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When I moved to [suburban town], I never thought a webcam above a train station in [city] would be my best friend. My new school was intimidatingly different from my middle school and I struggled to fit in. I'd approach "cool" kids, but after a perfunctory "hi," they'd turn their backs. I was left standing there embarrassed, confronting the insidious feeling of being invisible. During the first few months, I'd escape the stresses of my new school by coming home and gazing at the famous four-way intersection at [City] Station through a live webcam. I'd watch my old home for 30 minutes, engrossed in the hasty interaction between a driver and a pedestrian and other mundane scenes that I'd taken for granted. I reminisced about my life in the city where I always felt visible.

After several months of trying to fit in, I stopped feeling like myself. I noticed that I only started feeling better when pursuing what was important to me, namely becoming a better teammate and peer. Initially, after crew races, I used to daydream and eat a bagel instead of supporting my teammates because it was 'uncool' to cheer. But once I got over being "cool," I got to enjoy cheering on my crew teammates who were still racing after most spectators had left. I also challenged myself to be visible in ways that contributed to my school community, such as becoming a tour guide and increasing membership in the [ERG] club.

Pouring myself into being an impactful community member not only made me more visible but also gave me a deep sense of gratification. I gradually felt closer to the center of things and realized that 'visibility' was only a piece of what I'd been craving. Visibility was the outer shell of what was, at its core, my desire to be an integral part of my school. I discovered that this desire felt sated when I was shopping for [ERG] meeting snacks, or cheering for my teammates, or dressing up as Santa Claus to play "Frosty the Snowman!" on my trumpet for the winter holiday.

Today, I've earned a new kind of visibility that includes being trusted with significant responsibilities. One of the things I'm most proud of is being selected as the only student co-chair in the forty-member [Committee]. This role was entrusted to me during my junior year in recognition of my dedication to diversity and long-term involvement in the [ERG] club. Additionally, the administration is looking for a new head of school and I was one of two students chosen to interview the candidates. Being entrusted with these important roles means so much to me because they speak to the fact that I've evolved from a freshman who cared about being popular to an upperclassman who is recognized for his citizenship. Even though I was first driven by a desire to be visible, in the process, I've become known for embodying our school motto: [quotation].

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When I look back at lonely, freshman me, I'm reminded of why I became so involved in my school community in the first place. Now, my goal is to prevent anyone else from feeling invisible. I've fostered community by encouraging younger peers to embrace the urge to feel noticed and I never dismiss this desire as superficial. I'm a firm believer that even if an underclassman craves visibility, the emotional fulfillment they reap from their contributions will soon become more important than recognition. I was empowered to carve out my own place in the school and become a mentor when I leaned into what mattered to me. Now, I channel my energy toward helping peers unlock this same level of self-knowledge and confidence in themselves to champion inclusivity so that no one has to rely on a webcam for a best friend.