

WHO'S YOUR BEST FRIEND?

Do you remember your first childhood best friend? Mine lived down the street from me on Emming Street in Clifton. We walked back and forth from St. Monica's school, each day, shared secrets, spent lazy summer days together, dreamed about the future, and teased our little sisters. Her family moved to Middletown in the third grade and though we promised to write we soon lost touch with each other.

Our family moved too when my little brother was born and a new set of friends replaced the old. Unlike our previous neighborhood which was mainly populated by seniors, our street was filled with large families and plenty of people to play with after we finished our chores or schoolwork. We built clubhouses in the back-yard, played baseball and kick-the-can in the street, worked together to stage a carnival benefitting polio research, and spent carefree summer evenings playing canasta after the sun went down.

Things changed again when we went to high school which had many more students than our local parish school. Some were in the college prep track; others studied business. We became involved in activities there and had less time for neighborhood fun. Some of us were involved in sports and service clubs; I chose journalism and did a lot of volunteer work. I was hardly ever home. My neighborhood friends began to slowly drift apart. We were too busy to notice.

Some of our friends got married shortly after high school. We witnessed their weddings and were at baptisms for their children. Others of us went to college, started careers, and made a new set of work friends. Aside from the occasional note at Christmas, we rarely connected with friends from the past. We were busy with our new friends and many of us were beginning families. Little

children didn't fit into the lifestyle of our single friends and we found ourselves spending time with young families like our own. Then it was with soccer team families or those with children in band or scouts or ones going off to college. Before we realized it, the house was empty and it took time to nurture friendships that previously had come so naturally. There was an empty space.

Yet if we are lucky, we are blessed with some friends whose relationships remain deep even though we haven't seen or talked to each other in a very long time. We can pick up where we left off and it seems as if no time has passed. These are the friends who feed our spirits. As we get older

we realize how valuable these friendships are. Though she no longer can see, my 94-year-old mother dictates letters to her friends who are still living, savoring those relationships, recalling memories and times of joy and struggle when they were there for each other.

What would it be like to have a friend who would be there for us all through our lives? Who wouldn't move away and who always had time for us? Who would love us even with all our flaws and failings? As the old hymn reminds us, we do have such a friend in Jesus who told his disciples and us that he no longer calls us servants, but "friends." Somehow it seems too good to be true, but it is true. Jesus is always available ready to listen and love and support us. I tease one of our long-time parishioners who comes weekly for adoration that she is hanging out with her best friend. She grins, but knows it's true. Working, playing, or praying, alone or in a crowd, our friend Jesus is with us, always loving and inviting us to be his best friend

—Angela Anno, Pastoral Associate

