

This story about *friends* appears in Marion Winik's book:  
*Telling: Confessions, Concessions, and Other Flashes of Light*  
 Vintage Books, Copyright 1994, New York

I was thinking about how everybody can't be everything to each other, but some people can be something to each other, thank God, from the ones whose shoulder you cry on to the ones whose half-slips you borrow to the nameless ones you chat with in the grocery line.

Buddies, for example, are the workhorses of the friendship world, the people out there on the front lines, defending you from loneliness

and boredom. They call you up, they listen to your complaints, they celebrate your successes and curse your misfortunes, and you do the same for them in return. They hold out through innumerable crises before concluding that the person you're dating is no good, and even then understand if you ignore their good counsel. They accompany you to a movie with subtitles or to see the diving pig at Aquarena Springs. They feed your cat when you are out of town and pick you up from the airport when you get back. They come over to help you decide what to wear on a date. Even if it is with that creep.

What about family members? Most of them are people you just got stuck with, and though you love them, you may not have very much in common. But there is that rare exception, the Relative Friend. It is your cousin, your brother, maybe even your aunt. The two of you share the same views of the other family members. Meg never should have divorced Martin. He was the best thing that ever happened to her. You can confirm each other's memories of things that happened a long time ago. Don't you remember when Uncle Hank and Daddy had that awful fight in the middle of Thanksgiving dinner? Grandma always hated Grandpa's stamp collection; she probably left the windows open during the hurricane on purpose.

While so many family relationships are tinged with guilt and obligation, a relationship with a Relative Friend is relatively worry free. You don't even have to hide your vices from this delightful person. When you slip out Aunt Joan's back door for a cigarette, she is already there.

Then there is that special guy at work. Like all the other people at the job site, at first he's just part of the scenery. But gradually he starts to stand out from the crowd. Your friendship is cemented by jokes about coworkers and thoughtful favors around the office. Did you see Ryan's hair? Want half my bagel? Soon you know the names of his turtles, what he did last Friday night, exactly which model CD player he wants for his birthday. His handwriting is as familiar to you as your own.

Though you invite each other to parties, you somehow don't quite fit into each other's outside lives. For this reason, the friendship may not survive a job change. Company gossip, once an infallible source of entertainment, soon awkwardly accentuates the distance between you. But wait. Like School Friends, Work Friends share certain memories which acquire a nostalgic glow after about a decade.

A Faraway Friend is someone you grew up with or went to school with or lived in the same town as until one of you moved away. Without a Faraway Friend, you would never get any mail addressed in handwriting. A Faraway Friend calls late at night, invites you to her wedding, always says



she is coming to visit but rarely shows up. An actual visit from a Faraway Friend is a cause for celebration and binges of all kinds. Cigarettes, Chips Ahoy, bottles of tequila.

Faraway Friends go through phases of intense communication, then may be out of touch for many months. Either way, the connection is always there. A conversation with your Faraway Friend always helps to put your life in perspective: when you feel you've hit a dead end, come to a confusing fork in the road, or gotten lost in some crackerbox subdivision of your life, the advice of the Faraway Friend—who has the big picture, who is so well acquainted with the route that brought you to this place—is indispensable.

Another useful function of the Faraway Friend is to help you remember things from a long time ago, like the name of your seventh-grade history teacher, what was in that really good stir-fry, or exactly what happened that night on the boat with the guys from Florida.

Ah, the Former Friend. A sad thing. At best a wistful memory, at worst a dangerous enemy who is in possession of many of your deepest secrets. But what was it that drove you apart? A misunderstanding, a betrayed confidence, an unrepaid loan, an ill-conceived flirtation. A poor choice of spouse can do in a friendship just like that. Going into business together can be a serious mistake. Time, money, distance, cult religions: all noted friendship killers. You quit doing drugs, you're not such good friends with your dealer anymore.

And lest we forget, there are the Friends You Love to Hate. They call at inopportune times. They say stupid things. They butt in, they boss you around, they embarrass you in public. They invite themselves over. They take advantage. You've done the best you can, but they need professional help. On top of all this, they love you to death and are convinced they're your best friend on the planet.

So why do you continue to be involved with these people? Why do you tolerate them? On the contrary, the real question is, What would you do without them? Without Friends You Love to Hate, there would be nothing to talk about with your other friends. Their problems and their irritating stunts provide a reliable source of conversation for everyone they know. What's more, Friends You Love to Hate make you feel good about yourself, since you are obviously in so much better shape than they are. No matter what these people do, you will never get rid of them. As much as they need you, you need them too.

