The Most Valuable Things That I Learned During My Freshman Year of College

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It was my first night in the dorms, and I was feeling particularly excited. High school had been a particularly stressful time, and I was ready to leave that behind and start anew. No longer would I be the shy, awkward girl that never spoke in class and let opportunities pass. No, I would be self-assured, outgoing, and cheerful. College would be a time where I focused on growing independently so that I could thrive independently in a very independent world. In case it wasn’t apparent, I was particularly focused on the autonomy that I would develop during my time here. Thinking back on my initial mindset, I find it particularly amusing how often and how quickly I learned that living inde-
pendently doesn’t quite hold a candle to being a part of a community that gives and receives support.

To be frank, my first roommate and I did not get along very well. I don’t mean to say that we fought *per se*, but we just tended to feel quite awkward around each other. This was not aided by the fact that she had requested a different roommate and felt the need to remind me of the fact constantly. I, having decided to be the strong, unaffected, independent type, took this with a smile and said nothing. However, the delicate balance that we had found fell to pieces the weekend that her boyfriend came to visit. Sure, he was nice, and I understood that she missed him. There were a couple of problems, however: he would be staying in our room, and to my surprise, I would not.

In retrospect, I should have said something then. Shoot, we should have come up with a roommate agreement at the beginning of the year. Instead, I said nothing, and we did not. Luckily, I had made friends with the girl next door, and she was willing to take me in for the weekend. If it weren’t for her, I honestly do not know what I would have done for the three days that I was displaced. Her act of kindness towards someone that she barely knew touched me. I hadn’t expected to see this in what I was told would be a cutthroat environment. However, she was there to support me even as my roommate moved out, leaving me feeling guilty and confused. As I continued to get to know her and other girls on my floor, however, I began to see how important it is to surround yourself with people that are willing to support you when you feel like you’re at a low.

At this point, because I was beginning to form a support system, I started coming out of my shell, bit by bit. I started talking to people before class, I joked around with new friends, and I introduced myself to people in the dorms. Unfortunately, this was where I ran into some trouble. There was one girl on my floor that simply seemed to dislike everything and everybody. I had tried to be nice and say hello, but she seemed disinterested in continuing any conversation, so after a few attempts to get to know her, I stopped trying. When we crossed paths, I would offer a nod of acknowledgement, but I didn’t really feel the need to try to reach out to her any further. Today, though, I am glad to call her a good friend.

I was on my way to FYCARE, and I was in a hurry to catch the bus that would take me there. Because I had forgotten to get my jacket and bag together before I was due to leave, I was running a little
late, so I would have to hurry to reach the bus on time. As I hurried past the door to the floor lounge, I was surprised to see my “unfriendly” roommate curled in a ball and in tears, all alone. This gave me pause: on one hand, she was clearly in need of comfort. On the other hand, she wasn’t particularly welcoming.

I glanced at my phone to check the time, and a thought popped into my head that immediately shamed me. *Whatever it is, she’ll get over it. I have places to be.* In that second, I froze. What was wrong with me? I saw somebody that needed help. I saw somebody that needed support. I saw somebody that needed somebody to care, just like I did a few weeks prior. Even thinking about this, I was about to leave someone in their misery just so that I wouldn’t be inconvenienced, and quite frankly, that didn’t seem right to me.

I ended up going into the lounge and giving the girl, whose name I found out was Caitlin, a hug, making her tea, and listening to her talk for a few hours. The FYCARE session that I was in such a hurry to get to was forgotten and later rescheduled, and I found that it didn’t bother me as much as I would have thought it would. Instead, I was given the opportunity to be there for someone, and I value that much more than I would have cared about an informational session. This experience really impressed upon me the idea that my time here isn’t just for me to grow, but it’s also for me to encourage others as well.

**Over the course of the school year, I had many opportunities to both receive and give support, and I am grateful for all of them.** They didn’t make me weak, as I had erroneously thought prior to arriving here. Instead, they shaped me into a more caring person and taught me that I can be independent while being in a community. I might not have learned that in a class, but I consider it to be one of the most important lessons of the year.