



Aaron Rice, who lost a leg in Iraq. Wes Ely, a doctor and Ironman athlete. John Bulcock, the first True Gentleman of the Year. Jack Hotaling, a former Eminent Supreme Recorder. And Ken Jernigan, chairman of the National Amateur Golf Tournament. They're five men from five different chapters, on different paths, explaining what they've learned — in their own words. As Socrates said, "The unexamined life is not worth living," and these are the examined ones.

LOOKING BACK THINKING FORWARD

Five stories of life, wisdom, experience and Fraternity — in their own words

text and photos by Nicholas A. Ziegler, Editor-in-Chief

AARON RICE

In 2005, Lance Cpl. Aaron Rice (Mississippi State '08) lost his leg to the explosion of an anti-tank land mine while driving on a routine patrol in Iraq. A reservist with the Marine Corps, Rice has also worked on the campaign of Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour (Mississippi '69). He is now in law school at Ole Miss.

I'VE ALWAYS been interested in societal problems and policy.

THE LAW is really where policy meets the road. It's how something plays out in the courtroom that decides what the words of the law mean. Law school was a way for me to make a career out of it, as opposed to just watching it on TV.

I ALWAYS HOPED my drill instructors didn't ask me why I joined the Marine Corps. I had the answer you're not supposed to give — I want to serve my country.

My senior year, September 11 happened. I had already decided not to make the military a career and was ready to go to Mississippi State. But I instinctively knew we were going to war, so I decided to split the difference and join the Marine Corps Reserve.

MY GRANDFATHER was a Marine in World War II. He was a guy who, you could tell, had been in the military. I respect him for it, but I didn't know him on a personal enough level to say that I wanted to do what he did.

“I’M THE LUCKIEST PERSON I KNOW.”

I WAS A MILITARY-AGED MALE sitting around, having an easy life. It did not seem right to not be a part of it.

I WAS A GOOD MARINE, but I don’t think, looking back, that my personality would mesh with a long-term military career. Back then, I wanted to be a badass.

I HAD A FRIEND who just got out of the Marine Corps boot camp. Talking to him got me to try it. I grilled him, so I knew all the inside stories and all the tips.

If you fail at something, you fail. You don’t try to lie. You don’t try to cover it up.

WHEN I GOT HIT AND LOST MY LEG, guys didn’t know what happened. Guys didn’t know if there were mines, they didn’t know if there were mortars coming in. Do we move? Do we help people? I remember my platoon sergeant saying that a helicopter couldn’t come in until the mortars stopped coming.

THE ACTUAL EXPLOSION slowed time.

I KNEW WHILE IT WAS HAPPENING that I was being blown up. My first conscious thought was “Who is that screaming?” My second thought was, “Oh, God, that’s me.” I started getting some feeling back and I felt the air coming out of my lungs. That’s when I realized it was me.

THE NEXT THING I THOUGHT — and this is human pride coming out — is that I wondered if I had a face.

EVERYTHING, AT THAT POINT, is slow and deliberate.

The smoke was still clearing and I looked right at my leg. When I saw it, I knew it was gone. The finality of that sunk in immediately.

I REMEMBER reading an article, before I got in, I think, about amputee veterans and how great the prosthetics were. I was a civilian at this point. A few years later, and here I am glad that I’m getting a good prosthetic.

THE HARDEST PART came after. It was knowing that what I had gone there to do, when the time came, I wasn’t able to do. I wanted my primary objectives to be going to fight the bad guys. I was supposed to be there for my guys, just like they were there for me. But there I was in Walter Reed in Washington, probably sleeping.

WHEN YOU COME HOME and talk to your wife and your friends, they try to make you understand that there was nothing you could do. But that doesn’t make your guilt go away.

I grew up in the Mississippi Delta around a lot of poverty, but I didn’t notice because it’s what I grew up with. Being in Iraq and seeing real poverty reminds you it’s a big world. Coming home, it was like I was looking around for the first time.

MY FOOT MAKES A LOT OF NOISE. It’s bad when I’m walking through the library and it’s squeaking. People don’t like that.

