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Author changes focus after shipwreck

Travel writer Eric Hansen chronicles his travels through the Yemeni desert in his new book

BY THOMAS MUNRO
FREELANCE REPORTER

When the Ethiopian goat smugglers offered him a boat ride to Yemen, Eric Hansen was not a writer. He knew he would have to walk ten miles through the soft sand of the Yemeni desert after the honorable thieves dropped him off, so he brought water, a compass and a sailor's chart, but he could not justify bringing his notebooks. Instead, he wrapped them in plastic and buried them on the uninhabited desert island where he had shipwrecked several days before.

Hansen began a reading in the Knight Library Browsing Room on Wednesday with this unlikely tale because three stories in his new collection, "The Bird Man and the Lap Dancer: Close Encounters with Strangers," came from those notebooks, which he recovered ten years later. However, many of the other stories by the renowned travel writer represent a change of focus.

"I want to do some stories that are a little closer to home," he said.

It makes sense that Hansen should begin to look next door rather than across the ocean for his stories, since he said he has always been driven to travel less by a curiosity about places than by a curiosity about people.

"I have a habit of letting people be who they are," he said.

This openness to strange and surprising characters was the catalyst of "Bird Man" and somewhat explains the attraction of his earlier books.

Associate Dean of Humanities Wendy Larson, an audience member who has read all of Hansen's previous works, described his appeal.

"It always has to do with the social world," she said. "He grasps the interest of social life in a way I find very revealing and very enlightening."

Hansen read from the title chapter of the book, which tells the tale of a friendship between a "pear-shaped," middle-aged bird and slug enthusiast and a group of strippers. Early in the story, the birder explains at length the elaborate mating rituals of the banana slug, whose body and genitalia are both more than half a foot long, and which follows hours of "foreplay" with a day and a half of intercourse. Later the chapter adopts a more contemplative tone as Hansen introduces the strippers, whose complicated stories challenge the assumptions that made the theme of the story so intriguing.

Hansen expanded on the story at the reading, describing the close relationship he developed with one of the strippers, who had called the author out of the blue when her daughter suddenly fell gravely ill. Hansen held her hand through a 92-day ordeal of hospitalization, and he shared with the audience his wonder at where a story about a slug fancier had led him.

"If you don't know where you're going, any road will get you there," he said.

Hansen's last book, "Orchid Fever,"

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DANIELLE HICKEY | PHOTO EDITOR

The Sigma Nu fraternity house, located on 11th Avenue, now stands silent. The University's first fraternity lost its affiliation in December 2002 because members missed the signing deadline of a contract regarding alcohol use.

Sigma Nu first to open, latest to close

Alcohol violations, financial problems and a failure to fulfill reinstatement requirements contribute to the end of Sigma Nu

BY MORIAH BALINGIT
NEWS REPORTER

The exterior of Sigma Nu's house on 11th Avenue seems to personify the legacy of fraternities on the University campus. The facade features six white columns, red brick and a wide sweeping porch; on the inside the halls are quiet, the rooms vacant. The building stands empty, silently marking the end of a 104-year legacy of the fraternity on campus.

The organization, which was the first Greek organization in Oregon, succumbed to financial troubles and closed its doors at the beginning of this school year after an eight-month struggle to become reaffiliated with the University.

"It's hard to walk by and see nobody's living inside," former chapter President Andy Newsom said.

The chapter lost its affiliation with the University on Dec. 15, 2002, when the University implemented its new endorsement program. The program required, among other things, that houses sign a contract to be substance-free.

"The expectations we have for them are the same expectations that their own national organization expects," Greek Life Coordinator Shelley Sutherland said.

But University graduate Spencer Miles, who was the chapter president at the time, said the Sigma Nu national organization took issue with the contract's wording, which would have placed much of the legal responsibility on the chapter president and the executive board. The national chapter was in the process of negotiating the provisions of the contract when the deadline for the contract passed, Miles said.

"They couldn't come to a consensus before we had to sign to go dry," Miles said. "It was out of (the students') hands."

A few months later, Sigma Nu hosted a party that was broken up by the Eugene Police Department. The police issued four minor in possession citations, and Miles received a citation for an unlabeled keg and for furnishing alcohol to minors.

