

## True Friend Forever

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There are two important words to know when discussing the subject of your TFF. One is *sahwira* and the other is *adda*. These two words will help us move beyond the impoverished definition of friendship which concepts like the BFF or Facebook Friends have wrought upon the very serious, life-long commitment that is the hallmark of True Friends Forever. The disappearance of 90% of your so-called Best Friends Forever or your virtual Instagram buddies or your Twitter fans and followers who are witness to your extroverted, mediated, performative self – the person you want the world to believe you are - might cause you a moment of consternation but you wouldn't want to even contemplate for a second the bleakness that is existence sans TFF.

Of course, life is infinitely harder without parents to provide you ballast, colleagues with whom to co-create, siblings to support you, neighborly neighbors, relatives to remind you of your roots and a loyal partner with whom to forge a future but life is unbearable, well nigh nonviable, without your TFF who is one of the few people who you let inside, deep inside the realest you whom hardly anyone even suspects exists, the person closest to who you are, not the persona you broadcast to the world at large.

Just google “friendship quotes” and you will find an overwhelming number of quotable quotes, some of them dry as stale bread, some of them delicious as ice-cold pineapple juice on a sweltering day. But if you are lucky enough to have a TFF or two or three, you will know that it's impossible to sum up the value of their contribution to your life in mere words. How to adequately describe the way they help you rise above the deluge to prevent you from drowning; how they provide an antidote to the hollowness of existential loneliness; their special ability to listen so you feel heard; the way they can tell you when you are wrong but never make you feel misunderstood; how their laughter makes your own that much more satisfying.

If you get jilted at the altar by your fiancé like Carrie in *Sex and the City*, one of the most powerful tributes to TFFdom, your TFFs drop everything as well as a ton of unbudgeted money to accompany you on your honeymoon. It's no longer a honeymoon of course because your Mr. Big has flaked out at the last minute thus nearly breaking you into smithereens. Only your TFFs can put you back together piece by piece. It takes time, a lot of time, but that's okay because TFFs are not there for the highlight reel, they are there for the *War and Peace*-length edition of your life.

You can't develop a TFF overnight. It takes years of blood and sweat. Like all worthy relationships, it might even take some throw-down fights but those only forge a truer bond. Your TFF will babysit for you at midnight if you have an emergency or fly across the world if you need them. You know you can give your always reliable, ever loyal TFF

your email password or the pin for your bank account because you share an absolute trust. That's because your TFF is not just a friend but a sahwira which is conceptually more accurate for TFFdom than the English language word, friend.

**Sahwira** is a ChiShona word. A sahwira is a confidante so intimate that s/he is more like a blood relative. It's a friend who is as close as family, or even closer, your chosen family. Your relationship with your sahwira is formed through myriad addas...

**Adda** is a Bangla (Bengali) word which is rich in meaning but for our specific purposes here it refers to a lengthy, deep and order-making conversation with your TFF. Order-making as in that unsurpassable quote from Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: "She is a friend of my mind. She gather me, man. The pieces I am, she gather them and give them back to me in all the right order."

If you are very lucky, you are involved in an ongoing adda, thick as cream, juicy as a mango, with your sahwira. It began several years ago, it can be left off at any point and picked up at any time, like a forever unfinished braid, constantly needing plaiting, in and out, out and in, over and through the years, in a never-ending discussion. Your sahwira is there when chapters come to a close and when new ones begin. Your sahwira is there to bear witness to the real you, in triumph and despair. Sometimes, they might have to glue the pieces back together. Sometimes, they are that glue. They will also be there when you are ready to take that big leap. They are the air under your wings but also your parachute, just in case, no matter what...

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