THERE’S AN AMPUTEE SECRET. Doctors want you to wash your leg sleeve with antibacterial soap, but you learn to put rubbing alcohol in a bottle and just spray it off.

I MADE SOME DECISIONS EARLY ON. I decided I was going to put the leg on in the morning and not take it off until I went to bed.



WHEN YOU'RE FIRST LEARNING TO WALK again, you deal with a lot of pain.

THAT PAIN toughened me up. Now I can walk around all day and not get sore. I can go snowboarding and get in the halfpipe.

I don't consider myself disabled.

LESS THAN FIVE PEOPLE have said anything to me about my leg in four years. I guess they don't want to invade my privacy.

YOU ADAPT TO WHERE YOU ARE. In the Marine Corps, I became rigid. But when I came back, I could consciously feel that flowing away.

I QUIT WEARING military t-shirts. I had them in my wardrobe, ones that said "Wounded Warrior Project" or "3rd Battalion, 25th Marines." I was proud of them, but I didn't want my life to be defined by them. I wanted to become the person I was before it happened.

You want to live life in a way so that everything doesn't relate to that one thing.

MEETING SOMEONE in the Marine Corps is like meeting someone in the Fraternity. You can make some basic assumptions about that person.

WHILE I WAS IN THE HOSPITAL, I remember telling my twin brother that he was going to forget this happened. I was going to be in jeans, we're going to be hanging out, watching the football game and he's not going to remember that I'm missing a leg. I remember asking him if he believed me, but he didn't. Since then, he forgot several times. That's how I wanted it to be.

I KNEW FROM THE BEGINNING I had to do something big to put this behind me. I had been walking for two weeks when I signed up for the Army Ten-Miler. I don't think I had a prosthetic yet.

There are people who would be willing to be giving me a pass for a lot of things. They would call it combat stress, they would cut me a break. You have to fight that temptation.

WE'RE FROM MISSISSIPPI. It's a catfish state and I've never filleted a catfish.

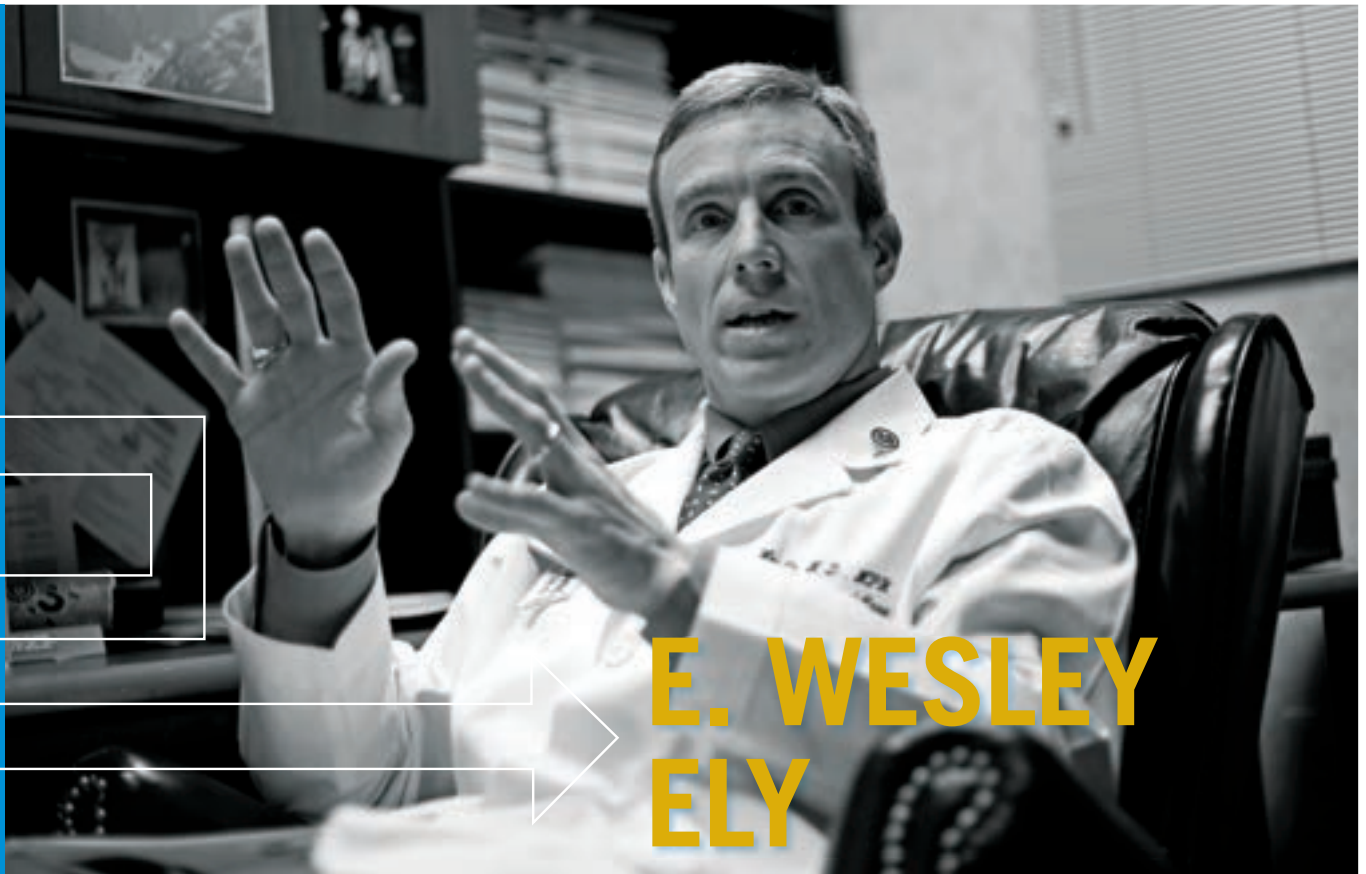
THE MOST INTERESTING PART of being a delegate to the Republican National Convention? You could feel the energy, like there was something about to happen.

