

My greatest Lesson in school was taught by a student

University is not only a vessel for achieving higher education but also a one for forming friendships and relationships that will shape your future. Balancing friendships, a social life and class work is never easy as for anyone and when I started university I had to learn this the hard way.

I came to Taiwan in the summer of 2017, bright and doey eyed ready for the new adventure that awaited me. I am from the Caribbean and came to Taiwan on a scholarship, and culturally a 'free' education is nothing that one wastes or toys with. My mind had been made, I was here to study my hardest to get my degree and return home to use what I had learned to not only better my life but that of my family and country. So my plan was during the days of school, I would go to my classes, after my classes I would spend at least five hours in the library and then head home to study until I fell asleep. On the weekends I would prepare myself for my upcoming classes.

My plan worked, I had straight As and an almost perfect attendance record and I was exceeding my expectations in school. I had never been the most studious child and in High School I would often get in trouble and was a frequent visitor to my Headmistress' office. But, I had made a vow that this would not be my life in university.

I was a loner, I had no friends in Taiwan, I would often be seen throughout the campus eating lunch alone, walking alone and just being by myself in a book or with my laptop. I kept all my classmates at arm's length and would reduce conversations to topics about subjects at school. I had made it clear to my lecturers that I was not a fan of group work since I preferred doing my projects and class work on my own. However, my lecturers insisted that I work in groups and that is when we met.

She introduced herself, her name was Tenduma but insisted that I call her Tee because that's what her friends called her. She then went on to tell me about her life and her country, the Kingdom of Eswatini formerly Swaziland. She asked to follow her on all social media platforms, although I initially refused to give her my social media handles, getting all my contact information and talking to me outside of the realm of schoolwork. My classmate would message me to speak about her life in her country, ask me about my day and how things were in the Caribbean. I was hesitant in the beginning, since making friends and being socially active was not part of my plan.

After a few weeks, we started eating lunch together and would often walk to the train or bus station together. We spoke multiple times during the day. So in a short few weeks it moved from me being seen on campus by myself always, it would be and my new found friend. However, despite our friendship, it was confined to walls of Ming Chuan University and mobile communication.

I was still determined to stick to my plan, I had no time for friendships and social activities, despite our blossoming friendship. Up to that point, our relationship was surface, we spoke only when I wasn't studying or doing school work.

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Tee had invited me out several times and I politely declined her offer. In my mind, going out to party to party or even having dinner was taking away from precious time that could be spent completing a project or class work.

After a couple of months after our friendship formed, we started becoming distant, talking less and again I was being seen campus by myself. I could not wrap my head around why our friendship was dwindling. We hung out everyday and talked on the phone daily. I still refused multiple times to socialize outside of school. However, I rather enjoyed having someone who I could speak to and take my mind off school, even for 5 minutes in a day.

And, like the old adage goes, "all work and no play made Chanolde a dull girl". I became a recluse, only coming out to go to school. Shortly after I fell into a deep depression, everything in my school was going exceptionally well, yet despite all that, I was not happy. I could not figure out what was making me so depressed. My plan was working, I was doing well in school, I was ahead with all projects for school and work, I was up-to-date on current events and I even began writing for my old job. Despite all of this I was not happy.

Tee took me aside after a class and told me flat out that I looked horrible. She said that as a friend and someone who cared about me, she had to speak up. She said that for weeks it looked like I was a robot just doing things out of obligation, my eyes were sunken in - probably because of my lack of sleep, she said I had given up on grooming myself and I did not look like my usual self. She pointed out that despite always being by myself I was always cheerful and looked happy, however, over the past weeks I had not smiled once.

She said we were going out to a bar to get drinks, she insisted and said that she would come to my home and force me out, I refused. I was already in such a deep hole, I reluctantly said ok, at the time only to appease her, I actually had no intention to show up and planned to turn my phone off and try to catch up on some much needed sleep. However, when I got home, I showered and looked at my makeup bag which hadn't been used in months and decided to get dressed and go out. For the first time in months I did my makeup, got dressed up and went out. After getting dressed, I looked in the mirror to make sure I looked okay and for the first time in weeks, I smiled a genuine smile that made me feel joy.

She greeted me at the train with her bright smile, I spotted her pearly white teeth, bright yellow dress and long curly hair, before anything. I saw her smile and immediately got in better spirits, when she saw me she let out a squeal and ran to hug me - a hug that was warmer than a crackling fire. We arrived at the bar and she yelled SHOTS and the rest was history.

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Tee taught me that in order to have a full life and to have an actual adventure in this new place, I needed to balance my school and social life. She taught me that life is not just about grades and studying. She taught me that I needed to grasp this new opportunity to not just further my education but to explore, travel and learn about different cultures.

Tee and I have been friends for three years, we've made plans to visit each other's home country and we have built a friendship that will last what we both hope is a lifetime.

I have been here for three years and while studying hard is still of utmost importance, I have been sure to include time for socialization, outside of school with different people to list of things to do.

Here I thought my greatest lessons would be taught by learned professors but my greatest lesson was learned from a classmate, who became a friend who is now like family, my favourite member of the Ming Chuan Family.