

University of Illinois Myths Nichol Chontofalsky

Evoke

About the Ethnographer

Rough draft of my section of the actual paper:

After Class Erna hurried to the third floor of the women's building to make the four o'clock Women's Welfare Committee meeting about the development of the newly built Beta House and to vote on this year's choice of operetta for the annual fundraiser. The girls of the WWC were somehow different than the rest of the girls hanging around campus, somehow more driven, perhaps because they had no time or resources to get caught up in the society system. These girls, like Erna, were working their way through school, one pile of laundry at a time, and she admired them for it.

It was also wonderful to be able to help out other girls who desperately wanted a college education but just couldn't pay, whether because their family was totally poor or because the money had gone to pay for the education of older brothers.

Pauline, the chairman, addressed the girls by discussing the role the orange and blue feathers played in the roles of freshman girls, urging them to join society and make extracurricular connections early on. She emphasized that the key to the continued success of the WWC would be to utilize their influence to recruit girls who would emphatically continue to work for the cause.

Erna herself had recently signed on as a mentor to Beta freshmen, the first group to inhabit the house. She was openly excited, but resented being hounded by society girls like that Lucia Leigh, who failed to see the role she played in university life just because she moved about below the radar of social frivolity. Why should she continue to explain her choice of activities to those who could never understand? She didn't feel any special need to justify her place on campus. This was a gateway to teaching and independent life. The rest would come later.

Pauline continued to drone on about other possible fundraising opportunities, but Erna's mind drifted elsewhere. The Orange and Blue Feathers already seemed constantly to be selling something, cornering the markets in roasted peanuts, karmel corn, and taffy apples at various times, leaving little room for smaller, upstart women's group. Plus, the operetta was such a huge and demanding undertaking and the one thing Erna adored both planning and attending. She asked what the extra budget would really accomplish – once the last house was almost fully furnished with funds to spare. Pauline proposed a separate scholarship fund, which many were enthusiastic about. Erna rolled her eyes, realizing how futile her protests would be.

Sometimes it seemed as if no one truly understood her point of view, and maybe that was a bad sign, but she felt it made her unique and progressive, an idea long ago instilled by her mother, a wild, confident suffragette, proud to raise her daughter in this "time of privilege and opportunity". Besides, what was so earth-shattering about being devoted and hard-working? Wasn't dancing the real sin here? Although she had never been to a themed ball, Erna heard the stories and read about the controversy. Regardless of what the society girls said, she didn't care to explore such a risqué social world.

If she wanted to hear good music, she need only feign enough societal interest to garner

symphony tickets, as she had done for that evening. The anticipation caused the meeting to drag on that much longer. There was still no more consensus on the operetta, it seems, and beyond that, she was frustrated and apathetic. If she had wanted to be an Orange and Blue Feather, she would have showed up to their meeting first thing freshman year. It was as if the group was losing all sense of direction, she felt. Despite the opposition, she voted down the trail mix sale idea that someone had presented. Still, the motion carried, and Erna walked home angrily, eager to eat and head off for a relaxing evening out.

Explore **Question**

It appears the O&B Feathers group consisted of all freshman girls. I also found a short list of requirements for "active" membership in the group. Their basic aim was to encourage women to be as involved as possible in university activities through a points and rewards system and informational meetings. The officer positions of the group were split evenly between sorority girls (blue) and non-sorority girls (orange). In 1927, the sophomore branch, the Gold Feathers formed, to continue this mission past the first year of college. Otherwise, it seems to have been very similar. This pushy spirit of frequent fundraising and over-involvement (quantity over quality) doesn't seem like something Erna would've been fond of, so I've set her in opposition to it somewhat in my portion of the paper thus far.

I plan on starting out with the women's brochures, detailing activities available to women from 1897-on, to get an idea of not only what activities were offered, but, based on their descriptions, which to look for in my search for Erna (focusing heavily on music and teaching related organizations, but, if need be, broadening my scope to include anything Erna is not said to abhor - such as dances and formal sororities).

Update: I found a bit about Orange & Blue Feathers as well as the Gold Feathers (which seems to be a sophomore specific version) but I'm still not quite sure what they are. The information I've found just proudly discusses the Gold Feathers' 1926 founding and calls them the "nucleus of sophomore organizations". I'm hoping to find out more this afternoon, though, as my quest continues.

Plan

In my search through the 1926 and 1927 Illios, I failed to find a specific Erna, but I did find out about an organization called the Women's Welfare Committee, which looked like something Erna might've been involved in. The committee owned and ran three houses where less wealthy girls could live while on campus, earning their way through upkeep of their household. Each year they put on an Operetta to raise money to sustain the program. The idea of hard work leading one through college combined with the musical element makes this a perfect fit for Erna.

Observe

I hope to find scrapbooks of interest, giving me full multi-textual insight into the activities (such as programs, bits of decorations, and event flyers).

So far, I'm targeting the Marjorie Virginia Guthrie Papers which include home ec. club scrapbooks (Edna earned room and board cleaning house, and I suppose these women would've shared a similar quiet mindset, in general, and possibly similar activities accordingly) and school of music related scrapbooks which are listed as beginning in 1929.

My search thus far is now centered on collection 41/3/1, box 6, which is full of things pertaining to various women's groups.

Discuss

For this paper, I'm looking into the myths, legends, shocking facts, and outrageous lies surrounding the University of Illinois, part of the stories we tell.

Files:

[paper 2 draft 1.doc](#) (Thu 04/26/2007 11:15)

[paper 2 draft 2.doc](#) (Sun 05/06/2007 14:34)

Reflect

Link

Implications

Other