I'M the luckiest person I know.

I wouldn't take back joining the Marine Corps. I wouldn't take back going to Iraq. Even if that meant I would still lose my leg.

IT'S A GOOD THING my wife was there while I was at Walter Reed. If she hadn't, I could have come home a different guy. It kept me happy and not focusing on the negative.

YOU CAN'T ever start making excuses for yourself.



E. WESLEY ELY

E. Wesley Ely, M.D., (Tulane '85) is a practicing physician, as well as a researcher and lecturer on pulmonary and critical care, at Vanderbilt University's medical center. A former Eminent Archon, Ely completed one of his many Ironman competitions in 2006 and dedicated it to the memory of a friend who died of cystic fibrosis.

I JOINED this Fraternity because I wanted to draw on the strength of some great friends towards becoming a better person.

DURING MY TIME AT TULANE, I decided I wanted to be a physician. I wanted to improve the lives of people I would otherwise never meet.

THERE'S A TRIPLE APPROACH TO MY LIFE in medicine. I help people with their medical problems as a physician. I teach medical students and residents. And I do research.

In the ICU, it's either help someone get better or help them have a good death.

IT'S REWARDING to see brothers come out of medical school and to be able to teach them how to become the best doctors they can become.

"The True Gentleman" encompasses all the concepts I need as a physician. It's a constant reminder never to take myself too seriously, to know that I'm humbled by all the things I don't know and to know that I have to keep my ideals as my guideposts.

IT'S EASY to get off track in life.

IF YOU KEEP the truths and the virtues in front of you, by the grace of your brothers, your family and your God, you can make decisions that can help you become a better dad, a better husband, a better doctor.

MY FAITH is the driving force. It's disappointing when I don't adhere to what that tells me to do.

IN COLLEGE, it's about the brotherhood, those incredible life experiences. But once you make a commitment to your wife, you have to re-gear your thinking to make sure you become the right guy for her.

I'VE BEEN MARRIED 20 YEARS. On my 20th anniversary, we went fishing for salmon in Alaska.

Every day is a gift not earned, but given.