Shortly afterwards, the national chapter intervened and "reorganized" the local chapter, meaning that half of the members were made into "matriculated alumni." The fraternity lost

half of its members, including many of the older, more experienced members.

In winter term of 2004, Newsom said he began the process of getting the chapter reaffiliated with the University. He added that the national chapter was threatening to revoke the fraternity's charter if it didn't start moving toward reaffiliation. Newsom, who had no experience with the Greek Life Office, said he appealed to Sutherland to start the reaffiliation process.

As per Sutherland's request, Newsom put together a chapter governance folder, a 200-page document outlining the chapter's procedures, bylaws, community service and philanthropic activities.

"We did all the things a normal fraternity does," he said.

However, Sutherland affirmed they hadn't fulfilled all the requirements to become reaffiliated.

Newsom said he didn't think Sutherland provided him with the proper guidance to become reaffiliated. He said Sutherland had not even reviewed the document when he contacted her at the end of the summer.

Miles said relations between Sigma Nu and the Greek Life Office had been strained since Sigma Nu became lost its affiliation.

"They didn't like that we were questioning the dry policy," he said.

Newsom concurred.

"I think (Sigma Nu) got singled out and ... vilified," he said.

However, Newsom admitted that he told Sutherland that Sigma Nu was substance-free, when in fact it was not.

"I can't defend us because the fact is we were breaking the rules," he said.

Newsom added, however, that fraternity members were planning to make the house substance-free this year and would have continued its process toward reaffiliation if it weren't for the fraternity's financial trouble.

In mid-September of this year, Sigma Nu's alumni board voted to raise the rent from \$750 to \$900, which would help pay off the debts incurred from renovations done three years ago, pay for the mortgage and pay for a \$40,000 sprinkler system that the

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Students elemental in inspiring learning

Students generally rely on fellow classmates for academic help, but other services are available

BY ANTHONY LUCERO
NEWS REPORTER

Students strung out on difficult math problems or stumped on the first lines of their essays have many places to turn for help at the University — but the resource students use most often is help from fellow students. In addition to the University's Academic Learning Services, student tutors help on an individual basis, with test prep companies like Kaplan and student-faculty programs offering additional services that allow students to get a better grasp of their work.

Student tutor Daniel Occhipinti is a free resource for underclassmen in the Greek system at the University. Occhipinti, a senior, said he began tutoring in his sophomore year and estimates he has helped 35 to 40 students since.

"I treat tutoring as a community service, and I want to help out," Occhipinti said. "Being in the Greek system, you see a lot of young students who need help. What got me started was a need for assistance."

SO YOU NEED A TUTOR?

In addition to advertisements on announcement boards in the EMU and McKenzie Hall, many departments offer their own tutors to assist students in department courses. Free tutor service at Academic Learning Services covers all subjects. Drop by the ALS office in 68 PLC or call 346-3226.

Also, Kaplan Test Prep, which offers test preparation for students entering college, graduate or professional programs, is located at 720 E. 13th Ave. The number is 345-4420.

Occhipinti said he observed fellow students suffer with writing essays or taking tests. So he began tutoring, specializing in writing, essay organization and test-taking strategies.

"It's rewarding when someone you tutored calls the week after a test you helped him out on and says, 'Hey, I just wanted to let you know I got an 'A' on that test.' For some guys, it's their first 'A' in college," Occhipinti said.

A common problem for students, Occhipinti said, is that the essays need more argumentative focus, a clearer thesis, citations or other technical aspects of essay writing that may not be up to professors' expectations.

Occhipinti said his free tutoring service is not an inconvenience to his schedule, and that he typically spends about an hour with each student who needs help.

"There's a lot of places for students to go (if they) need help, but in many regards students are hesitant to use these services," he said. "They feel rigid sometimes for students, whereas I can just get called for help and have an informal session with a student at Starbucks or somewhere they choose."

Sitting in the ALS writing lab, sophomore Allison Cody said the need for help in writing and math outweighs any hesitancy.

"When I needed math help, I really needed it so I couldn't be shy to ask for it," she said.

Typically, Cody uses ALS in addition to lectures because one-on-one assistance with a fellow student and the ability to

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