

## *'I buy my friends'*

I buy my friends. I don't have much money so they aren't good friends. Just kidding fellas. That's the reason I joined a fraternity. I figured I wouldn't make any friends on my own so I'd better buy them. I pay for the privilege of friendship.

What I can't figure out is why my room and board at the fraternity house was only \$3,240 for the school year when dorm rates next year are \$3,640. Our double occupancy rooms are bigger than the dorms. Our room rates also include extended cable. If I'm paying for my friends, why am I not paying as much as a person living in a dorm?

It is a commonly held stereotype that members of the Greek system buy their friends. There are social, new member and initiation fees the first year that push your total living expenses as a freshman over that of someone living in the dorms. There are in-house scholarships, paid offices and payment plans that reduce that cost back below that of living in the dorms.

I didn't join a fraternity because I feared I wouldn't fit in, I joined because I thought the guys there would be loyal friends for life.

On March 27, I received a reminder of that fact. It was the last day of spring break and I was sitting around with five friends in our Panama City Beach, Florida hotel room. We were supposed to be talking about the week, women, the trip home or what club we could be going to. Instead, we were talking about another friend of ours who was back in Nebraska.

In March 1996 a brother in my fraternity came up to me at 8 a.m. the Thursday before spring break. I had heard his little sister had passed away the night before. He walked into my room and told me when the funeral was so I could spread the word among the fraternity members. I asked him how he was holding up and he broke down crying. I hugged him for 10 minutes, not knowing what to say. I told him how sorry I was and that I would see him at the funeral. I didn't know his sister; I didn't even know he had a sister before that morning. But I felt an instant connection to the pain he was going through and I felt devastated. The funeral was on Saturday.

My fraternity brothers took off work, delayed spring break trips, put off going home and even came back from out of town to be there in support. When we arrived, the church was packed. There were five seats reserved in the pews for myself and four other officers. The other 30 or 40 of my brothers watched the funeral on a television monitor in another building without sound. We were there to support our brother. That support came in the form of simply being there for him.

We saw our friend for a total of only 30 seconds that day. In those 30 seconds he walked out of the church, looked over at all of us standing in the grass and said to his mother, "That's my fraternity."

The brother had a difficult time with the death of his sister. The next time we saw our friend he made it obvious how much our support that day meant to him. When I think of that day I think of tragedy and pain, but most of all, I think of support. Brotherhood and the fraternity experience are concepts without definition. When someone comes up to me and asks me to explain what brotherhood is, I can't. It is something different to all members.

Friendships are formed and tightened in every aspect of our lives. A simple conversation over dinner can make a friendship stronger. Fraternities and sororities add another dimension to a friendship. Members of the Greek system are there for a common purpose - to add their abilities and skills to the organization. This common purpose and the shared experiences bond members together tighter than in a normal situation. You work and live with these same members, and it only increases the bonds that you feel. Just two weeks ago the women of Gamma Phi Beta Sorority buried a sister and friend, Laura Cockson. These women have been each other's support for the last two weeks. Not only have they given a shoulder to each other but also the Cockson family. The grief that all of these family members feel is eased ever so slightly by the knowledge that so many people knew and loved their daughter.

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The goal of this article is not to convert all members of this campus to Greeks. The truth is that being Greek is not for everyone. It takes a lot of time, dedication, personal sacrifice and selflessness. The unity and friendship that results from this conscious time sacrifice has been enormous. I could not imagine surviving and excelling the way I have over the last five years without my fraternity brothers. People in the dorms may have friendships that match or even exceed the ones I have described above. If you believe that Greeks pay for their friends, I won't disagree with you. We pay with time, sacrifice and ourselves.