

World Class Schools Essay Writing Competition: Friendship
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Dear Ella

I haven't been on this earth for very long but I've experienced plenty. Though I would've liked to have done more by now - commit to learning Portuguese to communicate with my family properly, learn guitar like my father or improve my drawing and impress myself - I have experienced the height and depth of my feelings through both friendships and relationships. I am a strong believer in the adage 'friends are our chosen family'. I adore my family. They are the most important thing to me. Saying this, if I regard you as my best friend, I hold you on the same level as my amazing family, which is not something I take lightly. This is why, out of all I've experienced, the biggest heartbreak, so far at least, happened on the 2nd of October 2020. I am finally going to get this all down, so I can move on. I was never able to confront you because of COVID. So this is me saying my peace before I lay it to rest. So it doesn't become yet another skeleton in the back of my closet. I'm allowing myself to be the friend to me that you couldn't be.

For me, the worst part was the surprise of it all. Seven texts and a voice message. That's how long it took for you to jump ship, for eleven years of friendship to unravel. That voice message I sent you is one of my only regrets. I don't remember how long it was because I deleted it the second I knew you'd heard it. I cried hard whilst making that voice message. I'm not sure if you'd ever heard me cry before, at least in that way. I deleted it because I hated myself for crying, for caring as much as I did, for still holding on whilst you were letting go. I wanted to be stronger than that and thought I was being weak. It wasn't what I wanted to remember. I wanted to remember the chocolate wafers after school, the bonding over the pains of ballet classes, the One Direction songs you yelled in playgrounds and generally throughout my entire childhood. You were there for all of it. And then, suddenly, you weren't.

I don't remember how we met. You preceded my remembering years. I can't pinpoint why we were friends or how we fit together, but we did. Most of what I remember is just random giggles and nonsense. I can't remember the specifics. You were simply a constant. But the thing is, I don't miss you as much as I thought I would. Of course, I wonder what could've been but it wouldn't have lasted much longer. I see your friends now and they suit you more than I would. We don't fit anymore. I've changed so much that primary school friends don't recognise pictures of me and hopefully wouldn't recognise my personality either. I have new friends too but haven't changed in the respect of only a couple of close ones. When we were best friends, there was always someone jealous, always wanting your attention. You loved being liked by everyone, and I wasn't enough. You were the most empathetic and kind

person, always helping people, and making them feel better, to the point where you let people walk over you. I tried to “toughen you up”, the way my brothers claim they do for me. But ironically in your last messages, you said you were “finally standing up” for yourself. And, whilst I’m glad you did it, I didn’t realise you’d been building up your confidence for me.

You just left such an impression on me. Someone I trusted so much and considered a sister, suddenly confronted and accused me, saying that I hadn’t been treating you right for the last eleven years. You made me feel like a monster. But, I’m not angry at you. Although I feel like that would have been the expected response, after the fact, I was only mad at myself. I felt called out. My insecurities and self-deprecating thoughts were your lines of argument. If my best friend saw that in me, the one I considered akin to family, then it must be true. I must be a horrible person. I still feel like a horrible person at times. My conscience uses you as evidence for the legitimacy of my self-depreciation. Granted, looking back, I made bad choices, acted in bad ways and wasn’t a nice person, but I’ve over-thought it enough. I’m sick of it all repeating and circling through my head like a ceiling fan. We were just kids. I sent you a message checking in because it’d been different recently. You combatted me with a paragraph clearly written out and read through before you’d sent it, starting with “Dear Ella”. The formal address of a text message made my heart sink before carrying on. You claimed that I’d hurt you. In all these years you didn’t feel like you could speak up. I was in between a rock and a hard place, unable to stand up for myself without proving you right but not wanting to be weak by agreeing with you. I kept the messages, I don’t know why, but when I look back on them I feel horrible. We cut ties. And I just have to remember that I’m glad we did.

Without that, I wouldn’t have found them. My best friend now isn’t just a sister. They are my platonic soulmate. They saved me and I saved them. But yes, I still have doubts. Am I being too aggressive? Are they lying? Will they leave? Do I need them more than they need me? But I don’t hate who I am around them. They are always the person I talk to, with no judgment, or at least only the fun kind. I am enough for them. They are one of the best things to ever happen to me. We talk about futures in the German countryside, Brazilian beaches, eating steaks, counting down to New Years in our shared flat, and spending as much of our futures together as possible. We listen to sad songs during blackouts and late nights on pavements, and upbeat songs while I skip past them and dance in the street. I miss them more over the summer holidays than I do with you completely out of my life.

I remember a monologue I made in the shower, directing my useless anger at you. But the only one listening was my reflection, I was the only one there to console myself. I felt better after speaking to the glass wall. I imagined that writing this would be the same but now I just miss them. I want their hugs and their stress baking, our matching rings and inside jokes. I care about those more than any argument or memories of yours.

I need to let you go. I need to take a deep breath and let it all go. I think I'm finally ready to delete those messages. I'm looking at them now, your emotion painfully evident even through text, "Only looking back now can see how much I have had to put up with, and you need to understand to treat me, and everyone else equally." I guess I remember our friendship more fondly than you do. What I think I wanted to tell you is that it wasn't only one of our faults, you cannot just blame me and I can't you. I need to take a deep breath and let it all go. I'm looking over them one last time, my first friendship. Solid evidence of my old self, I hated myself then and I still do looking back, but think I might not now.

So, I'm taking that deep breath and scrolling through the old messages, from April 6th 2018 when I said "And don't forget we'll always be best friends." So many messages I sent of the alphabet to get your attention, our first messages on my new phone on the 17th of February 2018, the majority being cat GIFS and our last message on the 5th of March 2021. So much has changed between the two dates. Everything has changed. We've grown up, not all the way mind you, but enough for it to bring tears to my eyes. But I let them out now. I don't erase them as I did before. To console me that day, my father said that I shouldn't be sad because we "weren't that good of friends anyway." I understood where he was coming from but it was the opposite. I cared so much because it had been real. I loved it and didn't want to let it go. It was good that I cared. I don't think I'd realised that before. I had always beaten myself up for being too sensitive. Thinking you'd let go, so I should too, and kicking myself for crying as hard as I did. But my depth of hurt is the depth of my capacity to feel and if I felt that much and cared that deeply, then I'm not as bad a person as I told myself I was. If I could go back and tell myself one thing it would be that bad people aren't worried about being the bad guy. It's bittersweet as my finger hovers over the icon of you in front of a sunset. I take one more deep breath and finally hit "Delete chat" as I listen to sad songs, in the dark, and laugh at how dramatic this all was.