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The Closing Chapter

Jacob Olson
Linfield College

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Jake Olson
Hong Kong
May 20th, 2018



The Closing Chapter

(To better understand my emotions while writing this entry, listen to Donny Hathaway's "A Song for You" while you read this.)

And so, the time has come for the final entry during my study abroad semester. I write this from Seat 28H on Air Canada Flight AC008. I knew this day would come, but I could never have prepared for it. Just fair warning, if this post turns into a love letter to all the people I just said "good-bye" to, don't be alarmed.

This has been a week full of reflection, "last times," and heartbreak with the periodic departure of dear friends. Originally, my flight was scheduled to depart on the 17th, but I requested an extension until the 20th, knowing most of my friends were leaving on the 19th. This flight change happened in February, and as I mentioned in my previous post, so many life-changing friendships have been made since then. There is a quote I came across recently that goes something along the lines of "Friendship is not how long you know someone. It's about who came, and never left your side." I would manipulate that quote to make it fit my experience more. Instead, I prefer, "Friendship is not how long you know someone. It's when people come into your life, make an effort, make themselves vulnerable, and truly care." If this study abroad experience has taught me anything, it's that when people take down their walls, that is when true bonds form.

As I mentioned in Entry 8, the recent connections I made with people mean the absolute world to me. That is because these people have shown me their true selves beyond what I could have ever asked for. It did not come easy though. Many barriers had to be broken. One of those barriers has been referred to as "The French Barrier." A large majority of students studying at Hong Kong Baptist University are from France and they are known for spending most, if not all,

of their time with other people from France. Few people have had the luxury of being included in one of the most exclusive “clubs” in Hong Kong, the French exchange student club. From an outsider’s perspective, one can misinterpret why they spend so much time with one another. It wasn’t until I began to try to connect with some of them, that they told me why they rarely venture outside of their group. They feel insecure that their English language skills are less than stellar, so they prefer to use their native tongue. To be honest, if I spoke French, I would definitely prefer to use it as well. However, I have picked up a few phrases from them that I will be using for the rest of my life. If you’re reading this, and you are one of my French friends, the word starts with the letter “P” ;). As if I don’t miss them enough already, I decided it was a good idea to turn on *Ratatouille* on the plane as I write this. Not the best decision when considering my emotional stability right now.

That is beside the point. As I was saying... I thought I had a general understanding of what caring for and loving people looked/felt like. No. I did not. Never in my life did I think that in less than 2 months’ time (and in many cases for me, less than 1 month's time), I could go from being complete strangers with someone to not being able to imagine my life without them. Saying “good-bye” to people ripped my heart out of my chest and it will never be fully replaced. It sounds sad, but I know it was worth it. As the great philosopher Winnie the Pooh once said, “How lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard.” Typically, I think it’s cheesy when people use this quote, but hey, I can’t argue with it. This really means that we had the time of our lives. I will never be the same because of the people I met while in Hong Kong. I cannot put into words the emotions I feel when I think of them. They have taught me a whole new meaning of love.

I think it’s necessary for me to mention some of the things I learned from my friends. I will not mention names, but those who I am writing about will know who they are.

The first lesson I want to touch on is in relation to happiness. This person changed my life. She has an unparalleled ability to light up a room with her smile. Look up the lyrics to “Lemonade” by Jeremy Passion. Probably one of the best ways to describe her! I’m convinced that her laugh and smile could change anyone’s mood or end world wars. Without fail, whether I was having a good or bad day, I could always count on seeing her to propel my mood to a state of almost irrational happiness. She taught me that life is far too short to allow little things to get the better of me. I can’t think of a better example of pure joy than this girl. Her love for life and people (especially her friends) is one of the many reasons why she is so happy. I try daily to emulate her passion for those things. If I am half as happy as she is in my life, I’ll count myself the luckiest guy in the world. The world is a better place because of her. If there were more people like her in this world, I can only imagine how much more amazing life would be! To her I say, “HIP HIP HIP BUBBLE.” (If you don’t understand what that means, I am talking about someone else lol)

Let me now talk about someone else who really changed my life. The lesson is about friendship and creating a connection that cannot be broken. This person truly loves people unconditionally. Watching her with those she is close to (me being one of them), made me feel like maybe this world isn’t as crazy as I thought. She also happens to be best friends with the person I wrote the previous paragraph about. If I learned to love like her, I would be such a better son, brother, and friend. Thank you for being who you are. The impact you had on me is immeasurable. I look forward to our future culinary endeavors together!

Next on the list, someone who I have a bond with that will last a lifetime. The lesson is about going above and beyond for those you care about. I witnessed this girl be one of the best

examples of a friend that I have ever seen. She wasn't asked or required to do what she did in this situation, but she saw the need and helped immediately. That is the definition of what it means to be a good friend. Thank you for showing me the art of serving others better than anyone expects! She also has a ridiculous sense of rhythm. Her dance moves are stellar, haha.

The next person I want to mention taught me so much about making an effort with others. This is where the vulnerability concept comes into account again. She had recently gone through a separation with a significant other right before she met me. Despite not knowing me very well, she was so willing to share how she felt. I didn't expect her to talk about her feelings, but I am so thankful that she did. It catapulted our friendship to a place I didn't think was possible in such a short time. It is rare to connect on such an emotional level with someone and to know exactly where you stand with that person at all times. It was the easiest thing in the world getting to know this French "work of art." We also have a running bet as to whether Oregon wine can put up a fight against French wine. She will soon know what a true Oregon Pinot Noir is!

My next lesson is about compassion brought to you by one of the most caring guys I've ever met. He was the glue (one of them) that kept my group together. The epitome of a great friend. If I listed all the times he put other people above himself, I would need hand surgery from typing so much. Seriously, I have never seen such an example of compassion in a person before. I can only hope to care for people the way he does. He turns "like a bridge over troubled water" to "like a bridge over peaceful waters." Cheers to you buddy!

I have so many more examples I could include, but this is the final one I will talk about to save you some time. The last lesson is about being less concerned with the opinions others have of you and how it can drastically improve your quality of life. This girl never worries about what people think about her. She has gone through so many hardships in her short life that have molded her into the woman she is today. There was a time on a holiday trip where we shared some of our thoughts on life and I was completely blown away by her insight. She told me that once she stopped worrying about what others thought of her, she became exponentially happier! I can only hope to be more like this!

As I sign off, I want to thank everyone who made me feel so welcome in this foreign land and experience. Hong Kong was never my home. The people, my friends, my new family members were what made it a home. Now, my home is all over the world returning to their normal lives. However, it will never feel "normal" again. I know that will be true for me as well. What we went through together is an experience of a lifetime. It was a gift that I honestly will never be able to put a value on or describe in words. I know exactly how each and every one of you made me feel and I only hope that I made you feel the same. I am a much better person because of you all.

I'll leave you guys with one final quote. Again, from the cartoon character mentioned above. He said, "If there ever comes a day when we can't be together, keep me in your heart, I'll stay there forever." No matter the distance or time, you guys will always be with me.

I love you and miss you already.

Until we meet again.

Avec Amour,

Jake