

## **Fast Times at Loyola University** **By Brendan McNerney**

*“I got to know all of [the women] and so I felt that they... were very much at home here and having seen how many marriages came out of all of those relationships and people who are still friends of ours today . . . I think it was well integrated.”*

*-Dennis Branconier, LMU Alumnus on the integration of Marymount*

The supposedly constant battle of the sexes has been the punch-line of nearly a million jokes, and has been characterized in oftentimes conflicting terms. Men and women are often categorized as fire and ice, while at the same time considered congenial companions. Historically, men and women have undergone periods of both intense rivalry and eras of inspiring integration. While the Loyola University and Marymount College merger certainly entailed a much subtler progression through that spectrum, there is no doubt that the transition was a significant one.

Although Marymount College had to make the physical move to the Loyola campus in 1968, the men had to do their fair share of adjusting as well. The all-male campus had certainly lived up to its name in the decades prior. Fred Lower, a 1956 Loyola Alum, characterized some of the campus culture in the mid-1950s as “very much a male, macho environment.” Lower recounted in particular detail how the newest underclassmen were welcomed onto campus. As the story goes, the incoming freshmen were given a hat/beanie called a Dink. It was to be worn at all times by freshmen on campus so that any prowling upperclassmen could identify them and solicit a cigarette; smoking was very common in these days before the Surgeon General issued his opinion! Lower clarified ominously, “Be sure and be able to light the cigarette that you give them.” This period of ritualized ridicule and camaraderie would continue for about two or three weeks, and then would come the climactic battle to fully establish the fraternity of the under and upperclassmen. As Lower remembered:

“Someone dug a huge pit that was maybe 20 yards in diameter and in the middle was a mound [with a pole]. The ... Dink would go up on top of that. Then the area surrounding the mound in the middle was filled with water. The goal was for the freshmen to go and reclaim the Dink to show that now they were really Lions. The sophomores’ goal was to keep the freshmen from getting up that pole and getting the Dink.”

The label given to this ritual was the “frosh-soph brawl,” which Lower found fitting, given his experience: “When I was a sophomore... it was really just a huge wrestling match in the mud... Somebody moved their elbow and I ended up with a broken nose.”

Perhaps the impression given by the frosh-soph brawl is too harsh for what Loyola University actually was. For all the bruises and broken bones, Loyola was populated by a group of men who developed a tightly bound society on a campus which they held all to themselves. Like the recollections of the women at Marymount College, the men of Loyola looked back fondly on the special relationships they developed. John Page, who graduated in 1961, remembered that the beanies [dinks] actually served to create and strengthen relationships and introduce new people to one another. As Page recounted, “You see these kids wearing these beanies, and you say, ‘Oh, okay, that’s a freshman just like me’.” It was, according to Page, “an opportunity for more integration of the student body from the very beginning.” His brother,

## **Fast Times at Loyola University**

### **By Brendan McNerney**

Steve Page, who graduated in 1968, added that Loyola “had a way of bonding you.” As he succinctly noted, this bonding was “the fraternal organization that Loyola [was].”

But not everyone was totally satisfied with the all-male campus. 1963 graduate, Brian Quinn, asked, “Was it healthy? I don’t know . . . Guys would really be wild, do crazy stuff, too much drinking. . . I’m not sure it was the best situation to be in an all-male school.” Quinn went further in describing a campus without women: “It was horrible,” he stated, unless “you had a real cute girlfriend. . . that made life very pleasant.” Quinn also remembered that in the early 1960s, “[the men] had to rely upon mixers.” Whether it was the famed annual St. Patrick’s Day Dance held at the Riviera Country Club, the Homecoming festivities, or one of the many other social events, mixers often meant that busloads of female students came to campus, directly creating the atmosphere needed for social interaction.

Fortunately for the men of Loyola, there were several women’s Catholic colleges in the area that became the source of these buses full of feminine partygoers; or as Joe Callinan, who graduated from Loyola in 1957, suggested, “there were opportunities.” Similarly, John Page remembered, “there was plenty of dating going on. It wasn’t like you never saw any women.” The social mixers were a common place for men and women to get that much needed and desired connection and to build relationships that would often blossom into lifelong commitments. As a case in point, Chad Dreier, who graduated from Loyola in 1969 and is the current Chairman of the Board of Trustees, explained that he met his wife, who attended Marymount College, at a school dance in 1968.

While these circumstances satiated some of the men, Quinn still had his doubts and though he agreed that there were opportunities for long-distance connections, he often wondered if things would have been better with men and women together: “We’d get together with the girls . . .” Quinn remembered, “But it was different. . . It would have been nice to have been in class [together].”

