



LIVE

RIGHT BY MY SIDE | MY FRIENDSHIP GARDEN

If you visit my home here in Forster NSW you will see that I have been blessed to be surrounded by a beautiful garden. Whilst I have loved to tend to it over the years, now in my ninety-second year around the sun, I have to leave a lot of the hard yakka to my gardener Anthony, who does a wonderful job at keeping all the plants, trees and shrubs well looked after. I believe my garden and my friendships have a lot in common. You have to nurture, water and love your garden and it is the same with friendships. There are friends that need a lot of care and love: a lot of watering. There are also friendships that could be described as cactus friendships. Cactus friendships don't need much watering and often bring exquisite flowers but like a cactus some friendships can be a bit challenging because they can be a bit prickly. And then there are those friendships that just end up completely cactus. We learn from them and sometimes have to move on for our own well-being. Fortunately, those are far and few between. Then there are those annuals that blossom every year no matter what. They bring constant joy and pleasure with an abundance of perfume and beauty, friendships that fill the soul and feed one's spirit.

Over fifty years ago I began a craft group at the church hall at Kingsgrove Community of Christ. Every Monday evening for three hours a group of spinners, weavers, knitters, leather crafters, potters and crafters came together and shared their skills. Together we practiced our craft and forged friendships.

We had weekends away together at our church campground at Berringa and made things of beauty, shared at table, shared in worship, shared life stories

Last year I realised who my best friend is and that they've been in my life for a very long time. It wasn't that we weren't already friends, we were, but I realised that they were one of the very best I could ever ask for in this lifetime.

See, I have been blessed in my life so far, to always remember having at least one friend, usually more. Maybe not "a" best friend, but friends who were the best! Even when I had falling out's with friends at school, I still had friends from church; one of the special and important perks of belonging to a community like ours! Some friends have been and passed and taught me different things about myself, and others I know will be there for a lifetime. Different friendships mean different things, and I love the beauty in how they evolve, but no matter how different they look or are expressed, they each have some things in common, namely one that resonates with me most now after the year we have all just had; Everything is less scary with friends by your side. I realised very quickly last year that not seeing your people, and not being ABLE to see your people, were two very different things.

I'll be honest though, even before rules imposed by a pandemic, it was not all that uncommon that I might go a few months without seeing certain friends face to face. Our schedules would finally align, and we'd get together as if no time had passed. Time I now realise



Pamela Thompson and her friend Joan Jordan

and created loving community. The by-product was a beautiful garden of friendship. The craft group closed when my husband Bob and I moved to Forster in 1990. The craft group that had ran for so many years did not die however and transformed into life-long friendships. Many of us have stayed connected with cards, letters, phone calls and visits. My garden of "craft-group" friends, continues to flourish, add colour and bring joy and happiness to my life. My friendship garden has been so richly blessed through seeds planted at the Monday Night Craft Group all those years ago.

PAMELA THOMPSON FORSTER, NSW

that I took for granted. And, although my house felt constantly crowded, and the state that I live in was only locked down for much smaller parts of the year, I was isolating in preparation for a surgery or recovering from non-covid19 related illnesses and I found myself feeling even more lonely than I had for a very long time and missing these friends a great deal. As each of us we're journeying through the uncertainties of the year, I like, many others, had other challenges to navigate. Of course, loyal and true, my friends were right there on zoom, on FaceTime, Facebook and phone call, showering me with support and love. I felt it, I carried it with me, and it even almost felt so tangible at times, like being wrapped in a hug.

But my most important friend, my best friend, was right by my side. She's put my happiness and wellbeing above her own, taught me the hard lessons, to do what I think is the right thing, even when I'm not sure what the right thing is, and to forgive myself when I'm wrong. She has made sure that my worth is something that I always know. The most imperfect of perfect friendships, and my very first friend; All that I am and ever hope to be, I owe to my mum.

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