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An Inquiry Into Friendship

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Jonathan A. Kerner
An Inquiry into Friendship: Honors Thesis Scholar’s Day Presentation for 2007

Jonathan A. Kerner
For Helena, whose unwavering encouragement is but one aspect of her true friendship.

And for Pete – about as good a friend as a guy can ask for.

I would like to gratefully acknowledge the invaluable help of Professor Teresa K. Lehr: as professor, advisor, and friend Terry set me on the right path early, and often; my Thesis Advisor, Rynetta Davis, PhD whose help is deeply appreciated; and the professors of the English department of the State University of New York at Brockport whose tireless support (and patience) have enabled my pursuits in writing.
Jonathan A. Kerner  
Honors Thesis (unabridged)  
Dr. Davis, Advisor  
Scholar’s Day 2007  

*An Inquiry into Friendship*

One day I was chatting with my friend Terry Lehr over coffee. Terry is someone who I came to know first as a professor and advisor, and then as a friend. This was able to happen because I found in her that rather rare mixture of qualities that I admired, amiability, and availability where availability is defined as the coincidence of our being, for a significant period of time, in roughly the same place and for reasons such that interaction was inevitable. This is an important aspect of friendship’s beginnings, and thinking back over a lifetime, is common to all of the beginnings of friendships that I have had. The time needed to get to know one another must be provided by circumstances that typically exist for other reasons: in this case, Terry’s profession as an English professor and advisor at Brockport, and my decision to major in English Literature.

So the course of our becoming friends was that we had the association created by circumstances first — in this case teacher and student; then, along the way, it became clear that we had a lot in common in the areas of humor, opinions about current events, and our approaches to things we needed to work on. And then that kind of magical thing happened which Laurence Thomas calls “something that seems to happen to us” (53). You will know when this occurs because (and again circumstances must conspire) a conversation is able to be continued, and is interesting enough to continue, and one does
so over coffee, or just in the office; but, it becomes clear to both parties that things are not all business anymore and that it is a desirable turn of events. One looks at one's watch and is surprised to find that a whole hour, rather than the ten minutes that it felt like, has gone by. Then it dawns on you that something special has occurred.

What develops next, if the relationship is going to mature, is a kind of association by choice, rather than necessity, simply for the pleasure of one another’s company and voilá, a friendship is born. The relationship begins to have the kind of critical mass in which no particular reason for arranging visits is needed, mere invitation will suffice, and the serendipitous accidentalism that I have been describing is no longer required.

This is in contrast to, for example, dating. Whereas dating has a cultural infrastructure, friendship has none. Dating is a thing that can begin after an accidental meeting, but unlike friendship, it is often deliberately pursued and may be preceded by visits to places understood to be in operation for that purpose among others. Single’s bars, websites, even get-togethers where you will have a pre-arranged meeting with a friend of a friend all facilitate dating. Consider the internet. According to their advertising, one can go to sites like eharmony.com with the hopes of starting a serious long-term relationship. Sites like Myspace.com offer a way to introduce yourself, keep in touch, and presumably, one could start a conversation that could lead to dating. Of course, if all else fails, there is always the old up close and personal: “So, do you come here often?”

Therefore, if someone sent an e-mail, or initiated a conversation in person, in which they said: “hi, my name is so-and-so and you work in the building next door, or are in my World History class, and I think you are attractive, interesting, funny etc., and I
wonder if you would like to go out for coffee?” there would be nothing wrong with this obvious prelude to dating. Now, imagine this opening line: “hi, my name is so-and-so and I want to get to know you better to see if we can become friends—you know, buddies, pals.” That just does not happen—nor is there a cultural protocol for a response if it did. I think that stunned silence would be most likely, and the person making the overture would be seen as strange. Therefore, we see again that—at least in adulthood (I mention adulthood lest someone might point out the times arranged between parents for children to meet and play, but note how infrequently this results in long-term friendship probably due, at least in part, to the fact that the parents had to make the appointment to begin with indicating the lack of regular accidental opportunity for the social interaction. As I have pointed out, this essentially negates the likelihood of developing friendship), so at least in adulthood—an initial accidental association that also allows for conversations that go beyond the business at hand is crucial to the formation of friendship; and moreover, we see that there are culturally established norms for beginning other kinds of close relationships, but not friendship. One incidental irony is that when accepted protocols for dating do lead to friendship instead, it usually indicates failure. Consider the dreaded phrase: “let’s just be friends.” Enough said.

Now, returning to my conversation with Terry, we were chatting over coffee and something she said caused me to consider how little is written, or at least how little I had read, that dealt thematically with, or defined, friendship. I commented to her that the buddy movie genre was alive and well—consider such films as, Lethal Weapon, The Blues Brothers, Thelma and Louise, or any of the Dean Martin/Jerry Lewis comedies—but if one was asked to name literature that depicted the relationship as its central theme.
I thought it would become difficult after *Of Mice and Men*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and perhaps *Cannery Row*. Even Hamlet’s friendship with Horatio, though it looms large in the story, is only incidental to the story’s real theme, or would be, if anyone could agree on what the story’s real theme is.

So I began to consider, and to ask myself what friendship really was, and what it meant in our lives and in my own life, as I was deciding what to research for this paper. I decided to discover just what the word meant, and to whom, and to share that with you today; but, by no means shall I pretend to provide the final word on such an important and personally vital topic.

In doing my research I have learned that friendship has been a subject of philosophical and scholarly thought for many centuries. Also, the philosophers, both current and ancient, view friendship as a form of love, which indeed it is, and throughout this text I shall also. In addition, I shall share stories I have written—my feeble attempt at correcting what I first perceived as the dearth of fiction with friendship as its central theme, though since then I have found several,—and in these stories I hope to illustrate characteristics of different kinds of friendship. Here is the first:

**The Elves, the Shoemaker, and the Magic Cat**

Once upon a time there lived a shoemaker, his wife, and their black cat in a small room behind their shop in a very old village in Holland. The old couple was good and kind and their great joy in life was in seeing that each and the other was healthy and happy, and sometimes in secretly observing that it was so. Though their belongings were meager, they also delighted in giving a share of their food to their beautiful cat. However, such was their preoccupation with the daily chores and making and repairing of shoes
that though they grew older and suffered the effects of their aging, they never noticed that their cat remained ever-young, that his black coat glistened continually, and that his step remained vigorous and lively as theirs once had been. They did not know that long before they were born a wizard had rubbed the cat with the Royal Dust of the Fairy Queen making him a magic cat.

One day, sitting attentively at the feet of the kind old man and woman, his tail shifting first this way and then that in the way of all happy cats, he heard the shoemaker say to his wife: “we have only enough leather for one pair of shoes, which I have laid out on my bench for tomorrow. Our larder is empty, and everyone is buying shoes at the big stores or on their computers. No one seems interested in coming to the shoemaker anymore.” This saddened the cat, who loved the old couple, and he began to plan a way to help the man and his wife who had always loved him and shared their food and home with him.

