



## Feeling A Little Lonely?

**Y**ou're normal. This time of year causes me to reflect on my first week, month and year at university. While part of me was glad to be away from home and on this new adventure, I was anxious—okay, let's be honest, I was frightened—about the unknowns of university life. What would residence be like? Would people like me? Would I make friends? Would I fit in? I'd been a good student in my small high school, but would I cut it at university? Would anybody care—or even notice—if I was having difficulty? I am reminded of Mother Teresa's quiet words, "Loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted is the most terrible poverty," and on some of those days past, I felt truly "impoverished."

Four relatively happy years later I graduated and went off to grad school at yet a larger university. I'd like to be able to say that after my first-year university experience those basic worries were forever resolved, never to disquiet me again. But alas not so. Perhaps I was a little more sophisticated at hiding those feelings, but they were still there. Or maybe like Maggie Thatcher says, "You may have to fight a battle more than once to win it."

Big research-focused universities, including UBC, just don't feel warm and welcoming for many new students. It's easy to feel like a number rather than a known, accepted and valued member of the community. So if, according to Mother Teresa's definition, you're feeling "poverty-stricken" today, I assure you that you're not alone, and I promise that you don't have to feel poor for long. Others around you are feeling much the same, even though they appear assured, confident, outgoing and together.

The secret to feeling that you belong at a big place (like UBC) is to find a smaller place, a smaller group of people, a smaller community within this larger community—and begin to meet others, one at a time. Yes it's challenging—but you can do it! Martin Buber said, "The fundamental fact of human existence is person to person." Loneliness is overcome one "hello", one conversation, one relationship at a time.

Here are some ideas that will help:

- By choosing to live in residence you've chosen one of the most effective strategies to meet friends, adjust to, and succeed at university.
- Sit in the lounge, not in your room. Watch a little tv, and take the opportunity to enjoy a show and to meet others.
- Invite others to eat with you. One of the biggest worries for most new residents is who they're going to eat with. If you live in Totem or Vanier, your floor or house have special tables in the caf where they regularly sit. Just ask your residence advisor, because they're likely heading that way to eat too, and would be glad for your company.

If you go by yourself, and there's someone at your floor or house table that you've not met, sit next to them instead of sitting alone a few seats down. If you live in Marine Drive, Thunderbird, Fairview, Gage or Rits and cook for yourself, make enough for two and invite one of your roommates to have dinner with you. Suggest to your roommates that your unit invite the neighbouring unit for a potluck.

- If you want company, leave your room door open when in your room. Fellow residents will stop and say hello. Your door—closed or open—sends a clear message about what you want. Make sure you're sending the message you want others to hear.
- Look at the bulletin boards around residence, and watch for flyers at your door that announce what's happening. See what's going on, and check it out. It's fine to go by yourself! If you don't like it you can always leave; but if you don't go, you'll never know what opportunity you missed.
- Talk to one of the residence advisors. Ask them what activities and events they're planning, and tell them what kinds of things you'd enjoy doing or trying. Ask them about rez intramural teams. It's amazing how many people you meet when you go to an activity or event.
- Go to Rez Involvement Nights in Totem and Vanier during the second week of September! It's a great way to be part of what's happening in rez. Go to AMS Clubs Day (mid-September) at the Student Union Building (SUB), and look around. See if there's one that interests you. Successful students tell us that getting involved was a key factor in building campus connections.
- If you continue to have a hard time and still feel lonely, talk with a residence advisor or the residence life manager. They can't fix the problem—but they'll listen and try to help you find the answer that works for you. And there are other people who can help on campus: Counselling Services, Access and Diversity office, International Student Advising, First Nations House of Learning, Pride and Speakeasy are prepared to assist you. There's no shame in asking for a little "hand-up." Trust me, others will look to you for help at another time.

There are many things you can begin to do to feel a part of your residence, your faculty, and the UBC community. But the key words here are "begin to do." Lao-Tzu said, "The journey of a thousand miles begins beneath your feet." First years can be hard, whether it be first grade, first year of high school, first year of university or first year of grad school. But I encourage you to take that first step, and see where your journey takes you.

Loneliness can be distressing, but it is normal and, more importantly, it can be an opportunity for you. In the early 1900s Anne Shannon Monroe, a lecturer, novelist, and journalist said, "For loneliness is but cutting adrift from our moorings and floating out to the open sea; an opportunity for finding ourselves, our real selves, what we are about, where we are heading during our little time on this beautiful earth."

Wishing you good adventures this year,

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UBC Student Housing & Hospitality Services