

A Friend Indeed

Jan O'Daniel

It's been 27 years since a friend scratched these words from Ralph Waldo Emerson in my high school yearbook: "A friend is a person with whom I may be sincere." Indeed.



But friendships have a funny way of ebbing and flowing as the years go by, especially for women. My single, 20-something friend Kristi (who, by the way, wasn't even born when my high school yearbook came out) recently lamented that she can't understand why her girlfriend casts her aside every time some guy comes along. I got the distinct impression that one more slight and the friendship would be over for good. I wanted to tell her that it was an age-thing; that her friend would outgrow it ... but I couldn't.

The fact is, as a married woman with no children, I've often been the outcast among the mom-set. Oh, sure, I talk the talk, regaling the moms of child-rearing stories that I've read in magazines or heard from my sister. But it's not the same and my inner circle knows it. I'm naturally left out in the cold when the tots have a play date or there's some kid-centric activity for parents only.

In all fairness, I've done the same to them. My work often has me gushing about blogging, portals, pinging and deep dives. Yet my eyes glaze over while they enthuse over diapers, daycare, sibling rivalry and SATs.

But we're no less friends. With some friends, weeks, months and, yes, even years can go by where I (or they) become just a name in a Christmas card database. Annual promises to "do lunch" are made in hastily scribbled holiday hand. These annual promises become like New Year's resolutions: well-intended but never fulfilled.

If Emerson is right about friendship, though, honesty of mind—not time spent—is the true measure. I like that. I like having friends with whom I can be myself, friends with whom I can pick up a conversation that left off five minutes, five days or five years ago.

Hat-juggling women are oft-times fueled by their stage of life. Sometimes that means we're focused on our looks, our jobs or our hot, new boyfriend. Sometimes that means we're focused on our house, our husband or our kids. And many times that means friendships take a backseat to the chaos that is our lives.

I'm way past the dating game my friend Kristi's in right now, but I have been dumped by friends in favor of soccer games, Little League and piano recitals. And when I couldn't beat 'em, I joined 'em, spending many an evening at the soccer field while the little ones were out there bending the ball. I've also been to more than my fair share of school concerts, plays and Saturday afternoon recitals. I did these things not because I particularly like them. No, I did them because I have great affection for my friends. They had jam-packed schedules that didn't leave much time for catching up and it was my way of multi-tasking alongside them.

With the friends for whom we have real affection, we cut them some slack. We forgive them when they dump us weekend after weekend to go out with "him." We

send them cards and emails and remember their birthdays, even when they forget ours. And we're ready with a box of tissues and a pint (take your pick) when Mr. Right turns out to be Mr. Wrong.

I get this. My friends get this. I only hope that Kristi gets it before it's too late.

Jan O'Daniel is a friend and freelance writer who lives with a husband, a laptop and three cats in a houseful of fur.