

**Daniel Gross**

My Buddy's Speech

For my first two years of high school, I was an outsider looking in on Better Together, having never taken the initiative of joining the club. During my sophomore year, I was invited by my friend to the Better Together end of year event, a gala to honor the participants. As I milled around the room, each friend of mine introduced me to their buddy, and with each introduction I felt a stronger and stronger need to join this organization. I noticed individuals who were shy, or overly aggressive, or unpleasant at school transform into new people when with their buddies.

I have always felt shy and anxious. These hindrances have been difficult to overcome, significantly affecting my social function. Seeing how positively affected my friends were from their relationships with their buddies, I felt that this opportunity was something I couldn't, and shouldn't pass up.

The beginning of the next year, my junior year, saw me the first to sign up, eager to get a buddy and begin going to sessions. I could see all the benefits Better Together can bring to me, but that was exactly the issue: I was thinking about me. Now, I see better together primarily as a service for The Medallion residents, and myself as a companion for my buddy. I feel as though this tectonic shift in attitude requires some explanation. As such I would like to tell a small story, which will serve as a micro-cosmic example of the macro-cosmic changes in the way I see Better Together.

It was the end of my first year, and the very event that inspired me to join was approaching. That year, the end of year event was to be held outdoors in the newly renovated

Beren Academy Campus. A beautiful setting, students dressed up, presents in hand to gift to our buddies. As we were entering the building, my buddy told me, "I'm going to miss you next year". Confused, I asked why, and she replied "because you're graduating". I corrected her that I do not graduate for another year, whereupon she lit up, excited at the possibility of many more meetings. I thought nothing more of the exchange.

The previous year, my buddy had been democratically elected as the president of the residents, in part for her truly congenial personality. Due to her high position of power, she was asked out of the residents to give a few words, as her counterpart in the student organization did the same. Being the affable individual that she is, of course she obliged. And seeing the diligent notes scrawled on her paper, I felt pride for her. She stepped up to the podium while I stood behind like a fearsome bodyguard, and began her remarks

She began to speak about how she will miss me next year. My confusion turned to horror as I realized she had made the majority of her speech on my graduation, an event scheduled for over a year from that day. Embarrassed, I looked around the crowd and saw many friends laughing, giggling, and smirking at me, at my buddy's blunder. I stood there in silence as she closed her remarks, knowing any correction would just confuse her more, led her to her seat, and concluded the event with her.

As soon as I hugged her goodbye, friends ambushed me with jokes and jabs about the speech. Had I lied to her? Why hadn't I corrected her? Reflexively, I entered defense mode. If I had been taking the brunt of the jokes I would not have minded, it's happened many times before. But as soon as they invoked my buddy's name, I had zero tolerance for any jabs,

comedic and offensive alike. I would chastise these friends for making a mockery of a resident with clear memory issues, instead of applauding her for giving the speech in the first place.

Looking back, I notice one thing in my mindset: I never blamed Barbara. Despite the embarrassing circumstances, I never felt ill will towards her, or that it was her fault. Perhaps it was the delight in hearing I wasn't leaving that year, or the smiles during our conversation, but I realized, as I had been throughout the year, that she was the main benefactor of our relationship, and I a companion for her, with her best interest in mind.