At the other end of the spectrum are Hero Friends. These people are better than the rest of us, that's all there is to it. Their career is something you wanted to be when you grew up—painter, forest ranger, tireless doer of good. They have beautiful homes filled with special handmade things presented to them by villagers in the remote areas they have visited in their extensive travels. Yet they are modest. They never gossip. They are always helping others, especially those who have suffered a death in the family or an illness. You would think people like this would just make you sick, but somehow they don't.

A New Friend is a tonic unlike any other. Say you meet her at a party. In your bowling league. At a Japanese conversation class, perhaps. Wherever, whenever, there's that spark of recognition. The first time you talk, you can't believe how much you have in common. Suddenly, your life story is interesting again, your insights fresh, your opinion valued. Your various shortcomings are as yet completely invisible.

It's almost like falling in love.



## The Dog Ate My Disk, and Other Tales of Woe

Carolyn Foster Segal

This story about **excuses** appears in Laurie Kirsner's book  
**Focus on Writing Paragraphs and Essays.**  
 Bedford St. Martin's, Boston, Copyright 2014

Taped to the door of my office is a cartoon that features a cat explaining 1  
 to his feline teacher, "The dog ate my homework." It is intended as a gently  
 humorous reminder to my students that I will not accept excuses for late  
 work, and it, like the lengthy warning on my syllabus, has had absolutely  
 no effect. With a show of energy and creativity that would be admirable if  
 applied to the (missing) assignments in question, my students persist, week  
 after week, semester after semester, year after year, in offering excuses  
 about why their work is not ready. Those reasons fall into several broad  
 categories: the family, the best friend, the evils of dorm life, the evils of tech-  
 nology, and the totally bizarre.

**The Family** The death of the grandfather/grandmother is, of course, 2  
 the grandmother of all excuses. What heartless teacher would dare to ques-  
 tion a student's grief or veracity? What heartless student would lie, wishing  
 death on a revered family member, just to avoid a deadline? Creative stu-  
 dents may win extra extensions (and days off) with a little careful planning  
 and fuller plot development, as in the sequence of "My grandfather/grand-  
 mother is sick"; "Now my grandfather/grandmother is in the hospital"; and  
 finally, "We could all see it coming—my grandfather/grandmother is dead."

Another favorite excuse is "the family emergency," which (always) goes 3  
 like this: "There was an emergency at home, and I had to help my family."  
 It's a lovely sentiment, one that conjures up images of Louisa May Alcott's  
 little women rushing off with baskets of food and copies of *Pilgrim's Prog-  
 ress*, but I do not understand why anyone would turn to my most irrespon-  
 sible students in times of trouble.

**The Best Friend** This heartwarming concern for others extends 4  
 beyond the family to friends, as in, "My best friend was up all night and  
 I had to (a) stay up with her in the dorm, (b) drive her to the hospital, or  
 (c) drive to her college because (1) her boyfriend broke up with her, (2) she  
 was throwing up blood [no one catches a cold anymore; everyone throws  
 up blood], or (3) her grandfather/grandmother died."

At one private university where I worked as an adjunct, I heard an 5  
 interesting spin that incorporated the motifs of both best friend and dead

relative: "My best friend's mother killed herself." One has to admire the cleverness here: A mysterious woman in the prime of her life has allegedly committed suicide, and no professor can prove otherwise! And I admit I was moved, until finally I had to point out to my students that it was amazing how the simple act of my assigning a topic for a paper seemed to drive large numbers of otherwise happy and healthy middle-aged women to their deaths. I was careful to make that point during an off week, during which no deaths were reported.

**The Evils of Dorm Life** These stories are usually fairly predictable; they almost always feature the evil roommate or hallmate, with my student in the role of the innocent victim; and can be summed up as follows: My roommate, who is a horrible person, likes to party, and I, who am a good person, cannot concentrate on my work when he or she is partying. Variations include stories about the two people next door who were running around and crying loudly last night because (a) one of them had boyfriend / girlfriend problems; (b) one of them was throwing up blood; or (c) someone, somewhere, died. A friend of mine in graduate school had a student who claimed that his roommate attacked him with a hammer. That, in fact, was a true story; it came out in court when the bad roommate was tried for killing his grandfather.

**The Evils of Technology** The computer age has revolutionized the student story, inspiring almost as many new excuses as it has Internet businesses. Here are just a few electronically enhanced explanations.

