I was hurt things might be different today? I am not sure; however, I am going to start with forgiving myself.

⁵³ The definition of verklempt is a Yiddish word that describes a person that is too emotional to speak.

CHAPTER FOUR

“All this leads to wisdom.”
Robert J. Nash⁵⁴

My advisor, Robert Nash often talks about writing from the heart and head and back again. In Part 1 of *How Stories Heal*, authors Robert Nash and Sydney Viray share: “*The wisdom of SPN lies in the recognition that writing from the head to the heart...and back again require a unique set of technical skills that enable both the writer, and the reader, to arrive at the ultimate goals of self understanding and self transformation*”⁵⁵. This is something Nash reminds us, his students, in his classroom and has casually reminded me during one of our one-on-ones at Chefs Corner. It is written on the wall in my office to help ground me when I am not taking a risk to go deeper with my own writing. “Personal narrative writing is telling the truth about being a human through our own stories – what we are capable of, what makes us lose, laugh, weep, fall down, and gnash our teeth, and wring our hands, and kill each other, and love each other”⁵⁶. Maya Angelou, as cited in *How Stories Heal*, reminds me that the emotions I feel are okay and that when I get closer to telling my truth often I find myself also knowing that I have found an uncomfortable comfort, one I have learned to live in as I have covered many aspects of my life for decades.

While I can tell you a story of a young woman who goes off to college and finds her, “home away from home” in her sorority and has the best time ever I will spare you

⁵⁴ Robert J. Nash and Sydney Viray, *How Stories Heal: Writing our way to meaning and wholeness in the academy*, (2011), 1.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 1

⁵⁶ Ibid, 107.

the predictable ending. Why I believe in fraternity and sorority life has many more layers and as I have become more self-aware, I also realize events, such as family separation, financial struggles, graduation, success, failure and upset, have helped me become a self-actualized person. Yet, with this being said, "...self-actualized people are not perfect."⁵⁷ Maslow talks about self-actualization needs, experiences and learning "to become everything one is capable of becoming"⁵⁸. Even in my thirties, I am still questioning how I got here. I am going to retrace some of my path and give credit where it is due. Why is it that everyday I can go to work and believe in fraternity and sorority life and its relevance?

Where Believing Began

"We hold in our heart the uncomfortable truth that we're leading our own students down that same path of cultural alienation, bringing them individual freedom while simultaneously interfering in their familial and community allegiances. We recognize more fully than most that college can change your life -- and in ways that cannot be predicted sufficiently to decide whether that's going to be a good idea. We love what college has done for us -- to us -- but we can never wholeheartedly cheerlead for higher education, because we know what those gains have cost."⁵⁹

Looking back, like a good book, I wish I could have anticipated what the next chapter of my life would reveal to me. Summer 1998, the summer between my freshman year of college and my sophomore year, so much was left unknown. It was one of the best summers of my teenage years and sadly, the last summer I spent at home with my parents. When I close my eyes and think about those summer months, I fondly recall the bonfires, stargazing and the time with childhood friends laughing, dreaming and staying out late. It was also the summer that I flew on my first airplane as the delegate of my

⁵⁷ https://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-sze/maslow-the-12-characteris_b_7836836.html

⁵⁸ Abraham H. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, (1987), 64.

⁵⁹ Herb Childress, *Inside Higher Education* (Feb. 16, 2017).

woman's fraternity, Phi Sigma Sigma, and attended my first national conference in Virginia. It was pre-911 so my parents, who had never flown either, nervously waited as the plane took off and I, from the tiny window of what I would learn was nicknamed a "puddle jumper," anxiously awaited our takeoff.

Knowing sorority culture even in 1998, it is hard to imagine I was not provided a packing list of what to bring with me to my first Phi Sigma Sigma national conference. However, I remember that first conference and moments of it like it happened this morning. I remember my roommates and the way they were dressed, the activities they participated in and how "polished" they looked, a sorority term I would learn about later. While I am sure that I looked presentable and wore my best badge attire (another way of saying business attire), I remember feeling out of place among these sisters; ironically, I was told I was supposed to feel an immediate bond with any sister from any corner of the globe, this was not true. This exclusion, while already being in an in-group, was the first of many that I would feel as a member of a woman's fraternity, or as commonly referred to as a sorority. Over the years I have learned to have language around the exclusion that I felt and understand due to many articles, blogs and even Will Barratt's book, *Social Class on Campus: Theories and Manifestations*⁶⁰, that my comfort among my "sorority sisters" was not just about money. It was about experiences, language and even what fork to use at the table.

While I stand by my words that my membership changed my life, just like college in general, it is without a doubt that my sorority membership also contributed to losses that I felt, distancing and moments of feeling less than. It would be years until I

⁶⁰ Will Barratt. *Social Class on Campus: Theories and Manifestations*, (2011).

would find a sister that I truly could share my stories with and even now, as an alumna of my university and my Greek-letter organization, I find moments where my chapter sisters, or even my regional sisters, continue to be othered by those that fit into more of the sorority stereotype and/or social construction.

The following summer, like many of my college friends, I would stay in my college town and not think twice. While it was exciting to explore Marquette (where I attended college) in the summer and to have a leg up on off campus housing and part time jobs, when I think back to that summer the best memories are still when I went home to Wisconsin. Nonetheless, if I could turn back the clock I would have encouraged my younger self to go home for as many summers as I could hold onto, and this is the advice I give my students each spring.

That summer I sublet a room in a house that sat conveniently between campus and my place of employment with some of my sorority sisters and a group of senior men from the university. It was the closest experience I will ever have to living in a fraternity house, or should I say, the stereotypical fraternity house. It was loud, the doors were always open, random people would be asleep on our couch in the morning and it was disgusting. That summer seemed to last for way too many weeks and I missed being home with my family. I missed being in our yard as a family, being at the lake and just spending time with my mom. I missed the familiar faces in town and my high school friends that I knew since kindergarten. I missed my small town, I missed home and perhaps deep in my heart I knew it would never be the same again.

Where the Pines Touch the Sky

Mercer, Wisconsin is a small town in the Northwood's of Wisconsin where the population hovers around one thousand during the winter months and is filled with tourists during the summer occupying the houses on the lakes and the waters with their expensive toys. Until I was seven my Mom and I lived in a small one bedroom house. It is with fond memories that we continue to call that house the "little house." My Mom, as much as she sometimes dislikes the tourists, actually visited Mercer as a child with her family from Chicago. Later they called Mercer their home and it is there that our small family remains today. My mom a library assistant, my fatherly figure a machinist and my brother a factory employee at the same company.

There is a strong class divide in my hometown that I was not quite aware of as a child. There are those who have, those who struggle, those who do not have nearly enough and then those who depend on the government to get by. The median household income in 2010⁶¹ was \$31,413 and 98.6% of individuals identified as white alone.

When it was just my mom and I she would work odd jobs with my granny – painting, cleaning and eventually working as a waitress at a nearby supper club. Even after she married she would work two jobs for quite some time while he would work jobs that would eat away at his body, perhaps even to current day.

