

Why do friendships drift apart? This work focuses on concepts of friendship and change. At the beginning of this journey, I thought a lot about living in a small community and the effect that has had on my friendships and relationships.

This installation was created with acrylic paint, spray paint, oil paint, and string. The acrylic paint is meant to convey the feeling of the beach by my house where I grew up, a place I have known and visited regularly since I was born. I took colors from this place—such as the colors of the sand, grass, stone, and sky—and created an abstract background. The hands represent friendships and relationships. That is why they are grasping at a thin string; rather than being directly connected, they hold onto the memories they have in common.

I decided to explore this topic to write about and paint something personal to me, rather than focusing on something I have not directly experienced. I want the viewer to think about the bonds that hold us together and, more specifically, the way it feels when those bonds begin to disappear.

Iris

The interlocking cycles of friendship and change

Iris



Friendships come and go throughout one's life, and often become more meaningful as you get older. I've learned that time is not a measure of friendship; friendship is measured by trust and loyalty. When I look back on my childhood, I divide it into time periods, separated by the friendships I have had. Out of all of these friendships, one stands out far above the rest: my friendship with Eliza and Montana. I don't know what happened, why I drifted away from the people that I once told everything to. There are parts of it I can comprehend, but I don't understand it as a whole.

Living in a small town definitely has put a strain on the friendships I've had throughout my life. Everyone is irreparably entangled with each other; there are so many complicated social dynamics and stalemates. It seems like everyone in the county knows every detail of every mistake you've ever made—that is to say, you can't do much at all without stirring the pot.

I became friends with Eliza and Montana our freshman year of high school. They were already good friends, and seemed so glamorous and perfect. I was still very uncomfortable with myself; I carried a lot of anxiety and self-consciousness with me from middle school. I felt that I was too tall, too quiet, and too awkward. I talked to both Eliza and Montana a few times, but not a lot. Then a few weeks into freshman year, they contacted me via Snapchat and asked if I wanted to hang out with them.

From the first time we hung out, the three of us became inseparable. Eliza was one of the few people I met in my life who is genuinely kind, so unlike the friends I knew in middle school. Montana was a wild child; intent on the idea that no one could make her play by his or her rules. We talked about everything, both good and bad. They were so much more genuine and open-minded than the friends I had in the past. There were no put-downs, no body shaming, and no drama within our friend group. We looked, felt, and acted older than the other freshman, and everyone treated us differently. I felt special to be a part of something so wonderful, and we were all so close. I don't think I'll ever have something like that again.

Montana was in the Bahamas with her family for most of the winter, and Eliza and I became even closer. We spent every single day together; watching T.V., going for long walks, and talking about how trapped we felt living in a small town in Maine. Then Montana came back, and it was the three of us again. The night she got back was the same night Eliza and I got back from a weekend in Boston. I remember that night so clearly; it was like nothing had changed.

That spring was one of the happiest times of my life. The three of us went out every night, hung out with older students, and most importantly we were always together. But that summer my parents tightened their control, and I didn't see Montana and Eliza as much for a while. They hung out with a rich summer crowd they had met at the yacht club, and although I joined them sometimes, I mostly spent time with other groups of people. But although the time I spent with Montana and Eliza diminished a little, we still stayed close.

Especially Montana and I, Eliza no longer went to George Stevens Academy, the local high school, she had started homeschooling. But Montana and I did, and we all stayed close. Montana and I spent every day together; we were closer than family, closer than best friends even.

That winter our friendship became less than perfect. Eliza's family was very wealthy, and they had taken her on a trip around the world. We still talked online, but it wasn't the same. Montana and I still spent a lot of time together, but we started to become bitter toward each other. She put me down a lot, and I think I put her down too. She had a temper, and would snap over small, trivial disagreements, and I in retaliation would make snide comments or simply ice

her out. I started to make other friends, and I think she resented me for that. To my knowledge, she only really had close relationships with her boyfriend, Eliza, and me. I was her only close friend who still went to high school, and as I branched out it seemed to bother her. We stayed very close, but it was a more destructive friendship. We were both having a hard time coping with the fact that we were stuck going to a shitty high school in a town we wanted to leave, and it made it hard to be our best selves.

When Eliza got back, I really hoped things would be the same but they weren't. We were still friends, but I didn't see her as much. We hung out on the weekends and after school sometimes, and it was fun, it really was. But we had lost that closeness that had made the beginning of our friendship so significant.

I began to have other friends, and sometimes boyfriends, and as I started to spend more time with other people, I could tell it was hurting Montana. She relied on me as her go-to for plans, and although I relied on her for the same thing, I wasn't always available anymore. I felt bad but we still spent so much time together that it didn't really seem like a problem. I was starting to be okay with spending time alone, too. My freshman year I had always wanted to be at every party and kickback. I never wanted to just chill at home. But last spring I started enjoying being on my own more and more. It wasn't like there was a whole lot going on anyway, and I no longer had the illusion in my head that everyone was out having a great time without me.

Then Montana and Eliza went to Spain on vacation. I resented not being invited, and my parents seemed to resent their parents for not inviting me as well. To this day I don't know why I wasn't invited, I assume they just didn't think I'd be able to go. It began to seem like the three of us weren't what we used to be.

When they got back to Maine it was late spring. Things stayed about the same for a while. Summer was a strange time. Montana and Eliza hung out with the rich summer people. A lot of the time I went with them. But I didn't really like that group, I found them boring and insincere and I didn't feel like they liked me either. They were all incredibly privileged, and I felt like they looked at me like I was white trash.

