

“Let’s Grab a Meal”

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What the Crimson Key Society doesn’t tell tourists is that there is a 4th lie in Harvard Yard. It’s not written on John Harvard’s statue, but he hears it every day – “let’s grab a meal.” You’ve heard it, you’ve said it, and you know it never ends up happening. And since the whole meal thing rarely works out, I’ve considered two other ways to maintain friendship. First, I could have my mom pay people off, but it’s hard to compete with Goldman Sachs summer salaries. So I’m left with the second way – being intentional in friendship. That may sound vague, so let me give you two examples.

Each morning, I flip open to the bookmarked page in the journal I keep next to my bed. In it, the dates of the week are scribbled at the top followed by a list of any of my friends who have birthdays those days. Knowing who has a birthday tomorrow or in a week prepares me to quickly order a goofy gift, like a Kanye 2020 t-shirt, or to at least send a message at midnight. To me, knowing that someone was thinking of you and waiting for the clock to strike 12 to celebrate you means a lot.

Besides the journal, I have an Excel file with lists of friends from high school, teachers I’ve had at Harvard, and people I’ve met through internships. Next to each person’s name is the last day we talked. If it’s been a few weeks since I’ve talked to someone, the Excel sheet is programmed to turn their name red, reminding me to reach out to them. After it had been a few weeks since I talked to a few of my high school friends last year, I sent them Ryan Gosling themed post-cards to jump start our conversations. Unfortunately, despite several post-cards, I’ve had to keep the cell next to Taylor Swift’s name red.

This kind of intentionality felt forced to me and initially even seemed disingenuous. But, I’ve found it more important than ever given our busy lives and our social media world. At Harvard, I often get caught up in thinking about upcoming assignments and struggling to help my roommate with his love life (and my roommate is Will Skinner, so it’s a struggle). It’s easy for me to let

weeks or even months go by and lose touch with my high school track teammates or my favorite middle school teacher. It's even easier for me to think that being connected is the same as feeling connected – that a generic birthday wish on Facebook is the same as a midnight call or that watching someone's Snapchat story is the same as having them tell me their stories.

I've found that feeling connected is vital for myself. In the lonely, repetitive cycle of work, intentional acts of friendship always manage to make me happy. When I spent a summer alone in New Hampshire, I had no friends and spent nights alone on the pier trying to teach myself guitar. Out of the blue, my friends Luke and Nick called me and it'd feel like I was in Cambridge for a night. On my birthdays in high school, I always received a homemade cookie and a big handwritten card with inside jokes from my friend Eleana.

I've found that being intentional with my friends also gives me joy. During finals period last semester, I saw in my journal the fast-approaching birthday of my freshman roommate Yang. Momentarily forgetting about my work, I immediately remembered the nightmare that was living with Yang. I would try to work in our suite each night, but would get distracted hearing his breathing get heavier and heavier... as he struggled to handle the spiciness of his nightly bag of Flaming Hot Cheetos. Seeing his birthday, I relived those Cheetos filled nights and also the time he got me a Patriots hat on my birthday. Remembering both his addiction and his kindness, I sent him 44 bags of Cheetos. Yang constantly reminds me that when you care deeply for people, they care in return.

But these kind of relationships are not inevitable. People move, priorities change, and tragedies can happen. And, unfortunately, what is inevitable is my departure from Harvard. In the blink of an eye it will pass – the shenanigans with my block-mates, the 1 AM dining hall study session, and living in this community with my closest friends. Without friends, life can be lonely and cold, but all of you make it just the opposite for me. I hope to never lose that. So expect to hear from me and to be woken up on midnight on your birthday, and if that's not enough, please Venmo charge my mom.