Our financial struggles are not something I am fond of thinking about as they bring up some memories that I would like to forget completely. My first memory that is connected to not having enough is not one of being hungry or cold. In fact, most of my first memories of financial struggles are weaved so carefully into experiences that if one

⁶¹ 2010 U.S. Census.

is not paying attention they would never notice. Perhaps, that is the story of social class for many.

I remember when my fatherly figure stole a pack of cigarettes in front of me when I was around seven or eight at the grocery store. Where this happened was not as important as it would become years later. At age fifteen I started working at this very same store and stood under those cigarette dispensers and would think of that from time to time with mixed emotions that I did not quite understand. Sometimes, just like today, I would come up with rationalizations, perhaps I did not see him pay? Perhaps it was an exchange? Perhaps?

A few years later my fatherly figure would be incarcerated. I have struggled with this my entire life and very few even know this about this part of my childhood. Vividly I remember my mom gathering her personal belongings to sell at my aunt Chris' garage sale within that same timeframe. It is silly that I still remember the pile of clothing, ceramics, and music including a John Cougar Mellencamp cassette tape.

Oddly, as short as I believe the time was that my fatherly figure was away, memories from that time haunt me more so than any others. There was only one attempt to take me and my brother to visit him; it must have been over Thanksgiving or Christmas and I remember the weather being bad so we turned around. I think about this from time to time and what impact that visit would have had on me, us, and while I understand he was likely disappointed we did not visit, frankly no child deserves to see their parent at the county jail. While I know there are numerous studies out there and research to support the way I have felt all these years, the effects of parental

incarceration, even for short term, is not something I want to know more about. Having it be a part of my truth is enough.

I believe that my empathy for others that have less, experience family hardships or even substance abuse, come from my short glimpse into what others' lives might be like all the time. Over the years I have had so many minutes add up on me reflecting on the story lines that got our family to where it was and where it is today. My step-father, one of five children, a child from a family with alcoholic behaviors and while I was too young to really remember, financial difficulties. While I have not ever really come to terms of forgiveness, I understand that sometimes, the cards we are dealt are not the ones we wish we had. My fatherly figure has always loved me the best that he could, even from the distance I have created and the coldness I have made an ordinary part of our family's interactions.

My mother never really talked about being "poor" or not having enough while we were growing up. I never really realized what I did not have until I went to college and saw what others had sporadically. I remember in an art class one of my closest friends, Nate, talking about government cheese and peanut butter. It was in that moment at the age of eighteen that I realized I too knew what those products were and whom they were intended to assist, not knowing if we received them because my Granny worked for the city or because we qualified. Either way, I knew and felt a sense of solidarity with my classmates that could have a moment together, a connection around gift baskets at holiday time from community organizations, groceries from family members and the appreciation, even excitement those items brought to me as a child.

It was through my art assignments that I had found a way to creativity express my experiences and things I did not want anyone to ever know about. That silence and secret keeping is something I believe bonds my mother and me but at the same time has complicated our relationship. Her parents, both artists and storytellers as far as I can remember, also seemed to be secret keepers. Or perhaps, just glossed over things like fresh paint on one of their brushes.

My granny, perhaps one of the most important individuals in my life, passed away my senior year of college. A survivor of breast cancer, cancer came back to take her away. While my granny without a doubt role modeled the importance of relationships and even styles of leadership, what she was not successful in was taking care of her health and going to the doctor. Some of my fondest memories of my granny are of her in her backyard painting or even at the beach with me; both images include her body covered in a baby oil substance with a brown, skinny cigarette hanging out of her mouth. When I smell suntan lotion today I still think of her, particularly the kind that smells like coconut. My granny had an ear for classical music and seemed to enjoy the arts more than most people in our small town.

The death of my granny came way too soon and was preventable. As for my grandpa, her ex-husband, the last time I saw him was the summer after my high school graduation. Memories of childhood contain disagreements and family members not getting along. As a child, I never wanted to spend time at his house as he thought it was funny to pull on my ears and grab my sides. While it pains me to say that I did not like a family member, I did not like him. Maybe his intentions of trying to get to know me were good, but his actions of how were just uncomfortable. In my teenage years I

learned more about my mom's childhood and upbringing and it seems he was not the kindest of individuals. My grandfather had type 1 diabetes, and also a history with alcohol. Knowing what I know now as an adult, perhaps with different choices he too would have lived longer, been a better husband, father and grandfather.

Connecting the Stories

While these memories and stories are hard to share I have found that as an educator, specifically a fraternity and sorority professional, being vulnerable is where I have found some of the deepest rewards. While there are some books that are about fraternity and sorority life that give a nod to social class privilege (Hechinger⁶², Syrett⁶³, Turk⁶⁴), when I was an undergraduate and even graduate student these were far and few between. While I did attend a university where many people were paying their own way, and like myself, identified as first generation to attend, intentional learning about differences did not exist in my undergraduate sorority experience and the only reoccurring conversations around difference was the gossip around who was dating a black man. Thankfully my senior year conversations around social class organically started occurring in smaller friend groups as we shared our fears around the job search, paying back student loans and for some, responsibility to financially contribute back to one's family.

I share all of this as too many times as fraternity and sorority professionals, both campus and headquarters, we do not take enough time to think about or even share our life experiences or even our identities that are so rich with understanding and

⁶² John Hechinger, *True Gentlemen: The Broken Pledge of American Fraternities*, (2017).

⁶³ Nicholas Syrett, *The Company He Keeps: A History of White College Fraternities*, (2009).

⁶⁴ Diana Turk, *Bound by a Mighty Vow: Sisterhood and Women's Fraternities, 1870-1920*, (2004).

transformation. My sorority membership has continued to provide me opportunities to grow as a leader, a mentor and a learner to this current day and I am committed to my organization. Looking back I have no hesitation saying that without my sorority membership I may not be a doctoral candidate today. While the fears of being discovered may have contributed to my covering throughout most of my undergraduate experience, my close sorority sisters may have sensed something along the way and perhaps we can call it sisterhood, extended an extra hand along the way.

Erin, was the one who made me go to the library and actually study, not just socialize and it was Erin who first put me on scholarship probation when my GPA dipped. It was Heidi who asked me about my organizational skills and challenged me to think about how I spent my time. Reminding me this was not high school. Through these experiences and so many more I was learning to navigate a college environment and becoming a new version of myself with new forms of knowledge and being, including academic, cultural and social capital. As I have continued to learn more about first generation college students, I also can identify with how academics many times were not my motivation,⁶⁵ but I was deeply afraid getting caught underage drinking, doing drugs or even using a fake ID and being sent home. I knew that my family was giving up things, including taking out retirement money for me to attend college, while some of my peers may have received a different message, I relate to the recent article in the Chronicle of Higher Education, *When 'Failure Is OK' Is Not OK*.⁶⁶ In this commentary, many things stuck out and even made me get a bit teary eyed. Specifically, the suggestions

⁶⁵ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10668926.2013.819304>

⁶⁶ <https://www.chronicle.com/article/When-Failure-Is-OK-Is/242489>

around how to make first generation and low-income students feel they belong, just reaching out and telling them they belong.