DEATH IS not a tragedy. It's a transition. If you think that there's no afterlife, then you might see life as pointless.

I GET MORE FROM PATIENTS than they've ever gotten from me.

There was a woman who was dying of lung cancer. She had divorced her husband, but she told me she still loved him. I asked what, if she still loved this person, broke them up. She gave me a crisp answer: "What happens to any relationship? We didn't take care of it."

IT'S LIKE THE STORY in *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. The point is that you put the big rocks in first. The solid foundations of your life, time with God, time with family, time with friends are all first.

I HAD A LUNG-TRANSPLANT PATIENT. The surgery was a success, and he eventually went parachuting and rock climbing. Years later, I was on a podium in San Diego giving a speech when his wife called and said that he was dying. I left the conference and got back here to Vanderbilt to his bedside. He died ten minutes after I arrived. To me, that was putting the big rocks first. It was more important than giving a lecture to other doctors.

IN THE GREAT DIVORCE, C.S. Lewis asks a simple question: "If you knew that the bus you were on was going to heaven, why would you get off?"

PEOPLE GET ANGRY WITH GOD, they ask why God did something to them. God didn't do that to them. He's here going through the trials with them.

IN COLLEGE, I CRASHED A CAR. Drunk. We didn't get in any legal trouble, but afterwards I knew that God was speaking to me. That was a fire I had to go through. My daughter fell off a diving board and nearly died. That was another fire for me. But that fire refines us. Be thankful for it.

Like days, our kids are gifted to us. They're on loan.

AS SOON as I get a notion that I am in charge of my life, the freer I am.

OUR HOUSE BURNED to the ground at Christmas one year, and that was a great lesson for me. Total detachment from material things. The temptation is to look at these bad things with resentment. But I look at them in the opposite way. I say, "Thank you."

THE RICH MAN is not the one who has the most, but who needs the least.

YOU'VE GOT TO CHALLENGE YOURSELF. You've got to let your soul grow.

WE OWE more because we've been given more. The Fraternity gives us such incredible experiences. So we owe more back to those around us.

I feel like my life is too comfortable. I look at my patients and see the pain they're going through, so I put myself in a circumstance where I have time to think and pray in the midst of pain. And that brings clarity.

EACH OF US has to find out what our own balance is.

AS I'M WALKING AROUND every day, I hear my mentors whispering in my ears. They tell me to live in the present.

AS BROTHERS, we have to make sure we help each other grow.

REALIZE YOU'RE IN A PROCESS of lifelong growth. This is way more than a game.



JOHN BULCOCK

John Bulcock (Wichita State '02) was named the first True Gentleman of the Year in 2001. He is a member of the Ritual committee, a former Leadership School faculty member and a former Province Archon. He is currently the Greek adviser at Minnesota State University at Mankato.

THE CHAPTER could nominate one person to apply for the True Gentleman of the Year. They chose me. At the time, I didn't seem like a big deal.

I DON'T REMEMBER the award being a big focus. It was in the rest of the awards in general. I don't think anyone knew it was anything that was going to continue.

I NEVER experienced attending Leadership School at the Temple.

During the closing lunch, they were doing several awards. Eminent Supreme Recorder Tom Goodale got up and started to read things

that sounded familiar, and I realized what it was. I didn't know what to say. It was humbling, but I still think it was a bigger deal that Miss America was there at Leadership School that year.

THE SELECTION PROCESS IS NICE. The people who have received it in previous years sometimes help with the selection. But we still don't know who will be receiving the award.

WHEN I LOOK BACK, it's something that I'm proud of, but when you're recognized like that, it's embarrassing somewhat.

I'm not one who likes to make a big deal of things. A hand-written card does as much for me. Simpler is better.

THE EXPECTATIONS of someone who receives the award are pretty high. I've tried to do that, to stay involved and give back to the Fraternity whenever I can.

I want to be old and gray — or without hair — and still be giving back.

THE RITUAL and the things we say in the Ritual are what make us different from the chess club. We say we're going to hold ourselves to higher standards.

WHY PROVINCE ARCHON? It's a connection. I met with alumni and saw those members who were 75, 80 years old and still coming back to homecoming with their chapters.

