DANGEROUS PARTIES

Was it gang rape, or merely undergraduate folly, that traumatized the University of New Hampshire? Worse yet, does it make any difference?

By PAUL KEEGAN

Photography by MATT MAHURIN

'I LOVE THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE, ITS GREEN LAWNS, ITS beautiful turn-of-the-century structures, the little paths that snake through the woods to classroom buildings hidden in the trees. I went to college here from 1976 to 1980. It's Everyman's school, ten thousand kids on two hundred acres, cheap and easy to get into for New Hampshire students, expensive and more prestigious for the thirty-nine percent from out of state. Almost everyone can find their niche here, as I eventually did.

But it's the darker side of college life that took me back recently, the side that can emerge at a place like UNH after a night of partying at a bar like the Wildcat. The Wildcat is a pizza-and-beer joint in Durham, a small town that for nine months of the year is overrun by students. Steve Karavasilis, the owner, will pour you a draft beer for a dollar or a pitcher for $3.75. The Wildcat's signature is a wall of windowpanes that creates a huge, moving mosaic of Main Street. That's where guys sit down with a pitcher to watch girls.

Steve has hung a sign clearly stating that you can't be served unless you are at least twenty-one. But somehow, last February 19, on a cold and clear Thursday night, two twenty-year-old sophomores named Chris and Jon, and a nineteen-year-old sophomore named Gordon, sat here and shared several pitchers of beer with a group of friends. The three were buddies who lived on the fourth floor of UNH's Coke Hall. They were happy-go-lucky guys with a boyish charm and a bag of fraternity pranks. Jon and Gordon had recently become brothers at Sigma Alpha Epsilon. Jon, from Manchester, New Hampshire, was the character of the bunch, a slick talker who always wore his SAE hat, even when he walked to the shower carrying his soap and shaving cream in a six-pack carton. Gordon was tall and good-looking, a little moody, some thought. He was from Rochester, New York. And Chris, of Lexington, Massachusetts, was not a fraternity brother, but he had lots of friends at SAE.

The boys arrived at the Wildcat that Thursday night sometime between nine-thirty and ten o'clock and drank about six beers apiece. At about twelve-fifteen, they went out into the freezing night and headed back to their dorm, where they encountered an eighteen-year-old freshman named Sara who had been drinking heavily at a fraternity party. One by one, each of the three boys had sex with her. As the incident proceeded, witnesses said, Jon bragged in the hallway that he had a "train" going in his room and then gave his friends high fives, as a football player might do after scoring a touchdown.

SEXUAL ASSAULT, IF THAT IS WHAT HAPPENED HERE, GOES ON AT EVERY college in America. About one woman student in eight is raped, according to a government survey. Ninety
percent of these are victims of “acquaintance rape,” defined as "forced, manipulated, or coerced sexual intercourse by a ‘friend’ or an acquaintance." Its most repugnant extreme is gang rape. Bernice Sandler of the Association of American Colleges says she has documented evidence of more than seventy incidents of this nationwide in the past four or five years. They usually involve fraternities and drugs or alcohol, she says, and the men nearly always contend that it wasn’t rape, that they were merely engaged in group sex with a willing partner.

That was precisely the defense used by the UNH boys when they were arrested five days later. Jon and Chris were charged with aggravated felony sexual assault, punishable by a maximum of seven and a half hundred years in prison, and Gordon with misdemeanor sexual assault. All three pleaded innocent, claiming Sara was a willing and active participant in everything that went on. Sara says she had a lot to drink and does not remember what happened.

Like friends of mine who went to other schools, I remember hearing vague tales about such incidents. What makes this case unique is that everyone on campus soon learned the details of what happened that night, and the turmoil that exploded was unlike anything UNH has experienced since the late sixties.

Four days after Foster’s Daily Democrat, in nearby Dover, mistakenly reported that the boys had confessed to the crime, three life-sized male effigies were hung from a ledge at UNH’s Hamilton Smith Hall along with a huge banner that read BEWARE BOYS, RAPE WILL NOT BE TOLERATED. When the accused were allowed to stay on in Stoke Hall, someone sprayed a graffiti message to UNH President Gordon Haaland on the walkway leading to his office: GORDON, WHY DO YOU ALLOW RAPISTS TO STAY ON CAMPUS? And senior Terry Ollila was barred from taking part in the university’s judicial proceedings against the three because she was overheard saying, “I want to see these guys strung up by their balls.”

