

Friendship

John & Fiona Earle

*"When other friendships are all forgate
Ours will still be goin' great"*

Cole Porter

Easter has come and gone. Just think back, please. Was there anything in particular that you remember? Was it the holiday? The religious side that deals with the Resurrection and later the Ascension? The eggs? The incredible rebirth of nature with the coming of blossom and daffodils? Or something quite different?

In the practice where John worked and in the clinics for treating sexually-transmitted diseases, we knew that Easter was a peak time for suicide. If we had a patient, a young girl who had left home early in life, who had a pregnancy which was the last thing that she wanted, and a sexually-transmitted disease, and who had split up from her boyfriend, then we must look out. Obviously she would be down – but was she severely depressed and hiding it?

We can withstand adversity alone, up to a point. Then a little voice says "I can't go on". The key word is "alone". After all, a jilt is almost as bad as a bereavement. Suddenly there is no love. No body warmth and most likely a terrible loss of confidence; all this when everyone else seems to be enjoying the spring sunshine.

This may happen within a few years of leaving school where (we understand) failure is not recognised. So people may not have developed a coping mechanism for dealing with the sense of loss that goes with failure, or unwanted change for the worse.

In the practice, we would listen carefully to phone calls. Was this an everyday request? Or was a patient feeling for deeply buried words or words that they needed much courage to express? Most people know there is such a thing as deep depression when a person's entire world seems black – and black without a border in time or space. This may lead to a really determined suicide.

Over the years, John can remember four such deaths. None of the patients were known to our practice and it is hard to believe that any of these could have been prevented.

Loneliness

Some years ago, a college in Cambridge was designed and built so that the buildings could be used for conferences during the University vacations. This meant that every room had its own bathroom and kitchenette.

In other colleges the students have to go to the dining hall for their meals where, inevitably, they will meet other people. In the first college the students could stay alone in their rooms, day in and day out....and, to everyone's sorrow, the suicide rate in this college rose, as compared to other colleges.

It often happens around Easter for obvious reasons. For students there is the threat of examinations to come and the self-questioning "What have I done with my time...am I a total failure?" and the little voices whispers back the lethal words – "well ... how do you feel?" Also, after the dark days of winter, some people just feel very tired, too tired to struggle.

Small groups

A small group with a common purpose can become very cohesive and mutually supporting – providing they listen to one another; whereas a group who are merely listening to a tutor don't necessarily really bond. You can easily see this in a school. A class of people learning the same subject may have similar individual aims but if eleven of them are on a football pitch they have a common aim. They play as a unit.

A New Zealander who won a scholarship to Haileybury for a year summed it up when he

All Saints Alive

said: "I'm in the team. I've got ten friends. Straight away."

We belong to an ecumenical group that began as a Lent Group some years ago, and went on meeting almost every month. One of the members recently died suddenly and unexpectedly. We all went to the funeral and have kept in touch with her husband – and he recently came to supper. The fact that a group exists to meet a need, like doing church flowers or cleaning, means that we meet some people more than we might otherwise.

We get frequent requests for money from the Samaritans. There is no doubt that if you are feeling very low, a listening ear is good first aid, and the Samaritans do a very good job. Prevention is better still, and that can come from doing a job, maybe a small one, and feeling good about it. Repeated doing is more positive than repeated listening.

A recent article in the British Medical Journal concerned health in older people. The doctors stressed the importance of causes of disease. The patients stressed the importance of being members of society and making a contribution, which helps self esteem and minimise as the "I'm on the scrap heap" idea.

When trekking in Nepal, we came across a small shop, painted blue, with "Come as Customer, Go as Friend" written in red on the outside.

Our visiting clergy come first as visitors, but we think it is fair to say that they go home as friends. It is quite amusing at times – a pot of our marmalade passed through two or three pairs of hands before reaching the Rev. Marion Harding at home, just a few miles away.

We'll get a new priest. If we advertise for a position where someone feels that (s)he can make a contribution, one may turn up.

A priest probably feels a bit lonely from time to time, but at All Saints the congregation is helpful. Not only in the big jobs such as Churchwarden, Treasurer, handling the

bookings at St John's Hall, but in the routine cleaning, maintenance, flower decorations and stewardship. Also there are the little tasks in the services, handing out hymn books, greeting people, doing the readings; and, of course, everything to do with the wonderful music that we enjoy. So any priest who comes need not fear a lack of help.

Friendship?

Fiona has heard that some people who go over to coffee after the service can feel a bit left out. No one talks to a stranger, probably because no-one except an insurance salesman is good at striking up a conversation with a stranger – but we feel it is a thing we all ought to try and improve. If we see someone new in church, we try to invite them over for coffee and then look after them. A young(ish) man from Palestine who was staying with us came and talked freely to others, whereas English people find it less easy. Let's just sit on the psychiatrist's couch and think – "How may a stranger misinterpret our natural shyness?"

Christian Aid Walk

All Saints' are again taking on the responsibility for running the starting checkpoint to help out with such an important fund raising event. We need volunteers on Saturday 12th May 2007 from 7.30 am to 9.30 am only!

If you are able to help, would you please put the date and time in your diary and let me know - thank you!!

Rosemary Bolton

Christian Aid Week 13th – 19th May

This year's campaign focuses on encouraging growth for poor communities using the image of planting a young tree. I have a DVD 'Growing a future' with videos & songs (and many computer files) if anyone would like to see or learn more.

Martin Penny