

LIFE'S JOYS


My Grandson started at a new preschool this year. I know his parents were hoping it would be a happy day and that he would make some new friends. It's a daunting experience as an adult walking into a new environment, let alone a four year old, pretty scary stuff. His mum informed us after dropping him off, that before he'd even arrived at the door, he'd met another boy and together they discovered an insect, so having made a friend, these like minds happily went off to school with a smile. Life just seems less scary with a friend by your side, whether you are four or sixty-four.

My four year old self found her first special friend in the U.S We had just moved there for dad's work and were living in a beautiful home in Hillsborough, San Francisco. In the house next door lived a very friendly family whose youngest daughter, lucky for me, was just my age. I have such wonderful memories of those sunny days together. We were constantly at each other's houses, building blanket cubbies, play acting under a big tree, packing lunches for adventure outings and swinging in her hammock for hours, laughing and talking about nonsense probably but so happy together. We even shared Chickenpox.

I started school in the States. In later years my experiences of starting at new schools was pretty traumatic, but starting school at Hillsborough was not scary because I had my friend by my side. Of course, Mum might remember differently.

Luckily for my friend and I, our parents also became firm friends as well and even when we lived in London and then back to Sydney, we were all still connected, not the same as those sunny childhood days but with the writing of letters, friendship continued.

My friend is now an obstetrician in the States and thank goodness for Facebook we are connected still. Our lives being in two different countries could never have had us staying as close, life happens. I started a family and she studied, that doesn't lessen the importance of her friendship in my life. The fact that I remember all the smiles with such clarity; the learned lessons of sharing, compromise, the care of other's feelings and the sheer joy of friendship. My friendship with her, grounded my beliefs in what it is to be a friend and how important it is for my wellbeing - to have friends around me.



Years later, at another first day of pre school; my daughters this time, I met another true friend. I think we bonded on that first day as much as our daughters did. Our lives, for so many years were so interwoven, that I don't think there were many days we didn't talk. We studied porcelain doll painting together, sewed costumes for dancing, even started a business together making carob chocolates for health food stores. Whatever we were doing we did it with smiles on our faces, quietly knowing the other was always there, supporting and encouraging.

In an instant a car accident changed everything. My friend was left with severe brain injury and was months waking up and when she did, needing to work so hard to walk and talk again. Her accident happened twenty nine years ago and yet it feels like yesterday. I needed my friend, she would have been the friend to dry my tears and hold me in a hug but she just slept on.

The practical side of me had to do something, so I talked to her for hours, massaged her hands and feet, took her girls shopping, chatted to her mum and family and when the time came encouraged her during therapies. Weeks became months which became years and I suppose I was the friend giving the hugs and drying the tears; hopefully learning more about what is to be a friend. Life ebbs and flows and our lives aren't physically together but the friendship we forged taught me compassion, tried to teach me patience, but more importantly how special the love of a friend is to us and that without them our lives are nowhere near complete.

It is interesting to hear what other people's interpretation of a friend is. My Osteopath says a friend is someone you share a meal with. Now I understand he means you are more strongly connected that way but still I think I have friends I have not broken bread with. I was talking to a client the other day and discussing the Osteopath's interpretation. She looked at me and said she didn't agree, that we had never shared a meal but she thought of me as a friend and I had to agree with her. My work as a Beauty Therapist definitely starts with beauty but more times than not ends with therapy. Sharing life's joys and experiences over many years together, my clients and I have formed some unique friendships. Many thoughts processed, laughs shared, tears shed and hugs given, well before

Co-vid anyway, special bonds made. Not many people in business can say they are friends with their clients - how honoured am I.

I was lucky enough to be born into this church and it's unique ways of worship. Participation in shared community definitely helps forge friendships that are strong and irreplaceable. Sharing community under the "Blue Dome" has special meaning to many of us. Camping at Tiona over many years has made a group of friends become my tribe. These friends come from all ages and all parts of the country. Years disappear when we get together and we just enjoy each others' company. Whether it's planning New Years Eve extravaganzas, gathering together for a meal, a beachside camp fire or getting out all the musical instruments for a sing song our friendship, grown from these, connects us in very special ways and forms bonds never to be broken.

The friends I have gathered along my journey whether they remain with me or not, have helped to mould me into the person I have become.

These things I know with certainty;

- A shared laugh with a friend will always be longer and louder and more joyous
- A holiday or new experience with a friend will be less daunting and much more fun
- A meal with friends more than just the food
- A tear shed with a friend, comforts and that same tear will be shared.

I thank you my friends for walking beside me, sharing our journey together.

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