

Matt Update
January 31, 2017

My mind has been all over the place as I try to write this year's annual Matt update. As I say every year, for the past 12 years, the hardest part is getting started...and as every year I feel myself being drawn back to Matt's final torturous days. I have always felt like the Sunday night, January 30, 2005 when Matt walked into that basement to begin Hell Week was the beginning of the end. But truly the beginning of the end for Matt, was the day he decided to join the Chi Tau Fraternity (formerly known as Delta Sigma Pi) and unbeknownst to him allowed the hazing to begin.

What I have learned about hazing is the victims don't realize they are the ones that hold all the power. They don't realize it because they are too caught up in midst of all the rituals "the game" and believing they must follow the rules. But the true game is - *How far can we push you before you break?* And by break, it just means before you say NO MORE. Because once you do, the game is over. But most never do. Why? Because they just DON'T KNOW. They are coerced into accepting it no matter how much they don't want to, never realizing they have the power to make it stop.

It's our job at AHA! to help our young people, and adults, see what hazing is and give them the power "knowledge" to not get caught up in its heinous rituals.

What keeps coming to mind as I think about this year's update are the young men who were responsible for Matt's death, their friends, their families, their lives. And that makes me think of all Matt's friends, family, co-workers, acquaintances, the lives he touched and affected day-to-day, and those who will never get to know him; and the one thing we all have in common. We are all victims...victims of hazing.

When one life is affected thousands are touched and changed forever.

Thousands of people, children and adults are hazed every year, leaving hundreds of thousands of victims in its wake, and this is why the AHA! Movement is so importance.

The good news is we are making a difference, people are talking and this is great news. We are hearing more and more about hazings that are taking place without someone losing their life. Don't get me wrong we are still losing lives to hazing but there was a time when the only time you heard about a hazing was when a life was lost. This means **PEOPLE ARE TALKING, VICTIMS ARE FINDING THEIR VOICES!** There is a crack in the hazing armor and this is a good thing. Sadly, the stories we are hearing are quite sadistic, disturbing and can't help but make you cry, but that just makes us want to work harder.

So much has happened this year, so much has been accomplished, so much to be proud of. It is a lot of hard work running a non-profit but we have the best people, and it just keeps getting better. This year we have some pretty amazing additions to our board. If you haven't heard, Cal State University, Chico President Paul Zingg, retired last summer and joined our board in the fall. And Pleasant Hill City Councilman and Sgt with the Concord Police force, Ken Carlson was newly appointed to our board last month. Our Advisory Committee is growing as well with newcomers Christopher Pollot, Dale Bourassa and Maggie McCoy. These are wonderful additions that we are very proud of.

We are currently updating our website and are super excited about making it more user friendly with a new updated modern look. We have had wonderful opportunities to share our message this past year in schools, organizations, groups, the Board of Supervisors, etc. Pleasant Hill City Council proclaimed September Anti-Hazing Awareness Month in PH, and the Board of Supervisors proclaimed September

Anti-Hazing Awareness Month in Contra Costa County, allowing for a presentation. It was an awesome experience.

Renowned hazing expert and author Hank Nuwer's asked me to write an article for upcoming book to be released later this year. I told Matt's story from a different perspective.

One of the most exciting things that happened this year, since our last update. was receiving a \$7000 grant from the Discovery Shoppe in Chico to help us launch our Youth Outreach Ambassador Program in Chico. These adorable sweet ladies get it! They understand the importance of what we want to do and have decided to help. It's a wonderful feeling...

We had our annual Zachary's Pizza Fundraiser with overwhelming support and whole lot of fun, and raised over \$2300.

Because of how early hazing begins and we want to educate our young people so that when they go to college they know what to look for, we need to share our message with our high schools and middle schools as well as college kids. Unfortunately, our schools don't have any money but we can't let that stop us, which means we must raise it ourselves in various ways. GOOD NEWS we are a 501©3, YAY!

So, this year we have decided to have a BIG FUNdraiser! We are going to have a Monte Carlo Night on Friday, August 25th in the Perera Room at the PH Community Center. This event is going to be FABULOUS with all the bells and whistles including our very own, Paul Cotruvo as our MC! Mark your calendars and SAVE THE DATE because this is an event you don't want to miss, and we don't want you to, lol. And if you would like to help in any way PLEASE let me know. It takes a village....

We set some pretty stringent goals for AHA! this year and are already in the process of seeing them come to fruition. We have started booking presentations, making some incredible contacts, and learning the importance of moving in the right direction.

Other ways you can help is by going to our website and making a donation, or mailing a check to 40 Belinda Drive, PH, CA 94523. Remember all donations are tax-deductible.

I am doing something very different this year on Thursday, February 2nd, the worst and most horrific day of my life. I feel a little selfish because I am usually in Chico or opening my home so that people can come by and learn who Matt was, or friends and family come to remember Matt. I have so many deadlines with AHA! that I have not had a break to just breath and my heart is aching. I am going to be spending the evening with the most special person in my life, my son Travis. We are going to make a dinner together, which will be fun, and see where the night takes us. We may even end up somewhere. Greg has to work nights this week so he will be home late and be with us then. I will light up the front of the house with candles and have Matt's giant picture in the window for all to see, and light up the inside too. Anybody that knows me knows I love candles. I hope that you will light a candle for Matt as well and post it on Facebook tagging me and #ahamovement & #MattCarrington, I have loved that the last couple of years.

Remember, life is short and memories are precious. Time goes by too fast; in the blink of an eye...don't miss out. MAKE MEMORIES!!! And when you are feeling down, remember the good things in your life and be thankful you have them, life is a blessing.

"Hug your children and tell them you love them EVERY DAY!"

God Bless....

Love and Smiles,

Debbie, MM

www.wemissyoumatt.com