The cat said to himself, *I will shake some magic dust on the workbench at midnight and attract the elves. I will make them help when they come to roll in the dust.* That night, after the old couple was asleep, and as the clock struck midnight, the cat leapt gracefully onto the workbench and strode into the moonbeams that shone through the open window. He shook himself, and a small cloud – a gentle fog of translucent green and blue – appeared around him twinkling and sparkling and settling on the dark brown top of the workbench. No sooner had the cat hidden behind the curtain than two little elves, no larger than the cat himself and in appearance like wood sprites, rode in on the evening breeze gently fluttering their wings. They landed softly on the bench.
“Let’s play in the magic dust” said one. “Yes!” replied the other. As they rolled and danced in the shimmering dust, the cat leapt from behind the curtain. His arched form was outlined by the moon’s light that poured in through the window behind him and his slanted eyes emitted their own intense glow. He cast a menacing shadow across the frightened elves, and in their astonishment he seemed huge to them. The elves knew they were trapped. “Please don’t eat us cat,” the elves begged. “We have only come to play in the moonlight and the magic dust.”

The cat replied, “do not be afraid, I will not eat you. I have two kind masters and wish only to help them. That is my magic dust. It will give you powers greater than the other elves, and if you will make shoes people will buy, tonight and for three nights more, I will give you magic dust each night, and you will be the fastest of the elves.”

“We will do it,” replied the elves, “for your dust is of the finest magic.” The elves were overjoyed that the magic cat did not eat them and that they would be the fastest elves. They quickly made a pair of beautiful shoes, unlike any the cat had ever seen, from the leather that was on the bench. Then, with the moon setting and morning on its way, they fluttered off on a gentle breeze. The cat, thinking that he had not felt so tired in a long time, curled up to sleep under the workbench.

When the old couple awoke they were filled with wonder at the sight of the strange pair of shoes. “How can it be?” wondered the old woman. “Finer work has never been seen, but what kind of shoes are these? Husband, did you make these while I slept?” “No” he exclaimed, “I was asleep too. These are cowboy boots. I have seen them on the internet. All the Nascar fans wear them in America.”

“Nascar fans” repeated the old woman. “what is that?”
“I’ll tell you later, for now just help me put these on e-bay!”

The boots sold for a good sum that same day and they were able to buy enough leather for four pairs more. They fixed a fine meal for themselves and their cat, and weary from their busy day forgot that they had not made the boots. The old couple was fast asleep as the clock struck the hour of enchantment and the elves reappeared on the bench. “We are here as we agreed,” said the elves. “We can fly higher and faster than all our elf brothers, and will make you the finest shoes.” The cat said, “I have enough dust for you for three more nights.” He shook himself, and the delighted elves watched the beautiful blue and green cloud settle on the bench. “Make the strange shoes,” said the cat.

The next day the old couple trembled in wonder and joy at the sight of four pairs of the fanciest boots they had ever seen. The old shoemaker looked carefully at how they were made and wondered if he too could make such excellent boots. The old woman photographed them and put them on-line; but, the old couple knew that they had to find out where the shoes came from and they decided they would stay awake that night to see. So the old woman said: “tonight we will stay awake, but now, we have enough money for leather for a dozen new pairs, and a fine meal for ourselves and our beautiful cat.”

“Yes,” said the man, “but he is sleeping just now, and I think he got dirty in the wood pile because his shiny black coat seems dull.” Later that day, after they bought the new leather, they had a delicious meal – making sure to give juicy pieces of ham and a saucer of milk to the cat. They watched him as he ate his fill of the tender meat and walked slowly through the shop to his bed. After the new leather was laid on the
workbench the old couple went to bed and pretended to be asleep quietly peeping past the curtain into the workshop.

As they watched, they saw the cat muster all his strength and try to leap onto the workbench— but he could not and he fell back on to the wooden floor. So, as the clock struck twelve, he climbed the woodpile up to the bench and walked into the streaming yellow moonlight. The shopkeeper thought he saw the cat limp slightly before pausing and catching his balance. He shook his magic dust, and the elves appeared. “Make the beautiful boots,” said the cat, “and tomorrow I will give you the rest of the magic dust, the most powerful of all, that the old magician rubbed on me.” The elves worked busily. Meanwhile, the old man and woman were astonished to see that they had a magic cat. “Our cat must once have been a wizard’s cat,” whispered the man, “and now he is using his magic dust to help us. Let us watch to see how the elves make the boots.”

As they watched, the old shoemaker saw how the elves did their work and thought, *I see how they do it, I can make those boots too!* The next day, all the boots sold quickly and after buying more leather they enjoyed another excellent meal, feeding the cat his fill. The old couple watched as the once quick and nimble cat slowly and carefully curled into a comfortable ball next to the woodpile. Donning their nightclothes, they fell exhausted into their bed, and were soon fast asleep. The moon rose into the night sky, and the cat awoke and slowly climbed the woodpile at the end of the workbench. Walking carefully into the moon’s light, he gathered his strength and shook the rest of his dust for the elves—who appeared before the shimmering cloud could settle on the bench. The next day, all the boots had been made and were even finer than those of the days before. The old couple awoke to find the cat asleep by the dying embers on the hearth, and almost
wondered if he was theirs, for his black coat was dull and streaks of gray had appeared by his nose and ears. He was not awake to greet them as he had always been, and instead lay still and quiet in his basket on the hearth. The old shopkeeper petted him and gently stroked his chin and ears, and finally, he awoke.

“Our cat has used all his magic for us,” said the shoemaker, “and now grows old just as we do. By selling these boots, and with all I learned from watching the elves, we will live in comfort for the rest of our days and take good care of him, and we won’t need the elves anymore.” And so it was for the old couple, who lived to a good old age with their good old cat, in their little shop in the village. (The End)

It seems unlikely that there has ever been a time in human history when friendship – or at least an agreed to cooperation between equals – has not existed. If there is strength and safety in numbers, then friendship might be seen as an adaptive behavior, and indeed fossil evidence bears this out (Begley 56). And a friendship enacted for this kind of cooperation, the kind that enables mere survival, would be illustrative of a friendship sustained for its incidental benefit. It would be Means Love – friendship contingent on the outcomes of the association. This would be in contrast to Ends Love (or Ends Friendship) – friendship contingent on nothing more than that the person to whom the affection is directed be who they are. But, this arrangement of mutual help can also be the circumstance which provides the time and contact needed for the development of Ends Love.

Therefore, it is possible to begin to see some overlapping qualities that might muddy the waters when trying to define the different relationships. For example, Aristotle, in his “Nicomachean Ethics” lecture, considered friendship to be able to be
found based upon three foundations: usefulness of the friend; pleasure found in the friend; and "the perfect form of friendship [which is] between good men [good people] who are alike in excellence or virtue" (68). In essence, this Greek philosopher felt that the highest order of friendship was a naturally occurring relationship between persons of good will and virtuous inclination; and not the incidental result of relationships forged between persons seeking other benefit. He said that "these friends wish alike for one another’s good because they are good men, and they are good _per se_" (Aristotle 68). Cicero, a Roman philosopher who lived just before the Common Era, agreed saying: "friendship cannot exist except between truly good men" (76).

