

# Social Media Friendship: A Contradiction in Terms

*"Congratulations, Alan! You've reached 2000 friends today!"*, Fakebook announced to me. Teehee! [Excuse me while I chuckle]. This bizarre landmark has forced me to meditate on what the meaning is of friendship in this strangesome day and age. So, first, I will write a little piece about this, then, at the conclusion, I will share three poems I have written on the subject of friendship in a "Facets of Friendship" series, entitled "Friendship Lite" (about superficial friendship), "Fairweather Friends" (a sonnet about those friends who only stick around when the going is good or when they can gain something from it) and "True Friends" (about those few friends in life who can truly be called Friends, who will be there for you, whatever the weather, and on whom you can rely unconditionally. But first, social media friendship.

Social media has completely transformed the nature and outworking of friendship across the planet in the last twenty years. I have met some wonderful people on social media who I can honestly say that I love, some of whom I have then gone on to meet in real life. I am so thankful I met them. This is one of the benefits of the internet. But there are others, the vast majority, who are not really friends at all. In some cases, they are quite the opposite. Some will be all over you like a rash when they first discover you — extolling your wonders and brilliance! But within weeks or even days, when these unstable folks detect the least little thing which they don't like about your profile, posts or comments (or if you don't reciprocate by telling them how wonderful they are too), they will disappear as suddenly as they arrived. It's what I call Fakebook Fickleness. **Social media is what puts the fickle into friendship.** A teenager can now have thousands of friends exclusively on social media. Personal contact has become unnecessary. Then there are other social media friends who are what I call "lurkers". They don't really like you — may even be jealous of you in some way — but they stick around to spy on what you post, occasionally surging onto your space to make a sarcastic or vitriolic remark (or to "like" the nasty remarks which others make about you). Then there are others who make it their business to try and undermine anything you post. When you finally delete their friendship (for they are not friends) they slag you off on their page, saying what an ego-tripping snowflake you are! ☹️

The social media friend is unlike any other kind of friend in the history of friendship. I have learned a great deal about human nature by observing the words and actions of people on social media. It seems to have become one vast mental asylum in which some of the inhabitants (the sane ones) have been wrongly imprisoned. **Social media is like a dancehall for the ego.** One of the principal developments during the countdown to the end of this aeon is a massive rise in narcissism. It is like the tail of the dying dragon thrashing around in a last desperate attempt at asserting its dominance before benign supernatural powers will take this civilisation into its inevitable death and transfiguration. Narcissism is one of the main symptoms of being cut off from the essence of creation and a connection to spirit. When spirit (the journey to *tiny withinness*) has been negated, there is only one direction in which the ego can travel: *outward and bigsome*. Social media is the perfect environment for an outward and bigsome ego. Alongside narcissism one also finds huge hypocrisy and dissimulation. Therefore, it is not surprising to find so many pseudo-spiritual people (among the biggest "look-at-me" egos on the internet) thriving on social media by building a huge portfolio of ~~friends~~ admirers under the pretence of doling out high-sounding platitudes — always accompanied, for some strange reason, by a nice photograph of herself (or her vegan meals/smoothies)! 😊 One sees them constantly engaging in trendy spiritual-chic virtue-signalling with yoga poses/workshops, "Reiki master" status, "lightworker" status, "starseed/indigo" status, Rumi quotes, Osho quotes (he with the more than 100 'spiritual' Rolls Royces!), or pseudo-spiritual slogans of their own (designed to show how enlightened they are), as if those things are sure signs of genuine spirituality, which they are not at all. They are no more evidence of spirituality than the number of social media "friends" are evidence of popularity. There is only one evidence of genuine spirituality from which everything else flows: the certain, unswerving inner knowledge that *"what is essential is invisible to the eyes"* (coupled with the giving of oneself in service). One cannot advertise that on social media for it is only an evidence to oneself. Neither would the genuinely spiritual person *want* to advertise it, for bigging-oneself up publicly with spiritual virtues is not a spiritual virtue.

