

Friends.

What do you treasure most in a true friend?

Teens and parents in conversation HomeWord

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Teen Talk *by Abby Stoddard*

Thinking back to my elementary and middle school years, some of my fondest memories are of goofing off with my friends. I had a number of close friends, and I find they possessed some of the same qualities.

You might take compatibility tests, handwriting analyses, or even rely on zodiac signs to see what type of person you

would like to be friends with, but if you ask me, meeting a “best” friend is ten percent compatibility and ninety percent luck. Your friends may share some of your interests, go to the same school as you, or belong to the same parish, but how did you actually hit it off with that person? The answer is that one of you probably initiated a conversation. I met my friend Catherine when she invited me to sit next to her at lunch. She was a little more outgoing and even courageous than I was the first day of high school, which is why I admire her so much.

Another friend, Leann, is smart and has her head on straight. I was drawn to her because I did not want

to hang out with someone who would make reckless decisions and end up getting us both in trouble. I admire Leann’s ambition and intelligence. Yet she is also casual and laid back—not one of those people who are all work and no play.

Best friends need not have the same personality. Sometimes I find that what I lack is thriving in my friend Carolyn. She went out for the cross-country team, while I doubted my ability. She is not afraid to try new things and test her strength. I really look up to Carolyn. One of my favorite things about her is that she never doubts me and always encourages me to try new things. Sometimes the phrase “I’ll do it if you do it” is all I need.

It is easy to get carried away when I am hanging out with my friends, but my pal Katie is always there to keep me in check. Although we often do crazy things together, she also gives me sound advice on my decisions. She is always easy to laugh with and just relax around. Even though we live ▼



Teen Talk *by Jordan Walsh*



Editor’s note: *When it comes to the topic of friendship, I think it makes perfect sense to give both “voices” of this HomeWord issue to youth. At what age is friendship more crucial to one’s day-to-day social (and sometimes literal) survival than during the teen years? Yet both parents and youth will enjoy and benefit from the story below. Jordan Walsh of Flourtown, Pennsylvania, first submitted this story to Saint Mary’s Press for inclusion in the book Friends: Stories by Teenagers 2 (1997). It has been adapted from its original version for space considerations.*

I never really felt that anyone considered me a close friend. That is, until my father’s heart attack and surgery. I’ve always heard that you judge your friends by who stands by you when things are all wrong, not when things are going well.

Three days after my father had his heart attack, everything seemed to be going very well, so the sur-

geons decided to remove the balloon pump that had been pumping my father’s heart for him. Murphy’s Law. Almost immediately after the pump was removed, my father went into distress and began to show signs of another heart attack.

I later found out that they were going to have to do emergency surgery on my dad the next day. I tried to stay calm, but it wasn’t working very well.

I lost control completely when the surgeon began describing the procedure. Six, possibly seven bypasses? I left the ICU and went out to the waiting room. I went over to the pay phone and called one of my best friends, Lauren. She cried with me. Then she told me that she was going to have her dad drive her to the hospital, no matter what the ICU visitor regulations were. I was relieved. Then, two minutes later the waiting room phone rang. It was another of my friends, Gina. Lauren had called her and told her what had happened. All she said was, “I’m coming.” ▼

I don’t know if I could have made it through that day without Lauren.

Teen Talk *continued*

pretty far apart, we see each other often, and she is never too busy to ask me how I am.

Would you believe I have known the people mentioned here only since the beginning of the school year? Well, it is true. When I went to Pius XI High School, I left behind a lot of my longtime friends. Although I felt sad, I was anxious to meet new people. If you want my advice on how to meet people and make new friends, I would tell you never to be afraid to say “hi” to anyone. Even if the way someone dresses or acts tells you they may not be someone you want to be good friends with, it never hurts to say “hi” and get to know them a bit.

Remember though, just because you talk to a person or even get to

know them does not mean you automatically have to be best friends. Just keep your options open. If it turns out you like this person, then go ahead and give them a call! You never know, you might really be starting a long-lasting friendship.

God is also one of my close friends. As a friend who does more listening than talking, God is my ultimate guide in life. No matter what comes up, if all my other friends leave me, I know that God will always be there for me.

Abby Stoddard is in ninth grade at Pius XI High School in Milwaukee, WI.



Friendship

I can remember the scene as vividly as if it were yesterday. My best friend Skipper and I were seven-year-old boys living in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin. One day, after playing in the verdant valley behind his house, we sat down in our favorite place between two tall trees. We looked into each other's eyes and promised that when we grew up we would be cowboys out West. And no matter what happened we would be friends forever.

The valley seemed to conspire with this shining moment in our lives. The sun was bright, the sky was blue, and the two trees served as silent witnesses to our vow. But circumstances beyond our control pulled us apart. My family moved to another part of the city. Years passed, and I never saw Skipper again. But I have not forgotten the ardor of that perfect instant of mutuality with him. Although we never rode the range together, our friendship lives on in my mind.

(Frederic Brussat in *Spiritual Literacy*:

Reading the Sacred in Everyday Life [New York: Scribner, 1996], page 455)

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I can still remember them getting off the elevator. I ran down the hall, hugged them, and cried. They decided to take me out to dinner to get my mind off of things.



We went to this little diner a few blocks from the hospital. The food wasn't great, but I think it was the best dinner I've ever had. We just sat and talked, reminisced and laughed, something I hadn't done in about four days. I know it might seem selfish to want people there for me when my dad was the one in danger and need, but I did need them.

Mr. Smith, Lauren's father, drove me home that night, and shortly after I got home, my mom, aunt, and grandmother arrived. It was then that I realized I wasn't going to be able to handle the next day alone. So at 11:30 p.m., I called the Smith's. I asked Lauren if she could miss school

the next day to come to the hospital with me. She didn't even think twice. "What time are we leaving?" she asked.

I don't know if I could have made it through that day without Lauren. She was there when I broke down because my uncle, who is also our lawyer, came to have my dad resign his will, and when the priest came in to give my dad last rites—even though they are not called that anymore. When my dad finally went into surgery at two o'clock, we knew the worst had just begun.

Seven hours of waiting followed. Lauren sat with me, talked to me, played cards with me, and made me laugh. At 9:30 that night, the surgeon came out and said the best words I've ever heard: "Everything went very well." Lauren knew to just let my mom and I cry with each other. That is what true friends are for.



Silent Companionship

I also remember the time that a friend came to me and told me that his wife had left him that day. He sat in front of me, tears streaming from his eyes. I didn't know what to say. There simply was nothing to say. My friend didn't need words. What he needed was simply to be with a friend. I held his hands in mine, and we sat there . . . silently. For a moment, I wanted to ask him how and why it all happened, but I knew that this was not the time for questions. It was the time just to be together as friends who have nothing to say, but are not afraid to remain silent together.

Today, when I think of that day, I feel a deep gratitude that my friend had entrusted his grief to me.

(Henri J. M. Nouwen in *Here and Now* [New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1994])