



Friendship . . . "a
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take for granted."

I have been blessed with many amazing friendships in my life, and as I get older, I reflect increasingly both on the lasting quality of certain friendships, and the factors that helped forge such close bonds. I have been living in New Caledonia for 35 years now, with only very occasional contact possible with the many friends I made in Australia and New Zealand during my childhood and youth. Despite that physical separation, many of those friendships are such that as soon as we are together again, it feels as if we have never been apart, and we are able to pick up the threads of our relationship seemingly seamlessly.

What factors help forge such durable friendships? I certainly don't have all the answers, but I can offer the following suggestions, based on my own personal experiences.

Relationships forged whilst people are participating in an activity that appeals to the noblest of their sentiments seem to develop into something deeper and more meaningful. A good example of this is participation in church camps, with their focus on Christ-like values, and the desire to put into practice Zionistic aspirations. Many of my deepest friendships were forged – in large part – during church camps such as reunions and Leadership, with classes and activities designed to encourage all of the participants to reflect on the spiritual aspects of life. Hilltop worships, sunset reflections (not just at Tiona), campfires – all of these experiences help people bond in very special ways. Even washing and drying dishes – preferably whilst singing barbershop – is an unforgettable, friendship-forging activity.

For me, another church-related endeavour that has contributed to my forging some amazing friendships is being part of a team providing simultaneous French interpretation during church conferences and activities. Interpretation is very demanding, exacting work – but if you are working in tandem with someone who enjoys the experience as much as you do – and who genuinely seeks to enable you – it is an amazing, uplifting experience. And if that person happens to share your sense of humour, that is icing on the cake...

Other vivid memories linked to people who are close friends centre around activities such as working together on building projects, and helping to mow and maintain church campgrounds in the different places I have lived. For me, countless weekends spent at Karanga (NZ), Grace Valley (SA) and Koonjearre (QLD)

bring back many memories of enjoyable interaction with good friends – all of us working together with a common purpose, and talking and laughing whilst doing so. I have experienced the same sense of purpose and cohesion whilst working with one of my brothers-in-law here in Noumea – the two of us working together on our respective homes for weekends on end, and sharing our deepest thoughts and aspirations whilst doing so. So, what I term “activity-related bonding” doesn't only occur in a church-related context.

Exchanging and sharing with someone whilst trail-walking is another activity that – for me at least – helps deepen relationships significantly. Climbing with someone to any kind of hilltop or mountain top provides a very different perspective on things – both physically and spiritually. I have had many fascinating discussions with friends whilst climbing through the bush to various viewpoints. There are some wonderful walks here in New Caledonia, as there are in most places..... but for me the Waitekere ranges around Karanga were a much-appreciated part of my youth (despite the imported gorse).

And very occasionally you have the opportunity to do a one-off expedition with someone – something that is unforgettable in and of itself. Climbing in the dark to the peak of St Mary's Peak (at Wilpena Pound in South Australia's Flinders Ranges) to watch the sunrise from up there ... or walking late at night from Karanga all the way to the top of Pukematekeo are but two examples that spring to mind.

Most deep friendships are built up progressively, as you both get to know more and more about each other, discover more and more points of commonality, and deepen the reservoir of your shared experiences. However, very occasionally you meet someone with whom you feel completely at ease right from the start – as if you have known each other all of your lives. This has happened to me a handful of times, and coincidentally (or not) it has always occurred in the context of a church camp. And in my experience, the all-too-rare friendships that start out that way remain deep and unbreakable – a sort of miraculous gift which you should give thanks for, appreciate fully, and never take for granted.

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