Moreover, C.S. Lewis seems to agree with Aristotle’s highest ideal of friendship, but discounts any adaptive notion of its origins. In his essay, “Friendship—The Least Necessary Love,” Lewis calls friendship “the least _natural_ of loves; the least instinctive, organic, [or,] biological” (40). He says that, “it has no survival value; rather it is one of those things which give value to survival” (44-45). In so saying, he clarifies that his topic cannot be Means Love—friendship for the benefits derived—but rather is the friendship of Ends Love. He expounds articulately when he says:

> the role of benefactor always remains accidental, even a little alien, to that of Friend. It is almost embarrassing. For Friendship is utterly free from Affection’s need to be needed. We are sorry that any gift or loan or night watching should have been necessary—and now, for heaven’s sake, let us forget all about it and go back to the things we really want to do or talk of together. Even gratitude is no enrichment to this love. The stereotyped “Don’t mention it”... expresses what we really feel. The mark of perfect
Friendship is not that help will be given when the pinch comes (of course it will) but that, having been given, it makes no difference at all. (44)

Allow me to paraphrase Lewis in order to emphasize this essential point—the mark of perfect friendship is that the friendship is neither diminished when help is needed, nor strengthened when help is given: the friendship exists outside of that realm.

On the other hand, while this state of affairs between persons is quite exquisite, Lewis also reminds us that, “this love... has its congenital liability to a particular disease” (46). Having pointed out earlier in his essay that there is an exclusive nature to friendship which necessarily means that, “the moment two men are friends they have in some degree drawn apart from the herd.” and also that “[h]eads of religious communities, colonels and ships’ captains, can feel uneasy when close and strong friendships arise between little knots of their subjects,” (40) he warns that exclusivity can become “indifference or deafness” to outside opinion which can lead, in one’s thinking and perceptions, to the kind of unhealthy intellectual state that is possible in the physical realms when inbreeding occurs. Indeed, no discourse that admits no new ideas or opinions, no religion in which the pastor preaches only to the choir, can remain vital for long (46 – 47).

Moreover, Lewis points out that Ends Love is spiritual (47). It is of a higher order than the necessary instincts of erotic love, by which we are begotten, and affection, without which “none of us would have been reared” (40). Of course, the same cannot be said about Means Love and these two, taken to their respective extremes, define the friendship spectrum. According to Professor Neera Kapur Badhwar of Toronto University, “one cannot love a person without delighting in her under some aspect— in
the End Love of friendship, without delighting in her as being the person she is. Hence
End Love is necessarily a good to the one who loves” (Badhwar 4); but, she maintains
that the good derived by one party does not constitute means, or instrumental, love.
Badhwar defines the continuum this way:

If I love you unconditionally, I love you regardless of your individual qualities – your appearance, your temperament, your style, even your moral character. So you no are different from anyone else as the object of my love, and my love for you is no different from my love for anyone else. But then in what sense are you the object of my love? On the other hand, if I love you instrumentally, for the benefit I derive from certain of your qualities, then your value to me is entirely dependent on my needs . . . and you are dispensable as soon as I have achieved them or relinquished them or found someone else who can better serve them. So again, in what sense is it you that I love? (5)

If we accept this, then sincere friendship of the kind that we hope to experience throughout our lives, the kind in which we are known and valued as individuals, must lie somewhere in-between, but where; and how will we recognize it? In Steinbeck’s Of Mice and Men, George and Lennie are an unequal pairing. Lennie is clearly not George’s intellectual equal and it is left to the reader to surmise the basis of their friendship. On meeting the ranch foreman, who comments on Lennie’s silence, George says: “he ain’t [much of a talker], but he’s sure a hell of a good worker. Strong as a bull” (22), and: “that big bastard there can put up more grain alone than most pairs can” (34).

One might think that George values Lennie for his labor, particularly since George dreams of having his own farm. But when asked, George comments that: “it’s a lot nicer to go around with a guy you know” (35), which in Lennie’s case fits perfectly since Lennie is incapable of anything like duplicity so there is no question that George
knows him well. Furthermore, Steinbeck illustrates the simplicity and depth of their connection in addition to a feeling of mutual (if not slightly lopsided) responsibility with the metaphor of the character Candy and his old dog. Candy, in a conversation that foreshadows events to come says: “I ought to of shot that dog myself, George. I shouldn’t ought to of let no stranger shoot my dog” (60).

Finally, the nature of this End's love relationship is made clear in the closing moments of George and Lennie’s friendship as they are together down on the river bank for the final time in the closing scene:

Lennie said craftily—“Tell me like you done before.” “Tell you what?” “‘Bout the other guys an’ about us.” George said, “Guys like us got no fambly (sic). They make a little stake an’ then they blow it in. They ain’t got nobody in the worl’ that gives a hoot in hell about ‘em—” “But not us,” Lennie cried happily. “Tell about us now.” George was quiet for a moment. “But not us,” he said. “Because—” “Because I got you an’—” “An’ I got you. We got each other, that’s what, that gives a hoot in hell about us,” Lennie cried in triumph. (101-102)

It would seem that Steinbeck is saying that the outward appearance of people—that might seem to allow an intuitive judgment about compatibility—is irrelevant so long as two friends can say: “we got each other, that’s what, that gives a hoot in hell about us.”

Another example of this kind of friendship, one that is sustained not so much out of a complete compatibility, but rather a sufficient compatibility that is rendered all the more valuable due to circumstances, is found in Henry James’ *The Turn of the Screw.* The story’s protagonist, a new governess, finds herself employed in Bly house with the housekeeper Mrs. Grose as her only adult companion. They find unity together while at odds against controversy and crisis, and the protagonist as narrator comments, as one of
their conversations ends, “[h]er thus turning her back on me was fortunately not, for my just preoccupations, a snub that could check the growth of our mutual esteem” (13).

Then, a short time later, they agree on a course of action and the narrator says:

“[s]he gave with her apron a great wipe to her mouth. ‘Then I’ll stand by you. We’ll see it out.’ ‘We’ll see it out!’ I ardently echoed, giving her my hand to make it a vow. She held me there a moment, then whisked up her apron again with her detached hand. ‘Would you mind, Miss, if I used the freedom—’ ‘To kiss me? No!’ I took the good creature in my arms and after we had embraced like sisters felt still more fortified and indignant” (13-14).

One might argue that the relationship’s inequality in terms of social position (the governess is of higher social rank and educated while Mrs. Grose is illiterate) produces inherent weakness and failure in the relationship, a weakness that has begun to show, when upon seeing a ghost (James’ story revolves around visitation by apparitions) the governess says: “[s]carce anything in the whole history seems to me so odd as this fact that my real beginning of fear was one, as I may say, with the instinct of sparing my companion” (17). Indeed they, the governess and Mrs. Grose, never do really bond in a meaningful way in order to undertake to face the challenges of haunted Bly House. While their friendship begins as a shared unity in the face of emotional turmoil, it does not come to maturity in the heightened state of fear and apprehension that the governess feels; therefore, while it bears all of the earmarks of the beginning of an Ends Love, it finally withers on the vine coming to fruition neither as Means or Ends Love. However, as we have seen in “Of Mice and Men,” the inequality is not necessarily the reason.
Rather, I believe that it was simply Henry James' choice to heighten the story's tension by further isolating its protagonist. And James' genius shows through as he chooses the abject isolation of friendlessness as the most effective context in which to exacerbate an already difficult situation.