Being provided a college experience is not something I take lightly. I realize the privilege I hold today having attained a college degree. I have changed in many ways and those changes have contributed to distance between individuals I grew up with and even my own brother at times. When I finally read Alfred Lubarano's book, *Limbo: Blue Collar Roots, White-Collar Dreams*, I found relief and found language to name what I had been feeling for years. I have since taken on the identity of a straddler. As Lubarano writes and as I relate, I am living a middle-class life, working a white-collar job, but was born into a blue-collar family. Even as I write this and read pages out of the book I highlighted so many years ago, I cry. "It's a unique group, because in terms of education they've come the furthest, having earned Ph.D.'s in families where parents finished high school, at best....The downside is obvious: Rise that far in a single generation and you're liable to feel hopelessly alienated from those who raised you."⁶⁷

My education has continued to contribute to my upward mobility and evermore I now can look back and see where some patterns around cultural, social and academic capital were being provided. Experiences in my sorority had contributed to my manners, etiquette, travel and even language shifting. It hurts to say it but being a straddler and straddling two worlds you love so very much can be painful. Carved in my memory is a moment being at home, having my very own brother question why I was talking differently and I had to stop and think about if I even was.

⁶⁷ Alfred Lubrano, *Limbo: Blue-Collar Roots, White-Collar Dreams* (2004), 3.

Social Class and Fraternity & Sorority Life

*“Even though many faculty members were themselves first-generation students and had to learn the secret handshakes, values, language variety, and fashion of campus, many faculty do a poor job of passing along those lessons to other first-generation students.”*⁶⁸ I refuse to be this staff member I told myself after reading Barratt’s book. While I was working at UVM, I knew that the social justice work I was already doing was important but I had to find a way to start speaking up more around social class and challenged myself to submit an educational program to a regional and national conference on the intersection of social class and fraternity and sorority life. Both were accepted, opportunities had presented themselves and now I had to take the risk. Years later I have continued to present and even wrote a small piece on social class. Through these experiences listening to other fraternity and sorority professional’s stories, being vulnerable in a room with strangers, I have found my passion.

I believe in fraternity and sorority life because it welcomed me, a first-generation college student and provided me with a learning environment where so many opportunities were extended. I believe in fraternity and sorority life as I have seen it change individuals’ lives and help them become a better version of themselves. I believe in fraternity and sorority life as it has given me a platform to make meaning out of my personal experiences and elevate my voice in advocating for others. I believe in fraternity and sorority life because I understand my responsibility to my fraternity values

⁶⁸ Will Barratt, *Social Class on Campus: Theories and Manifestations* (2011), 153.

and ironically the final part of, “writing from the heart and head and back again⁶⁹,” is action.

⁶⁹ Robert J. Nash and Sydnee Viray, *How Stories Heal: Writing our way to meaning and wholeness in the academy*, (2011), 1.

Going Grey

*“Head, Heart, and Action are at our disposal
if not already automatically in play when
we engage in a situation, conversation, or
opportunity to make a connection.”
Jessica Pettitt⁷⁰*

There are moments in my career that have come and gone yet are etched, perhaps scratched into my memory and heart, forever. Some of these moments are collected, attained and categorized and left for when I return to reflect on those experiences and understand deeper the meaning and truth of the situation. While I have never said that my role as a fraternity and sorority life advisor is easy, I have said that I love it. Perhaps it is that love that has allowed me the courage and resilience to go through movements in moments and store away the emotions until ready. Perhaps it is that same love that has provided other fraternity and sorority professionals the same.

In recent years there were many national events that rocked college campuses and impacted educators, families, neighbor, and even social justice advocates. This would include the murders and deaths of many young black individuals, which symbolic actions continue today such as taking a knee, raising a fist and even chanting Black Lives Matter.

Living in New England for over a decade, in one of the whitest states in the country, the Black Lives Matter movement was visible in the circle and community I spent time with; however, just like anywhere else in the country, not welcomed by all nor understood. In the fall of 2017, days before sorority formal recruitment and the university homecoming and family reunion weekend at the university, a Black Lives Matter flag flew alongside the state and American flag. The Student Government

⁷⁰ Jessica Pettitt, *Good Enough Now* (2017), 46.

Association had made a request to fly the flag in solidarity and while the student leaders knew it would have impact, there was no way anyone would have predicted what would unfold for weeks, months and now even a year later.

As one could have guessed, not everyone was a fan of the flag flying. In fact, dangerous emails and calls threatening to pull funding and/or donations were made. National news picked up on the flag, including more conservative websites and stations, and had a field day mocking this action and rallying individuals that support the All Lives Matter movement. All individual lives of course do matter; however, until Black lives and those of marginalized identities are amplified, there is still work to be done.

All of the media, phone calls and meetings were occurring while I was busily preparing for one of the largest sorority events of the year, formal sorority recruitment. This is an all hands-on deck event and is something that is a tradition across North America. The fraternity and sorority life staff and volunteers were cutting nametags, organizing, answering calls on grades and missing class. Service animal requests and making sure everyone would get fed were rampant during the long days into the weekend.

While I would like to have been more focused on the energy and the excitement of the advocacy and symbolism of the flag being flown, it just was not possible when I was going on four hours of sleep. Early Sunday morning we left the building and walked to our cars around 4:00 a.m. only to have to be back by 7:00 a.m. I remember how bright the moon was and oddly we did not even notice the flag was not there. Perhaps if we had, we would have thought someone took it down so no one would steal it. We would not have thought someone actually had.

That vision of the moon so bright has played back in my memory numerous times – how tired we all were from sorority recruitment, something that on the grand scale of things simply does not matter. Whereas, the Black Lives Matter flag was something that brought tears to students’ eyes. Students that identified as Black, students that identified as allies and students that just understood what it meant to have their peers feel welcomed in the way they do daily. The flag went well past the students – colleagues, families and even community members beamed with pride as the flag raised high provided a sense of belonging to so many.

The week would come and everyone was more than upset about the flag being stolen. Not taken, stolen, and the accusations that many people at UVM stole it and/or questioning if an investigation was going on to find it. Words around hate crimes came up and students wearing black. I am not sure if I have felt harm and hurt in such a way before. I am not even sure I can describe it; however, little did I know it would get worse.

Next, I knew I was sitting in a room, “...*three unnamed FIJI members and their chapter advisor...*”⁷¹ being told about the missing flag. Damn, how did we get to this place and all I could think about in my mind was how this was not going to go over well and how on earth was I even keeping it together. The next months would be a blur, and while I have experienced many things in my life, this experience would take a toll on my mind, soul, and body in a way I could have never anticipated and still cannot quite put words to.

⁷¹ <https://vtcynic.com/39751/enterprise/blm-flag/>

Managing Up or Just Being in the Room?

