

Finding my first true friend

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I can't remember how many times my parents and brothers told me that everything would change in high school. I never really believed it- how could everything change from middle school to high school? Let me start from the beginning- when I first moved to Georgia. I moved in the summer of 2012 from North Carolina to a suburb called Johns Creek. It was an adorable place and I fell immediately in love with it when I arrived. I was terrified of the school year to come but knew that I had to face it anyway.

It would be my first year of middle school. I didn't know anyone when I moved, which made starting middle school even worse. When school finally did start, I ended up meeting some great people who would eventually become the friend group I would spend my entire middle school years with. When it finally came to the end of last year of middle school, the entire grade was buzzing about high school. Everyone was excited to finally become an "adult", little did we know that freshmen are seen as no such thing.

I myself was scared but excited as well. I ignored all the talk about how all my friends would change and nothing would be the same. I knew that it wouldn't happen because I had a solid friend group – or so I thought. As the summer before freshman year rolled in, I found myself feeling lonelier and lonelier. All of my only friends were hanging out without me and I found that I was spending most of my days alone. I remember waking up and grabbing my pink and sparkly phone just to see elaborate posts of all my friends hanging out at Cambridge pool, or someone's house.

My friends had seemingly moved on. Now, I'm not calling them terrible friends- they were amazing throughout all of middle school and helped me fit in in a new place where I never imagined possible. They took me under their wing and introduced me to most of the people I know at school today. Even still, my friends had left me in the dust and for the first time, I felt real loneliness and a newfound sadness. This situation left me in an awkward position going into high school. Who were my real friends? Did I have any? I felt like I had moved to a new place and was going to be forced to make new friends all over again.

The loneliness and sadness that I had felt in that summer and the beginning of freshman year were definitely a turning point in my life, and I would say the start of my depression. Another factor that unquestionably added to my depression that is worth mentioning was my decision to take AP Government. Although I am forever grateful that I survived and ended up doing exceptionally on the exam, I will never forget how the class made me feel during my time in it. Every day before it started, my stomach would clench up and I always wanted to throw up at the thought of another day in that class. The whole reason why I hated it so much was because my entire life I had been told that I was smart, but this class was the first time ever that I felt actually stupid. I was afraid to answer anything, even if I thought I knew the answer, my fear of looking dumb in front of the class of geniuses convinced me to respond with "I don't know" every time.

This deep seeded fear of mine took a heavy toll on me and weighed me down for a majority of the school year. It wasn't until I met Divya that I truly started to gain hope for a better future. I first met her for real in my ninth

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grade biology class and further in our tutoring club, which makes me forever grateful for both of those things. When I did meet her, I was shocked. She was extremely optimistic, which was funny considering I was and still am super pessimistic.

She also understood me in a way that no one else had before- she had the same exact humor as me and made everything funnier. Being her friend brought out sides of myself I had never seen before and she made me genuinely happy. We became fast friends and best friends towards the end of freshman year, but even though the happiness she brought me was so great, that didn't get rid of the fact that I still felt like an idiot in this one class. Since Divya and I had become closer faster than you can say "AP gov sucks", she knew that I was sad and had been for some time now. I still remember the text we exchanged one day when I was feeling more depressed than usual.

I had been keeping the secret for what felt like a million years and needed to tell someone, and who better than the only person I really trusted. I was sitting on my bus when I told her about my depression- something I hadn't told anyone. Not even my parents knew. She became worried and told me to get the help I needed. That was the last thing I wanted to hear- that I needed help.

My whole life I hated feeling weak and vulnerable and being told that I needed to seek help made me want to burst into tears in front of the entire bus. I ended the conversation quickly saying I would be fine and that she should forget I ever said anything. She sent a smiley face and told me to be

strong and life went on. The next day after telling Div, literally the next day, she had somehow found a way to make me feel better than I had in a year. I remember walking into biology class, my last period, after another sucky day that I knew would be made better after seeing my best friend.

I walked into the extremely noisy class full of screaming teenagers unfazed, since that was the normal atmosphere of it and anything quieter would've been seen as unusual. I finally saw her and immediately started smiling since she was always smiling and it had become contagious. I could tell she was hiding something behind her back which meant trouble for me because of my deep hatred of surprises. Her smile got bigger and bigger as she came closer and pushed aggressively against the wall of rowdy kids to talk to me. "IVAN!!" was the first thing she greeted me with as she had adopted that nickname for me early on.

Her squeal was followed by one of her signature enormous hugs that I loved so much. They were uniquely her hugs because she always grabbed the other person's arm and slung it around her shoulder and bent her knees to nuzzle into the person's chest. "What are you hiding behind your back??" I questioned her with. That was when her smile stretched from ear to ear and her eyes brightened up more than I thought possible. "I made this all last night right after you told me about your depression", she said softly handing me the heavy jar.

I eyed the jar with suspicion. It had been decorated with colored paper that had "101 Reasons to be Positive" written on it in blue and pink colored pencils. I looked at her astounded as she encouraged me to investigate

further. I opened the jar to reveal 101 slips of paper with things like “ you’re the coolest person I know” written on it, not to mention she had filled the jar with candy. At this point, I could feel the tears forming in my eyes as they started to roll out. Each tear that dropped took a piece of my sadness away with it.

“ Are you crying? Ivana??!” she asked as she continued to hug me, probably worried at my show of tears. If I ever cry at school, something incredibly astronomical has probably just happened because I never cry at school if I can help it. That hug that we shared then will probably remain the tightest hug I ever gave in my life since I think she stopped breathing at one point of it. My heart was soaring at the thought of someone thinking of me in the way she did, and I couldn’t believe how lucky I was to have her in my life. I quickly wiped away my tears as the bell rang and class started.

That day was the one that I realized the most important thing I’ve realized so far: I have finally found a true friend. Knowing that I had come by a true friendship gave me hope that I would eventually find more friends that truly cared about me. Since that day, my outlook on friendships and relationships in general has changed because I know that I, and everyone else for that matter, deserves the kind of love that Divya gave me. I’ll never forget that fateful day in biology and I doubt that Divya and I will ever stop being friends.