In studying and attempting to discuss, in a meaningful and defined way, the friendship relationship I realized that it is difficult to describe due to the infrequent instances in our lives when we have an opportunity to do so. We are not educated in the matter, particularly since we do not think of friendship as love usually, and we are rarely asked to talk about it. Contrast this to romantic love. There is no end to the various forms of the question “what is love?” either in song, verse, or many other venues. After all, the movie “Love Story” told us that “love is never having to say you’re sorry.” And the long running comic strip “Love Is,” created by Kim Casali, featured two essentially miniaturized StayPuft Marshmallow type characters and sought to define love every week in the classic single panel comic strip. These little neo-human characters were featured without clothes, or as I recall, any form of genitalia, so of course, it was easy to see why they had so much difficulty.

Friendship, on the other hand, is not so widely scrutinized, or when it is it is often rather insipid. Take, for example, the “Golden Girls” television show of the early 1990’s which reminded us that in a friend we wish that “your heart is true; you’re a pal and a confidant.” And of course the hit series “Friends” left no doubt that “I’ll be there for you, 'cause you’re there for me too.” But usually, as close as we come to talking about what friendship is is by talking about what it is not. We might say, “so-and-so and I began working together on a project, and we have become friends.” In other words, we do not
just work together; we have a different, perhaps better, but for the time being undefined relationship. Conversely, we have all known people who seem to work or cooperate together quite amiably and in a friendly manner and then been surprised to find that they do not associate other than professionally, perhaps even hearing one of them comment that “we work together, but we aren’t friends.” Perhaps this is why we find it easy to describe the qualities that make a person a good co-worker when they are: punctual, educated, trustworthy, productive, and so forth; but, rarely do we try to list the reasons why persons are our close friends.

From early childhood we are expected to know the difference between friends and non-friends intuitively. Among the questions asked of us as we come home from the first day of school is: “did you make any friends?” And perhaps most telling of all is the fact that our children never look back at us and ask the obvious question: “I don’t know, how can you tell?”

This intuitive expectation about friendship can be observed in children’s media. For example, in the story of Elmo’s first day of school on the Sesame Street website, Elmo is at his first day of school when his classmate, Maya, says: “Hello, I’m Maya. I’d like to be your friend . . . . can I play with the fire truck too?” and Elmo replies, “Sure, Maya, we can play together – that’s what friends do.” That may be true to a point, but it does not mean that all kids who play together are friends and anyone who has ever taken care of children for long knows that they will not play together well for very long if they are not—or do not become—friends, and even then there are no guarantees. So the playing is not the friendship; rather, it is the symptom, the outcome, or the opportunity, but not the cause. Of course, as our children grow older and make poor choices in
companionship we may have to explain concepts like what it means for someone else to have your best interests at heart, and to be trustworthy. And in these simple concepts we find the foundations for our most prized adult relationships.

Children are especially adept at having a best friend. Adults rarely use this term to describe someone. In my own young life I had a best friend. For me, that meant that this was the kid who was my first friend, as far as I can remember, and with whom I had bonded by about age five or six. We went to the same Baptist church and public school, and I know that we toddled around the same church nursery before we could speak, and we just clicked. The calculus at that age is pretty simple. You feel comfortable and unthreatened together, you laugh at the same things, you indulge in the same mischievous fantasies and acts, and – and here is that one consistency – you are accidentally together often enough to form the relationship. As much as anything, our last names starting with K and M, close enough for the public schools to group us in homerooms and the like, meant that we would have ample opportunity to become friends, which we did.

Once, I was sitting in the principal’s office trying to account for some of the abundant naughtiness we had been guilty of. He asked if it would be a good idea to separate my friend, Chris Marone, and I. I recall answering that it wasn’t possible, that we were always friends and always would be – that we always found a way to be together. He asked me why and I said I did not know, but was sure that it was true nonetheless. Some forty years later it still is.

Perhaps the thing that I did not know was that we did not have a choice. I was reminded of this when I read from “Of Friendship” by Michel de Montaigne who says of a lost friend, “If you press me to tell why I loved him, I feel that this cannot be expressed.
except by answering: because it was he, because it was I” (82). Or, as George says of Lennie, it is someone we know. And perhaps it is a way of knowing ourselves. For, as Cicero points out, “a man loves himself not in order to exact from himself some pay for his affection, but simply because every man is by his very nature dear to himself. Unless this principle is transferred to friendship, a man will never find a true friend, for the true friend is, so to speak, a second self” (78). And also speaking to this mysterious relationship, where good is given and received but not required, and where the relationship is entered into not for the good that will be given or received but rather to pursue the sublime association, is the narrator in John Milton’s Paradise Lost: “a grateful mind / By owing owes not, but still pays, at once Indebted and discharged” (94).

Of course there are other views on friendship. According to Joseph Epstein in his book *Friendship: An Exposé*, the English essayist Hugh Kingsmill called friends “‘God’s apology,’ by which he meant that, by way of apology, and to make amends to us for the families He has burdened us with, God has also supplied us with friends” (1).

Furthermore, Epstein wonders whether jealousy or rivalry can be avoided or sustained in friendship when he quotes Gore Vidal who said: “‘whenever a friend succeeds, a little something in me dies.’” or Francis Bacon who claimed that “‘there is little friendship in the world, and least of all that between equals’”—which Epstein interprets as an observation about a lack of rivalry, and as if to underscore the importance of non-competitiveness in friendship, cites Bacon’s other claim that, “‘nothing so fortifies a friendship as the belief on the part of one friend that he is superior to the other’” (8).

These cynicisms notwithstanding, remember that I have pointed out that Neera Kapur Badhwar, in her essay “Friends as Ends in Themselves,” defines, and distinguishes
between, “End Love and Means Love” in the friend relationship. In Means Love there is a relationship that is based on the recognition of traits in the other that are “instrumental” as a means to an end. In other words, a relationship that springs from a desire for personal gain or advantage through a relationship with someone who is replaceable so long as the same traits and advantages are present (1). But in Ends Love there is a bond springing from a respect and admiration for traits that are “essential features” of the friend who is therefore “unique and irreplaceable.” With this in mind, here is another of my stories.

**The Crow and the Two Cats**

During the moment when night is finished and morning has not yet begun, Gestalt the Crow lighted on his well-worn perch high in the graying dead pine that overlooked the woods behind the sprawling white farmhouse. He watched the horizon as the black night sky became gray and then blue, and as the bottoms of clouds that rippled like a waking ocean stirring in an on-shore breeze became distinct and reflected the yellow, orange, pink, and red, of the advancing sun. Unlike the white foamy-topped breaking waves of an ocean’s morning tide, these had their tops colored by day’s first light and were interrupted in the troughs by bands of white that resisted shadow and maintained translucent brilliance beneath the crests.

