

Preface:

On June 9, 2020, on behalf of the Development Office, I called Eureka College alum Bill King (1971) to ask him why he had donated so much of his time and contributed financially to Eureka College. I first met Bill a few years ago when he was the featured speaker at a leadership conference sponsored by the College. He impressed me as being an eloquent speaker with much wisdom about leadership, and I was especially interested in how he would answer my question because he had served as Chairman of the Eureka College Board of Trustees and, after the death of David Adams, had been asked to serve as Acting Chairman until a permanent one could be named. Bill's service was especially important because it came at a crisis in the history of the College, a crisis which in his own words was “a transitional time.”

Bill answered my ‘why’ question directly and cogently, “I gave because I can never repay Eureka College for what it has done for me.” Then he told me that I needed to hear his story in order to understand the reasons for his generosity to EC.

The Story:

Bill King is an Illinois native who grew up in Joliet, Illinois. He graduated from Joliet Catholic High School in 1966; he was 21st in his class of 175. He applied for admission to three colleges: Blackburn, Northern Illinois University, and the University of Iowa and was accepted at all three. He chose to attend the University of Iowa and major in business.

He attended Iowa for two years and in his own words “had a great time there but was not a serious student.” In his first semester, he achieved a 2.75 grade point, but “it went downhill from there.” At the end of his second year his grade point was 1.80, and “I received a letter informing me that I need not return, which is a nice way of saying that I flunked out.”

That letter was a personal crisis for Bill. He said, “This was 1968, and unless I was able to be accepted by another college, I was sure to be drafted into the Army and sent to Viet Nam. My mother, who was a Caterpillar employee, had two friends that were associated with Eureka College, and they told her to have me apply there.”

Acting on that advice, Bill applied and was accepted by Eureka College on probation even though his grade point was below the admission level. In his words, “Eureka College gave me an opportunity to continue my college education and was literally the start of a **life changing** series of events.”

When I asked if there was one person or one event he could point to that defined the life changing experience, he said, “My accounting professor was Professor Alvin Thomas, and during my junior year, he arranged for two interviews for business internships: one with Caterpillar and one with State Farm Insurance.”

Bill continued, “There were seven business students who were eligible to interview, and I had the lowest grade point of the seven. I, therefore, felt it would be a waste of time to interview, but Professor Thomas thought differently. After several discussions about interviewing, Prof Thomas pointed his finger at me and told me to interview, and I said ‘Yes Sir.’”

The Caterpillar interview was first, and Bill was not selected, as he expected; instead they selected a great candidate with the highest-grade point. That left the State Farm interview with six candidates

remaining. “I still had the lowest grade point, but somehow State Farm saw something in me and decided to offer me the internship. This was the second **life changing opportunity** I received from Eureka College.

Bill spent five months with State Farm on the internship, and what follows are the ways that this opportunity changed his life. “When I finished the internship, State Farm told me when I graduated if I wanted to come back, I had a job. During the internship I met my future wife Katy, and this year we will be celebrating our 50th anniversary. During the internship, I found the company I wanted to join after graduation, and I have had a 40-year career with State Farm. Finally, when I retired in 2010, I was an Executive Vice President in the Chairman’s Council and had the number four position in the Company.

Summary in Bill’s own words:

“Eureka College took a chance on me and truly gave me opportunities that **changed the direction of my life**. I have told my story to many people and always say that there is nothing I can do to truly repay Eureka College for what it did for me and my family. I feel it is important to understand, as you live your life, one of the greatest things you can do is **‘pay it forward’** to help others as you were helped along the way. That is why Eureka College was and is so important to me.”

“When I tell the story, I want folks to know and take away from it that its message is not so much about me as it is about never giving up, never quitting on your dream, but especially about never passing up on an opportunity because you will never know when the opportunity will come along that will change your life.”

The Celebration of Gratitude:

On behalf of Eureka College, I thanked Bill for all that he has done for our alma mater. More important, I realized the profound truth of his story: Eureka College has provided life-changing opportunities for many students who studied here. Furthermore, he is exactly right; there are some things so valuable we cannot pay back for them. The most and the best we can do is to “pay it forward” so others may benefit from their time here and feel the same gratitude.