

An Arm around the Shoulder

Jackie Robinson was the first black man to play Major League Baseball. His hire heralded the end of racial segregation in professional baseball that had relegated black players to the Negro leagues. Robinson was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1962.

In his first season with the Brooklyn Dodgers, Robinson faced venom nearly everywhere he traveled. Pitchers threw fastballs at his head. Runners spiked him on the bases, brutal epithets were written on cards and spoken from the opposing dugouts.

Even the home crowds in Brooklyn saw him as an object of reproach. During one game in Boston, the taunts and racial slurs seemed to reach a peak. To make matters worse, Robinson committed an error and stood at second base humiliated while the fans hurled insults at him.

Another Dodger, a Southern white man by the name of Pee Wee Reese – a 10-time All-Star who contributed to seven National League championships for the Dodgers – called timeout. He walked from his position at shortstop toward Robinson at second base, and with the crowds looking on, he put his arm around Robinson's shoulder. The fans grew quiet.



Robinson later said that arm around his shoulder saved his career.

True friendship is priceless and can impact lives in positive and wonderful ways.

A middle-school English teacher asked her class one day to write imaginative definitions of a friend. Here are what some wrote:

- *A friend is a pair of open arms in a society of armless people.*
- *A friend is a warm bedroll on a cold and frosty night.*
- *A friend is a lively polka in the midst of a dreary musical concert.*
- *A friend is a mug of hot coffee on a damp, cloudy day.*
- *A friend is a beautiful orchard in the middle of the desert.*
- *A friend is a hot bath after you have walked 20 miles on a dusty road.*

These children had some lovely descriptions.

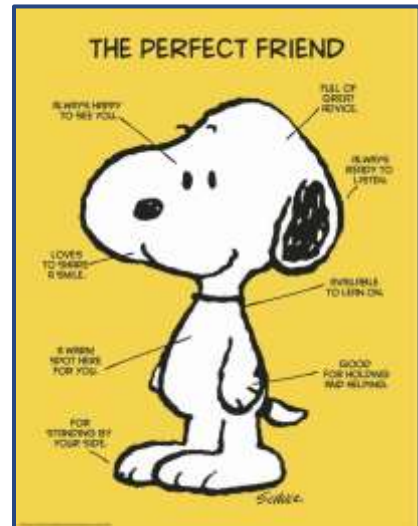
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Mark Twain put it this way: “The holy passion of friendship is so sweet and steady and loyal and enduring a nature that it will last through a whole lifetime if not asked to lend money!”

A British publication once offered a prize for the best definition of a friend. Among the thousands of answers received were the following:

- *One who multiplies joys, divides grief, and whose honesty is inevitable.*
- *One who understands our silence.*
- *A volume of sympathy bound in cloth.*
- *A watch that beats true for all time and never runs down.*

The winning definition read: “A friend is the one who comes in when the whole world has gone out.”



All are apt descriptions for this important relationship among human beings. And by these definitions, we have opportunities in the work we are called to do to show ourselves as friends to those we serve.

The Bible has much to say about the qualities of friendship. Here are a couple:

- *Oil and perfume make the heart glad, and the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel (Proverbs 27:9 ESV).*
- *Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends (John 15:13 ESV).*

– Beecher Hunter