ROOM 127 OF HAMILTON SMITH HALL, WHERE I STRUGGLED THROUGH PSYCHOLOGY 401, can feel claustrophobic when all of its 170 seats are full. It was here, in late spring, that the controversy, after simmering for months, began to heat up again. Thanks to a shrewd defense lawyer trying to reverse the tide of opinion running against his clients, the normally private student disciplinary hearings were held in public.

Jon, Chris, Gordon, and eleven other witnesses had their backs to the audience as they testified to the five Judicial Board members facing them across a large table. But they could feel the crowd close behind, hear the shuffling of feet, the coughing, the whispering. For four extraordinary evenings, witnesses nervously described what they had seen and heard, and the hearings soon became the hottest show in town. When sophomore John Prescott described how he had interrupted the alleged assault, he could hear women behind him whispering encouragement: “Yeah, good answer.” When the testimony became graphic, the crowd gasped. At one point, when the defense began asking about the alleged victim’s previous sex life, Sara’s father leapt to his feet shouting.

Finally, in the early morning hours of May 7, the board found all three boys not guilty of sexual assault. Gordon, cleared of all charges, wept with relief. Jon and Chris were suspended for the summer and fall terms for violating a university rule entitled “Respect for Others.”

It was at this point that the campus, poised at the precipice for months, went over the edge. Four days later, a hundred people, including Sara, turned out for an “educational forum” that turned into a shouting match and led Dan Garvey, the normally easygoing associate dean of students, to storm out of the room. The next day more than two hundred people showed up at a protest demonstration that was crushed by a group of about twenty fraternity members and boys from the fourth floor of Stoke. “Dykes!” they yelled. “Lesbians! Man-haters!” Then it got much uglier: “Look out, we’re gonna rape you next!” shouted one. “I had Sara last night!” cried another.

Unrattled, the protesters acted out a satiric rape trial and read a list of demands: the university should nullify the hearings, make a public apology to Sara, and expel all three boys. As the group began marching to the office of Dean of Student Affairs J. Gregg Sanborn, they encountered Sanborn on the sidewalk. More than a dozen of them surrounded him, linked arms, and said they wouldn’t let him go until he promised to respond to their demands.

Sanborn agreed, but in his response he defended the university’s handling of the affair. Demonstrators marched to his office, announced they were relieving him of his duties, and hung a HELP WANTED sign from the flagpole. After a weekend of altercations between demonstrators, fraternity members, and other students, campus police arrested eleven protesters for criminal trespass. As the semester ended, a shaken President Haaland wrote an open letter advising everyone to return to UNH next fall “ready to examine our moral behavior.”

Until then, I had followed the public agonies of my school from a distance. Incidents like the one in Stoke Hall were rare, I knew, and most nights at UNH were probably filled with the warm times among good friends that I remembered so vividly. Still, each new development also triggered less pleasant memories about college life, until finally I decided that I had to go back and find out exactly what was going on at my old school — or, for that matter, at virtually every school. In truth, though, I suspected I already knew.

WHEN I MOVED INTO STOKE HALL AS A FRESHMAN, IN THE FALL OF 1976, THE place terrified me. It is a hulking, Y-shaped, eight-story monster, made of brick and concrete, crammed with 680 students. We called it The Zoo. It was named after Harold W. Stoke, president of UNH during the baby-boom years that made high-rise dorms necessary on campuses across America. After a tearful good-bye to my parents, I introduced myself to my roommate, who was stoned, and then I ventured into the hallway to meet my new neighbors. They seemed much older
than I, standing in front of their open doors bragging to each other about how much beer they’d drunk last night and how many times they’d gotten laid.

I lasted about two weeks in Stoke, then found an opening in another dorm. My new roommate was Ed, a born-again Christian with a terrible sinus condition who would sit on the edge of his bed and play his guitar, accompanying himself by wheezing through his nose. He was engaged in this favorite hobby the cold January afternoon I returned from the holidays with four friends. My buddies pushed me into the room, laughing and screaming and dancing and tackling each other. Devout Ed looked up from his guitar in disgust and amazement, wheezed, and said, “What happened to you?”

