

Zucchini Friends (2009)

Houston Hodges, for Writer's Corner, WLRH Radio Huntsville, AL USA

I knew a guy in California who divided people into two categories — ordinary folks and Zucchini Friends. When you grow zucchini you get accustomed to an oversupply; first you have a few of modest size, then before you know it you have enormous zucchini, a foot long or longer, and lots of them; you cook a lot of Italian food, and look for people to give them to. Some zucchini growers resort to sneaking up to their neighbor's doors by dark of night and leaving a sack of anonymous zucchini. Therefore, a Zucchini Friend is not someone who gives you zucchini, but a real Zucchini Friend is someone who likes you enough to take one more bag of them, clear up to the end of the season.

Another definition of friendship has been spawned by the Internet. That's "Forward Friends," those people to whom you can forward notes you get from the Internet: colorful photographs from the Everglades or the Hubble Telescope, bloopers from church bulletins, political cartoons (and it's absolutely essential that you know the preferred political label of the person to whom you send it), petitions about saving the walrus or free speech or reducing gas prices. The only happy note about getting these ginormous files through your dialup connection is that it justifies your sending some to them if you want to.

My favorite class of friends, however — one that has increased in importance in the past few years — hmm, I wonder why — is those to whom you can tell grandparent stories. It's unseemly to brag too much about your own children; people who sit beside you on airplanes or at the church supper tend to get glassy-eyed and change the subject when you explain why your son or daughter is truly remarkable, after they achieve the age of about two. But then there are grandkids. Those are the people for whom you are not directly responsible, but who mean a very great deal to you, and about whom you have a license to emote. My grandson Joe (age five) called me on Father's Day; I wasn't home, but he left a message on the machine, "I'm calling for Mommy, who is your daughter." I loved it; he's got it, that web of relationships which connect us; he's figured out that his beloved Mommy is my beloved daughter, and that's very important.

There, you see, I've just made you into a Grandparent Story friend.
When you see me you get to reciprocate.