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### Companionship

Human beings are hardwired for companionship. We have evolved to the point that we seek and yearn for community in almost every facet of our lives. In a world dominated by social media such as Facebook or Twitter, company is easy to acquire, but true companionship is increasingly rare. To me, a companion is a comrade who is always ready to administer tough yet unconditional love.

Camaraderie is connecting with someone on a personal level and means lending trust and support in any situation. My best friend, Mason Rideout, embodies this component of companionship perfectly. He has stuck with me through both good times and bad. He has always been available to listen to my problems and lend any support that I need. One example of his support is that he recently traveled hundred of miles from Fort Worth, Texas, to Russellville, Arkansas, only to watch me perform an admittedly small role in Arkansas Tech's theatrical production of *Candide*.

True companions must always be prepared to dole out as much tough love as they do support. Another amazing friend of mine, Allison, is constantly at the ready to dash my rose-tinted views of romance with no-nonsense truths about the women I date in order to keep my affections in check. She has the knowledge and fortitude to break my heart when needed. She points out flaws in my potential paramours that I have seemingly chosen to be blind toward. Allison has saved me countless hours, days, and weeks of heartache due to her companionship.

The last and rarest quality of a true companion is unconditional love. To be honest, when I first think of what it means to be a true friend and a partner, my first thoughts are not of Mason or even Allison. I first recollect the memories of my beloved dog, Max. He was a mixture of border collie and black Labrador breeds and was my best friend through the years of my early social development, puberty, and high school. I am deeply saddened by my last memory of him, but it shows just how much of a companion my dog came to be. In the waning years of Max's life, he grew very deaf and nearly blind. One morning he chose to sleep under my car for shelter. Without seeing him, I unwittingly backed over my best friend, breaking his hips. I was hysterical and ran to his aid, but in that moment, he turned savage and bit my hand, breaking skin. I did not care, and I still clutched him close to me. After his initial shock, he became my companion again and licked my face as if to tell me that he forgave me. I made him as comfortable as possible and stayed with him as he passed. The acceptance and compassion this dog showed me even after I fatally wounded him taught me the meaning of unconditional love.

In the twenty-first century, individuals are beyond fortunate to have encountered even one true friend and partner in their lives. I have been blessed to know three: Mason as my trusted comrade, Allison as my most diligent teacher, and Max as my most loving and forgiving friend. The world would be a happier place if we set down our phones in order to establish and cultivate lasting relationships such as these three that represent the true meaning of companionship.