

■ OFF CAMPUS ■

ON SURVIVING

long distance friendships

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Every time a new year rolls around, I find myself curling up into a ball of seasonal depression and dying a little on the inside. The days grow shorter as the sunshine begins to dwindle, and each year, the West manages to steal pieces of my heart. Eventually, these rays of sunshine in human form forget their childhood homes in their ventures to build new ones. Far, far away from the home that was once ours to call. One that was right here.

As someone whose social circle consists of people at vastly different life stages, maintaining long-distance friendships becomes frustrating and lonely. By the time they get off their job, I'll be half-asleep. I'll be done articulating how much I miss them in the form of this article by the time they're awake, but I'll probably forget to actually tell them about it. Our once sunny days are now punctuated with dry obligatory texts until we meet again, and I'm left wondering if they've hit backspace as many times as I have on the deadly, dreaded question – how long until distance inevitably tears us apart?

While nothing comes close to replacing the warmth of human presence, there are ways I've been trying to tighten the loosely dangling strings that bind me to my loved ones. Although your approach should be tailored to the nuances of your own friendship, here are a few things that I hope come to be as helpful to you as they've been to me.

Start by establishing, and more importantly, internalising that even if the frequency of your interactions decreases significantly, the bond you share is unlikely to dissipate as easily. Love languages apply just as much to platonic relationships, so identify yours and make the best of it. If, like mine, yours happens to be gift-giving, consider giving them something small to remember you by. It should be easy to pack and carry, and while monetary requirements don't matter as much here, make sure to tick all the boxes that scream sappily, embarrassingly sentimental. For instance, I draw my friends' favourite animals on tiny canvases that they're happy to keep on their desk.

If they come to visit you, clear out your schedule to the best of your abilities. For me, this looks like dedicating an entire calendar block to just their name for the week and a half that they'll spend here and compiling a to-do list of everything we've missed out on while we were apart. All of this somehow goes in vain because we end up doing nothing but sitting in silence for an hour while the temporary lapses on where we stand sink in. Yet, one awkward hug later, it's like they never really left.

Calls and texts will be your new best friends when navigating the challenges of anything long-distance. However, remain mindful of each other's time. Not every conversation has to be productive, and sometimes, sitting in silence and doing your own thing can be comforting and feel less lonely.

To accommodate overwhelming schedules, make a routine that you know you'll never really follow. What is the point of calls if they're not unscheduled and the agenda has nothing except you squeezing in an hour of telling them about the one time your crush looked at you, nestled between your everyday banter and unimportant nothings?

While I can find ten more ways to vent about it, there aren't as many ways I can find to sugarcoat this hurtful batter of drifting away, losing people and replacing memories as you grow up. Long-distance friendships are difficult and can eventually fall apart if life leeches out either party's energy to the point where there's none left to pour out into outgrown friendships. And as scary as that thought is, honest conversations where you can let go of the fear of being vulnerable go a long way when it comes to reassuring both your friends and yourself.

In the grand scheme of things, I realise how little their Facebook profile no longer reading "lives in Dhaka, Bangladesh" means in a friendship that I pray, hope, and wish will withstand the test of distance and time. Every time we giggle at the absurdities of time zones, saying goodnight and good morning to end the same monthly FaceTime call and patting our webcams in futile attempts to feel half the warmth of a hug, we find ourselves at home again. Sure, it's not the one we grew up in, but it's a bittersweet one we put our heart, soul, and internet connections into – one that we couldn't be prouder of having made ourselves.

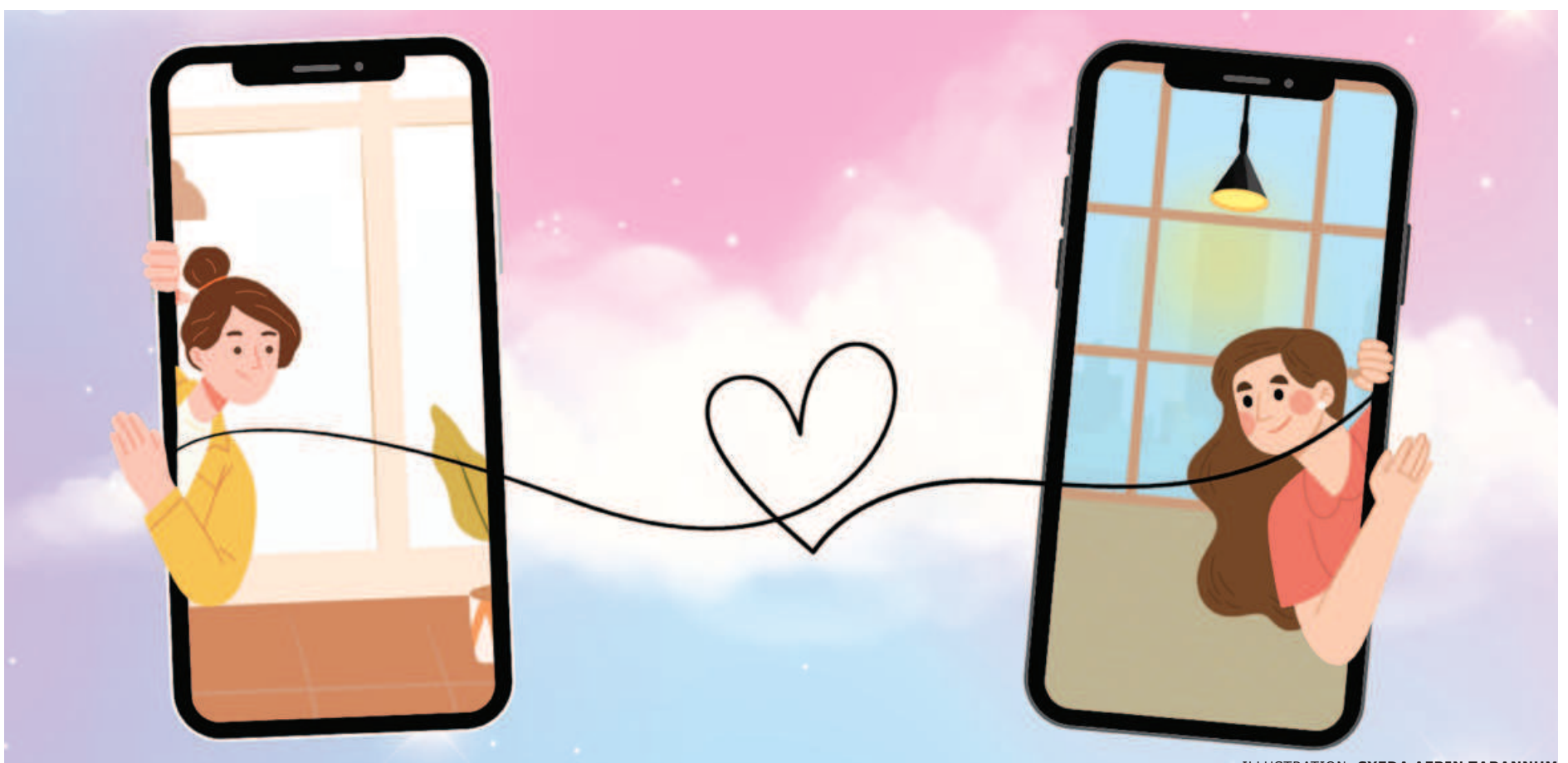


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