Social media provides the perfect thriving environment for people with personality disorders and psychological issues. In real life, people with personality disorders and psychological issues have quite a challenge on their hands juggling any friends around as they alienate them one by one, abuse them and tell different lies to each of them. It's much easier to suss a friend or potential friend out in real life, because you are connected to them through other people and you most likely know their other friends, family or relatives and work colleagues. However, on social media, through intensive virtue-signalling and building up a carefully-constructed profile image, people with personality disorders and psychological issues (who will rarely have their "in-real-life" friends, relatives, family or working colleagues numbered among their social media friends) are in their element and can create an idealised identity for themselves, so as to attract the large number of widely-scattered social media ~~friends~~ admirers they need in order to feel popular and

“validated”. They will repeatedly make reference to their achievements and boast about how many “friends” they have, as if being able to repeatedly click a button to make a “friend” somehow makes them interesting or admirable (though their outwardly attractive appearance will mesmerise many naïve admirers). Any of their social media friends who may say something unfavourable or derogatory on their page, who disagrees with them, or who dares to question their integrity will be quickly deleted. This is perfect for narcissistic people with personality disorders and psychological issues. They can always delete any awkward customers at will. And they do. Frequently.

In real life, if you have a friend and that friend says something once with which you disagree, or constructively criticises you, you don’t turn your back, walk away and never speak to that person again, treating them as if they never existed. In the world of social media, however, many do. In social media, many get offended by the comments of their “friends” if they don’t conform to what they require in order to maintain their false, aggrandised view of themselves. **For in the world of the narcissist, other people are merely pawns on a chessboard to be used for their own ends, which is precisely how it is in social media.** In real life, friends have disagreements many times. Some friendships in real life actually thrive on those disagreements, by which they are strengthened and grow through the debate and cogitation! On social media, many value a “friend” according to how much that friend admires them and agrees with them. In real life, a friend is valued by the content of his or her character. For many on social media, their social media friends are like trophies. They serve as a ready-made contingent of abstract nodes who can be called upon to sympathise when one wants to play the victim or when one wants to gain sympathy and pseudo-encouragement. For the average Joe or Jane on social media, their friends are like strokes for their desperate, attention-seeking egos.

So, the fact that I now have 2000 “friends” on Fakebook — about which it wants to congratulate me — proves absolutely nothing! (It would actually have been more like 4000 if it had included all those who have deleted me! 😊). Fakebook’s algorithms ensure that only a very small percentage of one’s “friends” receive one’s posts anyway. So this media is actually restrictive rather than social. Here’s a question: how many of your social media friends do you think will turn up to your funeral? Here’s the answer (if you’re lucky)! 😊



Some years ago, I wrote three poems in a “Facets of Friendship” series. “Friendship Lite” (about superficial friendship), “Fairweather Friends” (a sonnet about those friends who only stick around when the going is good or when they can gain something from it) and “True Friends” (about those few friends in life who can truly be called Friends, who will be there for you, whatever the weather, and on whom you can rely unconditionally. Here they are:

## Friends Lite

Just one little puff falls fruitily from my lips  
and lighter atoms scatter —  
not from any words I quip but through the fact  
that to their pride what I say matters  
(not in any helpful sense for I simply bend  
their rigid little ears, unleash their inner fears,  
send what tiny calm in them was left  
into some frozen frayed forgettery).

It's all so plain predictable  
you'll see it in their eyes  
their bland responses clearly show  
they're only on the ride until the depth gauge  
measures half a metre  
then they panic  
hoist Blue Peter  
(quickly run aground).

The leading hallmark of these types  
(what I can only call "Friends Lite")  
is that they love to mollify  
the words I boldly speak  
swaddle them with hide and seek  
(never grasp a nettle by the leaves  
or the bull by the horns  
never hold a rose and place  
a hand around the thorns)  
always qualify mitigate  
pacify and then placate  
mellowize and moderayte  
lessen subdue dissipate  
cushion quell deactivate  
curb and quash alleviate  
ease appease and palliate  
soften temper lessen deaden  
ANYTHING  
to put some leaden trousers  
on my mind's long sprintful legs.

