

***“The brick walls are there not to keep us out; the brick walls are there to give us a chance to show how badly we want something.”***

***- Randy Pausch***

This quote is perfect, not only for me personally, but for my topic this month. For most of my life, I've tended to keep a wall around me and not let many people inside. I think I've gotten better about it over the years and those who've helped me the most are probably those who have shown me they want to come in. Then I had to decide to trust them enough to let them enter. Pain and heartbreak can cause us all to put up walls....some temporary, others more permanent. But the years have taught me that letting down those walls often means deciding that the risk of doing it is worth the reward. We all need friends. Some of us need them more than others. But true friends are the ones on whom you can always count. I call those friends the family I got to choose and I'm lucky enough to have a few of those people in my life. Read on to learn why friendship is so important.

Yours in health,



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## **Why We Need Friends**



Most of my family is gone, which makes holidays and special events particularly difficult. If you have a family, no matter how dysfunctional you think it is, consider yourself lucky. You might fight, disagree and annoy each other. But at the end of the day, you know that those are the people who will typically (but not always) have your back. Once they aren't around anymore, you have to find people to fill that void. I'm blessed to have a few close friends who I absolutely consider to be my family, and they know who they are. It's not blood that joins us. What binds us is mutual love, respect, trust and admiration for each other. This small circle of friends is who I reach out to when the going gets tough and it's really important to reach out. People who isolate themselves are more likely to become depressed and sick. As I've gotten older, I've forced myself to stop "hermitizing" myself and to start making a phone call when I need support, advice or comfort. There is typically someone there to answer that call and for that I'm grateful. Here are just a few reasons why I think it's important to have friends:

**True friends tell you how it is.** Your husband or boyfriend may not tell you that the dress you just bought makes you look fat, but your true friends will. They might not be super direct about it (though some will), but they'd rather be honest than have you go somewhere not looking your best. This is true about pretty much every aspect of your life. True friends are honest, sometimes to a fault. But I wouldn't want it any other way.

**True friends listen to you.** You may tell them the same story a hundred times, but they'll still listen patiently, as if it's the first time they've heard it. True friends know that sometimes you just need to vent. They also know that you'll be there when they need to do it.

**True friends know when you're hurting.** No offense to my male readers, but most men get uncomfortable when women are upset or when they cry. You pretty much want to run the other way or try to do something to fix it. When a friend knows you're hurting, they'll usually offer a hug or hold your hand until the tears stop and they'll remind you that it's going to be okay. If you're lucky, they'll even let you wipe your runny nose on their sleeve as you sob so hard you can barely catch your breath.

**True friends come running if you need them.** A true friend knows when they're needed. My friend Deborah drove over 3 hours each way to attend the funerals of my dad, my mom and then my brother. I did the same for her when her parents died. That's what friends do. They're there for you without expecting anything in return. They'll literally drop everything and come to you when you need them.

**True friends know when they just need to be silent.** We've all had moments when we just feel like crying and don't want to be alone when we do it. True friends are comfortable enough with your relationship that they can just hold your hand and not say a word until the tears are done. Only then will they ask, "What can I do?"

**True friends are the same people years later.** You know someone is truly your friend when you haven't seen them or talked to them in years, yet you pick up right where you left off when you reunite. I think that is one of the best signs of a true friend. Years don't change them or you or the relationship you had. When I went to my high school reunion, I reconnected with Beth, who was my best friend in middle school. We hadn't seen each other in decades, but it was like no time had passed at all. We laughed all weekend like we did when we were teenagers. I think it made us both feel young again.

There are some excellent reasons to cherish and nurture our friendships. A well-established friendship carries a long history of experiences that define who we are, which can keep us connected. My friend Suzanne has known me since high school, knew my family and understands who I am. We went through a lot of good times and bad together. I'm so thankful we've reconnected, and we spend hours reminiscing and laughing (and crying) about our pasts. A shared history and memories with someone is truly priceless. These special friends can help us remember who we were, which helps us better understand who we've become. They help keep us grounded.

During your life, you'll undoubtedly have some ups and downs with your closest friends. Here are some ways to help mend fences if a relationship ever goes sideways.

- Swallow your pride. Let your friend know how you feel. When a friend hurts you, you instinctively want to protect yourself. But that self-protection mechanism can often make it harder to make amends. Be willing to talk about what's bothering you.
- Apologize when you're wrong. Sometimes, even if you're the person who's been wronged, you need to apologize for getting upset. Taking that first step gives your friend the opportunity to admit she messed up.
- Don't start a fight. Experts tend to agree that one of the worst things you can do when you're upset is to start a fight. This probably impacts love relationships more than friendships, but it's still good advice to remember. When we argue, we don't typically think as clearly as we should and we can say things we later regret. Be sure to apologize if there's something you said or did in anger.
- Try to see things from the other person's perspective. I think tolerance is really the key. It's unbelievable how many times a simple misunderstanding can cause a terrible dispute with a friend. Take a step back and think about how you would feel in that situation.
- Learn to accept that friendships can change. As we get older, we change and sometimes that change puts us on a totally different path than someone with whom we were once close. It's ok. It doesn't mean you can't be friends anymore. It just means your friendship is in a different place.

For some people, it's super easy to make friends. But the work comes when you try to keep those relationships strong as you plod through the stresses of day-to-day life. Friends are truly a gift and you have to remember that it's very important to treasure that gift and nurture it. The same holds true with a love relationship. Hopefully that person is also your friend. I'm truly blessed to have friends I consider to be my family. It's especially important since those who were closest to me are no longer around to offer their love, support, friendship and advice. I'm thankful to have friends to fill that very large void. I hope that you do as well.

Have a wonderful month.