What was happening to me, dear Ed, wherever you are, is that I was learning to drink, one of the two major components of a college education. The other, of course, is sex, and soon enough I learned about that, too.

When I returned to Durham last fall, I wasn’t surprised to discover that some things don’t change. Drinking is still the number one social activity, and beer the beverage of choice. As for sex, you want to try it but you’re scared of it, so you usually get drunk before deciding anything. Thus, it’s common to get drunk without having sex, but rare to have sex without being drunk.

Drinking remains a surefire way of getting to know someone in a hurry. This is necessary partly because of the tendency of college kids to travel in packs. Everybody goes to parties, not on dates, to get to know people, and at that age, the last thing you want to do is different. There are also practical considerations: hardly anyone has a car. The students’ universe is Durham and the campus, for at least the first two years. And on weekends, there isn’t anything to do on campus but party.

What has changed dramatically, however, is where the kids party. Today’s students were incredulous at my stories about the huge keg blowouts in our dorms. UNH banned kegs from dorms in 1979, my senior year, when New Hampshire raised the drinking age. Then, in 1986, the university stopped serving alcohol at the student union pub when it found itself in the embarrassing position of selling liquor to minors that it couldn’t seem to keep out. This leaves just two options for freshmen and sophomores who aren’t lucky enough to know an upperclassman with an apartment: they can drink in their rooms with the door shut, or they can go to fraternity parties.

Frats were decidedly uncool in the sixties but began to come back in the mid-seventies. During my visit I couldn’t help but notice all the new frat houses that had popped up. Today, UNH has fourteen frats with twelve hundred members. Their growing influence seems to have worsened the drinking problem.

“All the drinking has gone underground,” Paul Gown, chief of the Durham police, told me. “At least bars are controlled environments where they’re obligated to cut you off if you have too much to drink. But wearing a headband and marking it every time you chug a sixteen-ounce beer is not exactly what I would call a controlled environment.”

MADBURY ROAD, ALSO KNOWN AS FRATERNITY ROW, LOOKS EXACTLY AS YOU might expect: aristocratic old houses line one side of the street, set back from the road on small hills, with wide lawns stretching in front. Several frat members told me that a spate of bad publicity in the last few years over the usual offenses — alcohol poisonings, vandalism — had made this a period of retrenchment for the Greeks. Parties are now smaller and more exclusive. Posted outside the door are signs that say BROTHERS AND INVITED GUESTS ONLY. “Invited guests” means girls, preferably freshmen. The logic is circular: girls go to frat parties because they’re the only place to drink and meet boys, who, in turn, joined the frat because that’s where the parties are where you drink and meet girls.

Fraternity Row is only half a block up the hill from Stoke Hall. Forty percent of Stoke’s residents last spring were freshman girls — 250 of them — which makes the dorm an integral, if unofficial, part of the Greek system. Just out of high school, freshman girls are not yet wise to the ways of fraternity boys. On any Thursday, Friday, or Saturday night on Madbury Road, after about ten o’clock, you’ll see clusters of girls marching up from Stote and the other dorms beyond, toward whichever houses are having parties that night.

There they find the beer, and the boys. Because the fraternity houses stand on private property, police can’t go into a frat without probable cause. To protect themselves from the occasional sting operation, most frats now post at the door an enormous boy-man with a thick neck who, with deadly seriousness, asks every girl who enters the same question: “Are you affiliated with or related to anyone affiliated with the liquor commission or any other law enforcement agency?” The girls will either say “No” or “Jeez, you’ve asked me that three times” before he lets them through.

One Friday night last fall I asked a fraternity member to take me to a party, and he agreed on the condition that I not identify him or the fraternity. We met at about eleven o’clock and walked to the frat house for what is known, without a trace of irony, as a Ladies’ Tea. We squeezed past about eight guys standing near the door and descended a flight of stairs into the darkness. My first sensation was the overpowering stench of stale beer, and when we reached the bottom, I could see its source. Enormous puddles covered most of the basement floor. Standing in it were a couple of hundred kids jammed into a room the size of a two-car garage, picking up their feet and dropping them into the puddles — dancing — as rock blasted from two enormous speakers. The only illumination came from two flashing lights, one blue, the other yellow.