*“The room where it happened
The room where it happened
No one really knows how the game is played
The art of the trade
How the sausage gets made
We just assume that it happens
But no one else is in
The room where it happens”
-The Room Where It Happens, Hamilton*

For years I felt the privilege to be invited to the table in different ways than my office peers. I realized this had to do with the nature of my job and the level of interest from more seasoned professionals at my university regarding policy, prevention and accountability, specifically for fraternities. Sadly, it is not the norm for all fraternity and sorority life professionals to have regular interactions with Vice Presidents, Deans or even legal council and if I could give one tip of advice to Vice Presidents of Student Affairs it would be to reach out to your fraternity and sorority professionals, it will mean the world and just like me years ago, they will feel a sense of mattering. I believe, *“...student affairs mid-level managers balance on the seesaw between the transformative goals and transactional realities of our work. They have to be experts at both, and they do not need to apologize for doing their transactional work well.”*⁷² It has been my responsibility for years to sell the idea of fraternity and sorority life; to help others, particularly those above me and around me to understand the relevance on our campus and why, I as an individual, with all my identities, really do believe in the fraternity and sorority experience. Additionally, it has been my goal and thankfully that of the

⁷² Robert L. Ackerman, Editor, *The Mid-Level Manager in Student Affairs: Strategies for Success* (2007), 15.

universities I have worked for to transform the experience into something that has value and contributes to fraternity and sorority being more than just the stereotype.

Even with this being said, sometimes in moments where I did not feel heard or know I would be heard I would circle the room and think about the salaries sitting at the table, the years of experience and the whiteness. I would think about how I was the least paid, passed as white and how this seemed to go hand in hand with how people were actually listened to at the table, not every time but enough that I thought about this. I never had the courage to share this before and even now feel a bit nervous putting it out there as many of my colleagues at the table I admire and my relationships with them mean a lot to me professional and personally. In the meetings following the flag's disappearance and us knowing it had returned, I felt something I had not felt before – I felt invisible. I felt like I was a little girl again and could hear my granny telling me not to let others think I was from the reservation, which I am not but now as an adult realize it was her way of oppressing my identities I did not know anything about. In those meetings I was feeling things and I did not even know what I was feeling or what to do. Moreover, due to position of power, I could not do anything.

I'm crying again tonight and I wish I could locate where the pain was coming from.

Is it my heart, is it my head is it my gut?

When you Google my name, it comes up.

"BLM flag thief identified."

*My career, advocating, educating being okay with 7 people,
20...30...finally 50...plus..coming to my conference sessions.*

Because, "People aren't really into diversity."

That is what I was told.

I'm crying again tonight because how did I not notice.

It was missing.

I remember the moon, how bright it was and how so very tired we were.

Going on four hours. Needing to sleep.

While I wasn't the one receiving the emails the threats I realize they were happening.

*I remember the phone call, next the meeting, next the feelings of what just happened.
"Of course, it was a fraternity member that took the flag."
Some would say.
It didn't seem like it was going to go well, even from the beginning.
Oh, the unraveling.
I was so confused and thankful to have someone to report to that oddly kept their cool
and somehow knew their next move.*

*Mine,
I went to my office.
Closed the door.
And cried.
Everything I wanted to work for and tried to prove could be.
Shattered in that moment.
Were they all correct? Was I wasting my time?*

*New flag in the sky.
My sweetest little girl you are.
How can I explain this?
Your skin, beautiful.
My silence,
My silence.
I'm crying again today. I had to tell a colleague.
"You haven't been yourself."
I'm not who I'm supposed to become.*

*Fall. Winter.
The meetings I was so thankful to be included at.
Would soon not have the same feeling.
Inclusion. Isn't always real.
When you aren't saying the same thing.
"Can't we say something?"
I must have lost my voice?
I must not be speaking loud enough?
I'm passing.
I wasn't the only one.
I'm crying again behind my closed door.
Spring. Mud.
I'm crying again sitting on your stool.
What's going to happen when...*

*It's out.
It's out?
I'm crying again because of the guilt.
I'm crying again because I knew it was so wrong.
I'm crying again as I sit with my colleagues of color.*

*And say...
Colluding words, words not my own...*

*The doctor would ask, how I am.
She would say, I've been thinking of you.
I broke down and cried in front of her.
The words of guilt, harm falling from my mouth.
Summer Fall Winter.
I'm miles away.
But still right here.*

Seven months later, it came out. That night after meetings and strategizing on how to support the students in the fraternity and sorority community, our fraternity and sorority life staff stayed in my office playing card games with the governing board elected leaders well into the night. Most of our eyes, red from crying and just wanting to be with one another and think about anything else besides what would find us in the morning.

That academic year will forever haunt me. The role of politics and leadership would be not just in theory, but a reality and I had been the student observing and tucking things away. “Frequently these moments of crisis are precisely the opportunities for growth and change⁷³...” and quite frankly, I had no choice. From the head, to the heart, the memories and decisions will be with me for the rest of my career. The guilt, the pain, the hurt and even the feeling of knowing what depression felt like will be memories that will help guide my actions in the future and help me find the boldness to act.

⁷³ Michael Jenkins, and Deborah Bradshaw Jenkins, *The Character of Leadership: Political Realism and Public Virtue in Nonprofit Organizations* (1998), 122.

CHAPTER 5

“Kim, Thank you for being a constant driving force during my time at UVM. Thank you for always being there to challenge me to be great, dare me to take risks, and implore me to seek out experiences I never would have dreamed up for myself. Thanks for your commitment to mentorship...Lian”

Letter writing, note taking and journaling have been a theme in my development as a leader. As a young child, I had numerous pen pals. This included friends from Girl Scout camp, seasonal residents from my hometown and my Aunt Dolores. Even now thinking back to the way it made me feel – receiving mail decorated with stickers and printed photographs (something you rarely receive today) it brings a warm feeling. The art of letter writing and card writing is something I have continued to make a part of my life. Finding time to do so brings me joy just knowing others have a special feeling, a feeling of mattering even if momentarily.

My career has been built on being innovative, strategic and resilient in an environment that often questions my being or even existence. I believe I would not have continued or found my way without those feelings of mattering and from those I deeply care about. Mattering is such a simple word yet so deep and connected to the theme of any fraternity and sorority life professional’s success. It is at the center of my believing in fraternity and sorority life, and ultimately my belief in myself.

“Kim – You may or may not have put this together but in two months you will have been at UVM for 10 years. I still remember running into you outside of Robinson Hall when you were lost in your first weeks on campus (not that I knew where I was). I’ll never forget being crammed in the office in Billings and the craziness of those first two years and your first true grad.

In truth, this milestone is a testament to the work we've all done as a team and the growth the community has had because of the continuity you have provided year in and year out.

*I hope those tears were the precursor to the smile beaming across your face.”
-Thomas*

I hung up the phone with joy, excitement and a sense of relief. As I exited the conference room I was able to walk with pride knowing I had done the right thing, made the right choices leading up to this day. I would one day leave my position and the office of fraternity and sorority life better than I found it.

My colleague saw my face and knew right away that our candidate had accepted the job. I reached out to hug them, knowing in my gut I needed it and I tried to hold myself together. Memories filled my head and wrapped around my heart. The tears started to come, knowing the choice had to be made, yet the words came out in that moment of job and relief, as I felt some weight come off my shoulders all I could say was, “but my grads.” The guilt of giving up my graduate assistance to provide financial assistance in creating a full-time professional had weighed on me for weeks, even with knowing the right decision was based on the needs of the fraternity and sorority community. Growing in size, needs and efforts.

