



gratitude

I want to show the significance of those that I am surrounded by in my life. It is important to understand people outside of yourself no matter the circumstance or how minor the impact. The people around us shape us, and it is powerful to recognize their influence. Showing others that you are listening shows a depth of compassion that makes me feel heard. These people continue to give me the space to be myself; to move kindly and without fear. Listening truly is gratitude.

ADAM
BAGUL

UCSB



The cold night Adam told me running around San Raf would be fun, I became distracted from the clouds of my heavy breath mixing with the crisp air as he enthralled me in stories of perseverance and his father's 'embarrassing' "marine dad shirt. As he casually talked about his fingers going numb in Japan, I thought about all the times I've complained when the weather drops below 80 degrees. I dramatically cover myself in countless layers, but he'll say, "Sometimes it's nice to be a little cold, it reminds you how fragile you are." I guess he has a way of making every moment warm.

Adam likes to disagree. I can't say it's my favorite trait, but the more I know him the more I begin to value his skepticism. Don't tell him I admitted that. At times he'll hold his tongue, mostly not to hurt my feelings, but I can see the counter argument in his face. If he were a cartoon it would be fuming red about to burst at any minute right before I say "what Adam, what do you want to say?" and he regains his bronzed complexion. I can't even get mad at his mocking tone or I'll end up with an odd look on my face trying not to crack a smile and our more serious conversations could never end without a laugh of reassurance.

"Hey big dog, let's eat." That was the first of many. Sometimes I'll get Buddy or Big Boy, and if we're lucky he'll come up with something new. It's fun to guess before I pick up the phone. The first time I ate with Adam, my new coworker who felt like an old friend stared at his plate and told me we were both thinking of how to appealingly eat the large piece of chicken in front of us, but he was just gonna "go for it." Adam always just "goes for it", like the night he put on his favorite navy blue Olympics sweater just before we headed out in pursuit of no particular destination. I couldn't help but feel a rush of gratitude while the notorious lime scooter carried us as we weaved through stumbling crowds, an air-pod shoved in one ear to listen to his favorite songs and the other open to listen to each other sing them.

I listen to Adam speak of his hardships, imagining every word as the slash of a sword slaying a 3 headed dragon. How does he do it? The way he has stepped on this dragon of adversity as a platform to rise and flourish through times that would have kept many people down. This trend I noticed after countless conversations, but would have never guessed from his brilliant, blissful eyes. Thinking of all the times I have let 'lizards' defeat me, Adam taught me how to use my sword. And I taught him that sometimes it's okay to put it down and take a break.

Apart from many similarities, like our love for cheese and shared hometowns and Egyptian heritage, Adam and I are like night and day. Yet, this was what created such a strong mutual sense of soundness and dependability; surely you couldn't really have one without the other. I've learned this through some of our unbeatable moments over a five star Carrillo meal or our long car rides home. I could listen to Adam's spirited stories or how much he loves his mom all day. Something about the red brake lights highlighting his face in the snug white kia forte. A Marty Robbins song carrying the captivating course of his words up and around the fuzzy dice and straight through me all the way to Chatsworth.

Streaty

Csun
Filmmaker





In the back of my middle school yearbook, reads a few heartfelt words and “have a good life” signed “Streaty”. Daniel Andrew Streaty. I feel it is only right to mention his full name because everyone will know it one day, but I probably will never use it in my life. I seriously still say ‘who?’ when someone says “Daniel. It’s always just Streaty but to me, that name was just beginning to play such a large role in my good life.

“Your friend is here to see you,” my mom said on a clear, warm day in 2014. I walked out to see Streaty in my backyard; he only walked down the street and took a quick left to make it there. His vibrant excitement was contagious, a light that I feel every time I see him, right before a warm hug that he leans into with a “hey dudeeee.” I don’t think my 14-year-old self knew while sitting there eating pizza with my neighbor that there would be six more years of exactly this. Yet I do know now that we’ll be 80 and still eating pizza, rain or shine.



Many people might panic if one day they woke up inside Streaty's mind. I would be so excited. I can only imagine walking through all the intricate tunnels of colors and ideas intertwined between a Stanley Kubrick movie, strolling to the beat of a Prince song. Surely you might hit a small area of grays and dark blues but it is only what gives him the ability to extend such immense compassion and understanding to the ones he really loves. His Scorpio rising creates a composed look on his face, so you could hardly know that the Cancer sun is probably wishing it was still 2009, his favorite year. Streaty has been trying to teach me the art of the poker face for a while now. Even if I could do it, I'm convinced he would somehow still have the ability to read my mind. Each time I sit across the table of our favorite ramen restaurant when everyone's words begin to muffle and my mind floats off. "Stop thinking dude", he'll say, catching it before it hovers too high up. Although annoyed that he pulled me back into reality, I'm grateful to be reminded of the value of the moment surrounding me.

I don't know if Streaty would write an essay for you on time but give him a camera and he'll give you something extraordinary, making his famous StreatyCinema mark. In all caps he writes every idea down and the words turn into a visual story. I wonder how many times Streaty has answered the phone during one of my creative spurts as I exclaim "Okay I have such a great idea." On the other end his silence becomes increasingly loud. His thoughts are internally outspoken before transforming into words of enthusiasm and affirmation. He takes my ideas to new heights; we never stay on the ground of conventionality. Our friendship has not let me be limited to a normal, he never even lets me get close. His words of advice are like open doors, each with a different reality, a different way of thinking and looking at the world, and I never have to choose just one. As I write this I'm thinking it might be good after party speech when he wins his first Oscar.