We pushed our way toward a long wooden bar with a line of frat boys behind it. They stood watching a wave of girls surging toward the corner where the beer was being poured, each girl holding an empty plastic cup in her outstretched hand. Two boys were pouring beers as fast as they could. My guide fetched two beers and told me one hundred tickets to the party were sold to girls, at three dollars apiece. Adding in girlfriends and sorority girls, he said, there were probably be-
between one hundred fifty and two hundred girls in the house.
"How many guys?" I shouted. "Oh, probably about seventy."

I asked how many kegs they'd bought tonight, and he led me behind the bar, past the sign that said BROTHERS ONLY
BEHIND BAR — NO EXCEPTIONS. In the corner stood a walk-
in wooden refrigerator with a "Bud Man" cartoon character
painted on the door. Twelve empty kegs were stacked outside
it. We opened the refrigerator and found fourteen more fresh
kegs of Busch, their blue seals unbroken. Two others were
hooked up to hoses that ran out to the bar. My host told me
that Anheuser-Busch has student representatives on campus
who take the orders, and the local distributor's truck pulls right
up to the back door to drop the kegs off. A guy pouring beer
dsaid they'd probably go through twenty kegs tonight.

I asked a stocky senior whose shirt was unbuttoned to the
middle of a hairless chest whether his flat
gets into much trouble. "Oh, once in a
while there will be some problems," he
said. "You know, if somebody rapes
somebody or if there's an alcohol thing."
When I asked about the rape controversy
he started to get angry.

"Everybody's singing fraternity guys
out," he said. "I took a women's studies
class last spring because I heard it would
be easy. Ha. There were about twenty-
five girls and three guys. They started
giving me all this shit just because I was
in a fraternity. What was I going to say?
"Yes, I think rape is a good thing? I don't
need that shit. So I dropped it and took
Introduction to Film," he concluded.

"All I had to do for it was sit there and watch movies."

I asked if he thought the rape issue was mostly about girls
having sex and then changing their minds the next day. "Ab-
solutely," he said. "I'll bet you guys twenty dollars each I could
get laid tonight, no problem. But you know what? If I'm in
bed with a girl and she says, 'I'm tired,' and then goes to sleep,
you know what I'm thinking? I'm thinking handcuffs."

We walked back into the crowd and I asked where the bath-
room was. My guide pointed to a door in a dark corner. When
I pushed it open, I was assailed by the stench of urine, and
realized I was standing in a shower. Bits of soap were scattered
around. A boy stood peeing on the tile floor. "So this is the
urinal," I said, trying not to breathe. "Yes," he said, zipping up
his pants, "just aim into the drain."

Later, at around one-thirty, I counted five couples on the
dance floor making out. "You've Got to Give It to Me" by
J. Geils was playing. Just before I left, I noticed a boy dancing
with a very attractive girl. They were bathed in yellow light,
circling a beer puddle. Her back was to me, but he saw that I
was looking at her. The boy smiled broadly at me, knowingly,
then looked at the girl, then back at me. It was all he could
do to keep from giving me the thumbs-up sign.

THAT WAS A TYPICAL WEEKEND NIGHT: WHAT HAPPENED ON THE TRAUMATIC
night of February 19, 1987, I pieced together from police
records, the testimony of witnesses, and conversations with
most of the participants.

On that night, a freshman named Karen decided she was not
in the mood to party with the other girls on the fourth floor
of Stoke Hall. She was still upset about her grandfather, who
had died in the fall. Also, a boy she liked was not treating her
well. Karen told the others she'd rather just stay in her room
and study. Her friend Sara, however, would have none of it.
"Come on," she told Karen. "You never have any fun. What
you need is to go out with your friends and have a good time."

This was typical Sara. She was popular, cute, fun-loving, and
smart — she'd had a 3.9 grade point average the previous
semester. She planned to be a biology major, and her friends
marveled at how easily subjects like botany and chemistry
came to her. But Sara was also a real partyer. It was not unusual
for her to get everybody else on the floor psyched up to go out.
And that night, excitement on the fourth floor was running
high. There was a Ladies' Tea at Pi Kappa Alpha, a fraternity
behind Stoke. The mood was infectious. Finally, Karen smiled and
gave in.

