

Making up on MySpace

Jennifer Bringle '01 on friendship and forgiveness in the digital age.

After three years living in a cramped dorm room, I was thrilled when I moved into an apartment with two close friends my senior year. But then, things started to disappear. ¶ They were little things at first—my favorite T-shirt, my Mary J. Blige CD. But when my debit card went missing and more than \$200 was spent using my account, I panicked. The semester before, my parents were in a terrible car accident that left our family nearly destitute. Thanks to financial aid and my part-time job selling shoes at the mall, I could pay my bills, but barely.

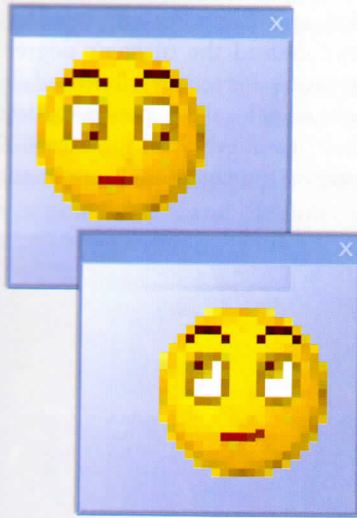
To get my money back, the bank required that I notify the police. A week later, a detective called and told me they had footage from a surveillance camera at Wal-Mart showing the thief using my card. He needed to see if I could identify her. As I sat in the store's security booth watching the grainy footage, my stomach turned—there was one of my roommates, buying CDs with my stolen card.

She'd left town for the weekend, so I had two days to figure out what to do next. The more I thought about what she'd done, the angrier I got. She knew my family's situation, so it seemed particularly cruel that she'd done this. I recalled the day she feigned concern over my lost card, patting me on the shoulder with sympathy and helping me look up the phone number for the bank.

When she returned, disheveled and raw-nosed, I confronted her. I'd known she'd tried cocaine before, but I'd never suspected she had a drug problem. Now, I was too angry and hurt to care. She tried to apologize, but I cut her off and told her I didn't want to hear it.

And then I let the detective arrest her. When she was released later that day, I called her parents and told them what happened. They came, packed her up and took her home. I never even said goodbye. There was a court appearance later, but because she confessed, I didn't have to testify. I'd severed all ties to this person who had been one of my closest friends since we met in the dorms our sophomore year, someone whose friendship and attention once made me feel like the funniest, smartest, most fantastic person on Earth.

Over the six years that followed, I thought of her often. Things ended so abruptly, and I wondered what she was doing and whether she'd overcome her demons. I wished things had turned



out differently—that I'd been able to recognize something was wrong before it got so out of control. But I was still angry, and I couldn't bring myself to call her. It was like having a splinter: You know pulling it out is the only way to end the pain, but you're still afraid to do it.

Then last year, I signed up for MySpace, the social networking Web site. After looking up almost everyone I'd ever known, I typed her name in the search field. Her page popped up on my screen. She seemed to be doing well. She had an information technology job, lots of friends and looked healthy and happy in her pictures. I moved the cursor over the messaging link on her page, but I didn't send a message.

A few weeks later, she took that first step. Her e-mail was short and to the point: She was sorry for what happened, she was happy to see how well I was doing and she didn't have any expectation of a response from me. In that instant, I knew the feelings of hurt and anger I'd allowed to fester were gone. I wanted to forgive her.

So I wrote her back. We e-mailed for a few weeks and eventually began talking on the phone. The first time I heard her voice again, it felt almost as though we'd never stopped being friends. But our conversation wasn't the same easy chatter we'd enjoyed in the past. There were tears, apologies and a lot of explaining. She surprised me by thanking me for turning her in. Facing the consequences of her actions motivated her to get the help she needed, she told me.

We still haven't gotten together in person. We blame it on our busy schedules and the miles of distance between us, but I know a touch of nerves also has prevented our reunion. I'm hopeful, though. Now that we've pulled out the splinter, the pain is gone. We're just waiting for the spot to heal.

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