There was a specific moment when I realized Streaty never plays music to appeal to the people in his car. And a time when I stopped making numerous requests and began to just sit and appreciate the way the sounds radiantly reflected his moods; even after the 100th time "Rock Lobster" poured out the speakers. I wonder if it might just be his severe stubbornness, but as time went on the short walk to my house became a long drive, and the good food and long talks still remained, in fact they became countless. It's like watching a great film unfold as I become enthralled in Streaty's strong sensitivity and individuality. Like a summer picnic, he encompasses a spirited simplicity, a unique sense of comfort that shines through everyone who is lucky enough to have him a part of their good life.

JASMIN & VAL

UCI



UCSC

Before I met Jasmin and Val, I was an incomplete puzzle with two unique pieces left to fill. With their many different edges and grooves, they fit perfectly into my missing hollow.

I can hear her laugh echoing as she walks in my house, although it reflects no matter the venue. I can see her curls that twirl perfectly long, but their beauty isn't cut short even when at the length of her shoulders. Jasmin is a ball of energy; she's like the feeling you get as a kid the night before your birthday. I can't help but feel excited for nothing whenever I see her button nose and freckles as she yells "awwww chiquita" every single time.

Jasmin is always the one who orders the food on the phone, or sets up our appointments, the person who tells the waiter they messed up my order when I'm too shy. She's outspoken and assertive, so I get excited for someone to test her mind, but it's not long before she fires back with facts. You almost feel like one of the burglars from Home Alone. Happens to me all the time. Yet, Jasmin's confidence and humor leave me feeling lighter than before. Her depth and logical thoughts complement my emotions, filling my mind with new perspectives, like breaths of relief. I can count on her to make me feel at home on days that aren't my best, yet her pragmatic approach to life never allows me to feel far from myself for too long.

"Who cares?" I can't count the number of times I have heard her say this when all I could think about was the millions of reasons to care about something so miniscule. Jasmin fuels my immunity to embarrassment; Like when I asked her to join the 9th grade musical with me, next thing I knew we were on our third year of stage lights and opening nights. Neither of us were planning on going to Broadway but we bonded on our countless walks to Chipotle before rehearsal and still laugh about our frantic costume changes backstage.

Jasmin is bubbly and full of life, enchanting and fiery, like the oranges and yellows that contrast her black boots and deep gaze. I've always admired her ability to be so electric, something you can tell from her striking makeup looks. Beyond the shock of electricity lies a softness that holds you tight. A natural night person, I found it hard to wake up for our early morning gym sessions. Jasmin stopped trying to call me over and over and I soon began to wake up to a warm good morning each day, my mom never questioned her just strolling in. Jasmin would lie next to me for a few moments, knowing I needed some time before I could get myself up. Pretending to be asleep I couldn't help but grin and even when it got annoying she still did it every time.

I won't lie, we tend to bicker like a married couple. But it's usually just a few intense seconds of battle before we both get over it and she'll probably ask me if I want some jelly candy. The answer is usually yes. And of course I'll need to grab one for Gam, her grandma who has come close to being a mother to our group of three.

As my aching sweet tooth takes over, Val is probably somewhere eating a carrot or some abnormally healthy salad she put together. As she dances around to Spanish rock I feel the same lightness beneath my feet. A weightlessness that makes you feel like anything is possible, like starting a Spanish Rock band, something we all considered for a while, until realizing only one of us spoke Spanish and none of us played instruments.

Since 7th grade, Val has never been too far. Through her wide smile and cheeks that sit perfectly high on her face, I can't help but smile too and feel a sense of gratitude even after all these years. "Can I have an apple?" Val asks numerous times after coming to my house for six years. I stopped telling her she doesn't have to ask and just started to look at her until we both laughed. We laugh at each other too much. Most of the time I'm cracking up at the way her laugh sounds like a long whistle. She flays her body through the air with that same weightlessness, like watching a dandelion whirl through the wind after making a wish.

She sees through a lens of light, a kaleidoscope of colors, each embodying all the vibrant parts of her personality. Though I feel really tall standing beside her, her spirit towers over me. "Variety is the spice of life," she says almost every single day as she embodies passion and peace, encouraging everyone she meets.

A pop of two green streaks runs through her hair, just perfect for the way she continues to grow like a gracious green vine. Val loves tall majestic trees and green bugs, which is probably why she loves UC Santa Cruz so much. I can't think of a better place for her, seeing as she walks lightly like poetry in motion, making sure not to harm the earth. Some might feel uneasy at the sight of a boundless forest, yet I know, just like so many things in her life, she welcomes it with open arms. Val has never been too far-maybe in distance, but never in heart.

During winter break, together the three of us unapologetically ate pho daily. Every so often we switched it up from our usual spot for a change of scenery, and occasionally substituted our thai teas for coconut waters. Not me though, I'll never turn down thai tea, and I still haven't heard the end of it. Though we did many things together, doing nothing is my favorite. I've learned the rarity of finding people to do nothing with, no background noise and no busyness of life, just basking in the harmony of a friendship. Val, Jasmin, and I can sit and talk for hours, this nothing becomes everything. Of course we need a break for some good cuisine in between, but each time we learn how our differences only bring us closer together. "I just seriously love you guys," Val will slowly say at the most random moment. Jasmin will laugh at her for it and I'll probably join in. But as the sun falls on every delightful day, we all know how lucky we are to have found each other, and how lucky I am for our puzzle to be complete.