

Keeper Of The House — Winnie The Chef Has Kept Us Strong

Being a brother in the bond acquaints one with wonderfully unforgettable experiences. Many aspects of one's life change upon becoming a brother here at Phi Delta Theta. Lasting friendships are forged that may have seemed unimaginable before pledging. The brothers of New York Zeta are truly fortunate because they have a special way of keeping memories of the last 39 years vividly alive. Yes, since 1965, Winnie MacKay has been our in-house kitchen master and history guardian. Every brother in the house since then shares delightful memories with our Winnie. To me, this makes the bond of brotherhood in Phi Delta Theta stronger than any other house on the row.

It is always an inspiring experience to have brothers from years past stop by the house (I encourage all of you to do so). The first stop of any post-1965 class is always the kitchen—to see Winnie, and to reminisce about their years spent here at the house. She is the one person who is able to share the memories of many years with any brother, for she can always recognize a face and remember at least a first name. Being able to remember all those names is a feat that I cannot even imagine being able to do.

I recently learned the interesting story of how Winnie became part of Phi Delta Theta, a story that when told by her is not only surprising, but is also delivered in Winnie's deadpan comic style.

Fred Stewart '66 is the man responsible for hiring Winnie, but is also the man who almost caused Winnie to walk out after less than a week of working. The year was 1965, and Winnie, 22 years of age, had already established herself as a culinary professional in the region. She had already worked at the Hamilton Inn and the Brae Loch Inn, and even served as a head chef at the Colgate Inn. Little did she know that

her next job would be one that she would keep for quite some time. As she tells the story, "I arrived at the house and rang the bell and came in the front door. I was met at the door by an enormous dog that jumped on me, just about knocking me to the ground. A few seconds later there was Fred, wrestling with the dog to get him off of me." They spoke in the living room for a while, and Winnie decided to take the assignment, thinking that it would be a temporary job, as she already had decided that a house with 40 guys and a big dog was no place for her and her son Tim, who was then only a few months old.

She recounted her first day in the kitchen to me: "I had just opened up the kitchen, and a brother came in for breakfast. There was essentially nothing in the kitchen to make him, and then all of a sudden, about 40 other brothers arrived at once. I was overwhelmed." As the days of her standing guard at the Phi Delt kitchen progressed, she stocked the kitchen with ease and became quite adept at feeding the mass amount of "football player-sized brothers." I asked if she didn't find it frightening being 22 and having all these big guys with colossal appetites as her employers. She said it had been easy to establish her authority in the kitchen: "The first time one of them smarted off, I threw an egg and hit him right in the middle of his forehead," Winnie says. "From there on out it was easy."

After about a week, she had her first Phi Delt surprise. Apparently, Winnie's predecessor had not really been let go. Fred, of course, did not bother to tell this to Winnie during her interview—whether or not he was afraid to, or had just forgot after tackling the dog. I'm not sure. But one day, Winnie was making breakfast, and in walked a woman in a crisp white uniform,

asking Winnie what she thought she was doing in her kitchen, (though not in quite such a cordial manner). Winnie then proceeded to walk out of the house, thinking her employment at the house was over.

It was not long before the brothers realized the treasure they had lost and were calling her to please come back. She agreed, but they had to formally dismiss her predecessor with a month's pay and an apology (more generous than I would have been with someone who was not doing the proper job), but Winnie was more than worth the struggle. She was back; little did she know for how long!

The fact that Winnie, a 22-year-old mother, was able to work in a house filled with college guys seemed a bit shocking to her friends. She explained that she had grown up on a farm and was always treated by her family and friends as "one of the boys." She added with a big smile, "Being around all you guys is great; I have a great time and feel like part of the house."

It is without a doubt that after 39 years here at Phi Delt, Winnie is a substantial part of the house, and in every brother's opinion, one of the best assets of the chapter. Not only does she provide the brothers good food and a good morning or hello with a bright smile, but also provides a priceless link between the brothers of the past and the brothers of today. Knowing that Winnie is here to talk to is a great feeling, but knowing that she loves her job and this house, enough to stay here for years to come, means even more. I enjoy hearing about the bygone years, and I am looking forward to returning myself, and reminiscing with Winnie about my own exciting days here at Phi Delta Theta.

Michael Blum '04