

# "Dear Alpha Gam..."

Almost four decades ago, 18 Alpha Gams at Beta Theta Chapter—University of Wisconsin—Whitewater, decided to circulate a "round robin" letter after graduation to stay in touch. Thirty-seven years later, the letter and the friendships are still going strong.



Beta Theta sisters reunite to reminisce and reconnect. From left to right, front row: Jacqueline Kern, Shebesta, Margaret Sirianni Orth, Margaret Haller Burmeister, and Lynne Karl Miksch; (back row) Eleanor Johnson Hanold, Karen Saxler Kainz, and Elaine Minshall Klein.



JACQUELINE KERN



MARGARET SIRIANNI



ELEANOR JOHNSON



MARY HALLER



KAREN SAXLER



LYNNE KARL



ELAINE MINSHALL

While some of the women have dropped off the list for various reasons as the years have passed, 12 sisters are still active participants. Terese Ann Basting Smith, Kathryn Eck Schneider, Mary Haller Burmeister, Dorothy Hansen Rode, Eleanor Johnson Hanold, Lynne Karl Miksch, Jacqueline Kern Shebesta, Susan Lutz Kenyon, Marcia Miles, Elaine Minshall Klein, Karen Saxler Kainz and Margaret Sirianni Orth have shared life events, both good and bad, with each other through this ongoing tradition.

Prior to their 1967 graduation, the Beta Thetas circulated a list among the seniors to collect contact information for those interested in taking part in the letter. The first person on the list wrote a letter to her sisters, telling them what was going on in her life. She then mailed it to the next sister on the list, who read the first letter and then included a letter of her own, detailing the current events in her life. The letter was circulated from sister to sister, growing in size after every stop and usually taking almost a year to return to the initial sender. Several times the letter was lost or delayed, and has taken almost two years to resurface on occasion.

The letter has documented the life story of each sister. "We shared new jobs, engagements, weddings, the birth of children, travel, job changes, promotions

and now retirements!" comments Karen Saxler Kainz. "We also shared the sad times as we learned of divorces, hard financial times and the deaths of parents, spouses and children." The sisters also mourned together when a chapter sister and participant in the letter died in the crash of a hijacked commuter jet in 1988.

Research shows that women who maintain meaningful relationships with other women are often healthier, happier and have stronger marriages. Oftentimes friendships drop off between the ages of 25 to 40, as people feel the need focus on careers and families rather than platonic friendships. If women are able to retain their friendships by the time that they are 40, then there is a high likelihood that they will remain lifelong friends.

The Beta Theta sisters have stayed connected not only through their round robin letter, but also by attending International Reunion Day and arranging their own reunions. Seven of the sisters were able to join each other recently for a get-together and found that their bonds of friendship remained the same. "We've all changed; we've gotten older and grayer," says Karen. "But as soon as we start talking we realize that we're all still the same."

Now that the sisters have moved into the electronic age, they have begun trading e-mails instead of writing letters. They enjoy the instant communication that e-mail offers rather than having to wait

months to hear each other's news. Several of the women have saved their own letters, as they have become a chronicle of their lives for almost 40 years. When asked whether she ever dreamt that the letter and the communication between the sisters would continue for so long, Karen replies, "I never had a clue!"

## Alumnae Initiates

Janice Williams  
Montgomery

Kathryn Daugherty Ryan  
Cynthia Krecicki Tuznik  
Gamma Beta-Florida State  
University

November 7, 2003

Randee Weiss

Theta Phi-University of Tampa  
November 15, 2003

Diana Danzo Roark

Epsilon Omega-Truman State  
University  
November 15, 2003

Cynthia Cheng

Erica Barnes-Smith  
Tau-University of Toronto  
December 5, 2003

Mary Turner Anderson

Pamela Junge Childers  
April Bremar Hargrove  
Pamela Jean Miller Sexton  
Cari Meigs Shaw  
Dawn Stroup  
Theta Lambda-University of  
West Florida  
January 17, 2004