His head cocked to one side, Gestalt watched as the sun emerged on the horizon. He knew that for him, high in his tree, morning was further underway than it would be for those on the ground who hid in burrows in the black earth under long angular stacks of split wood, or who scurried among leaves of brown, red, and yellow searching for seeds, or even for those who lay in wait observing as he did. Looking up, he watched as
light on the tips of the highest branches gradually but unceasingly made its way down to
his perch. He lifted his wings slightly and bunching himself, caused his feathers to ruffle.
Immediately, he felt the sun’s warming effect. He lifted one wing and then the other
bringing each in turn down sharply over his forehead and beak as he turned his as if to
tuck it under the wing. He shook himself, lifting and shuffling his wings, and stretched
his neck. Satisfied, he settled quietly on his branch - his feathers once again coalescing in
a reflective black sheen. The light continued down the tree and flooded the grassy green
yard below.

Lying among the weeds, Blacky the Cat experienced the sunrise as well. From
his place in hiding he watched a nimble creature whose activities had begun before
darkness gave way to morning, and who by sunrise was engrossed in his daily
preparation for winter. Blacky had first been merely listening. Focusing on sound, he
pinpointed location by the rustling of a leaf or the crunch of a tooth on a seed. As
darkness receded and gave way to light, he began to see shape and color and the acorn
brown fur and chestnut stripe of the energetic chipmunk that was so intensely interesting
to him.

Catching a flicker of motion, Gestalt looked down as the chipmunk dashed from
under the giant old walnut tree to the post the bird feeder was on. He peers into the tall
grass and saw Blacky—whose muscular body was now tense with preparation for attack.
He also saw another small patch of color and knew that the feral orange and white cat,
which lived in the woods, had slipped in unseen and was crouching amidst the tangle of
arching large-leaved plants next to the huge old tree five feet to the right of the hunting
black cat.
Blacky pounced. Halfway to the post he hit the ground and in one fluid motion was again sailing toward his prey: his paws outstretched; his claws extended; his eyes riveted on his target. Sensing the approach, the alert chipmunk dashed back toward the tree as the shadow of the flying cat passed over him. Blacky twisted and lurched toward the now moving target and felt a claw scrape skin as he sailed past the small creature. Off balance, he landed hard on the ground. Instantly, he gathered himself and sprinted in the new direction, but he was sure he was too late because the chipmunk was nearly to the safety of the shadowy plants and tree. Suddenly, the chipmunk stopped in his tracks. Blacky, so explosive in his reaction and pursuit, nearly dashed past him before twisting—this time with the agile control his paws on the earth gave him—and bringing one paw down over his quarry’s back. He bit, and teeth sank into flesh, and the chipmunk was dead.

Blacky remained motionless and held his prey. As he crouched there, his senses still aglow with the energy of the hunt, he began to feel a presence, and still holding one paw on his prize, he turned his head and peered into the darkness under the huge leaves. Two eyes burned like coals. Instinctively, he turned to face the intruder while keeping the chipmunk in his grasp. “I am Scipio,” said a voice that came from the place where the eyes were, “and I am not here to fight or steal your food.” It was the orange and white cat that Gestalt had seen. Scipio inched forward. Blacky tensed and seemed to grow larger as his back arched and he flattened his ears. A snarling hiss came from between his now exposed fangs.

Scipio’s head was now visible from beneath the leaves, and he calmly gathered himself, his paws forward under his chest, his ears erect, and settled on the ground.
Blacky realized Scipio’s posture was benign and relaxed slightly, but kept his sideways fighting stance and his paw on his prize.

“Why are you here? Are you the cat whose paw prints I’ve seen in the woods and coming from the great barn?”

“Yes, I live in the woods, and sometimes in the barn, but I have never lived in the houses like you do. I am a wild cat.” Blacky peered intently at Scipio, who returned his penetrating gaze.

“This chipmunk is mine.”

“I know, but he would not be if I had not inched forward and caused him to stop.” Blacky thought it over. The chipmunk had stopped; but, in the excitement of the hunt Blacky had not wondered why, now he understood that Scipio had helped him.

“You’re right, he nearly escaped. Why did you help?”

“I’ve been watching you. I live in the woods behind these two white houses. I saw that you began to live outside.”

“I did that because the lady in that house died, but the other lady, who was in this one, fed me but did not let me in.”

“She did leave food outside,” Scipio said, “and it was me that sometimes stole it; but you learned to catch your own pretty fast.”

“I thought the raccoons had stolen it. I learned to hunt because I was hungry!”

“Well, sometimes the raccoons did steal it—and that crow in the tree had his share too, but you learned fast—and well.”

Gestalt saw the two cats glance at him in unison and quickly look back at each other. So finally the two had met, he thought. The sun was above the horizon now, and
Gestalt scanned the skies for the other crows that would begin to light with him in the morning pine, or call from roosts in the woods behind the houses. He leapt to a higher branch as he heard their first inquisitive cries.

“You still haven’t told me why you stopped the chipmunk for me” said Blacky.

“That was an accident. I only came to show myself to you because I saw how you endured becoming an outdoor cat, even though I thought you never could, and how now you move between indoors and outdoors as you please. I don’t think I could ever live in the houses. Stopping the chipmunk was just some good luck.”

Blacky began to feel a kinship to this strange cat.

“Take the chipmunk,” he said.

“Why?”

“Because I will be fed by the new man and woman who live in this house and you catch or steal all your food. You helped catch it, you take it.”

Blacky and Scipio heard the key turning from inside the house and Blacky said, “here they come, you had better go.”

“You’re right,” said Scipio, “wild cats are not usually welcome near the houses.”

Scipio snatched the chipmunk and bolted for the woods as the door opened. Blacky watched him go and then turned to see the faces of the man and woman. He climbed two stairs and sat politely by the kitchen door as a dish was set before him. He turned his head slightly enjoying a scratch behind the ear before the door closed again, and he hungrily ate the food he’d been given. He knew he’d be given more again before dark, and decided he would leave some of that for Scipio who he now knew watched from the edge of the woods. He heard the crows’ morning calls from the pine, and
looking up, saw that six, one larger and sitting slightly higher than the others, were there. As he watched, he saw the large crow, the one Scipio had talked about, fly from the tree quickly followed by the others. They flew off toward the woods behind the house and the great barn, calling and answering and disappearing behind the trees. (The end)

In his book *A Separate Peace*, author John Knowles has the story’s protagonist, Gene, recount memories of Devon School, a New Hampshire boarding school circa 1942. Gene recounts his relationship with Phineas, his erstwhile companion and friend during the formative years of his adolescence. The narrator’s motive is his attempt at coming to terms with the circumstances that led to Phineas’ death and the guilt that he, Gene, feels in his realization that his overt means friendship precipitated the tragedy. The lines of their conflict, a struggle of which Phineas is unaware but in which Gene is constantly angling for advantage, are drawn early in the tale. In the opening scene, in which Phineas is challenging all the boys to jump from the high tree branch into the river, a challenge that Gene alone accepts, the competitive nature of the boy’s friendships is taking shape.