And then, in the late 1960s, quite suddenly, the women came to stay. Or, as 1969 LMU Alum Mike Page quipped, “The girls came and changed everything.” In the five years leading up to the official merger, from 1968 to 1973, the initial relationship between Loyola and Marymount wasn’t hostile so much as tenuous. Though the two colleges occupied the same campus and cross-pollinated each other’s classes, the two schools remained separate. Dennis Branconier remembered how the two institutions interacted: “Whenever we were going to go visit a girl, we would say we were going over to Marymount, not I’m going to the southwest quadrant of the campus. . . they were two separate institutions. . .” When men did undergo the perilous journey to the other side of campus to meet with the women, they encountered stiff protocol. As Fr. Engh, who graduated in 1972 recalled, “The women at Marymount College were under very strict surveillance. Women had hours by which they had to be in the dormitory.” Fr. Engh continued, “The men were not allowed upstairs. We were not allowed anywhere near their rooms.”

Even with women under such strict confines, many men were unsure about the merger. Explaining his views at the time, 1969 graduate Mike Page stated “I liked the idea of having a strictly male classroom. . . Maybe that’s just the way I was brought up. It seemed to be more

## **Fast Times at Loyola University** **By Brendan McNerney**

focused on what you wanted to do as opposed to trying to maybe impress a lady in the class. I enjoyed it that way.” Fr. Engh remembered that there were men, especially in the senior class, “who didn’t want the women on campus, and when the merger took place [they felt] alienated... they just thought this was the end of the good old Loyola that they’d known.” As a result, there were the occasional stunts and pranks that typically mark any union of opposites at its outset (a particularly noteworthy bit being the growing of flowers in men’s urinals by the women).

The recollections of graduates of the 1970s reveal a change in perspective. Rudy deLeon, who graduated in 1974 characterized the inclusion of women as a “progression that reflected changing times in the country.” 1975 graduate, Joe Page, concurred. “I think it was inevitable,” said Joe, “because the world was evolving in the ‘70s to a time of equality . . . I think the University actually needed to do that to continue to grow and prosper...” Remembering how he felt at the time, Joe’s brother, Frank Page, who graduated in 1973, stated, “I was glad about whatever it was that was happening. I just remember I had a positive feeling about this merger.”

Such differing viewpoints were, for the most part, at the level of plate tectonics, that is to say widespread but mostly subliminal. 1971 graduate, Mike Steed, described the initial integration as “a little awkward.” But, Steed stated, “very quickly everybody assimilated with everybody else. If there’s one thing in life that happens other than death and taxes, it’s men and women get together.” Callinan, who returned to the campus in the the late 1950s to teach, remembered that for him, the merger “didn’t seem to be a big deal. It seemed to be a natural transition. . . .And it was nice to have women on campus.”

Not surprisingly, when women arrived, the social scene on campus changed significantly, with the all-male camaraderie replaced by co-ed friendships. Thomas Beck, who arrived at Loyola in 1969, remembered that the men outnumbered the women at least two to one. Indeed, it was not, as Joe Page noted, “a target-rich environment. . . there were women, but there weren’t a lot of women on campus.” Even so, the relatively small number of women had a decided impact on campus culture. Mike Steed remembered that the women had a softening effect on the more boorish tendencies of the men: “You could begin to see the change in public behavior of some of the men: they were less loud, less boisterous... It became a gentler campus . . . over time.” As the more blatant hostilities were tempered by understanding and intermingling, women began to be formally integrated not only into the classrooms but into the shared student organizations of the newly formed university. They were smart and able-bodied and they surprised their male peers with their dedication to LMU and the future that was looming on the horizon. Steed noted, “I remember on the *Loyolan*, women would come to be reporters and whatever, and it was great. They had a different viewpoint, and shock of all shocks, they were smart, and they could write, and they did a great job. It was an easier assimilation than I think most people thought it would be.”

Reflecting Brian Quinn’s views a few decades earlier, many Loyola men found the presence of women in the classroom to be a positive change. Dale Marini, who started at Loyola before the merger, remembered that since the students had “signed on to be at an all-male school,” there were some adjustments that needed to be made. According to Marini, however, the “students adjusted very easily and very quickly.” Marini noted that having co-education in the classroom was “just more social, more natural. It was nice to get different perspective in the

## **Fast Times at Loyola University**

### **By Brendan McNerney**

classrooms.” Thomas Beck, who began at Loyola during the affiliation period in 1969, remembered that it was a plus academically to have women on campus. “They tend to be more serious students,” Beck asserted. “So I think they brought the level of academics up.” Assessing the progressive nature of the change, Rudy deLeon stated that the integration of women on campus “added ...an academic and social environment that was moving Jesuit education into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.”

As time progressed and the merger became official in 1973, the tensions and restrictions between the two institutions diminished. What had initially seemed like a potential powder keg of resentment and segregation, instead evolved into a cohesive and fully realized community of respectful peers, who went about their business amongst each other as if very little had changed at all. Contentions still remained about the name change and some masculine habits were prone to die hard, but all in all, the merger was a resounding success, supported by both the institutions that initiated it and the student bodies that comprised it. Summarizing the impact of the merger on an individual level, Loyola Alum Thomas Beck of '73 explained it best, “I developed some really close friendships with women that were in my class that I never dated. They became like sisters and they still are, frankly to this date.”

His was not an uncommon experience.