Ten years seemed to have just zipped by. Yet, many of those days were long and exhausting. On the loneliest days, once I had a team, even if it was just two of us, me and the graduate assistant, I never quite felt alone. However, where I found my rock, or rocks, were in odd places with individuals I was supposed to mentor and guide. Yet, I found myself in the best position, alongside them.

Most relationships are built upon a give and take. My mentor, Kaye, as introduced in Chapter One, taught me that mentorship is like a slinky, it goes back and forth. Over the past decade and even my whole career I have prided myself in helping to mentor, provide resources and experiences to the next generation of higher education professionals, specifically in the area of fraternity and sorority advocacy. For me that does not mean they need to become a fraternity and sorority life professional, but I expect that by the time they graduate they are able to communicate in any role why fraternities and sororities are relevant and why they personally believe in the experience.

Many years ago I read the book, *Greater Than Yourself: The Ultimate Lesson of True Leadership* as part of a conference committee expectation. I went into it thinking it would be just another leadership book. However, the philosophy that Steve Farber shares has stayed with me because I was already doing it. Farber shares three lessons: Expand Yourself, Give Yourself, and Replicate Yourself by sharing your experience. Reading this book so many years ago I had wished I had written down what he was confirming of my own practice. In the following letter to my graduate students, I hope to share how this theory has become a part of my being.

Dear Grads,

I honestly have so many thoughts coming to me and so many faces, voices and memories. In 2006 when I started my professional journey there were so many moments I wanted to give up. That first year, challenging to say the least, second year challenging, fourth year devastating and of course many more moments in between. Policies that had gone broken, bylaws that could not be found but didn't even matter. A community that was hated by so many, loved by so few, and grounded in way too much social kept me

busy. I hoped the long hours would give the meaning and purpose I was looking for in my role as a fraternity and sorority life professional.

Flashes of memories, tears, the view of the lake from my office window after the leaves had fallen. “*Story is a search for community. Open your mouth, grab a pen, type on the keyboard-sing out who you are, for I need you. I am looking for you; you are looking for me.*”⁷⁴ Throughout my life I have been looking. Looking for so many things. Answers to where I belong, where I could be whole and be accepted and where I could find a community that would be there as I struggled and found confidence. All of you provide me all that and more, a family.

In *Greater Than Yourself* the first value shared is, *Expand Yourself*. With all my heart I believe that each and everyone of you helped me shift my learning and supervisory style to an “us.” In order to be able to give I had to become more aware of what skills and experiences I had to offer and extend. Sometimes that meant story telling, other times it meant sharing a hotel room so you could financially be able to attend a conference. Still to this day I can count on one hand, over ten years later, how many rooms I have had to myself and I would not change one thing. It was my priority to give you all my connections, my resources and have patience in your growth as a leader and learner. Valerie once wrote to me saying, “*I learned to never give up on what you believe in.*” I tried my hardest to find ways to learn more about your passion areas and to be accepting of when fraternity and sorority life would not be your chosen career. It was the feeling of care I hope you all had when you graduated and even today. I cherish all

⁷⁴ Christina Baldwin, *Storycatcher: Making Sense of Our Lives through the Power of Practice of Story* (2005), 224.

the long days when we could do nothing but laugh with exhaustion the same way I cherish our vacations to Quebec City.

Give Yourself is the second value. This is perhaps what comes the most naturally to me. Setting time aside while you were all graduate students to help you meet your goals and even answer the calls today. Challenge you, be consistent in helping you reflect more on your own values and investing in our relationship as mentor, mentee and eventually friends. Farber shares that part of giving yourself is really, “*Giving it all away. I will open the floodgates and offer all of my: Knowledge, Connections, Experience, Insights, Advice, Life Lessons, Confidence, Words and gestures of encouragement, Tough and honest feedback.*”⁷⁵ I believe being authentic and vulnerable and not holding back emotions. This was captured in a note from my grad, Kristin, “*I learned the importance of showing students you are a whole person, emotions and all.*” With giving of yourself also comes the responsibility of holding those you mentor accountable. Through the years many of us have shared tears together, feedback about how my expectations were a pinch too high out of the gate and of course the cards over the years having the theme that I did not settle for mediocrity and encouraged, perhaps forced, you all to take risks. I hope that my advice and confidence in all of you showed in my pride as I walked taller by your sides and selfishly believe even today your successes are the biggest measure of mine. There isn’t a plaque in the world that means as much as a note on a napkin with my favorite sandwich saying, “I got AFA Graduate Staff!” or reading your name in a program book or The Vermont Connection journal. Years later I see you, I hear you and I feel you. As my life has changed, I looked out

⁷⁵ Steve Farber, *Greater Than Yourself* (2009), 166.

during my wedding ceremony and there you were. Standing next to me, as a guest, or on the phone.

The third value is, *Replicate Yourself*. The best part of being a leader is the development of others and giving them all you can. To help them be greater than you were at that part of your life and career. To replicate is to challenge those you have given yourself to, to do the same. Last year Alex wrote me a note that highlighted the changes in my own story and what I had to offer. “...*you are a role model for me as I think about integrating family life and work life in a way that is genuine and realistic.*”

I thank each and every one of you for giving so much to the fraternity and sorority life community. For helping develop and co-teach the Fraternity and Sorority Leadership Class, making CLIMB the first three day fraternity and sorority social justice retreat a reality to understanding the responsibility we all have to share what we are good at with others across higher education and that it really is, “Simple conversations held at kitchen tables, or seated on the ground, or leaning against doorways are powerful means to start influencing and changing our world.”⁷⁶ Each one of you allowed shared space for our students to continue learning and for us as the staff to keep dreaming about what could be. What could be started becoming reality and over time culture shift started happening. Thank you for being proud of the fraternity and sorority community that helped you become the professional you are today and for allowing me to tag along during your journey. I’m proud of you all.

Fraternally, Kim

⁷⁶ Wheatley Margaret. *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future* (2002), 9.

At year ten I was given a gift at Lian's graduation, a beautiful handmade book called, "Things We Learned From Kim: A Compilation from Kim's Grad's from 2006-2016." Lessons learned included the following:

- When you go to a conference with Kim you better be able to come up with at least one thing that you learned.
- My voice matters.
- Hand written cards can have a profound impact.
- I care about values way more than I thought I did.
- What it means to have passion.
- Let your students know that you believe in them and that you are proud of them.

Each time I even look at the cover of that book I get emotional. I do not take one relationship with my past graduate students for granted as they contributed to me being the individual I am today. I believe through the process of mentorship internally I knew I had to continue growing and learning to be able to continue giving of myself to them. There is one page that helped me get to this moment and reminded me not to give up. It says,

*“One Day
I Can Be
An
Amazing Mom
A
Caring Partner
An
Accomplished
Professional
And
Write a Dissertation”*

Finding my Exit

Throughout my journey when I share with others the experiences I have had in person, over the phone or even in writing, I have made intentional decisions to follow up any complicated or less desirable experience with a positive note and/or mention that the individuals, my colleagues and my graduate advisors are amazing. Annually new fraternity and sorority life roles and positions are posted and from time to time I am asked to consider something or a friend/mentor will point out a posting and encourage me to apply. It should be noted, immediately that I am always cautious when exploring these opportunities as I am aware of the community I have grown to be a part of and feel, perhaps selfishly, that I am now a part of the tapestry. Am I replicable? Yes, isn't everyone?

