

By Erica M. Hayden

Blood is thicker than water, it's a saying I rarely heard. I heard it once before I connected the dots of the saying to my family. Being the child on the sidelines, you're able to speculate and witness the whole playing field. I've seen my mother forgive my sister Josie countless times. Whether Josie crashed my mother's car, lost her favorite earrings, or "lent" her money every time she asked (even after Josie proved many times over, she wasn't good for it).

I constantly questioned why my family would constantly put themselves in a position where they would be burned for the benefit of others. Especially, when no one ever did that for me. Hell, I couldn't even ask my mother for project supplies for school without her telling me to ask my father. Nevertheless, my family was still my family. After all, you can't choose your family. However, I'd like to counter that statement; a wise man once said you can't choose your relatives, but you can choose your family. Over the years of my life, I've found exactly that; my friends are my family. I can honestly say, that without my friends; I fear my life would've ended as early as fourteen years old. For that reason, this last memoir will be a dedication; to my found family.

*"You're like my big sister! I'm really glad I have people in my life like her, people to ground me and keep me in check. Because I know without her, I'd be spiraling."* Mark Teregeyo, 19.

Mark Teregeyo, I met him in my junior year of high school. I originally met him as a sophomore at auditions for our future dance company. We connected over our collective nerves before our audition, I automatically pegged him to be charismatic and carefree. To which my assumption wasn't far off. We were attached at the hip during our time at the dance company, even after I graduated; we would still keep in touch as I was off at college, while he still had one more year in high school. Reluctantly, all my talk boasting about RU piqued his interest in plans

after high school. Enough for him to take a leap of faith and attend RU. I can't help but be grateful and proud of how far he's come. Mark may be impulsive and reckless at times, but that's just his way of life. And I wouldn't change a thing about him.

*"I cherish you as a person and friend and I'm grateful that I was able to meet you. You've helped me break out of my shell a bit and be more confident in myself."* Thomas Ramirez, 19.

Thomas Ramirez, at first, my initial thoughts of him were timid and nonchalant. Thomas has brought up the fact if he weren't dating Jessie, we'd never be friends. And I completely agree, nevertheless, how or why we met will never change or define our friendship. I'm very proud of him for finally seeing himself as more than my friend's boyfriend and my actual friend. He's been a wise source for reason, even when I don't want to hear it. I can always depend on him to be my devil's advocate with any problem I'm having. I must say, he definitely has broken out of his shell, and I can't be any more thrilled. He grew from being the shy boy who kept to himself to a man who keeps me on my toes with every quick-witted remark that I've never imagined to leave past his mouth. I can't wait to see what's in store for him next, but I will say I'm pleased to be along for the ride.

*"One day; you weren't a stranger to me anymore. You were a person that I cared for deeply, that I trusted with my life."* Oscar Godinez, 20.

Oscar Godinez, oh my- where to begin? Funnily enough, we both had different perceptions of each other. We technically met over FaceTime through our friend Maddie, and for the split second we conversed, he believed I hated him. I had little to no recollection of that instance and came to a perception of him when we met in person at our friend Jessie's party. I found him peculiar and off-putting, in a way where he could stand with our friends and look relatively normal, but something about him didn't quite fit the picture that my friends drew of

him. Nevertheless, so much has happened between us from when we met three years ago to now. Without going much into detail about the events, many may think I would hate him, loathe him, and not want someone like that in my life. However, I could never hate him. Despite what happened, I have no regrets about ever meeting a man like him. Oscar has helped me come to peace with many aspects of who I am and who I was, he's given me his shoulder to cry on more times than I'd liked to admit. I couldn't be more grateful that our paths just so happened to cross, and I hope he's someone I can continue counting on for more years to come.

*"I can confidently say that you are one of my best friends, because no matter what hour or day it is- you are always there (for me)." Jessie Guzman, 20.*

Jessie Guzman, she once told me her first impression of me was that I was a "hot Cheeto" girl. I can't say that I blame her; I was rocking overly sized hoop earrings at the time. I met Jessie through Maddie; I admit we didn't have as much in common when we first started talking. However, in my opinion, that never mattered much to me. No two people are the same; it was the fact that we could find ourselves laughing at the littlest thing. Or the fact that we found ourselves calling the other person to pick out an outfit or a nail color. We tried to construct a friendship with no initial "spark." After continuous hangouts and late-night phone calls, we discovered how much we actually have in common. We simply had to deconstruct the initial hesitance and awkwardness, just like in many friendships. I smile at the memories we've made together, and I look forward to the many more we will make together.

*"We definitely don't have an ordinary friendship, we're more of like an old married couple?- we go beyond that, more so like family in a way." Madelyn "Maddie," Reyna, 20.*

Maddie Reyna, we met back in middle school. How or when we originally met blurs in my mind, but it doesn't matter. I don't know where or who I would be today without her by my

side. She's been there to witness my successful highs and there for me to see my most traumatic lows. I can never find the right words to describe how much that woman truly means to me, but what I tell the ones who ask is this: she means the world to me. Some day in the distant future, she will be the aunt to my children, my maid of honor, the person my husband will have to compete with over my attention (there is no competition, Maddie won). In the past, my life became too overwhelming, overbearing, and too painful to continue. So, my solution was to take my life, no rational thinking or unnerving emotions brought me to this decision. Maddie was the one who saved my life, saved me.

I wake up every day feeling grateful to see how far I've come and to experience the memories I make, whether that be in accomplishments or spending it with the people I care about. I know I don't say it to them often, but I hope my actions speak louder than my words: I love them. Each and every one of them, and I beg and pray that wherever we are in the far future, we'll still be in each other's lives as we are now. Maddie gave me another chance at life, but meeting everyone: Mark, Jessie, Thomas, and Oscar? They showed me what living looks like, and I'm the luckiest person on earth to call them my family. But I'm even luckier to have Maddie by my side, my best friend, my sister.