

Challenges for Greeks include image overhaul

■ OUR OPINION: The closing of Sigma Chi fraternity points to existing problems in the campus Greek system

In an emotional letter to the editor Thursday (ODE, March 7), a Sigma Chi member articulated several positive aspects of the Greek system and advantages to membership in such an organization. To his credit, Jason Wissmiller balanced his opinion by also identifying some of the problems within the system — problems that put Sigma Chi on probation for the past year and eventually led to its doors being closed at the end of this term.

Apparently, the fraternity's national organization no longer cared to charter the house due to its reputation of throwing noisy parties, supplying alcohol to minors, hazing prospective members and other discrepancies such as poor chapter management. The fact that some Sigma Chi members reacted to the loss of their charter by promptly thrashing their house over the weekend did nothing to help the fraternity's image.

These are the kinds of activities that, if repeated, will continue to put the very future of Greek organizations in jeopardy.

But there is a ray of hope for fraternities and sororities — a proverbial light at the end of the tunnel. And no, it isn't the headlight of an oncoming train.

The Greek system has survived through the years because of its roots in community activism. Also, Greeks have a long tradition of training young people to be leaders and active contributors to society.

Through the late 80s, however, many fraternities and sororities had all but left their foundational roots for the more detrimental and shallow pursuits of partying hard, abusing alcohol, harboring under-age drinking, hazing its pledges, fostering sexually violent atmospheres and "networking" for the sole purpose of post-graduation employment.

The Greek community and the University reacted to those problems by instituting strict under-age drinking regulations, banning hazing and creating alcohol and sexual awareness programs.

Since those days, the Greek system has gradually changed from an organization that emphasized social functions toward one that highlights the importance of academics and community involvement.

For their own good, Greeks really have no choice but to make this transition back to their more responsible roots.

Greeks and students considering membership need to take a serious look at the reasons for being involved in a fraternity or sorority.

If Greek life means nothing but having the license and opportunity to tarnish the entire University's image while providing job security for the Eugene police, then the system should be sanctioned by its own national organizations as well as the University — and yes, people will be happy to see them go.

But if Greeks continue to improve, as they have done in the past, then they will be welcomed as productive members of this learning establishment.



Dad's love speaks louder than rhetoric

Because this is my last column for the Emerald and the closing of my classroom career as an undergraduate, I want to honor someone who, more than anyone else in my life, prepared me for college and helped me through. This person, born 53 years ago today, is Jon Fontana, my father.

The most important gift my dad gave me (and my younger sister, Kate), was his attention. Even though his work weeks usually averaged at least 50 hours when we were kids (and still do), when he had us during the weekends, we were his absolute focus at all times.

Because he was a single father, he had to take us with him anyplace he went. Because of his line of work, this meant shoot locations, meetings, editing rooms, equipment houses and studios. Name just about anyplace in the San Francisco film community, and my sister and I could probably give you a guided tour.

Sure, every now and then we found it boring to watch our dad take care of business. But, looking back on those times, I realize that our proximity, our constant interaction, made the three of us a family. This is not an easy task for a weekend parent.

Even during the most hectic Saturdays, he would make a point of driving 20 minutes out of the way so that we could get our favorite burritos. Or, he would rush us home just in time so that we could go and see some goofy movie, which he would hate but would sit through just to be with us.

During all of the talk of family values in recent years, I've realized that those who speak of them could never match my dad when it comes to practicing them.

In their spare time, they sit at conferences on C-SPAN and jabber with a bunch of other old people. In my dad's spare time, he doesn't talk about raising his kids, he simply does so.

My dad also worked hard to instill in us a sense of personal accountability and responsibility. When his friends' children would screw up in school, the first thing they would ask their kids was: "What did your teacher do?"

If either of us screwed up in school, the first thing my dad would say was: "What did you do?"

Although such thinking is now out of date now that our society is based on blame, it taught us that because we were responsible for our failures, we could also be responsible for our victories.

No coach was an excuse for not scoring; no teacher was an excuse for low grades. We were taught, repeatedly, that we were expected to do the best we could. If either of us stumbled, when we told our dad about it, he'd ask: "Did

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you do the best that you could?" If the answer was yes, then that was enough.

We knew that in playing games, we were not competing against the other person, but against ourselves. The score didn't tell us we had won. Knowing we had performed to the best of our ability did. This made us good winners and good losers. (This is only for our competition with others. When my sister and I compete with each other, all good-sportsmanship bets are off.)

My father also instilled in us an appreciation for some of the finer pleasures in life. To say the least, he had an opinion on everything culinary, most of them true.

Drinking: "Son, you've got to make a Boodles martini."

Smoking: "When it comes to cigars, you've got to have a long one."

Cheese: "The Parmesan should not be grated more than 15 minutes before you eat it."

Pastries: "How could that muffin be any good if it's in a plastic wrapper?"

Coffee: "Grind the beans the second before you brew them and always use bottled water."

My father's love and reverence for fine food was one of the focal points of our social lives. If we were going to entertain during the evening, we had our routine down pat.

In the morning, we would go to North Beach, the Italian section of San Francisco, and shop from a number of small merchants selling meats, pasta, focaccia, desserts, fruits and vegetables. The three of us would walk from shop to shop, each carrying a bag, all the while Kate and I listening to our dad lecture us on the death of small Italian businesses (hence, my own taxophobia). Then we'd spend the afternoon in the kitchen, my dad looming over the stove, and my sister and I standing at the butcher block, chopping his ingredients.

When I was young, I didn't understand why we had to go to so many places, cook so carefully and make everything so perfect. At first, I thought it was the food.

Now though, I know that the food was secondary. What was primary was our time together, and that a single father took the time and energy to devote his entire life to his children.

I love you Dad.

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