

Unexpected Friendships

Sometimes deep connections happen with those you might least expect.

By Sherry Surratt

A miniature ceramic bird perched on a nest of raffia sits on a small end table in my sunroom. It has a small card attached that reads: *A friend is someone who sings the melody of your life even when you can't remember the tune.* Given to me by my 70something friend Sibyl, it always reminds me to slow down and celebrate the small things: a steaming mug of fragrant coffee, the way the tangy juice from a Palisade peach fills your mouth, and the fact that I have a friend in Indiana who is always on my side.

My life is richer because of Sybil. She is a woman who has lived life well and full and always invites me in to do the same. Laughter comes easily to her, and I rarely catch her without a spicy glint in her eye. We've never lived in the same state, and sometimes our conversations are few and far between, but time and distance disappears with the question she always asks: "Sherry, how are you doing?"

God allows me to walk in the circles I do, with the people I bump up against, so he can mold and shape me through them. Many times I just need to get out of the way and let him.

My friend Lyndsey is a young mom of four boys, her life a whirlwind of chaotic days full of laundry, soccer balls, sticky hands, and smelly boy shoes. The amount she accomplishes in a day makes my head swim. She runs a business out of her home, blogs regularly, and tries to stay on top of a stubborn dog whose life goal is to chew on anything that doesn't move. She's driven by her dreams, lives life on two wheels, and always has a new idea. Lyndsey inspires and stirs excitement in my soul.

New Friends, New Perspectives

I don't have words big enough to express how thankful I am for these polar-opposite friendships. The span of generations encompassed by these women prompts me to remember where I've come from and also to anticipate where I am going. As I watch Lyndsey and share in the laughter of her mom adventures, I'm taken back in time to the moment my son, Mike, cracked eggs on his head just to see what would happen and the time our daughter, Brittainy, flattened a marshmallow so it would slide into the DVD player. It brings into focus how quickly the days pass and reminds me there is humor in every day if I will only look for it.

As I talk with Sibyl, we each hold a mug of coffee, hers full to the brim with heavy cream, mine hot and black, just like a sailor would drink it. She gently chides me to notice my life, to savor each day instead of gulping it down so I can get on to the next. She shares her slow, rhythmic practices of connecting with God—journaling, breath prayers, silence. I feel my soul quieting as she speaks.

Lyndsey is a breathing definition of *living life now and not stressing over the details*. We met for lattes once, and as we sat down she noticed the heel had fallen off her shoe. She then walked over and dumped both shoes in the trash can. *Oh well, time to move on.*

Is it the differences in their generations or their different personalities that make these friendships speak so loudly to my life? It's hard to tell. But I know for sure they each bring something so profound to my existence. God gave me a beautiful gift when he allowed our paths to cross, and I am thankful. And here's what else I know: cross-generational friendships don't always just happen. I have had to intentionally seek them out and lay aside any uncomfortable awkwardness our age differences might bring. Would a young mom want to hang out with me? Is it possible to forge a ground of common interest? Will I have anything in common with a 73-year-old with great-grandkids?

Intentional Time Investments

In every mentor relationship or friendship I've ever begun, I've wondered if there's anything of value I can bring to the table. Are there words I can say that would inspire or encourage? Any wisdom or comfort I can bring? Over the last year, God has been working in my heart about this, speaking in his quiet but big way. *Maybe it's time for you to just be. I have things to say through people who might surprise you.*

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Indeed he does. It's not that I want to be a leech that only takes and doesn't give. But I'm learning God didn't put me here to teach others about my wonderful self or my stunningly profound thoughts. He allows me to walk in the circles I do, with the people I bump up against, so he can mold and shape me through them. Many times I just need to get out of the way and let him.

Two of the areas where I am learning to pay attention are in *time* and *opportunity*. How can you find time in your schedule to set up regular coffee dates to sit and talk when life is so busy? But here's what Sibyl has taught me: when I take the time to sit with someone and listen, it forces me to slow down and focus. Instead of begrudging the minutes, I need to look on the time as a holy investment. I'm sharing space with someone God deems his precious child, who has different opinions and perspectives to share with me. I can walk away challenged and changed for just the price of a non-fat mocha if I'll only slow down and listen. But investments take time to simmer and gel. One of the best things I've learned is the moments we waste in silly banter and laughter aren't wasted moments at all. They are moments that knit the cords of our hearts together, allowing the soul connections God made us for.

But where can I find them? The truth is they are all around me. I've learned to not wait until we *click* or for the commonalities of our life to scream that we should hang out together. Different is good, odd is fascinating, and I've found my most rich relationships come out of unexpected circumstances.

One of my dearest friendships came through the fact that I found Julianna's young children irresistible. Not having young ones in the house any longer, I would run out my front door whenever I saw them playing outside their house just a few doors down. From hanging out with her kids I learned the whole family loved to laugh and play crazy games and jokes.

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Julianna became a friend I not only laughed with but shared tears with as well. It didn't matter that we were years apart in age. I was there when their third son was born, and I sat with her on her screened porch as she shared her heartbreak over a job opportunity gone bad. A silly but beautiful moment for me was when I returned home from church one Sunday to be greeted by a naked Barbie doll doing the splits on my front porch in front of a crayoned sign that read: *It's Mother's Day, let's celebrate! Come over for cake!* Julianna taught me it's okay when life is messy, and crying is God's way of watering a dry soul. And most importantly, you haven't fully lived your day until you laugh so hard you almost wet your pants.

What beautiful moments does God have for you wrapped up in a person you haven't met yet? Let your excuses of generational differences and time constraints fall away. God intended you for relationship, love, and laughter. Run out your front door and see what happens.

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