

Housemothers on the scene

by ANNE WAKEMAN

Perhaps in the 1950s, Daddy sent his little girl to college with some apprehension and strict demands that she "behave." But when that little girl joined a sorority, he knew he could stop worrying - for she would have a reliable housemother who would watch over "her girls" carefully. His little baby would be in good, safe hands.

Well, times have changed, at least at MSU. The sorority housemother is no longer looked upon as the mythical authoritarian in hair rollers who stations herself at the back door on Friday nights, glowering at boyfriends and ruthlessly subjecting the poor girls to breath tests.

Nor is she an ominous threat to one's privacy, and rarely does her dedication stretch so far as to throw herself bodily across the door, brandishing a rolling pin, when a fraternity raids the house.

So what is the role, or roles, of a housemother in 1976? Friend, manager or authoritarian? Many see her in the first two roles, but seldom the third.

"I plan it by ear," said Mrs. Janice Andrews, who has been the Kappa Delta housemother for a year now. "Different situations call her different roles - though I like to think of myself as always being their friend."

Mrs. Andrews does not feel the

job is ever too demanding, she said. She helps with rush and house functions, and gets especially involved in house sports.

"They're a great bunch," she said, when asked about her overall impression of her job. She enjoys the liveliness and feeling of friendship in the house, she added.

Mary Moon, a sophomore at Alpha Chi Omega, said she feels that housemothers may not be necessary, but are very helpful, especially in scheduling meals.

"We wouldn't have time to do it ourselves," she said. "In such a big house, we need a sort of overseer."

Mary said she feels sororities still have housemothers because of the stereotype of girls being dependent and fragile. She said she doesn't think fraternities would ever allow the return of the housemother, "though that certainly doesn't mean they're any more mature than sorority girls," she said.

Kappa Alpha Theta has something new this year -- houseparents, aged 25. Heidi Hicks, sophomore, said she feels it works out quite well.

"Someone is needed to take care of the meals," she said. "Besides, Jim (the house "father") is a terrific presence when we get raided."

Heidi said she feels the Theta's could manage without them, though, if they had to, by rotating the jobs among members. She also said she doesn't feel housemothers were any more needed in 1950 than today.

"Girls have always been basically the same - they knew what was expected of them, as we do now," she said.

Mrs. Velma Lewis, housemother at Sigma Kappa for the past four years, said she enjoys working with young people.

"I had experience with kids of my own, and as a Scout leader," she said. "I see myself primarily as a manager here, but also as a friend."

Cathy Coulter, Chi Omega senior, also sees a housemother as "mostly a manager. She's responsible for all the organization in our kitchen," she said.

Cathy also said she thinks fraternities could benefit by having housemothers also. Sororities could get along without them, she said, but it would be

difficult with classes all day.

"We probably wouldn't have as many formal dinners and other small courtesies if she weren't here," Cathy said, "but none of our rules would be any less strict."

A junior at Pi Beta Phi, Jennifer Cain said she feels housemothers are necessary for keeping an atmosphere of responsibility, but doesn't feel fraternities need them.

"Boys are just more independent," she said. Jennifer said she sees a housemother as a friend, and feels that things have changed a lot since the '50s.

Housemother at Alpha Chi Omega is Mrs. Helen Hunt, who has been one for 10 years. She was at Sigma Chi fraternity for five years, Alpha Epsilon Phi sorority (folded) for two years, and came to Alpha Chi in 1974.

She said the job does seem too demanding at times, as it requires 24 hours each day. She sees herself as a manager and a friend, "though I don't get very far as an authoritarian," she said.

Mrs. Hunt said she thinks fraternities should still have housemothers to keep them more orderly.

"They're not mature enough to manage well on their own," she said. "I feel that my presence at Sigma Chi helped them to be more like gentlemen."

She said she also feels sorority activity keeps her feeling young.

"I always try to be one step ahead of my girls," she smiled.

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