

Before George Nicholson III '56 joined Delta Chi DKE and became the chapter president, he was a son of a D-K-E. His father, George Nicholson Jr., Omicron '28, a University of Michigan grad, raised George in Grosse Pointe Park, Mich., near Detroit. According to the summer 1953 DKE Quarterly, (see [page 111](#)), George's father spoke at the spring 1953 initiation, saying the Dekes he knew "were leaders because of the training DKE life gave them, for when they left college they were instilled with consideration and feeling for their fellowmen." Over the ensuing 68 years, George has lived up to that lofty standard -- and then some.

George's Cornell -- and DKE -- adventures began with what he calls a "subfrosh weekend" in 1951. A dozen prospective students from the Detroit area piled into two station wagons and drove to Ithaca. They must have had a pretty good time: five of the 12 enrolled at Cornell.

In his freshman year, with the Korean War ongoing, "There were Navy quonset huts (which were George's dormitory) down the hill from Straight Hall," George remembers. Groups from fraternities visited the prospective students/pledges at those huts and George first met his future Delta Chi DKE brothers.

Bruce Johnson '53 made an early and lasting impression on George. "He had a cast on his leg. He was a burly guy with good shoulders. I assumed he must be a football player," recalls George. But the real reason for the cast was the type of dangerous hijinks you need some luck to live through. "When the fraternity brothers were driving up to Syracuse, he was in the passenger side and reached over and turned off the ignition. It locked the steering wheel and the car went off the road into a tree, breaking his leg."

According to George, Johnson wasn't even the most dangerous brother to be in a car with. Michael Peter Freed '55 took that honor. "Freed was the world's worst driver. He would back out his car through the archway and often scrape the sides. Everyone would come out to see what he would do," George remembers. "One time, I was going home to Michigan for Thanksgiving and Freed was going there too to see a gal he was dating. Thirty minutes out of town, he drove us into a ditch." George said given Freed's notoriety, he'd anticipated such an event, so, "I hit the floor. Otherwise, I could have decapitated myself. A truck came by and took us the rest of the trip to Detroit."

Living in the DKE house itself has always been an adventure, and it was no different during the mid-'50s. George remembers the house chef adding whale steaks to the menu -- just once.

"You couldn't break up the meat. It was like chewing on a squash ball. They actually bounced and we were throwing it off the walls. So, that was that for the whale steaks."

The brother who made the biggest impact on Nicholson's life was John Almquist '54, who proudly hailed from Kennett Square, Pa., the "Mushroom Capital of the World."

"When Almquist was a junior or sophomore, we had some event going on. He asked me, 'What are you doing besides studying chemistry?' I told him, 'That's all I have the time to do.' He recommended I get involved in activities," George says. "'Deke was very formative in terms of my growing up."

George spent a lot of time studying for his toughest course: physical chemistry. Fortunately, the DKE house had a repository of priorly administered exams, so George studied those all the time. On exam day, the professor handed out the mimeographed test. The second question had missing lines and as the professor was writing those sentences on the board, George recognized them. He finished the exam with confidence and turned it in about 15 minutes early. Two weeks later, when he got his test back, it had a C+ on it. He confronted the professor: "Didn't I get the questions right?" The professor said he indeed had but he deserved a C+. George followed up, "Just because you're dumb enough to give the same exam as five years ago, don't take it out on me." The professor's rejoinder: "George, you're just a C+ student anyway."

Given Nicholson's knack for humorous storytelling, it's no surprise that he was involved with Cornell's monthly humor magazine, "The Widow." It is surprising that none of Nicholson's sharp wit made it onto the pages. Dryly downplaying his burgeoning financial acumen, Nicholson notes, "since I'm not a writer, I got in the business side as treasurer. So, that worked out."

George's most vivid memory of his time at the Widow also involved Freed.

"Freed was a year ahead of me -- a writer, very very good. Once he put a quote in the magazine that you can pick your friend, you can pick your nose, but you can't pick your friend's nose. Then he wrote, 'Thank you, dean of the ILR school.' It almost got him kicked out," George says.

Upon graduation, George joined the Army as a second lieutenant, working on artillery and a Nike missile and radar site. But George had fewer brushes with danger in the service than he did with brother Nathan Pond '54, who grew up on a dairy farm near where George was stationed in Connecticut. Pond's father had been a bomber pilot in World War II and had a Cessna with parachutes that George packed and skydived with three times. After an uneventful first jump, "the second time was a windier day. Being blown out of the fields to over the barn, I

thought, 'Oh, boy I can't make it.' I turned the chute the other way and landed in a tree. It broke the worst of the fall and I ended up on the ground, no trouble. But the third time, I got hung up in maple saplings and they had to cut me down."

When George got out of the Army and was accepted by both Harvard and Michigan business schools, he chose to go home, which led to the most fortuitous meeting of his life. "At Michigan, in Statistics 101, there were 97 guys and three girls, one of whom was Nancy," George says, recalling first encountering his future wife.

Upon receiving his MBA from Michigan, George started as a paid intern at Arthur Andersen and Company and soon earned a promotion to a full-time position as an auditor working on the Owens Corning account. Eventually, he got his CPA and ended up a partner at Andersen, in charge of Owens Corning and several local hospital accounts.

As George became a fixture in Andersen's Detroit office, he began to give back to his community. He was familiar with the Red Cross after taking part in blood drives on the Cornell campus, so when a business associate who was on the board of the [Red Cross of Southeast Michigan](#) asked George to join, he did gladly. George helped raise millions of dollars for the organization, rising to chairman. He then served on the national board, earning accolades for decades.

George also devoted 50 years as a board member for [Franklin Wright Settlements](#), an organization that helps those in need in Detroit. He was part of the team that built a lasting endowment for the charity through the sale of a camp location that had limited use, for more than \$3 million. After many years, that endowment investment nearly doubled and \$3 million was used to purchase another major service location in the center of Detroit for Franklin-Wright. George was also on the board of Habitat for Humanity Detroit for several years and also served on a pro-bono basis as the CFO. During that time, they built about 100 homes and he averaged more than 1,500 hours of work per year for Habitat.

The Detroit area is still home for George and Nancy, who have now been married for 62 years. They have two sons and a daughter, and three grandchildren. With their 50-year tradition of Cape Cod vacations put on hold the past two summers by COVID-19, their children, who live in Boston, Seattle and Anchorage came to see them in Grosse Pointe Shores.

George last visited campus for his 50th reunion in 2006 and he fondly remembers drinking cocktails while overlooking Cayuga Lake. He's seen enough of life to know that "About every five years, you think you reach a plateau. But when you look out on the horizon then you realize

there's another mountain out there... A lot of stuff goes around in circles. You keep working at it and you end up with things you can be proud of."

George thanks his parents, the Cornell Deke house and John Almquist for his development and success. He can be proud of his life. And we can be proud to have him as a brother.