Gene is emerging from the water, and Elwin, or Leper—Lepellier as he is called, comments ‘I think that was better than Finny’s,’ a comment that the competitive narrator interprets as Leper—Lepellier’s “[bid] for an ally in the dispute he foresaw” (Knowles 9). The three boys who accompany Gene and Phineas will not jump and Phineas says: “‘[i]t’s you, pal, just you and me’” (10). Gene, as narrator, recalls (ironically) that as they walked toward school across the fields that “[w]e were the best of friends at that moment” (10), but the tension that arises from Gene’s competitive attitude is ever-present and the definition of “friends” in this context is revealed:
‘You were very good,’ said Finny Good-humoredly, ‘once I shamed you into it.’ ‘You didn’t shame anybody into anything.’ ‘Oh yes I did. I’m good for you that way. You have a tendency to back away from things otherwise.’ ‘I never backed away from anything in my life!’ I cried, my indignation at this charge naturally stronger because it was so true.

‘You’re goofy!’ (10)

With this, one can easily contrast the dynamic at play to that of Ends Love, for rather than value Phineas for the positive and adventurous attitude with which he approaches life, an attitude that Gene admires but envies, Gene instead seeks to pull Phineas down from his position as the leader of the little band of students. In light of the final demise of Phineas and Gene’s lifelong guilt over it, this is all the more tragic since the pair could have enjoyed a mutual delight in their association; for while Phineas is a born leader and hero, Gene possesses a superior strength of intellect. He recounts that while doing homework, “I was halfway through Tess of the D’Urbervilles,” and “he carried on his baffled struggle with Far from the Madding Crowd, amused that there should be people named Gabriel Oak and Bathsheba Everdene” (12).

Days later, Gene and Phineas find themselves on the tree limb again and when Gene nearly falls Phineas saves him. Gene says:

[y]es, he had practically saved my life. He had also practically lost if for me. I wouldn’t have been on that damn limb except for him. I wouldn’t have turned around, and so lost my balance, if he hadn’t been there. I didn’t need to feel any tremendous rush of gratitude toward Phineas. (25)
Reading this, it is difficult not recall what Aristotle said about good people who are alike in virtue and that they would enjoy the perfect form of friendship; however, there is no virtue in Gene’s abdication of his responsibility for his choices. Phineas did not drag him into the tree, his own competitive spirit did that, and then, rather than feel grateful for Phineas’s having saved him, he resents it all the more as just one more accomplishment that he must match.

However, the depth of Gene’s malice is finally revealed when he intentionally causes Phineas to fall from the branch.

Holding firmly to the trunk, I took a step toward him, and then my knees bent and I jounced the limb. Finny, his balance gone, swung his head around to look at me for an instant with extreme interest, and then he tumbled sideways, broke through the little branches below and hit the bank with a sickening, unnatural thud. With unthinking sureness I moved out on the limb and jumped into the river, every trace of my fear of this forgotten. (52)

Sometime later, after Phinny’s partial recovery he rushes from the auditorium where the boys are holding mock court over the cause of his fall from the tree, and he trips and falls down the stairs. After being brought to the infirmary, Gene watches as others carry the mortally injured Finny in a chair and he realizes that: “[m]y aid alone had never seemed to him in the category of help. The reason for this occurred to me as the procession moved slowly across the foyer to the doors; Phineas had thought of me as an extension of himself” (171). With this realization, Gene understands both Means Love, his initial relationship with Finny, and Ends Love, the friendship that Finny had had for him all
along. Finally Gene understands Phineas's earnestness in his friendship toward him which is summed up in the words of Cicero: *for the true friend is, so to speak, a second self.*

As the book is ending, Gene and Phineas are discussing the fall from the tree, and in an emotionally wrenching scene, Gene honestly tells Finny of his guilt. With this, duplicity of any kind is absent from their relationship, and they find themselves on the level ground of Ends Love. Unfortunately, Phineas dies as a result of his trauma but the authenticity of their friendship is verified as Gene is saying: “I did not cry then or ever about Finny. I did not cry even when I stood watching him being lowered into his family’s strait-laced burial ground outside of Boston. I could not escape a feeling that this was my own funeral, and you do not cry in that case” (186).

Here is another of my short stories.

**The Coyotes**

Like the returning tide, darkness crept steadily through the woods in which Scipio was hunting behind the Great Barn. Always stealthy and watchful, he became even more so now. He crouched close to the ground and listened to the night sounds rising around him. He realized that he was in a part of the woods he rarely visited. However, he had ranged this far because mice had been difficult to find; the day had been beautiful and warm, and he was hungry, and the combination of comfort from without, and persistent urging from within, had distracted him and he had not stopped to wonder why the mice were so scarce. Now, with his hunger nearly satisfied, the placid cool of night allowed him an insight that had been absent. *There were too few mice, he thought, and the tangled weeds were trampled and beaten down.* Suddenly Scipio felt an unease he could
not identify, and a need for safety and escape. He was surrounded by trees that were too small to provide either, and he was far from the barn to which he would flee if he was pursued.

He began to move cautiously and silently across the weed tangled meadow. When he was within sight of the towering blue and gray building that was the huge empty barn in which he took refuge, he heard the sound that gave reason to his sense of dread—the yelp and howl of coyotes. Instinctively, he froze and listened as their cries grew closer, and Scipio could tell that the pack was headed his way. Looking ahead to the barn, he saw the small hole through which he could enter in order to find safety. At this distance it looked like a small black spot. He knew that if he remained in the dense weeds he would be found, and none of the sapling trees around him were large enough to offer sanctuary. He bolted for the barn—leaping over logs and closing his eyes as his fur was torn by arcing stands of blackberry and the branches of the smallest trees and bushes. Behind him, fanned out like migrating geese, the pack was closing in.

As the much faster coyotes closed the distance, he began to hear not just their yelps, but he could hear their labored breathing and sticks and twigs breaking under their paws. As he feared, they had scented him, and while they had not seen him, they guessed he would go for the barn, and were sprinting toward it. Once they reached it they would spread out and double back hunting toward the woods, thus trapping the cat in the field. They had guessed well, and Scipio was running for his life. Suddenly, the ravenous pack saw him and their fury and speed increased. Scipio reached the large hollow log that was his last obstacle. He considered going into it, but he knew that the coyotes would tear at it all night until he was theirs. He also knew that the ten yards after it was open grass.
and the pack would surely gain ground on him there. With one graceful leap, his outstretched body cleared the old downed tree and he began the final sprint for safety. He could hear the snapping jaws and teeth of the lunging canines and he felt a greedy muzzle brush his hind leg. He dove for the opening penetrating the dark quiet of the barn’s safety; but just as he began to pull in his hind legs, he felt rock hard teeth clamp around one of them, holding him fast. Most of his body was into the barn, only his right hind leg was exposed but it was hopelessly grasped. He dug his claws deeply into the soft wooden floor and yowled fiercely as his powerful forelegs strained to pull him free.

He felt himself begin to be pulled out, and as he considered turning to fight, he suddenly heard the beast that held him cough hard and he felt his leg come free. Instantly he pulled himself in, and instinctively bunched his muscles as he moved backwards up against the old floor bumper of the empty horse stall, all the while hissing and spitting against an unseen enemy. He realized he was alone, and flexing his leg, he felt no pain—and relaxed. He was unhurt.

