Nearly 45 years ago, when Dave Zack's mother and sister dragged him to Eastern for an interview with the dean of Admissions, he had no idea it would be a turning point in his life. "My 1.5 high school GPA wasn't going to let me go to any college," Zack said. "They took me to the meeting to keep me from becoming a bum."

Zack was a first-generation college student. He came from a one-parent family and hadn't planned his future. When the dean admitted him on probationary status, it was bittersweet. Now he had to grow up.

A friend took Zack to the Pi Kappa Alpha (Pike) fraternity house on Sixth Street in Cheney. He became a member and sensed that there was something special in the house and among its brothers. "They were serious about making college a business and doing it well. Walking into that house as a kid, I saw some serious role models that I needed badly."

Zack's pledge class was required to study two to three hours a night. Older brothers accompanied him to meetings with his professors. Because of these efforts, Zack learned how to study and to do his work. In 1970, he graduated with a 3.0 GPA. Family members came all the way from Canada to celebrate the occasion.

Some pledges to the Pike house already knew how to study. Ken Privratsky, also the first in his family to get a bachelor's degree, says he was a jack and an excellent student who "didn't really think much about college." He was working full time at a gas station and said that the Pike house helped him form real relationships with other students. While his commute from Spokane to Cheney could have disconnected him from Eastern's social scene, his membership in the house kept him close to young men also interested in intramural athletics, social functions, student government and community service.

The brothers in the house were guided by Pi Kappa Alpha's motto of forming, "scholars, leaders, athletes and gentlemen." They came mostly from smaller communities around the Northwest, and many of them were also first-generation students.

Jamie Wolff started at the University of Washington but transferred to Eastern after "not fitting in" at UW. "The fraternity gave each guy what he was looking for, without him even knowing that he was looking for it," said Wolff. "Guys showed up and didn't know how to get a date. Some couldn't hold their liquor and behave. Some couldn't do their homework and others were scared to play sports. It was a huge maturation process where everybody felt satisfied and included."

This maturation process also included planning, developing and carrying out projects that benefited the community. One such event was a cleanup day around Cheney. Another was a bed race on campus. Denny York said these projects taught them to be successful and serve the community. "A core group of us even stayed together into our twenties and then went into business together after college."

The same bonds that connected these fraternity brothers have been connecting Eastern's students for more than 130 years. Most of them sought practical degrees with which they could build families and make a living. Eastern's University Archivist Charles Mutschler said that Eastern
has always attracted such students. "A lot of bigger, research universities are only concerned with educating the mind. Historically at Eastern, we've focused on teaching skills that make a living. If the oldest in the family got a college education, then he could help pay for his younger brothers and sisters to go through college too."

Though they didn't pay for one another to get through college, the Pi Kappa Alpha brothers took responsibility for one another and made sure everybody's work got done. The results of this process are friendships that have lasted for the past 45 years.

A less-talked about but grim reality that contributed to the camaraderie of these students was the Vietnam War. In 1969, Randy Turner, one of the chapters' founding members, was killed in this war. At their reunion last summer, the brothers paid tribute to Turner and more than 20 other brothers who have since died from other causes.

Privratsky, a retired major general in the U.S. Army, shared an idea that wasn't stated but was silently hanging over their heads: "Don't flunk out or you'll get drafted." This may have motivated some to work harder than they would have without such a threat.

The combination of these factors created what Denny York calls a "magical window of opportunity" from 1965 to 1970, where the fraternity members created lifelong bonds. "Brothers who came a few years before this window and those who attended a couple years afterwards don't participate in our monthly meetings or come to our once-every-four-year reunions," said York.

York is referring to the monthly lunch meetings held for the past 15 years in the Spokane Valley. Sometimes as many as 20 brothers show up to tell stories from the past and to stay informed about the present. They laugh until they cry when Gary Garceo retells how he threw Pat McMacken's beautiful chrome motorcycle parts in the dumpster following an order from the president to clean the study hall closet. He follows with a story about the time he came home late one winter night to find his bed relocated from the warm sleeping porch to the parking lot, and though it was covered in snow, the movers had been thoughtful enough to warm Garceo's bed by connecting his electric blanket with an extension cord.

Last summer, more than 50 members gathered in Spokane for one of their reunions. They came from as far away as Georgia, Florida and Alaska. Their efforts to stay connected show how through sharing their lives with one another, all of these men got more from Eastern then they could have received by themselves.

Now they are giving back. These Eagles are in the process of raising $250,000 to provide scholarships for Eastern students. Their desire to give back to the school that gave each of them so much is a testament to the work Eastern does to produce community-minded graduates. The fact that they are all still friends is a testament to the work they did to help one another get through school. Perhaps it was this awareness that unsettled and attracted Dave Zack to Eastern more than 40 years ago. Perhaps it's this same quality that still attracts students to Eastern today.