Mediocrity waits around the corner thus  
to ambush with its shallow-watered ponds  
and lily-livered pretty-petalled fronds  
littering the surface (the operative word)  
while all the while  
u n d e r n e a t h  
a maelstrom makes its murky lurky presence  
felt to those who dare to take the risk of making  
vivid deep and fathomless fiery wreaths  
for reasons I've already disinterred.

Just one puff from my lithely lips  
(should never make them splutter  
just because they're not familiar with the  
worded lightdarkdeepish bubbles  
uttered [with no trace of stubble] from  
my forthright facehole) shouldn't  
cause such palisades to be erected  
barricades to be effected all  
because their blandness  
could never be reflected in  
the microscoping mirror of my eyes.

O when will these friends contemplate  
the iceberg pasts and social forces  
engineered to alter courses  
rend'ring them aghast (contortive)  
hind'ring us from congregating  
hamp'ring us from relocating  
submarinal plateaus waiting for  
our summits  
in the deep!

## Fairweather Friends

There's nothing more unsettling than to find —  
when setting out on virgin paths untrod —  
that many friends you thought were right behind,  
and moving with you, were a patent fraud.

They said they'd always watch your fragile back  
and stand with you when life got deadly tough —  
protect you from irrational attacks;  
but in the end their words were just a bluff.

And so you learned your lesson well that "friends"  
can be your enemies who haven't yet  
revealed themselves. In shock one comprehends  
they'll leave you in the lurch without regret.

For every faithful friend you have in life  
a dozen more plunge in your back their knife.

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## True Friends

My definition of True Friends  
is those who never will condemn  
(with whom I can be fully me)  
who never will show false pretence  
or judge, rebuke or take offence  
at any stuff which falls  
sincerely from my mind  
my heart, my mouth or pen.  
Instead they use their wisdom  
sense and gentleness  
to share with me all they possess  
and me with them all mine.

Such friends will never umbrage take  
nor feel indignant when I make a  
gauche remark or speak my mind —  
their hearts not set on faults to find —  
although if finding some they will  
just laugh with me (and I with them)  
knowing well the finest way for  
flaws to be restored is not through  
banishment or war but humour  
love and gentle leading's door.

How predisposed so many are  
in this self-centred world today  
to be offended when you say

some little thing which doesn't  
with their own thoughts ring.  
Their prideful bubble popped  
and burst they then behave  
as if you'd said the worst  
words any man could fling  
in their direction.

What bliss to meet a kindred soul  
who doesn't feel the need to  
play a role of any kind and  
never has a sharpened axe  
to grind nor chips which fall  
from shoulders flexed  
and all because they  
straightaway felt vexed  
by you being confident in  
having views which no one  
is apparently allowed to hold  
in present spineless wishy-washy  
weak and rhymeless times in which  
(instead of common sense and logic clear)  
by social forces deemed correct  
all truth is now defined!  
How wonderful it is to know  
therefore (it doesn't matter how bizarre  
or sensible you are!)

there's always one or two  
or maybe if you're lucky  
even more  
who  
(bless their souls)  
will never fade  
renege  
desert your door  
claim with you  
they'll 'wipe the floor'  
never with your mind  
become annoyed  
nor will the weapons  
be deployed of  
attitude and  
thrusting swords  
and high-pitched  
carping vocal chords.

These rare accepting souls  
become your own True Friends  
because — with neither base  
desire nor fool's intention  
friendship's path to bend and  
shunning sentimentalism's  
vast deceptive trend and  
seeing through the chauvinistic  
thought "He's on my team"  
and promising to plumb your  
depths not just to skim the cream —  
they grasp the need for endless  
love in faithfulness and peace.  
Not a phoney peace which is  
a space between two wars  
but one which says with tears  
of joy "I'd lay my life down on  
the line for you forevermore".