“You fool, I had him,” came a voice from outside. Scipio recognized the voice of Lars, the second in the pecking order of the pack. Outside, the other eleven coyotes were sniffing and pawing at the ground. Their whining told of their frustration and their desperate scratching at the barn wall around the small hole Scipio had entered only verified his safety.

“I thought I could help get a grip on his leg too, Lars. I didn’t mean to bump you.” It was Limper, a coyote Lars had been friends with since they had been puppies. Scipio had recently spent several hours observing this group as they socialized and hunted mice under a large Oak in which he, Scipio, had taken refuge without their
knowledge. He had listened as Lars, swearing Limper to secrecy, told him he was planning to challenge the pack leader and asking him to back him up with fang and claw if necessary. Because of an injury suffered as a puppy, limper was weakened—and in a pack where rights to a kill were determined by dominance, and that meant strength—he needed a friend. Limper’s friendship with Lars gave him an unspoken, if tenuous, position as third in command, but it was a position Limper could never win or maintain on his own.

However, secretly, Lars had begun to resent the slow and clumsy Limper; and catching the cat would only have increased Lars’s standing in the pack, but now Limper had ruined it.

“What happened?” Scipio recognized the voice of Diago, Lars’s rival for leadership. “I almost caught the cat, but he pulled his leg out,” lied Lars. Diago looked hard into his eyes, and then at Limper.

“Oh,” said Diago, who now saw his chance to befriend the fierce and powerful Lars. “I thought you had him and maybe Limper got in the way.” By now the other coyotes had assembled around the three and were listening. “I saw you hold his leg, and then it looked like Limper crashed into you.” Lars looked at Limper, who was looking fearfully first at the pack, and then at Diago. Limper feared the retribution of failing in the hunt, and Lars knew only too well that Diago could use failure to influence the weaker ones to back him in a fight for dominance.

Lars looked into Limper’s eyes, and then at the ground. “Limper didn’t mean to almost knock me over, but when he did I lost hold of the cat.” The pack whimpered and gave little howls to show their anger. Limper stepped back separating himself from the
others. "Come back under the pines" said Diago, "I killed a rabbit, we'll share it while the others look for more." Lars knew that Diago had saved his pride by offering the respect of sharing the kill -- and that Limper would be on his own now. As Lars and Diago moved away from the barn the others fell in behind, sniffing and scurrying along logs and into deep tufts of grass with their keen noses, finding mice. Limper followed cautiously, but was pushed back further still by the snarls and challenging stares of the lesser animals.

Scipio heard the pack move back toward the woods. The moon rose sending shards of cold light through the wide gaps in the old barn's siding, and he climbed quietly into the hay loft and tucked himself into his favorite corner. (The end)

Another context in which friendship can flourish is perhaps rarer than most and holds a special place for those lucky enough to experience it, and that is the friendship between an adult and a child. Speaking as I am able from a male perspective, let me tell you that there is nothing as fascinating to a young boy as an old man who has the time, the patience, and the inclination to reveal to him the secrets and mysteries of the adult world -- especially in this instance, the adult male world. This is because young boys know that they will become men, and they want to learn. And so it is a lucky kid who finds an old man (who may be, but does not have to be, a substitute for an absent or at least deficient father) who also takes pleasure in the relationship, or at least doesn't complain too much about it. The truth is, just tolerating having the kid around is better than nothing.

A favorite author of mine who writes on this subject is Patrick McManus. Mr. McManus's stories are fictional autobiography, and many are based on his childhood.
His stories protagonist, Pat, is a post-modern frontier kid in Montana: he lives in modern times but his 1950 era family is so poor, his area so rural, that he may as well live in 1700. In one of McManus’s stories – appropriately titled “The Theory and Application of Old Men” – McManus gives the reader a good idea what kind of old man a kid is looking for.

“A kid may come across an old man who gambles, drinks, lies, cusses, chews ‘n’ spits, and hates to shave and take baths, but there’s also a chance that he will run into one with a lot bad habits” (45).

McManus relates that he once had an old man named Mr. Hooker who called young Pat “Bub,” he writes that Mr. Hooker would not put up with any whining and:

> Mr. Hooker would take me out on cold winter days to check his trapline along Sand Creek. I would keep my complaints corked up until I could stand it no longer. Then I would articulate them in the form of a scientific hypothesis. ‘I wonder what happens when a person’s toes freeze plumb solid?’ I would say. ‘Wall, when they gets warm again, they jist thaws out.’ Mr. Hooker would reply, splattering a square yard of snow with tobacco juice. ‘Then they falls off.’ I would respond to this news in a manner of appropriate indifference, as though I were unacquainted with anyone whose toes were at that moment in just such a predicament. Then, Mr. Hooker would abruptly change the subject. ‘Say, Bub,’ he would ask me, ‘I ever show you how to build a fahr in the snow?’ ‘A couple of times,’ I would reply. ‘But I certainly wouldn’t mind seeing it again.’ Then Mr. Hooker would make a few magical motions with his feet and hands, and there would be a bare spot on the ground with a pile of sticks
on it. He would snap the head of a kitchen match with his thumbnail, and before I knew what was happening we would be warming ourselves over a roaring fire, eating dried apricots, and talking of crows. (418)

For me, a kid who grew up in a woodsy area and spent hours reading Outdoor Life magazine and imagining adventure in the wilderness, an old man like Mr. Hooker would have been a dream come true. I would not have known it, as perhaps young Pat McManus does not know it, but this would be Ends Love. This is made clear by the fact that there is little that Mr. Hooker can hope to gain from Pat, although the best old men, kind of like favorite uncles, do take great delight from showing interested children the things that they themselves enjoy, particularly if the child’s interest is sincere because as C.S. Lewis pointed out, one foundation of Ends Friendship is doing “things we really want to do or talk of together” (44). And while Pat is driven to seek and befriend Mr. Hooker, his benefit, even if he does learn to build fires or hunt crows, is almost entirely beyond his ability to describe or even understand it. It may be innate or even instinctual, but it is not the calculating opportunity for gain that is implied in the term Means Love which names a relationship about which it will never be said that “we did not have a choice.”

Furthermore, the substantive nature of the attraction can be stated quite simply, and McManus does so in the story “Further Teachings of Rancid Crabtree.” McManus is remembering one of his favorite childhood companions — a rustic old woodsman who lives nearby — one Rancid Crabtree — who is regular in his bathing: once every spring. Pat’s grandmother despises Rancid because he is her diametric opposite. “She was practical, hardworking, neat, clean, methodical, and never smoked, drank, or told lies.”
Pat says that Rancid said of her (in his less than Standard English): “‘[s]he ain’t hoomin’” (128). Pat, whose own father had died and who was raised by his mother, grandmother, and sister (whom he affectionately refers to as The Troll) finally reveals the bedrock of his friendship with the old woodsman: “I studied him the way other kids in school studied their arithmetic. Because he didn’t work, Rancid always had time to give you, not just little pinched-off minutes but hours and days and even whole weeks. He was a fine example for a kid to pattern himself after” (128 – 129). And incidentally, speaking as an adult, I feel that in this way he would not be such a bad example for us either if we wish to make a difference in a child’s life – but I digress.

