

April 2009

Brotherhood. Brothers. Trust. Sacrifice. Dedication. These were all words that were used a thousand times during my pledging experience. They are words that I have heard a million times in my lifetime, with dozens of different contexts. If you would have asked me a year ago, I would have said that I thought they were just buzz words, taglines that were attached to fraternities in order to try to justify joining a group; words that were just a smokescreen to try to add some substance to an empty, loosely attached collection of guys. If you would have asked me what they meant, I could have recited you the definition of each word. That was a year ago, however, and it turns out there is a huge difference between knowing the definition for a word, and knowing the true meaning.

When I moved to Missouri from California, I left my entire life behind in order to pursue my career in pharmacy. I left my friends, my networks, my house, and my family. This didn't really worry me, because I knew I'd easily find new friends, I'd have a place to live, and I could easily integrate into a new social circle. And as for my family? I had a phone, I would be just fine. All was well for my first semester, and I went home for Christmas break to recharge, and was back in January. However, that's when my life in Missouri began to get overbearing. School was getting intense, I was tired of the cold, cold, cold weather, and my grades were slipping. I missed California, I missed my lifelong friends, and, I realized, I really, really missed my family. St. Louis was beginning to suck, and sure to get worse because I was now trapped in Missouri all summer to take a few classes. My homesickness was working full power now, and was only compounded by a recent death in the family, but yet I was unable to fly home. I began to slip into depression, my grades continued to plummet, and at the suggestion of a teacher, I began seeing a therapist where I was put on an antidepressant and went into counseling. However, despite this, things kept getting worse, and I was done; I was ready to quit and go home. Luckily, or unluckily I thought at the time, however, my parents refused to let me transfer. Ok, I thought to myself, if I can't transfer, then I'll fail out. I had to get back to sunny California.

Despite meeting tons of new people in St. Louis, it seemed as though every connection I made was superficial and empty. Sure, they had common interests, we had fun together, and they were conveniently close, I realized that that was all they were. And as soon as I began my downward spiral, they were gone. However, there was one friend I had that seemed to still be there despite everything. And at his urging, that fall I pledged a fraternity with him. It couldn't hurt I thought, I wasn't going to be there in the spring anyways, and I'd at least be able to have a little fun. During pledging though, it seemed as though fate had other plans. About halfway through, I got two phone calls that had me booking my ticket back to Cali for good. The first was during the California Wildfires. My parents called to inform me that the fires were moving to within a fire miles of our home, and that many of our family friends had already had their homes destroyed. Fearful for my family's safety, I was completely unable to focus on school, and I didn't really care. I stopped going to classes, stopped turning in homework, and cut off contact to both my friends and my therapist. And no one even batted an eye. Except for one group- my pledge brothers. As soon as they realized something was seriously wrong, every single one of them showed up at my door. And right on cue, enters the second phone call from my dad. One of my lifelong childhood friends was just in a car wreck, and no one was sure if he would ever come out of his coma. I wanted to fly home immediately, despite the fact that finals were just days away. I didn't care

what I got, I wanted to quit, and I would have too, except I didn't count on the support and encouragement that I received from Phi Delta Chi. Because of them, I was pushed and got the help I needed in order to finish the semester. As I grew to know them, and saw what they were willing to sacrifice for me, I began to finally understand. Every single time I felt like giving up, or quitting again, I'd turn around and one of them would literally be right there, picking me back up. I managed to find the strength to finish the semester, to pass my classes, and to continue with my career. I realized what I missed the most from California wasn't the beaches or the sun- it was my family. I never went back to therapy, but I never really needed to. As my support network grew, and I grew close with these new friends, my depression seemed to slowly fade away along with the things that were eating away at me. The fires slowly died away, and my friend is on his way to recovery. I don't have any biological brothers, and so I thought I would never fully understand what it would mean to have a sibling. But in the fall of 2009, I can truly say that I now gained 4 true brothers. They saved my life, and I would gladly sacrifice anything for any of them.

How does one define brotherhood? One can't. It isn't a single definition or a group of characteristics. It means something different to everyone. It can only be experienced. To me it means dedication and sacrifice, and a loyalty to something greater than oneself. Unlike friendships, no matter what happens, a brotherhood never ends; there is a bond there that supersedes feeling, and carries with it a surefire guarantee that at anytime, anywhere, someone is waiting, ready to help. It's not something one gets at a group outing or a camping trip, at a "togetherness seminar" or by sharing secrets with each other. It is a bond that is formed through sacrifice and loyalty. I am proud to be a Phi Delta Chi, and even more, I am proud to be a Beta Delta. No matter where my education takes me, or what career I choose, I have gained something in St. Louis that will stay with me for the rest of my life.