

***The Most Valuable Things That I Learned as a Freshman in the College of ACES***  
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I have never felt more ready in my life than I was come August of 2007. I was about to experience the biggest leap I had yet taken, and I could not have been more thrilled. However, the fact that I was so ready to leave home forced me to realize that I was not content there; I was searching for something extra that I couldn't possibly define at that moment. To my surprise, I was only a couple months into my college career when I discovered that something extra – a best friend.

Now this isn't to say that my family and friends at home aren't amazing; believe me, they are. It's just that I hadn't yet made that unique connection with someone; the type that you're certain will last forever. A Cuban-French author by the name of Anaïs Nin, who published many journals detailing her own personal life, wrote: "Each friend represents a world in us, a world possibly not born until they arrive, and it is only by this meeting that a new world is born." This quote very accurately describes how my best friend has affected my life. It is not that he changes me; it is that he brings out the best of me that was already lurking inside – the hidden world that needed some assistance to be revealed.

His name is Cameron. He is a selfless and loyal friend with an incredible heart. Now, I have always known that I am a dependent person; I will forever choose time spent with family and friends over time spent alone. The fact that I wanted a best friend in my life was not news to me, but the fact that I would find one who would have such an impact definitely was.

The only part of freshman year I regret is not meeting Cameron the very first day. He lived on my floor in the dorm, but as I had not yet ventured onto the "guys' side" of the floor, I made friends with a number of girls nearby. I was having plenty of fun with these new friends, but I couldn't help but feel uneasy. I worried that I was not going to find my niche here. As the discomfort grew, I was beginning to forget why I was so eager to leave home in the first place and often became homesick. Lucky for me, it was only another month or so before that feeling had vanished. From the moment I met Cameron, my world has honestly felt brighter. It would be well enough to just feel this change on the inside, but it seemed to immediately reflect on the outside as well. In fact, as soon as I had returned home for winter break after my first semester at the U of I, my dad made note of my change in behavior. He told me how happy it made him to see me so bright and sunny again; he told me it was great to see that big smile back on my face.

Of course, there are days when my smile does fade. Typically it's due to some minor discontent or stress from schoolwork. But even when I'm having a bad day and have that selfish urge to throw myself a pity party, Cameron will not let me get away with it. Regardless of how he is feeling, he will give every second and every ounce of energy needed to return my smile. Cameron teaches me how to let go of those daily troubles. Even better, he strengthens my ability to keep my head up and deal with those never-ending lists of exams and deadlines constantly calling my name.

Still, I believe the strongest feeling Cameron has instilled in me is confidence – confidence to be exactly who I am. Never before would I have had the courage to strike up a conversation with a stranger in my class. However, I have done just that countless times since I've felt this confidence in me and made numerous friends within the College of ACES, as well as friends specifically studying dietetics because of it. Having these familiar faces definitely helps with the feeling of fitting in. Plus, I know that I have plenty of friends to talk to that are just as passionate about agriculture, foods, and nutrition as I am.

To put it simply, Cameron has the ability to bring out the very best of me. If I want to hide, he'll pull me out of the corner and make me dance. If I want to frown, he'll entertain me to no end until there isn't even a trace of sadness left. With him, excitement is contagious. With him is when I laugh the loudest. We laugh until my cheeks hurt; we laugh until there are tears rolling down his face; we laugh until we've both gotten an entire abdominal workout and are at the point of literally begging one another between gasps of air to stop. Just a couple weeks ago, when we were walking home one night, Cameron asked me to do a cartwheel in the grass. I thought it was completely silly, but as I am used to these ran-

dom instructions of his, I did a sloppy cartwheel anyway and immediately laughed at myself in response. From the outside perspective, it may not look like much, but it is these seemingly small actions that make him the selfless person he is. He gives me the opportunities to enjoy my life as much as he enjoys his.

When I thought of the most valuable things I learned as a freshman here at the U of I and in the College of ACES, I thought about the importance of finding your niche no matter where you go. More personally, I thought of my newfound ability to handle stress and schoolwork, my brighter perspectives and confident personality, and my overall desire to be nothing less than my best. When I thought about how each of these changes in me came about, I thought of Cameron. It may seem extravagant to accredit one person with so much, but I believe that is what happens when you find a true best friend. As Anaïs Nin wrote, a best friend brings out a new world Inside of you when they enter your life – a bigger and brighter world.