



Friends Forever

Yuly Johnson and Kate Martinez Torres – a unique friendship that began at Booth UC



To watch Yuly Johnson and Katerine “Kate” Martinez Torres together, one would be forgiven in thinking they’ve known each other all of their lives. But their friendship only began at Booth University College.

Yuly Johnson was born in Columbia, one of six daughters.

“My mom is very strong, very strong,” says Yuly. “A victim of domestic violence, she left her husband and raised us herself. Then, she left everything behind – friends, family, her job – to give us a safe home in Canada. She overcame every obstacle in her path.”

The new Canadians arrived in Winnipeg in October 2009.

“Oh! It was raining, and it was very cold,” laughs Yuly. “When we were going to Canada from Columbia, we were told, ‘Imagine you have been in a stove. Now you are going to go to a fridge!’ We knew it would be cold, but -40?”

Yuly graduated from high school and studied to be a health-care aide. But after three years of study and feeling she needed to do something else with her life, she dropped out. She considered nursing and social work. Then one day, her friend’s husband suggested Booth UC.

“I told him I was thinking of social work and he replied: ‘Why don’t you study at Booth UC, which is a Christian school?’” says Yuly. “I decided to check it out.

“And I met Katerine on my second day here.”

Kate was born in the Dominican Republic and came to Canada when she was 12. Like Yuly, Kate's mom was a single mother and, like Yuly, her mother wanted a better life and a better education for her daughter. And where Yuly's family was sponsored by a church group, Kate and her mother were sponsored by a friend who owned a cafeteria in Winnipeg.

After high school, Kate went to university but dropped out after the second day: "I was lost."

"My mother kept asking me when I was going to go back to school and I kept asking God for guidance: 'Please give me a sign.'" And one day, He did. "I was walking down the street and I saw this billboard for Booth University College," says Kate. "Booth University College? I thought. 'Where is this school?'"

She did some research and liked what she saw but decided to put it off. However, she kept seeing Booth UC signs everywhere she went.

"So I applied and was accepted," says Kate. "I just felt like I needed to be there. 'And then I met Yuly on the second day of school.'"



While the two had met each other in passing before, as soon as they reconnected at Booth UC, Yuly and Kate became best friends.

"One day, I was coming out of my class and Yuly was walking by, and we locked eyes."

"I know you," Yuly said.

"I know you, too," Kate replied.

"We just started talking from there," smiles Kate, "and the rest was history."

It didn't take them long to discover how much they had in common.

"We both have single mothers, we were both immigrants who couldn't speak any English when we came to Canada, and we will be the first in our families to obtain degrees," says Kate.

Throughout their time at Booth UC, the two have become inseparable.

"We talk for hours and hours and hours. And then we study," laughs Yuly.

"But our friendship is more than that," she continues. "We are always supporting each other. If one didn't show up to class, the other would text, 'Where are you? What's going on? Why are you not here today?' If there is something happening in our families, we have each other's backs."

The friends travelled together during the summers off and when Yuly was married in June, Kate was a maid of honour.

"It's been a unique friendship," says Yuly. "I can only describe it as 'pure.'"

Kate and Yuly have thrived at Booth UC.

"For me, it's like a community," says Yuly. "It's my community, the place I could go to every day, even if I don't have

classes. To study, focus on school and connect with my friends and professors.

"It's just a place where I feel I can be myself and where I can practice my faith," she continues. "Going to Booth UC was the best decision I could have made."

For Kate, it was also a feeling of belonging.

"When I went to university, I didn't know anyone," she says. "I had to wait weeks to see a professor. Here, they know my name, and they're always caring and available. Booth UC is a multicultural school as well as Christian so I really like that and I really like how we are all connected, one big family."

"It's been a unique friendship. I can only describe it as 'pure.'"
- Yuly Johnson

Yuly and Kate are planning to graduate this summer, Yuly in social work and Kate in applied psychology. Though their futures may take them in different directions, they have a bond that can never be broken.

"If it wasn't for Booth UC, we wouldn't be the friends that we are today," concludes Yuly. 🇵🇪

