



RENEWNEWS

RENEW helps people who juggle work, family and community commitments sustain (or regain) their enthusiasm, effectiveness and purpose



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WINTER 2017

“One is Silver and the Other, Gold”

by Linda Hawes Clever, MD

During this rich, sparkling, light-filled season, I wish to proclaim friendship.

Even in our hectic lives, most of us know deep down, that friends are important. The word itself is powerful. It comes from Old English, as do many of our most meaningful words. Its roots mean, “love.”

The other day, a colleague ratified the value of friendship: “I love my work. I have a great home life. I have enough time for my hobbies, too, and that’s relaxing. Life is good... except that I have no friends. That is sad.”

It is sad.

Friends are a source of care, comfort and ideas. I didn’t understand that they were more than boon companions to share the good times – until several years ago. In eighteen months, my life’s trajectory shifted from up to down. The deaths of both of my parents plus other losses, including two jobs, a destructive burglary and health threats, flattened me.

After a while, I noticed that some people stayed in particularly close touch. I said to one, after her repeated phone calls, “Why do you keep calling me? I have nothing to offer. I’m not Sparkle Plenty.” She said, “I am your friend.” I said, “Oh.”

Friendships, you see, are reciprocal, so we are resources to one another. We give each other backing and feedback. Sometimes support flows mainly in one direction, as circumstances require, but over time the relationship equals out. Neither feels annoyed nor imposed upon – nor belittled – by helping or being helped because we are so comfortable with and so committed to each other. As comic book writer Len Wein said, “A friend is someone who is there for you when he’d rather be anywhere else.”

Friends can work with you on the very meaning of your life as you wonder, “Am I climbing the right mountain?” Friends reflect with you and tell the truth when you ponder, “Can I or can’t I...?; Should I or shouldn’t I...?” You walk with each other so you do not have to walk on your own roads alone.

It is a privilege to be a friend. The writer C.S. Lewis wrote, “Friendship is unnecessary, like philosophy, like art... it has no survival value; rather it is one of those things that give value to survival.”

Friends are usually different from colleagues. Although colleagues surely help and buoy us, we may develop dividing differences. Let's face it, as close to you as they are, your colleagues will not change your diapers. Friends – and family – will likely be there when you need them. Friends respond, time and again. They coach, cheerlead, and share. You are safe with them.

A Holocaust survivor once told me, "A friend is someone who will take you in, in the middle of the night, when you are running away." Using that standard, many people have rather few friends – maybe two to four, maximum six or so per lifetime.

It's true that friends may grow apart as interests change – and time, geography or jobs separate. We once lost track of a dear couple who, we learned when we reconnected, had lost three babies in three years and simply could not bear any contact at all.

Some people may prefer to go it alone for a lifetime, yet the uplifting 1947 film *It Happened on Fifth Avenue* ended with, "To be without friends is a serious form of poverty." Sometimes friendships may suffer and you may become isolated if you have no energy or blow up easily or loose interest in others. That would be a good time to get checked for underlying disorders.

In any event, it takes about three years to develop a firm friendship. Like gardens, friendships need attention and time to mature. If you are so busy and friendships are so valuable yet take so long to grow, how can you find and keep them?

Our daughter, Sarah, organized special interest groups as she moved back and forth across the country for her medical training. At each university, she started a book club and a poker club. The get-togethers were refreshing diversions that brought pleasure and friendships. Sarah sent a posse from her poker club to scout out safe neighborhoods when she was buying her house in Baltimore.

My husband Jamie and I have worked out various ways, to keep friendships alive. We and four other couples met about once a month for thirty years to talk about weighty and non-weighty matters. Sometimes we played Cranium or went to the flicks. Thinking and laughing together helped build our sense of belonging and community and solved problems. With other friends, we have season tickets to the symphony. Some people meet like-minded volunteers who become friends in more formal groups – Sierra Club, League of Women Voters, Red Cross units, museum docent training programs, basketball boosters.

There are other ways to stay connected. A tickle file of birthdays and anniversaries along with a stash of postcards or greeting cards; an e-mail group to bounce around news and jokes, a party to celebrate a solstice, a potluck Thanksgiving dinner, a picnic, a hike, a hobby. All can relink and reaffirm your bonds.

In short, put your friends on your calendar! This season or any season, set aside time to find and sustain relationships that yield the assurance, "I am your friend." Girl Scouts have it right as they sing their astute campfire round: "Make new friends but keep the old. One is silver and the other, gold."

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Many Years and Counting: RENEW and The Permanente Medical Group

For fourteen years, The Permanente Medical Group (TPMG, the association of Kaiser physicians) in the Diablo Service Area (East Bay) has asked RENEW to be part of its New Physicians Schools (NPS). We have reached over 750 physicians, often more than once, since we are also part of Career Day and even retirement conferences. And actually, some of RENEW's earliest Conversation Groups® date back to the turn of the century. Recently, when we compared new doctors' concerns to previous groups, we found similarities and differences. As before, almost everyone juggled career, family and friends, chores and, on occasion, exercise and big life changes. No one felt adept at juggling; some had dropped important balls such as relationships. Many lamented the lack of time for reflecting or for themselves. Multitasking, although frequently used, has lost some glitter. Many realize that it doesn't work well, since it leads to more errors and takes twice as long to finish a task.



Talk About Juggling!

Healthy Steps, a program designed to help staff at Stanford hospitals make good-health choices that benefit them, the hospitals and patients, asked RENEW to design a webinar. Resilience was a natural topic, given new buildings, leadership changes and uncertainty in the national health care picture. For Linda, talking while managing slides, asking and answering questions from several sites, and integrating opportunities for thinking and writing—all seemed like a vaudeville show. One nurse said, *“It cost me \$540 to come—I took the day off. It was worth it!”*

Ahead: Exploring New Vistas, Revisiting Old Haunts

Stanford's Health Improvement Program (HIP) serves more than 8000 faculty and staff. Over the past several months, RENEW and HIP's Susan Saba have collaborated to offer multi-part workshops and courses. The purpose was to advance good health and personal fulfillment. Topics included values (as always), change, setting limits and reflecting on experiences. Conversations, research findings, true stories, writing and, gasp, homework, gave structure to the sessions. Results? As Oliver Twist pleaded in *Oliver*, *“Please, we want more.”* And there will be more, come winter. Furthermore: Considering Baby Boomers becoming the Silver Tsunami, we will explore possibilities of programs for leaders, staff and residents at long term care sites. We will work more with students. We will do more mentoring and we will coach more coaches about RENEW theories and practices.

What's Not to Love About This?

“Thank you so very much for a wonderful retreat! I watched the transformation of leaders who walked in yesterday tired and a little guarded, open up and embrace your wisdom by the end. They are well inspired for the rest of the process. Thank you Linda, we are blessed to have you as part of the team. The work you do is truly transforming lives.” Larissa Robideaux, Executive Director for Center for Excellence in Nonprofits.