It never bothered me at first how rich Liza was, but by summer it was driving me crazy. I wanted to tell her how jealous I was, that she could drop out of school and still go to a good college because of all the money and connections her parents had. It just gnawed at me, and because of that I couldn't help but make little jabs at her to try and make her feel bad. It was just anger and resentment that built up inside of me and I couldn't help but let it leak out in little backhanded compliments and sarcastic comments. I feel bad for doing that, because she didn't deserve it. She can't help who her parents are or what her social status is any more than other teenagers, and even though she'll never understand having to worry about money, it's not really her fault.

Montana just seemed to be putting me down more and more. She seemed to get angry with me for the smallest things, and it seemed as though I couldn't ask her for advice or tell her about my problems without her putting me down. From my end it felt like a one-sided friendship in which I supported her but she didn't support me at all.

I also had a lot of resentment towards both of them because of how much they judged and made fun of my parents. They both grew up with next to no rules or restrictions, so they never really understood my situation. I was never particularly close with my parents like Eliza and her parents were, and my parents didn't let me do whatever I wanted, like Montana's did. I had a more traditional relationship with my parents, in which we loved and respected each other but they still imposed rules and I still fought back. This was incomprehensible to my friends, and

although in the beginning it was nice to have people to vent about my parents to, it eventually just widened the rift between us.

When I first got to Oxbow, I missed Montana and Eliza a great deal. But after about a week I didn't feel like talking to either of them. To be honest, I actively ignored them. I wanted to hurt them a little, confuse them, like I felt they had been doing to me all summer. I've talked to them a little more lately, just responding to their texts and such. Sometimes I look at old pictures of us from freshman year, and it makes me miss being close with them. But we've just grown so far apart. I don't know how we can bridge the gap enough to become close again.

I feel like a big part of the reason we drifted apart was resentment, especially on my part. I resented both of them so much, and when I look back I realize I should've handled it better. I resented Eliza for her money, her happy family, her clothes, and her effortlessly thin physique. I resented her for traveling; I resented her for leaving GSA and leaving me alone. I resented the fact that she seemed to make friends everywhere she went. I resented Montana for her family as well, even though they weren't rich. But mostly I resented her because everyone seemed to fall in love with her.

Eliza and I are still friends, but not close. We never really addressed the issue, we just have empty little conversations over text. I wish it could be like it used to, but things never move backwards. They speed forwards at a pace you can't moderate or control, and at some point you just have to accept it. Eliza was a really big part of my life, and I have so much to be grateful to her for, and so many wonderful memories.

Montana and I talked the other day. She texted me and straight up confronted the issue. We had a long talk about everything that's happened between us and everything we've been feeling. Maybe we'll be friends when I get home. I hope so, but my subconscious knows that it can't and won't be the same.

I think on some level friendships aren't meant to last, because everyone changes throughout their life. No one stays the same for their entire life, which would be completely illogical. No one even stays the same from their freshman year of high school to their senior year. Researchers in Florida conducted an experiment involving hundreds of seventh graders, in order to find out how many friendships lasted through twelfth grade. "The researchers measured the effect of both dissimilarities and undesirable individual attributes in determining whether a friendship would end. The findings revealed fewer than one in four friendships that started in the seventh grade were maintained across the next school year, and fewer than one in 10 friendships that started in the seventh grade survived the transition from middle school to high school. Only one percent of those friendships that started in the seventh grade continued to the 12th grade"(Borreli). This study proved how hard it is to uphold friendships during one's formative years. Change is good for us, and if you aren't growing and changing as a person, chances are your friends will grow and change without you, leaving you behind.

I've had the feeling of being left behind by friends many times. It wasn't until I was the one who was leaving that I understood there is no such thing as leaving behind a friend. You have to go on with your life and do what's best for yourself; you don't have an obligation to take care of your friends. Of course you should always be there for them and support them, but you shouldn't have to put your life on hold for them. Friendship should be a two way street of support, and if your friend supports you they should want you to grow and change into the person you need to be.

We tend to foster friendships with people who are similar to ourselves. We like to surround ourselves with people who have a similar sense of humor, a similar schedule, and a

similar social life. We bond over shared interests and hobbies, and later become closer through shared secrets and experiences. The best parts of a friendship is having someone to confide in when things are bad, and someone to enjoy life with when things are good.

One factor that often leads to friendships drifting apart is distance. It's hard to stay close with someone who isn't participating in your every day life, sharing in your experiences, and listening to your problems in person. You begin to tire of having to catch them up on your life, and the daily phone calls become weekly texts, which soon become every other week, every other month, and then one day you realize you haven't talked to your best friend in over a year. It's essentially unavoidable, and it can't be blamed on either party. It's the same reason long distance relationships rarely work. Once someone is physically out of your life, it's hard to stay emotionally invested. We often deny that a rift is being created, telling ourselves that things will be the same when whichever person is absent returns. But while time does not define quality of friendship, time spent apart can make it harder and harder to become close again. Your friend has missed a period of your life, and because this period of your life has changed and added to who you are as a person, they are missing a part of you. This creates a divide, an awkwardness that can't be fixed.

Another factor that can cause friendships to fizzle is how much we change as people over time. As we experience new things, our opinions about who we are and who our friends are change, shedding new light on our pasts. We grow up and figure out more and more about who we want to be and how we want to spend our time. As each of us tries to figure that out, our lives start to go different directions.

I chose this topic because I wanted to write about something that has affected me personally in recent months, rather than something I have never really experienced. I didn't write this paper with the intention of calling anyone out or staging a pity party, because that would be neither accurate nor fair to the people I have written about. I merely wrote this paper to try and talk about something I have never really been able to figure out, to see if maybe if by taking the time to write about it I could understand it a little more. I'll always love the two people I wrote about, and the memories I have shared with them are some of the happiest of my life. People grow and change, and our friendships either grow and change with us or fade away.

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