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## On Friendship

January 8, 2017

By Sarah Kilch Gaffney



***They are so much of why you are back on your feet, of how you are able to continue moving through life.***

Great friends are thrilled for you when you go from the least likely of the bunch to settle down to all-out smitten and engaged in the span of fifteen months. They wonder a little about this fellow you met in the middle of the woods and how you're only 22, but then they meet him and no one has any questions, just joy.

They agree to hike four miles round-trip to watch you get married in your favorite hiking pants (with a veil thrown in for good measure) on the mountain closest to both your hearts, and then help to remove the blowdowns from the "altar" before the ceremony starts.

Even when most of them are doing more productive things with their lives, they don't judge you when you decide to put off graduate school for a while to spend too much time in the woods and hang out by the sea.

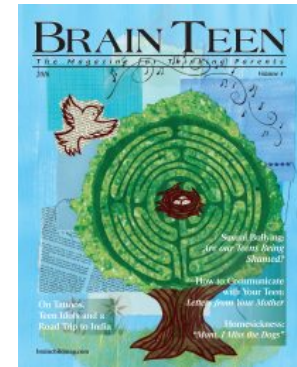
They are thus super impressed when you adopt a dog, buy your first house, and decide to actually apply for graduate school.

A week after they find a lemon-sized tumor in your 27-year-old husband's brain, they approach your car in the parking lot after work and hand you a half-gallon jug of homemade "apple pie" comprised of spices, apple cider, and most importantly, 100-proof-liquor. Also included is an offer to make more.

They ask what you need and they mean it.

They don't doubt you for a second when you decide to become parents and they offer to babysit after

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**J. Royer**

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the little one arrives.

They mow your lawn, plow your driveway, and take your trash to the transfer station.

They take your daughter overnight when it's time for the second brain surgery and then drive her down to the hospital when he's out of the woods; they pick her up from daycare when the chemo treatments run late or you have to travel out-of-state; they take her for a few hours here and there so you can try and juggle nursing school on top of everything else.

They call and it is like no time has passed at all.

They fly a thousand miles to help you survive school and take care of your family like their own, and then accept it despite their effort when you leave school a few weeks later when your husband can no longer safely stay home alone.

They start a fundraiser for your family to use to take a vacation, then for alternative treatments, then for just anything because sometimes that's how quickly it goes.

No matter how inopportune the timing, they meet you at the local emergency department every time.

Knowing your daughter needs as much love as humanly possible, they give, give, give.

After the oncologist tells you there is nothing left to be done, they fill the house with visitors and love.

When your husband starts hospice two weeks before your daughter's 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday, they arrange an enormous, spectacular party for her where all you have to do is show up and try not to cry.

When he becomes home-bound, they come visit with incredible spreads of food and booze, to play with your daughter for hours on end, and with enough meals for the freezer so that you won't have to cook for months.

After the hospice nurse says hours to days, they stand at your side until family arrives; they hold his hand and say goodbye; they put Patty Griffin on in the background, every album repeating; they shake their heads right alongside you in disbelief that this is actually happening.

They meet you at the funeral home to fill out the cremation paperwork and tentatively look at urns. When you find a little slate one with a golden tree and say you're not going to buy it just yet, but look at this, they completely agree.

When he dies, they shower the world with tributes of his good spirit, love for teaching everyone about the woods, and how much confidence, humor, and knowledge he brought to their lives.

They help plan his celebration of life and spill into your neighbors' house to fill it with love and laughter and stories.

When you turn 30 just over two months after his death, they take you out to a coastal town for dinner and drinks and the comforting smells of diesel fuel and the sea.

They hike 12 emotionally and physically grueling miles with you up your mountain to spread his ashes where they need to be; at the summit they all dip their hands and join you in setting him free.

When you return to nursing school that fall, they are there to support you through and through; when you find that you are miserable and leave the program six months later, all they want is for you to be happy.

As the horror of that first Christmas approaches, they entertain and distract.

They house/pet/chicken-sit so that you can travel for the first time in half a decade.

As the one-year mark nears, they gather with you at his favorite pub to reminisce and love.

When you start to date again, they want to know EVERY. LAST. DETAIL.

Your life is what it is in great part because of these friends, these friends who kept you afloat through the best and worst years of your life, through thick and thin, through marriage, birth, death, and life again.

Oftentimes, especially early in the morning with your first cup of coffee, you wonder where you would be without your friends. You breathe deeply, slowly, gratefully for all they have done, all they have sacrificed and loved. They are so much of why you are back on your feet, of how you are able to continue moving through life. You hope they never experience anything even remotely similar, but because of them you're there: ready, strong as hell, and by their sides to rally, protect, love, and provide anything they might ever need.

*Sarah Kilch Gaffney lives in rural Maine with her daughter. Read more from Sarah at: [www.sarahkilchgaffney.com](http://www.sarahkilchgaffney.com).*

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