

***THE MOST VALUABLE THINGS THAT I LEARNED AS A FRESHMAN
IN THE COLLEGE OF ACES***

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When I decided to attend the large University of Illinois, a lot of people were surprised. Coming from a small town, I loved having family just a few minutes away and never seeing an unfamiliar face. I knew living in Champaign would be different. My family would no longer be a few minutes away but instead a few hours, and the chances of me seeing a familiar face were slim to none. There would be many other changes, too: I'd be living on my own for the first time, making my own decisions, and meeting a lot of new people. Despite all these changes, I was excited! I had no doubt that my experience would be anything short of incredible.

Before even getting to Champaign, however, I began to question my decision. In early August, just two weeks before I would leave for school, my family and I received bad news. My Grandpa Don had been diagnosed with cancer. The doctors said it had spread from his lungs to his heart, and he only had a few months to live. Being a few hours away and surrounded by people I didn't know began to worry me. Who would let me cry on their shoulder when I was having a bad day like my Mom would? Who would ask me how my Grandpa was doing and show concern for him like my friends would? Who would put things into perspective and show me how to deal with the situation like my Dad would? At the time, I didn't realize that the people I would meet during my first semester in Champaign would have such a large impact on me.

I began my freshman year just as I had planned, and as I had thought, meeting people was easy. I made friends with several girls on my floor, got to meet my advisor and some of the Deans, and even had the chance to get to know a few of my teachers. The semester continued to go really good, and I was easily adapting to living on my own. I was able to go home to visit with my family and Grandpa about every two weeks. It was around November when Grandpa started getting pretty bad, and it was at this time that I really started to see how loving and caring people could be.

One of the people that really showed she cared was my teacher for ACES 100, Genny Schutz. I had been having trouble with a homework assignment and went to her office to get some help. She was very helpful, and after we got the problem figured out, she asked me how my semester was going. We began talking about different things, and I told her about my Grandpa. I started crying as I was explaining his situation to her, and she came right over, put her arm around me, and handed me a tissue. I was surprised at the fact that she cared for more than just the grade I got in her class. The concern and compassion she showed for me that day made me feel better about being away from those who love me.

Several of the girls on my dorm floor knew my Grandpa was fighting cancer often asked me how he was doing. On December 7, my Grandpa passed away, and that night the girls sat

with me in my room while I was crying. We talked about different family members who had passed away and how each of us felt about it. I remember thinking to myself that I had only met these girls a few months before, and yet they sat there all night with me trying to make me feel better.

My Grandpa's visitation fell on the night of the JBT Banquet, so my parents and I were not able to attend. The following week, I had several emails from people in my classes who were also JBT Scholars. They wrote to tell me they had heard about my Grandpa and wanted to send their condolences. A few even told me that if I needed anything to let them know. Dead Olson contacted me to send his condolences as well and had me stop by his office to pick up my awards from the banquet. Each of these people surprised me in that they took time out of their day to think of me and send me a message to show they cared.

Looking back, I see a lot of things that I learned from this experience. The one thing that stands out most has to do with the people I had met during my first semester. At the beginning of the year, I thought that if I didn't have my family and people I had known my whole life around me, I wouldn't be able to make it through this tough situation. The people I met, however, proved me wrong. I learned that at the University of Illinois, there are caring, loving individuals that are willing to make the effort to better the lives of those around them. I am so thankful for the support that these people gave to me that I want to pass the favor on to others. I learned during my first semester that people need compassion and love to make it through the day and that love really does make the world go round.