

Those Friends Thou Hast

Friends and Acquaintances

By Rick R.

Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried, Grapple them unto thy soul with hoops of steel.

(William Shakespeare)

Every so often at an Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) meeting I hear a newcomer share that most of his old friends stopped coming around and that he thought that he was losing them. Sometimes this may be distressful and may cause a person to question whether the sacrifice is worth the loss of those old acquaintances.

Sometimes the word friend is misunderstood. We often refer to people we are associated with as friends. Others will say that you can count on one hand the true friends you will have in a lifetime. So where do these associates/acquaintances come in?

I played golf for about 35 years and had many so-called golfer friends but when the round of golf was over, we put our clubs in the car and went our separate ways. Fishing was the same. When we finished fishing, we put the rods and tackle box in the car and went home.

With these acquaintances, the common denominator was the golf or the fishing. That is what bound us to each other. I quit playing golf about 15 years ago and when the common denominator was gone, I did not continue to go to the golf course to hang out with them. I seldom saw my old golfing friends except in passing where we exchanged pleasantries and again were on our separate ways.

Most of the, so called, friends I had before I got sober had only one thing in common with me and that was the drinking. Unlike the golf and the fishing, we could drink 24 hours a day if we wanted to. We did not need a boat or even a set of clubs to associate with each other. The bottle was all that was necessary and without it we had little in common. When the common denominator was gone, trying to hang out with them became awkward for them and for me. I had to accept that reality and let them be. If we have anything else in common, we will know it and share that association with each other, but that was seldom the case except for family members or work associates.

We, in A.A. are fortunate indeed for we have a common denominator that has been likened to the survivors on a sinking ship, in a lifeboat, caring for each other. We associate at such a deep and intimate level that we develop true friendships that the average person seldom is exposed to. Understanding this can be a great comfort to those new members who may need to be prepared to move on with their lives.

If that new member is fortunate enough to adopt the A.A. program for the long haul, he may become the true friend that those old acquaintances in the bar room may need should they become a troubled alcoholic seeking help themselves. I cannot tell you how many true friends I have developed in the program of Alcoholics Anonymous, but *I have been grappling them unto my soul* for over 53 years now. Thank you for the advice Mr. Shakespeare.