I DON'T THINK THE AWARD WAS A CATALYST for me. I was going to be involved regardless.

THE COLLEGE YEARS are some of the most life-changing times. A lot of people are still trying to figure out who they are and what they want to do with their lives. And I enjoy trying to help someone find out who they are and what they want to do.

YOU NEED to have someone you can talk to. Someone who will be real with you, who will not pass judgment but is not afraid to call you on a mistake. You need someone who can listen.

As far as Greek organizations, we're all here for the same reasons. We're here to raise the standard a little bit.

WHEN IT COMES TO RECRUITMENT, there are three types of people: Always-joiners, maybe-joiners and never-joiners. I was a never-joiner. One of the most fascinating things is that I now want to spend a good part of my career working with Greeks. I can see the change the ΣAE experience has had on me.

I AM PROOF that the Greek experience is a good thing.

WHEN I REFLECT on things, it's strange that I went from someone who would never give fraternities the time of day to someone who is now serving as an advocate for the groups I once bashed.

I look back and go, "How the hell did that happen?"

I'M PROUD to be a Fraternity man.

YOUR ΣAE EXPERIENCE is not complete without having been to the place named for one of the greatest brothers we've had, without being surrounded by the majestic nature of the Fraternity. That is at the Temple in Evanston.

MY CHAPTER has a scrapbook, and I believe I've signed it every time I've been to the Temple.

I WENT FROM BEING THE PRESIDENT of my chapter to being the pledge educator. One of the most valuable things was doing them in that order.

THE FRATERNITY is there to complement everything you're doing.

Realize how simple it is to do something nice for other people. The small things you do can go a long way.

SAY "THANK YOU." A lot.

"I'M PROUD TO BE A FRATERNITY MAN."



JACK HOTALING

Jack Hotaling (Syracuse '53) served as Eminent Supreme Recorder from 1969 until 1978, steering the Fraternity through a tumultuous decade. He received the Distinguished Service Award, the Fraternity's highest honor, in 2005. During his tenure, he also served as editor of *The Record*.

WE SUFFERED through the '60s and the '70s. But the Supreme Council was extraordinarily supportive. We did everything we could to keep the chapters alive. But it was tough. We had minimal field staff.

The best way to work with a board is to have your finger on everything and your fingerprints on nothing.

THE FRATERNITY HAS ALWAYS HAD a way of having the right person at the right time.

“I DELIGHT IN SEEING MY SON AS A FATHER.”

WHEN I TOOK OFFICE, I knew that we had to find a way to keep the Official Family informed. For ten years, I wrote a newsletter to every member every Friday. Simple. It was to keep everyone feeling that they were part of it.

I felt the antagonism the Vietnam War was having on fraternities, on all of us.

I BROUGHT a representative of the student movement to a meeting of the staff to talk to us. The staff was resistant, but I think they went away with a little more understanding.

WE HAD to make sure that we were never judgmental.

IT'S VERY EASY FOR ME to understand the concern the students have over the Iraq war, but not the intensity. It was a different era.

IF THERE WAS ANY FOCUS for Leadership School, the fact that they were at mecca was important. Everything was held at the Temple.

LAUREN FOREMAN USED TO SAY the greatest thing he ever did was to appoint Judge Nippert as chairman of the building committee. Because everything about the Levere Memorial Temple speaks to the Fraternity and to its ideals, what holds us together.

WE HAD A FRIEND who was running for Congress and he wanted me to run his campaign. I decided I wanted to leave and do it. So that's how I left the job. I don't regret it. It put me on a new path.

The Fraternity has always had a way of having the right person at the right time.

FOR THE 20 YEARS I worked at Sigma Alpha Epsilon, I loved it.

AFTER I LEFT OFFICE, I didn't reengage until the 75th anniversary of the Temple in 2004. For years, I was occupied with other things, mostly my family. But it was good to see those connections again.

I NEVER THOUGHT that being a grandfather would be such a life-changing experience. I had my two sons and the growing-up process is as worthwhile as anything you can experience. But it's totally different with a grandson. I can't describe it.