Sara was in her room with her best
friend, Michele, drinking rum and
Cokes and listening to Steve Winwood.
By the time they left for the party forty
minutes later, Sara had consumed two
rum and Cokes, and had finished up
with a straight shot. Finally, a little after
ten, Karen and two other girls, Noelle
and Tracy, were ready, and all five headed
out into the cold night. The temperature
was hovering around zero as they walked
to the three-story frat house they called
Pike.

The basement wasn't yet crowded.
Sara and Karen squeezed up to the small
curved bar. Each grabbed a plastic cup of beer and challenged
the other to a chugging contest. Karen won. They laughed and
went back for another. As the night wore on, Sara became
preoccupied with a Pike brother named Hal who was pour-
ing beer. Michele noticed that Sara was drinking fast so she'd
have an excuse to return and talk with him. But Hal acted cold,
which hurt Sara's feelings.

Within an hour, Michele saw Sara dancing wildly. Later, she
saw her leaning against a post, looking very spaced out. When
Michele asked her something, Sara didn't seem to hear her.
Linda, a freshman who also lived at Stoke, was looking for a
friend when she noticed Sara leaning against the wall. "Where's
Rachel?" Linda shouted. When Sara didn't respond, Linda
repeated the question, this time louder. Sara merely stared
straight ahead. Finally, Linda shook her and screamed, "Where
is she?" This elicited only a mumble, so Linda gave up.

At about twelve-thirty, Michele, Noelle, and Tracy decided
to leave, but Sara said she wanted to stay longer. Karen and Sara
agreed there was no reason to leave, since they were both hav-
ing a good time. They assumed they'd go back together later.
At length, Karen staggered upstairs, threw up, and passed out.
When she awakened she was lying on the floor near the
bathroom. By then, the party was over and Sara was gone.

AT ABOUT TWELVE THIRTY THAT NIGHT, JOHN, CHRIS, AND GORDON WERE RETURNING
to Stoke after their night at the Wildcat. The three sophomores
were probably legally intoxicated but not out of control. Chris
decided to go up to the fifth floor, (continued on page 91)
Oh, really? the girls said. “We were kidding around with Jon,” recalls Laura. “It wasn’t like, ‘Oh my God, that’s awful.’ Usually, if you’re in someone’s room, it’s because you want to be.” Even though Chris was in the room, too, it’s not terribly unusual to go to bed while two people are having sex in the bunk below you. What the girls didn’t know was that it was Chris having sex with the girl while Gordon (whose activities with her had not included actual penetration) waited inside for them to leave so he could sneak back to his own room.

Soon Laura and Linda said goodnight to Jon. As they passed John Prescott’s room, they saw that the sophomore resident assistant was at his desk studying. Laura was a good friend of his, so they stopped in. After some small talk, the girls half-jokingly asked him how he could let such wild stuff go on in his wing and told him about Gordon and the drunk girl.

“It’s not my job to monitor people’s sex lives,” Prescott told them. “But I’ll look into it anyway, out of the goodness of my heart.”

Prescott, a hotel administration and economics major from Hudson, New Hampshire, went to the room and knocked. When no one answered, he opened the door and saw two figures silhouetted on a bed. (He would later learn it was Jon, having a second round with the girl.) Prescott also saw Chris, sitting on a couch next to the bed, watching. (Chris maintains he was simply getting dressed.) According to Prescott, Chris looked up laughing and whispered, “Get out,” waving him away. After telling Chris several times to come out into the hall and being told to go away, Prescott barked, “Get out here now.” Chris at last obeyed. “I was tense and nervous,” Prescott remembers. “You don’t confront your friends like that all the time.”

Prescott asked if the girl had passed out, and Chris said no. “I want that girl out of the room,” Prescott said.

“Oh, come on,” Chris replied.

“Is she really drunk?” Prescott asked. Chris nodded and laughed, Prescott says, although Chris denies this.

“Do you know what you’re doing could be considered rape?” Prescott said.

“No, it’s not,” Chris answered.

“You guys are going to learn one of
these days that someone is going to wake up the next day and think that what happened was wrong, even if she wanted to be in there," Prescott said. "I want that girl out of the room." Chris finally agreed, but said he had to talk to her first.

Despite his role as the enforcer and voice of reason, Prescott nonetheless thought the events on his floor were entertaining — so much so that he went to see two of his friends and told them what had happened. "Wow! No way! Unbelievable!" Prescott remembers them saying. "We were all laughing. It was funny, in a sick kind of way."