Another author who writes brilliantly on the simple and beautiful relationship that can exist between an adult and a child is Ernest Hemingway. In the Pulitzer Prize winning book; The Old Man and the Sea, Santiago – the aged fisherman – has as his only companion the character called “the boy.” Their relationship is outlined in the opening pages as the boy, in disregard of the instruction from his parents, offers to again begin fishing with the old man:

‘I could go with you again. We’ve made some money.’ The old man had taught the boy to fish and the boy loved him.

‘No,’ the old man said. ‘You’re with a lucky boat. Stay with them.’

‘But remember how you went eighty-seven days without fish and then we caught big ones every day for three weeks.’

‘I remember,’ the old man said. ‘I know you did not leave me because you doubted.’

‘It was papa made me leave. I am a boy and I must obey him.’
‘I know,’ the old man said. ‘It is quite normal.’

‘He hasn’t much faith.’

‘No,’ the old man said. ‘But we have. Haven’t we?’

‘Yes,’ the boy said. ‘Can I offer you a beer on the Terrace and then we’ll take the stuff home.’

‘Why not?’ the old man said. ‘Between fishermen.’ (11)

A critical aspect of this passage that is worth noting is the use of this spiritual and difficult to define term: “faith.” This is metaphorical of the sharing of the indefinable foundation that friendship rests on.

This passage also illustrates a critical essence of the child/adult friendship – the child feels to be in some way equal or validated. Still, it would be a mistake to view this as Means Love. As Thomas Laurence points out, “companion friends can and do contribute to each other’s flourishing, where the emphasis here is upon the improvement of character and personality” (58). (Recall, for example, the way in which Phineas’s example to Gene in A Separate Peace finally allows Gene to grow beyond the petty rivalry that was ultimately tragic) Laurence goes on to say that:

Insofar as individuals can be understood as being self-sufficient in that they have [as Santiago the fisherman and the boy have] an adequate livelihood, I have assumed that by and large companion friends are self-sufficient or, in any case, that the material help each provides the other is quite ancillary to the friendship. This . . . enables us to see more clearly how rich a friendship can be that does not turn upon material offerings.

(58 – 59)
After Santiago’s desperate experience at sea his and the boy’s friendship grows all the richer. Returning battered, broken, and cut with little more than the skeleton of the great sailfish, he is greeted and cared for by the boy and they share the following exchange, “Now we fish together again.” “No. I am not lucky. I am not lucky anymore.” “The hell with luck,” the boy said. “I’ll bring the luck with me” (137). It is easy to see, as the story ends, that the boy has decided to shoulder a responsibility he feels toward his old friend, in spite of expecting his family and even the community to disapprove, and this reveals a depth of character in him that mirrors the fortitude the old man displayed while struggling alone at sea.

Of course, there are great literary works that diagram Means Love as well. One example is Gustave Flaubert’s Madame Bovary. Ms. Bovary marries Charles, the good doctor, but only uses his resources as a way of achieving other goals. For her, everyone and everything seems to be a means to her selfish ends. And this should be seen as a cautionary tale, particularly in light of the desperate situation she finally finds herself in and her ignominious demise. The shame and ruin that she brings on herself, her husband, and her child can all be traced back to her lack of virtue; the very virtue that Aristotle and Cicero extolled as being necessary to sustain the highest form of friendship, which is to say, love.

Herman Melville also wrote of friendship, but did so by illustrating its absence. In “Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street,” Bartleby is completely obtuse symbolizing the absence of the penetrating understanding that accompanies any Ends Friendship. His coworkers ignore him, and his employer seeks merely to utilize his services; and upon deciding that those services are no longer needed, to remove him.
Bartleby finally dies like an abandoned bird in a cage; arguably, a cage of his own making, but perhaps Melville is suggesting that the prison of his reclusive life and ultimate self-immolation may have been unlocked had anyone found their way to establishing friendship with him.

Finally, there is another very special friendship. That is the friendship that can develop between a parent and an adult child. Of course, your kids are always your kids; but, there is that wonderful thing that happens when the insanity of adolescence and the false independence of the college years ends. You will know this stage has begun when your child, who ironically at this point is actually most able to get along without you, begins suddenly to seek your counsel and advice in all kinds of ways. I remember being newly married and on my own and some of the first times that my wife and I were preparing meals for company. We quickly realized that we had better call someone’s mother to find out what some mysterious cookbook terms, such as separate the eggs, clarify the butter, or Dutch oven meant. And of course, once you have children of your own mom is like an on-call help desk. My own children are in these early adult years, and while they do not have children yet, there is a kind of sharing between equals mixed with a mutual respect and recognition of our positions as parent and child that is marvelous and makes the tribulations of the teen years diminish to irrelevance. However, there is still a unique quality to this friendship – and that is that of the perceived authority that the parent retains, and for that reason, as Laurence Thomas points out, it is not a true companion friendship (53).

Unfortunately, we live in a world whose contradictory nature seems to be in conflict with the impulse to have and maintain friendships. There are more people than
ever, but somehow we are more isolated. The pace of life and the fact that both males and females are working means that neighbors are rarely seen and are largely strangers. We have the internet, so intuitively one would think that we would never lose touch. However, the truth is that with relocation being so often required to find employment, and the pace of life, we have a harder time than ever trying to maintain friendship. Furthermore, real and lasting friendship seems to be less and less a priority and our lives have become littered with associates and acquaintances. Is this a reflection of the fact that the realities of our highly mobile, highly unpredictable lives have cast a cynical pall over the notion of having a really close friend? I hope not. And I, for one, have been fortunate enough to have found true friends; friends of whom I can say that we wish one another well simply out of a desire to see one another flourish and be happy.

Laurence Thomas has written extensively on the similarities between companion (or ends) friendships and romantic loves. He points out that, “the two are alike with respect to, on the one hand, being an expression of choice and, on the other, being experienced as something that seems to happen to us” (53). This is true, and conversely, both of these relationships will end for practically the same reasons – reasons such as betrayed trust, or learning things about the person that contradict what was first thought. Also, it begs the question of how marriage might be improved if it were viewed as a friendship and was treated and managed in the same way. What if marriage held the same expectation of a healthy autonomy mixed with the concern that is found in true friendship for how well one’s companion flourishes, but was absent any role of authority being adopted by either of the partners in the relationship which, as we have seen, eliminates the possibility of developing a true companion friendship?
Among my many blessings is my own participation in just such a marriage; it is wonderful, a thing to be sought after, and for that reason, as I prepare to leave you with the words of William Shakespeare, I would like first to dedicate this essay to the woman who has been endlessly supportive through these college years and who is my best friend: my wife Helena.

**Sonnet 30**

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past,
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought.
And with old woes bewail my dear time’s waste;
Then can I drown an eye, (unused to flow)
For precious friends hid in death’s dateless night,
And weep afresh love’s long since cancelled woe,
And moan th’expense of many a vanished sight;
Then can I grieve at grievances foregone,
And heavily from woe to woe tell o’er
The sad account of fore-bemoaned moan,
Which I new pay as if not paid before:
But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,
All losses are restor’d, and sorrows end.

The End.
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