I delight in seeing my son as a father. And he's a good one. A good one.

I'VE BEEN MARRIED SINCE 1971. 38 years this July. The most enjoyable part is that she's my best friend.



KEN JERNIGAN

Ken Jernigan (West Florida '69) has been the chairman of the National Amateur Golf Tournament for the last 18 years and has served as the president of the Pensacola Area Alumni Association since 1996. His work with Burr-Patterson has him selling jewelry to Sigma Alpha Epsilon and many other Greek organizations.

I'M BLESSED.

TAKING *THE PHOENIX* and studying the history, I realized that I've always tried to be a gentleman. A Southern gentleman.

I DEAL WITH PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD. We're in a global economy. There's a world of programs and opportunities and networking, but I've experienced the need for the training programs we've developed.

I DON'T HAVE A JOB. I have fun. I don't look at a clock. I just work to get the end result. And that's what I base my business career on.

You've got to have pride in what you do.

YOU LEARN NEW THINGS FROM PEOPLE. Some of the stuff these 18- and 20-year-olds do is crazy, but then you look back and see the things you used to do.

THE GOLF TOURNAMENT is an awful lot of work. We've had different committee members volunteer their time to make things happen, but in 2004 Hurricane Ivan kicked us in the teeth. It was hard to rebuild. But that's why our Fraternity is strong. We have so many quality brothers who volunteer.

BOBBY ENGLAND started the golf tournament. He did it 12 years, I did it 12 years. We did it together on the 25th anniversary. I continued through last year, the 30th.

IT'S LABOR OF LOVE. I won't call it my baby, but I want people to come in and enjoy the flavor of the area. You know these people look forward to this every year.

WE'VE BEEN CONTACTED by people who receive *The Record* by mistake. They say it's not their magazine, but they ask if they can play. I say no. They ask if they can come and play on the facilities we use. I tell them to call the number.

All we can do is offer a nice venue and a nice setting and make sure people are having a good time. If you build it, they will come. It's kinda like *Field of Dreams*.

WHERE YOU FIND a strong alumni presence and a strong alumni association, you find a strong chapter.

A FRIEND CALLED and wanted to let me know that his dad passed away. You're never ready for it, he said. I told him that I've experienced that with my own dad dying. Later, Carol asked what I wanted to do, and I said that I was going to drive to the funeral but that a few tornado warnings aren't going to bother me. I walked in that funeral home, and I'm sopping wet from the rain. He sees me, and you could just tell — that's my brother. He says, "I told you not to be here but you're here for me." We have a gentlemanly, brotherly hug and I gave him the grip. "You have no idea what it meant for me for you to be here," he says. "We're here for each other," I say. That's what it's about.

CAROLE, MY WIFE, she's supportive. She never says anything if I say I have to go to a meeting. Not only did I have the alumni council meeting yesterday, but tomorrow night is my monthly alumni association meeting.

SHE'S THE BEST THING that ever happened to me. And I was a confirmed bachelor.

I told her, "I knew I was going to marry you the first time I laid eyes on you." She said, "So why did you take so long?"

CAROLE'S AN ARTIST. She draws pictures for the kids when we teach Sunday school. If the person in the story is on the side of a mountain, that's how she draws them.

WHITE HAIRS? I earned every one of them suckers.

YOU CAN'T LOOK BACK. In my early days, I thought I wanted to be a dentist, so I majored in biology. I've had other opportunities. I taught high school. I don't regret the time it took to get my master's degree. I don't regret getting my real-estate license, getting my general-contractor's license. You can't ever stop learning.

YOU HAVE TO HAVE a nice blend with your faith, with your church, with your family, with your Fraternity, with your friends.

It's about loyalty. And it's about respect. Those are two pillars for your life.

I TRY TO LEAD by example. I want people to know that I'm a Christian. When people are around me, I want them to know that I'm different.

EVERYBODY is good as their word. And my word is good.

I'm not a star golfer. I'm not a celebrity. I'm Ken Jernigan.

"EVERYBODY IS GOOD AS THEIR WORD."