As Prescott and his friends went out into the hallway, Jon emerged from the room and walked toward them. When he reached the group, two of the boys said, he gave Prescott's friends high fives. Then he continued past them, slapping the air at knee level, giving low fives to other members of the imaginary team.

Prescott says Jon proceeded to tell the three of them in great detail what he had done with the girl and how he had gone to get Gordon and Chris. All three remember that during this conversation Jon told them he had a "train" going in his room. (Jon denies both the high fives and the train reference.) As the boys were talking, Linda and Laura returned, "not because we were worried about what had happened," Laura remembers. "We were still just hanging out." Then Joe, another freshman on the floor, joined the group. A discussion ensued between the five boys and two girls about whether the boys' behavior was wrong. "Someone said, 'Hey, a drunk girl is fair game,'" Laura recalls, "which made Linda and me a little defensive, obviously." One of the boys suggested that maybe Joe could "get lucky, too." Joe walked toward the door — just to see what was happening, he says.

Inside, Chris was now alone with the girl. She got dressed, and for the first time there was verbal communication: Chris told her a lot of people were in the hallway talking about them and watching the door. He carefully explained how she could avoid them. Just as Joe reached the room, the door opened and the crowd saw a girl walk out, her shirt untucked. Without looking up, she disappeared into the stairwell.

To their astonishment, everyone recognized Sara, the girl who lived on the same floor. They had all simply assumed it was someone they didn't know, maybe a high school girl. Suddenly the atmosphere in the hallway changed. Linda and Laura were outraged. "You asshole!" one of them screamed. "How could you do such a thing?" No one was more shocked than Jon: "You mean you know her?" It was at that moment that Jon and Chris heard her name for the first time.

By now there were six witnesses, two of them girls who didn't seem to understand the boys' point of view. This was trouble. Chris and Jon decided to talk to Sara to forestall misunderstanding.

When Giselle, Sara's roommate, heard voices calling "Sara, Sara, Sara," she thought she was dreaming. But when she looked up from her bed, she saw two boys bent over her roommate's bed, shaking Sara's shoulder. "What the hell are you doing in here?" she demanded.

"We have to talk to Sara," they said. "It's very important."

Giselle got up. Sara was lying on her side with a nightshirt on. "You okay?" Giselle asked, shaking her gently. Sara nodded. "Do you want to get up?" she asked. Sara shook her head: no. "I don't think she should get up," Giselle said.

But they pleaded with her, so Giselle shrugged and went back to bed. A moment later, she saw Sara standing in the middle of the room, wrapping herself in a blanket. One of the boys held her left arm with his right arm. This must have been, Giselle thought later, to prevent her from falling back into bed.

When the three were out in the hallway, Chris and Jon say, they all agreed on what had happened so there could be no misunderstanding later. Chris then suggested that Jon leave so he could talk to Sara more easily. Alone, they began kissing. They walked a few steps and opened the stairwell door. Then, at some time between three and four in the morning, beneath a window through which a slice of Pi Kappa Alpha was visible, near a heating vent painted the same blue as the walls around them, Chris and Sara got down on the landing and had sex again.

WHAT IS MOST PUZZLING ABOUT THE WAY THE KIDS in Stoke reacted to the incident is that for at least three days, until Sara first spoke with a counselor, no one called it rape. Even Prescott, who had used the term when he talked to Chris outside the room, insists that his main concern was the perception that it was rape, not whether it actually was. "These guys were my friends. My concern was not for the woman in that room. My concern was for the men. But look where it got me. Now when I see Gordon and say hi, he just gives me a blank look."

Prescott is thin and earnest-looking, with short blond hair and an angular face. Clearly, the incident has taken its toll on him, yet he talks about it willingly. Over the weekend, he told a friend what had happened, setting off the chain reaction of gossip that eventually led to Sara herself; only then did she go to the police. But Prescott's motives, he freely admits, were entirely base. "You know why I told him?" Prescott says today. "I wanted to astonish him."

But why didn't Prescott consider the possibility that the girl in the room was raped? "I just assumed she was willing, since I didn't know any differently," he says. "I saw her walk out of the room. Look, that's how sex happens here. Most scoops happen after parties, and guys go to parties to scoop."