University One

Over the past decade with the encouragement and support of others I have explored a few job postings and have had the opportunity to have on campus interviews and some amazing institutions that otherwise perhaps I would have never seen. Mid-career I was feeling the pressure to explore new job opportunities and with the nudge of a mentor the next thing I knew I was on the plane to visit University One (UO). Honestly, coming from the Midwest and having lived in New England I was very excited to visit North Carolina for the first time and from the research I had done and from having connections in the area I anticipated differences and thought I was prepared.

Anxiously as I navigated the airport, a life-size statue of the university mascot greeted me. It was clear immediately that school spirit flowed over the whole community as I scanned the area and saw school colors everywhere. Coming from the Midwest and

having lived in Madison, Wisconsin where the University of Wisconsin is, I was familiar with this sense of school and state sports pride and ironically felt a sense of comfort.

Years prior when I entered the higher education job force I was selected as the ACPA Wisconsin Graduate Scholarship recipient providing me an opportunity, which I gladly accepted and the job search placement. I was thankful for all the books on how to navigate the job process providing me with this to consider prior regarding my career path. During that experience I learned quickly that I enjoyed the job search and even with the placement involving multiple interviews back to back, in a very small area, I entered with a smile even on day three with blisters on my feet from not taking the advice about wearing new shoes. Similarly, to that experience I found myself on UO campus excited to meet new people and organically learn more about myself as a professional and see if it was a good next step.

The interview started with the typical night before dinner with the chair of the committee and a few members. Dress attire was casual, which is always appreciated and the dinner and conversation flowed naturally and left me ready for the next day. Day two, the fully scheduled interview day was a bit different. While it started out well with meeting the committee, constituents, and upper administrators, it was clear that the alumni and involved advisors were not necessarily looking for someone like me. Lunch was shared with students and conversation flowed easily around risk prevention issues and things the students would like to occur. All in all, the day left me feeling successful – I had provided the best picture of myself, my skills, the areas of growth. Ironically the most excitement I felt from some of those I met that day involved showing me their

football field, talking about the overflow of the city on tailgating days, and the Chick-fil-A on campus.

Being dropped off at the hotel is where everything started to go downhill very slowly. The committee member that dropped me off expressed their gratitude and shared how impressed they were with my interview day and said I'd hear from them in the near future about their decisions.

I believe my skills around hosting candidates further developed after the occurrences that followed. Logging online or calling to see about the flight I immediately noticed my flight had been delayed, I checked in within the hour and it was clear it would not be making it home that night. I pondered on what to do next and knowing the travel difficulties that weather can contribute to and trying to get into a smaller airport I communicated my needs to the airline to be rebooked the next morning before everyone else took the remaining seats; my experience in North Carolina was extended further.

After the flight accommodations were settled I was able to work with the hotel to extend my stay. It was already early evening and the weather was not cooperating so I took a cab to grab some dinner and returned to settle in. That evening I emailed my contact at the university and explained what happened. Ironically, I never heard back and the extended night at the hotel was charged to my credit card.

During a time in my career when I was questioning where I was at UVM and, as a professional visiting UO, it was a necessary step for me to check in with my values, my drive and what was beginning to really matter as an established professional. Looking back at the experience I realized that the tough alumni that I once had at UVM had

become actual friends and perhaps UO's alumni were not looking for someone like me but perhaps they needed someone like me. The feeling I felt being met by the mascot statue was not anything I had felt since coming to Vermont outside of sorority bid day. I took that feeling with me and questioned how I could work to create more sustainable traditions and bring pride to our community.

I often wonder if I had been offered the job at UO if I would have gone. Would the school spirit and football culture have swayed me? I would like to say no; however, one will never know as I never received a phone call not even to say I was not the candidate selected. I even checked in and asked where they were in their process and never heard back.

University Two

As each year had gone by I had become more familiar with not just my own institution and fraternity and sorority community but the others in the region. This familiarity developed by awards and recognition, interacting with individuals at conferences and the local, regional and national news sources. Transitioning into and really taking ownership of the idea that I was becoming a mid-level professional, an acquaintance suggested I take a look at a challenging opportunity that had just opened up. At that time I had just started a relationship and knew that my career had owned my life for so many years that I was cautious of this idea. However, at a national conference I agreed to meet with a committee member and learn more.

Very visibly I can remember us sitting in a lobby area in comfy chairs greeting one another with smiles. It is without hesitation that this interaction is what has led me to make sure to do research on who chairs searches and/or has a role in any of my possible

opportunities. The search committee chair immediately felt like an old friend and conversation flowed easily. Later in the conference I was extended an invitation to come to their reception. My partner and I attended, enjoyed seeing colleagues we knew well, meeting new people and I personally was introduced to many and really enjoyed the experience. I left that reception knowing I would be extended an on-campus interview before my application was even final.

It was without hesitation, even with knowledge of some of the uniqueness and challenges the campus had experienced for decades, that I would accept the campus interview. Perhaps it was the time that had passed or the feeling of confidence I had but I did not wear uncomfortable shoes and passed on the uncomfortable suit. Having experienced UVM's campus interview days, I knew how it should be done and what accommodations and language you should use to best welcome others. University Two (UT) was able to match that and also specialize the day with a care package of Vermont and their home state trinkets and treats to help me feel welcome and that my presence mattered.

The interview dinner the night before was simple, just me and the chair and once again felt like catching up with an old friend. The extended interview day challenged me to think about what it would be like to work with some of the most intellectual individuals attending college today and what self governance could look like when risk preventative measures were coupled with kegs being allowed on campus. Alumni proudly boasted events that made national television and while my tour of campus did not include athletic facilities, it did include a sorority house tour that would rival any

aftermath of a fraternity party with a broken television visibly on display and the smell, familiar from stale beer.

Perhaps my professional energy was at a different place but I was still confident I could make an impact and throughout the day remained positive. Concluding the interview day I was asked to offer a presentation to an audience that would include college administrators, potential colleagues, staff and alumni. Looking back at e-mail communications I was asked the open ended, ambiguous and commonly asked question in interviews to speak to a critical issue in Greek Life. Coming off conference season and the end of an academic year I had further developed my interest around the intersection of fraternity and sorority life and social class and had determined this would be my focus topic.

When I received the phone call from the upper administrator, not the chair of the committee, I was not selected for the job I was not surprised. Going in I knew my choice of topic was risky as was just general social justice. However, it was my newfound passion area and had just began providing me with an understanding of where my voice in the fraternity and sorority industry could matter more. While I did not attend the other presentations, it is likely I can guess they were on risk prevention, engagement or anything else that would likely pop up quickly if you Google fraternity and sorority life.

