

Shaky Brotherhood

“Men’s Club” was a bastion of bravery until it came time for initiation rites.

By Al B., Hartland, Minnesota

It was 1960, a time when boys my age in Hartland, Minnesota did things because they were double-dog-dared to.

My group of friends and I were fans of The Little Rascals television show, starring Spanky McFarland and Alfalfa Switzer. In one episode, they had formed the He-Man Woman Haters Club. Of course, the club had a rocky road thanks to a girl named Darla and her dazzling smile.

It was quickly agreed upon by the other boys and me to form our own Men’s Club, a secret society whose members would be known far and wide as paragons of loyalty, wisdom and unquestionable bravery.

We would share those things—and the hatred of girls. After all, it was very well documented that girls had cooties and were noted tattletales.

The Men’s Club headquarters was promptly located in an abandoned brooder house. The baby chicks were gone and we wanted to keep other “chicks” out, so we put up a sign reading “No Girls Allowed.” The sign was a thing of beauty, written in dripping white paint on a broken cottonwood board.

We were loyal, brave and wise, but that wasn’t enough. We needed a secret and complicated handshake, which soon became a simple handshake. We found that complex handshakes were much too complicated for us.

Each member would spit into the palm of his right hand before shaking another saliva-filled hand. A side benefit to the handshake was that it was an easy and painless way to wash our hands. The washing of the hands was a ceremony that the boys in my set ignored whenever possible.

As a secret society, we saw the need to establish initiation rites. One of the boys had an uncle who was a member of a fraternal organization. This uncle told his nephew that initiation rites kept the riffraff out.

We weren't exactly sure what riffraff was, and more than one of us worried that we might be riffraff. Still, it was unanimously agreed to keep out the riffraff.

Nobody wanted to do the blood-brother thing again. We'd all been there and done that. That process involved slicing a finger with a large, sharp knife and pressing your sliced finger against a similar digit of a proposed blood brother.

In our group, this endeavor not only made for blood brothers, but brought light-headedness and fainting.

Another idea was to sleep all night in the woods without a tent or even a sleeping bag, although in the woods, there were things that went bump in the night. Those things didn't bother us so much as the thought of mosquitoes the size of pterodactyls.

Are You Nuts?

Then someone suggested that the rites of initiation should include a fight with "Monster McGurk." This would be a fine test of courage, but was dismissed as lunacy. McGurk was as big as a monster. And we knew how our fathers felt about hospital bills. Most of us had not yet been completely paid for.

Another suggestion was the requirement that each prospective member eat a live cricket. You could not just toss it down, either. The cricket had to be chewed at least 22 times.

This idea was dropped when several members declared a cricket allergy.

I suggested that our initiation rites should consist of breathing air and drinking water.

Our initiation rites stunk, and so did the brooder house. The Men's Club disbanded after one meeting.

It was just as well, too. We actually liked girls.