But three guys? "It doesn't surprise me that much," he says. "You hear stories about that kind of thing all the time. I don't expect it to happen, but I'm not ignorant that it goes on. I'm not naive. My fault was in not going to see her right away, when she walked back to her room. Then there would be no question. I keep asking myself why I didn't. I don't know. I was like a pendulum swinging back and forth, and finally I just had to try to look at this objectively and make a judgment. He stares into space. "You know, I still can't make one."

Linda, who was one of the witnesses who recognized Sara when she emerged from the room, is transferring to another
school. Last spring she took one look at the huge crowds at the Judicial Board hearings and walked away. The next day she was convinced that telling her story was the right thing to do; now she's not so sure. Fraternity members are mad at her, and she's disillusioned about the social life at UNH. "I guess rape happens all the time here," she says, sitting on the bed in her dorm room, wearing shorts and a UNH sweatshirt. "You know, at home, I'd get really drunk and black out and wake up at my boyfriend's house. It wouldn't matter because I was with friends. When I came to school here, people would tell me, 'Linda, don't get so drunk. You're a pretty girl. People may want to take advantage of you.'" She looks down at her hands in her lap and says softly, "I didn't believe that anyone would do something like that. But it's true, they will.

IT WAS A BRILLIANT SEPTEMBER DAY, WARM AND sunny, when I at last began to feel good about my old school again. President Haaland had called a special convocation to undertake the moral reexamination he had promised in the spring. Sara had transferred to another school; Jon and Chris would soon plead guilty to misdemeanor sexual assault, for which they would each serve two months in prison. The court would also compel them to write a letter of apology to Sara. The misdemeanor charge against Gordon would be dropped altogether.

"Universities have thrived because they are driven by a core set of values," Haaland told the crowd of three thousand. "These shared values are free inquiry, intellectual honesty, personal integrity, and respect for human dignity." Then he announced a series of concrete steps: to make the job of coordinating the sexual-assault program a full-time position; to publicize sexual assault cases; to improve lighting, continue the escort service for women, review student judicial procedures, hire a full-time coordinator for the Greek system, and improve conditions in Stoke Hall. At the end, everybody sang the UNH alma mater: "New Hampshire, alma mater/All hail, all hail to thee!"

At the outdoor reception following the convocation some of the demonstrators who had trapped him on the sidewalk now chatted amiably with Dean Sanborn. "It just floored me that the administration got up there and actually said the word rape," said one. "Last year we couldn't even get them to say the word woman." The demonstrators, Sanborn told me, "deserve some credit for the change that's occurring."

I wish I could end the story there, when the sky was blue and everything seemed fine again. But then I made one last trip back to Durham. Rape crisis programs and well-lit pathways are important, of course, but they don't answer the question that occurred to me when I met some of this year's freshman class.

Ogre, as his friends call him, is a short, compact freshman whose boxers stick out from beneath his gray football shorts. On the door of his room is a sign that says FISH DEFENSE HQ, and if you ask him about it he'll tell you with a deadpan look that mutant radioactive fish with lungs are attacking us all, that they've already got Peter Tosh and John F. Kennedy. If it weren't for Ogre's regiment, consisting of Opus and Garfield, his stuffed dolls, they'd probably have gotten him, too. Ogre is a funny kid.

While I chatted with Ogre in his room, we were joined by a thin fellow with a blond crewcut, wearing a T-shirt with BUTTHOLE SURFERS silkscreened across three identical images of a bloated African belly with a tiny penis below it. His eyelids drooped: our visitor was zonked. I asked him who the Butthole Surfers were, and he explained they were punk musicians, "not hard-core punk, but definitely influenced by hard-core, for sure." The subject soon turned to acquaintance rape, and the Butthole Surferite said he'd never heard of it. Ogre had. "You know, those notices we've been getting in our mailbox about rape, with the phony scene where she says no and he says yes," Ogre explained. "Oh, yeah," the kid nodded.

Then Ogre summed up what he'd learned from the incident last spring: "You don't shit where you sleep," he said. "You don't have sex with someone in your dorm. It causes too many problems. You've got to face them the next day."

Ogre had been in college only two weeks when he made those remarks, so there's hope that eventually he'll grow up. Perhaps he will even think of other metaphors for making love. For my old school — and, I'd guess, for far too many others — the question is, What will he do in the meantime?