That day and showing up as a confident fraternity and sorority life professional and perhaps showing moments of my bravest self was met with opposition but over the years I have continued to reflect on using dialogue around comfort around crisis, difficult personalities and the importance of getting on the same page. Additionally, during my presentation time allocation I was asked why this matters and where I would find time to

have this “type” of conversations. As harmful as it might have been to hear such things it confirmed the importance of my exploration and having my voice heard.

No one likes to hear they are not the chosen candidate, even when they know it deep in their heart. However, the respect I have for the individual that called me remains today and has led me in decision making moments and has echoed in my mind when being on search committees today. While it may have been a hard decision, they could not offer me the position due to the fit of my passion areas and where the community and university was at. She praised my presentation and diplomatically communicated hopes to one day be at a place where the students would engage in such conversations.

University Three

Throughout this dissertation I speak to how my career had been my life for too long and how it was important for me to learn about putting myself first and seeing what else was out there. Years would pass from my last time tossing my name into the hat and I would find myself married. It is funny how relationships make you not just compromise but in rare situations settle. Shortly after we married a job posted in a city that is dear to my partner’s heart. While it was exciting to think about living in such a place I knew as I hit submit to the online application it really was not for me.

Days would quickly pass and next thing I knew I was flying in for an on-campus interview. I relished momentarily the idea of living in such a place and soaked in the idea of the social calendar we would have with everything imaginable at our fingertips. The dinner the night before was not planned and we just walked down the street and landed at one of the many restaurants on the block. We sat outside and I soaked in everything around me – the energy was unlike anything I had ever experienced before on an

interview. Dusk would come and the city buildings would light the sky and the memories of growing up with twinkling stars would be a distant memory.

When I first interviewed for jobs coming out of college I had two on campus interviews during the same week. The first was UVM, setting the bar followed by Albert Barbara College (ABC) where things did not quite meet my expectations and I am positive I did not meet theirs. While the morning interview for the city college was not nearly as bad of an experience, the breakfast left me feeling off and remembering my experience at ABC and I never quite recovered internally, I could not wait to get home.

Things to keep in mind when you job search that are not spelled out on the applications. Some postings will require you to pay for travel to get there, others will require you to reimburse the travel if you withdraw and/or do not accept. In the days that would follow I would keep a happy face on for my partner while crossing my fingers I would not be the match. It was the first time in my career where I really had that rude awakening of what I really had at UVM in the areas of financial stability with programs and budget. The grass was green under my feet. Additionally, I would learn to celebrate that while I am, just like any fraternity and sorority life professional, always somewhat on the clock having to answer calls pertaining to risk and liability. If I was offered the job I would have a learning curve of what being on duty was really like and it was communicated I would spend time transporting and checking on students at the nearby hospital.

When I finally received the phone call and heard, “We have decided to go with someone else...” I faded into another land and when I retell the story, I imagine Alice falling, which is how I felt. All I remember from that moment of conclusion is it had to

do with them having more experience around being on duty. My response should not have had the level of excitement it had. I replied, “Thank you for making this decision for me. I don’t know if I could have made the right decision.” In my head I was also thinking about how I would not have to pay that flight back.

Similarities of Experiences

I share these stories with you as a part of my research story not as failure but as successful moments of realizing who I was becoming as a professional. Early on I realized I enjoyed the job search and the benefits of meeting new people, sharing my skill set and talking about my chosen career path. Even if you would not be moving on in their search with fraternity and sorority life being a small field, you still might likely be remembered.

While I easily could have not checked out these possibilities and opportunities it was a risk to try. Each time it was hard. Hard to acknowledge my mentor or friend was right that it possibly could be a good place for me, hard to tell my supervisor feeling as if I was cheating on my university and that I owed them something. For years I have struggled with this and can only come up with it is my pride for UVM and our fraternity and sorority community contributes to that feeling. I have expressed this with graduate students when they verbalize when it is my time to leave UVM, a two weeks’ notice will suffice. I laugh.

They say, “When you don’t know what to do, go with change.” While I may have thought change would have been moving to a new location, working with more chapters, less councils, the experiences each taught me there are amazing students everywhere and

that change is where I would find myself. Not another location, but deep inside I needed to change with the months, weeks and years that had passed

My passion area would soon expand to yet another topical area. Something that was not being discussed as frequently in the mid 2010's as it is today – staying put. Another change I welcomed comfortably for the first time in my career was knowing it was okay to stay and being able to sit back in my chair, daydream out the window with pride and dream about what new programs we would create.

Because I believed in the work I was doing, the changes that were occurring and I stayed.

...and because I believe in myself, we left.

“Kim, I’m so excited for your new journey at OSU and in Columbus! You’ve waited and been patient, and now this next step so right for you, is happening! You deserve all the gratitude in the world for the vision and heart you brought to UVM & fraternity and sorority life over a decade ago...all the individual moments and no way to count the endless hours but the clear testament of your legacy at UVM is the extra ordinary transformation of our fraternity and sorority community...my admiration for who you are, and what you help all of us to become...”

What I love about my mentor Kaye is she is no-nonsense, transparent and still pushes 14 years after she first met me. While I am not a graduate student anymore, she still offers me advice and expects me to take risks. Kaye and I both love Margaret Wheatley and I believe that is where we have some shared philosophies around advising, mentoring and surviving. Wheatley writes about the difficulties to give up on certainties and how we like being comfortable. Furthermore, in order to really impact change, she believes, “...we have to be willing to move into the very uncomfortable place of uncertainty.”⁷⁷

It was a hard decision to accept the job at The Ohio State University. While I anticipated the offer as soon as the first night of the interview, I felt emotions that were so different. I cried after my interview dinner on the phone with my partner because I liked the staff and I remember saying, “I think we might move.” Followed by lots of tears and, “I don’t want to move.” My full interview day was smooth and during one interview I almost started crying as I felt guilty just being there. My loyalty to UVM had expanded past my students. I loved my colleagues, my grads, the buildings, the quirks and having everything just the way I liked it. I guess you could say I liked being comfortable.

⁷⁷ Margaret J. Wheatley, *Turning to One Another* (2002), 9.

As a family we had heavy conversations about what this could mean for our family; we, “evaluated and re-evaluated where we were on our career paths.⁷⁸” We thought about location, cost of living, upward mobility and education for our daughter. With my partner’s support the decision was mine to make. I asked for more time and slept on it over the weekend. I woke up thinking I would not take the job. I just felt too guilty, had just read an article about how hard it is to make new friends in your 30’s and was tired of crying about leaving what I had worked so hard to create. Not even an hour later an old colleague called me and asked me a few questions.

- How would you grow if you stayed?
- How would you grow if you left?
- If this doesn’t end up being a good thing, could you come back?

As the answers came to me, so did the tears. I shared my guilt around leaving and my heart hurt thinking about who I was leaving behind. She, of course, understood where I was coming from and being vulnerable pushed back and reminded me women are conditioned by society to take care of others before themselves. She challenged me to think about if a man would feel the same way, the guilt I was feeling, and asked me what would I tell those I mentor. I hung up the phone, took a breath and called my partner.

