

Random Memories of Hofstra

By William J. Flipse, Jr., Class of 1975, Parent of Christine, Class of 2011

It was a special experience to visit the Hofstra campus this past August 30th on freshman move-in day. After getting our daughter, Christine, settled into her room in Nassau Hall my wife and I attended the President's Welcome in Adams Playhouse and the Parent Volunteer meeting in the library.

Throughout the day I freely shared with people that my daughter was from a long line of Hofstra graduates – not only had I graduated from Hofstra but so had both my parents, my older sister and an assortment of aunts and uncles. But it was Hofstra Director of Parent and Family Programs, Branka Kristic who put it in a way I had not considered before, Christine represented the third consecutive generation in our family to attend Hofstra (a dynasty in the making, to be sure)! Over the years I have counted myself as the tenth in my family to attend Hofstra but when I tried to reconstruct the list for this article I came up as eighth. The list includes:

- Francis J. Sorg, Jr., 1939 (my mother's brother)
- Florence Hogan Sorg, 1941 (Francis' wife)
- Margaret Ohler Flipse Edmiston, 1944 (my father's sister-in-law)
- William J. Flipse, 1947 (my father)
- Mignon Sorg Flipse, 1947 (my mother)
- Beverly Sorg King, 1955 (my mother's sister)
- Adrienne Flipse Hausch, 1972 (my sister)
- William J. Flipse, Jr., 1975 (me)
- Christine E. Flipse, 2011 (my daughter)

Though not a member of the family when she attended Hofstra, we acquired another alumna, my cousin's wife, Brenda Madigan Sorg, 1972

My parents were both Class of 1947. My mother was supposed to have been in an earlier class but took a hiatus in her education during World War II. She shared many of her memories of her time at Hofstra College with me. Here are a few:

Hofstra was originally a branch college of New York University. My uncle was in the first graduating class in 1939 and had a choice between a Hofstra diploma and an NYU diploma; he chose a Hofstra diploma.

During its early years Hofstra maintained a firm dress code. Women were required to wear dresses or skirts; no slacks were permitted. Anyone who has been on the Hofstra campus over the winter knows how cold it gets when the wind whips across the Hempstead Plains. During World War II the dress code was relaxed to permit women to wear slacks during the winter. However, when a female student took her foot off the floor during class to rest it on the back of the seat in front of her the ban on women wearing slacks was quickly reinstated.

Willie Hofstra was a lumberman and had a collection of rare trees on his estate. During World War II a pilot on approach to Mitchell Field crashed into a tree and the U.S. Government ordered the trees cut down. (It was later determined that the crash was due to pilot error and, of course, if he hadn't hit a tree he would have hit a building.)

I started at Hofstra in the fall semester of 1970, a member of the last high school class to receive deferments from the military draft to attend college. The college experience in the early '70s was unique, to be sure. The Vietnam War was in full swing. The memories of the Kent State shootings and the subsequent student strikes were fresh from the previous semester. There were many Viet Nam veterans attending Hofstra on the G.I. Bill and, just like the rest of the student body, there were many who were supporters of the war and many against it. The campus was awash in Hawks and Doves.

Much of the campus was the same as it is today, just as much of it has changed. The area in the Student Center where the upper level of the Bookstore is today was an open-air courtyard. The Student Activities office sponsored a contest in the late fall to decorate the windows that surrounded the courtyard in holiday themes. (See the accompanying photos.) The dormitory towers were here but were very new. There was still a great deal of evidence that the North Campus parking areas had

once been runways of Mitchell Army Air Field. (You can still see a few of the hangars on the Nassau Community College campus.)

Speaking of the Bookstore, although the upper level did not exist when I was here the lower level (which was the entire Bookstore) and the Post Office are right where they were in my days here, except the Post Office service window was inside the Bookstore. This proved to be a security problem because students who did not want to pay for their textbooks would take the books from the shelves, wrap them in brown paper and mail them to themselves – book rate – without ever passing through the checkouts. Obviously, the store caught on and the service window now faces the corridor, outside the Bookstore.

Many of the newer academic buildings did not exist in the early '70s – the Chemistry Department (my major) was in Hauser Hall and Physics was in Davison Hall. Calkins Hall was in the process of being converted from Calkins Gymnasium, the first part of the Physical Fitness center having recently been completed (there was no pool yet). Monroe Lecture Center was a brand new building. Breslin, Dempster, Starr, and Gittleson Halls did not exist and there was only **one** Unispan.

Hofstra was well known in those days for being in the vanguard of removing architectural barriers for people in wheelchairs, long before it became common to do so. The irony was that, what came to be a symbol of Hofstra, the Unispan, proved to be a formidable barrier. The steep incline of the bridge was difficult to scale in a hand-powered wheelchair so it became common for students who saw someone struggling up the ramp just to get behind and push. It didn't matter whether you knew the person; you just gave him or her a push to the top.

Like almost every college in the '70s, Hofstra was not without its share of controversy. The presence of drugs in the dorms and the discovery that there were undercover narcotics agents in the dormitories resulted in protests on campus that drew the attention of the local news media.

The school made news again when a student hung a Nazi flag in the window of his dorm room, high in a tower, facing Hempstead Turnpike. There was a rumor that two rival motorcycle gangs were going to come on campus and rumble, one in support of the student and the other against. I was serving as a student Senator at the time and an emergency meeting of the Student Senate was called to decide what we should do. Amid the debate one of my fellow Senators stood up and said, "I think we should let it happen." We all reacted, "What? Are you crazy?" He said, "No, I think it would be a learning experience." In the end there was no rumble; it was probably just a rumor all along.

Somehow through it all we managed to get an education. Although I was a Chemistry major I decided to take a few Engineering courses, including one in a computer language called FORTRAN. Our assignments were done on punched cards, submitting programs to the Computer Center to be run in batch. You were lucky to get two or three runs a day. And yes, this was an Engineering course; no one had heard of "Computer Science" yet. (Other schools taught computer courses in the Mathematics department.)

Hofstra has changed dramatically since my days there, even more from the days when my parents and aunts and uncles were students there. While change is necessary for growth there is a feeling that we are losing a sense of our heritage. Hofstra is a Dutch name (as is Flipse, by the way) and it was Willie Hofstra's Dutch heritage that led to the Hofstra teams being called the "Flying Dutchmen." Whether a matter of political correctness (**Dutchmen**) or a marketing consultant's attempts at being modern, it is my hope and prayer that as Hofstra continues to grow it will regain and keep a sense of its roots and those that came before.

My memories of Hofstra are many and varied and are inextricably intertwined with the turbulent times in our nation and the world during which I attended. But I cannot help but feel a sense of pride whenever I hear Hofstra mentioned in the media. I look forward to the coming semesters and getting to be a part of the Hofstra family once again.

Je maintiendray,

Bill Flipse, 1975

P.S. "Je maintiendray" is the Hofstra motto, "I stand steadfast," which is on the Hofstra crest.