As he walked into my office he could tell I had been crying. I closed the door and said, “I’m going to take the job.” While I knew I would continue to grow if I stayed, it would not be the same opportunities as if I left. It was my turn to become the supervisor I wanted and needed when I started my career and I believed I could do it.

⁷⁸ Robert L. Ackerman, Editor, *The Mid-Level Manager in Student Affairs: Strategies for Success* (2007), 291.

*And the trouble is,
If you don't risk anything,
You risk even more.
-Erica Jong*

On my first day at The Ohio State University I was not greeted with welcome signs and a desk decorated. However, I was welcomed to sit at the table with senior administrators alongside my supervisor and discuss big impact challenges and culture changes. For the first time ever, I sat at the table with a senior administrator who said, “Fraternities and sororities have a place here...” and you could tell they meant it even with all the critical issues being made so public. I had to breathe, as it was rare that someone else besides me would be so bold with a statement at my last university during such messy situations. It was clear that first week that fraternity and sorority life was a priority and my feelings during my interview were correct.

During the weeks and few months that have followed I have struggled in moments and have found joy in others. My heart has ached for the spaces and conversations I had at UVM, while I need to be patient with myself. Organically I have found myself confident in my skills that I bring to my new place of employment and excited to see what the future holds. Working alongside graduate students, new professionals and mid-level professionals energizes me. Everyday there is someone in the office to bounce ideas off and someone who gets fraternity and sorority life. While I may not be lonely like I was my first year, I am learning to be myself in all spaces and with new confidence I will not be silenced or cover my identities.

CHAPTER SIX

*Your Name
After all these years
Your very name
Sends the inward sinews
Straining after wasted dreams.
And on my cheek
I feel a single tear turn cold.*

*Within the archives of forgotten hopes
I put your name away
Until it seeks me out again
Or fades like all desires.
-L.D. Streiker*

In Guatemala, I found this poem and it reminded me of years that had past. I can close my eyes and see myself staring into the mirror. Trying so hard to see what he must look like. I must be twelve, fifteen and even seventeen in the memory. Just sitting on the floor and just staring, hoping to see what he must look like. All my life I have been searching, trying to figure out where I belong and what I will become.

Throughout this dissertation I have shed light on moments that challenged my wellbeing as a professional and left me wondering why fraternity and sorority life is so meaningful to me. I believe that my career choice has helped me ground my personal values and has provided me with endless opportunities to grow, take risks and reflect on the moments I have found my voice.

“Belonging to ourselves means being called to stand alone-to brave the wilderness of uncertainty, vulnerability and criticism.”⁷⁹ I continue to believe that fraternity and sorority life is one of the most amazing opportunities on college campuses

⁷⁹ Brené Brown, *Braving The Wilderness: The Quest for True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone*, (2017), 32.

today when there is a balance between academics, service and social. I have witnessed how it can contribute to the retention of individuals in an academic setting, enrich one's life with leadership and transformational opportunities and set one up for success providing a unique commitment to brotherhood and sisterhood.

In Chapter Three I shared my experience with sexual violence and the shadow sides of fraternity and sorority. These stories are the ones that often make the news and provide others with reasons to question the future of fraternity and sorority life. It is not the good that people want to read or hear about and like most areas in higher education we struggle to share the good news about service, philanthropy or even the research that confirms membership contributes to retention.

In Chapter Four I shared some of my personal journey as a first-generation college student finding my way. Today I believe it is critical that we, as fraternity and sorority life professionals, continue to do our own social justice work learning about our identities and the influence we can have on advocating for others and just providing space. Fraternity and sorority life is an ideal community that has the opportunity to create trust and spaces, to have deeper conversations, to have a lasting impact on the students and alumni members that continue to have the privilege to do service work, sit on non-profit philanthropy boards and know the key stakeholders in their communities. What a difference it can make when there is also an understanding of injustices and more purpose, not fear around differences and lifting up and serving with others.

In Chapter Five I shared the importance mentorship has had on my journey, specifically the privilege I have had mentoring graduate students for over a decade. Without these individuals, I am not sure Vermont would have ever become my home or

that I would have stayed in fraternity and sorority life. The experiences these individuals helped me see or engage in would have never occurred, had my first professional career not been where there was a graduate higher education program. Over the years I had to continue learning what it meant to be a supervisor, advocate and cheerleader. As my graduate students shared their struggles in the classroom, I had to be equipped with the skills to help them understand learning is not always easy inside and outside of the classroom, I hope I provided a nurturing environment to become their true selves. Years would come and go, many of my graduate students would come out to their families, share their struggles with me as people of color and of course the unpredicted situations of family deaths, divorces and heartaches.

My confidence has come from letting my guard down and being okay with taking chances and sharing my story. I am thankful for a supervisor and community who've encouraged me to try new things. I have found my voice by being nudged to speak up and have found moments of pride when people are shocked I am a first-generation college graduate, sorority member and joined a sorority where my new member class was seven to now help lead one of the largest fraternity and sorority communities in the county.

My success has been found by having patience, being resilient and persistent in a career path that is often seen as a stepping-stone. I know that many of you, the readers will relate with my stories of crisis, controversies, moments of loneliness and wanting to give up. It is my hope that you will have not just read my story, but felt it and understand the difficult roads had great rewards and that you are not alone.

As I bring together the previous chapters I'd like to remind you of the visual shared earlier in this dissertation from Brené Brown's book, *Daring Greatly*. I now ask myself how have I been the mapmaker and the traveler and what advice can I leave with you?

1. When you come to work every day, have two things in your pockets. Why do you believe in fraternity and sorority life and what is its relevance today on your campus?
2. Get off the porch. This means, in order to see the new city you live in, meet a new friend, go on a date, you need to get off campus and step off the porch of yet another organization's event.
3. Ride the wave. Be okay with the calm moments; know that critical moments are often coming next.
4. If you are bored, it is time to move on. If you are burnt out, it is also time to move on. Also, remember the three questions I was asked?
 - How would you grow if you stayed?
 - How would you grow if you left?
 - If this doesn't end up being a good thing, could you come back?
5. Fraternity and sorority life MUST intersect with social justice. What does one's ritual look like? Action. What does social justice look like? Action.
6. Everyone's replaceable, but not memorable.
7. When managing up, less is more and practice patience.
8. Celebrate the small wins.
9. Thank a mentor.
10. Become a mentor.

Closing

*Be easy.
Take your time.
You are coming
Home.
To yourself.
-the becoming, nanyirah washeed*

Ironically, the answer I would have told you at eighteen is the same I am going to tell you in my thirties. My sorority membership and my career have helped me build an extended family and helped me find a new definition of home. *“Home is not a destination. We rock back and forth between here and the horizon. Home is drifting between here and there. Home is the calm between us that frightens the storm.”*⁸⁰ Home, what a powerful word and something I do not use lightly; but even at home with yourself there needs to be purpose, balance, rest, relationships and opportunities to become.

⁸⁰ Aja Monet, *When We Are Bold*, Art and Literature (2016), 251.

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