- The computer wouldn't let me save my work.
- The printer wouldn't print.
- The printer wouldn't print this disk.
- The printer wouldn't give me time to proofread.
- The printer made a black line run through all my words, and I know you can't read this, but do you still want it, or wait, here, take my disk. File name? I don't know what you mean.
- I swear I attached it.
- It's my roommate's computer, and she usually helps me, but she had to go to the hospital because she was throwing up blood.
- I did write to the newsgroup, but all my messages came back to me.
- I just found out that all my other newsgroup messages came up under a different name. I just want you to know that its really me who wrote all those messages, you can tel which ones our mine because I didnt use the spelcheck! But it was yours truely :) Anyway, just in case you missed those messages or dont belief its my writting. I'll



repeat what I said: I thought the last movie we watched in class was boring.

**The Totally Bizarre** I call the first story “The Pennsylvania Chain Saw Episode.” A commuter student called to explain why she had missed my morning class. She had gotten up early so that she would be wide awake for class. Having a bit of extra time, she walked outside to see her neighbor, who was cutting some wood. She called out to him, and he waved back to her with the saw. Wouldn’t you know it, the safety catch wasn’t on or was broken, and the blade flew right out of the saw and across his lawn and over her fence and across her yard and severed a tendon in her right hand. So she was calling me from the hospital, where she was waiting for surgery. Luckily, she reassured me, she had remembered to bring her paper and a stamped envelope (in a plastic bag, to avoid bloodstains) along with her in the ambulance, and a nurse was mailing everything to me even as we spoke.

That wasn’t her first absence. In fact, this student had missed most of the class meetings, and I had already recommended that she withdraw from the course. Now I suggested again that it might be best if she dropped the class. I didn’t harp on the absences (what if even some of this story were true?). I did mention that she would need time to recuperate and that making up so much missed work might be difficult. “Oh, no,” she said, “I can’t drop this course. I had been planning to go on to medical school and become a surgeon, but since I won’t be able to operate because of my accident, I’ll have to major in English, and this course is more important than ever to me.” She did come to the next class, wearing—as evidence of her recent trauma—a bedraggled Ace bandage on her left hand.

You may be thinking that nothing could top that excuse, but in fact I have one more story, provided by the same student, who sent me a letter to explain why her final assignment would be late. While recuperating from her surgery, she had begun corresponding on the Internet with a man who lived in Germany. After a one-week, whirlwind Web romance, they had agreed to meet in Rome, to rendezvous (her phrase) at the papal Easter Mass. Regrettably, the time of her flight made it impossible for her to attend class, but she trusted that I—just this once—would accept late work if the pope wrote a note.

## Note:

Include in your paper ALL forms of technology: Cell Phones, smart phones, tablets, computers, TVs, Twitter, texting, Facebook, gaming, gambling/betting, sports, dating sites, etc. Do not limit yourself to any one media. They all disrupt or help you reach your goals in one way or another.

## Web

### ON SOCIAL NETWORKING

Now the cliques are moving online. —Kim Komando

Rather than bringing me closer to others, the time that I spend online isolates me from the most important people in my life: my family, my friends, my neighborhood, my community. —Clifford Stoll

There are three kinds of death in this world. There's heart death, there's brain death, and there's being off the network. —Guy Almes

### The Most Annoying Facebookers

In this 2009 article for *CNN.com*, Griggs draws on his personal experience and his sense of humor to call attention to behaviors that are guaranteed to alienate anyone's network of friends.

This Brandon Griggs's web article, "The Most Annoying Facebookers," appeared on *CNN.com* in 2009

*Facebook*, for better or worse, is like being at a big party with all your friends, family, acquaintances, and coworkers. There are lots of fun, interesting people you're happy to talk to when they stroll up. Then there are the other people, the ones who make you cringe when you see them coming. This article is about those people.



Sure, *Facebook* can be a great tool for keeping up with folks who are important to you. Take the status update, the 160-character message that users post in response to the question, “What’s on your mind?” An artful, witty, or newsy status update is a pleasure—a real-time, tiny window into a friend’s life.

But far more posts read like navel-gazing diary entries, or worse, spam. A recent study categorized 40 percent of *Twitter* tweets as “pointless babble,” and it wouldn’t be surprising if updates on *Facebook*, still a fast-growing social network, break down in a similar way.

Combine dull status updates with shameless self-promoters, “friend-padders,” and that friend of a friend who sends you quizzes every day, and *Facebook* becomes a daily reminder of why some people can get on your nerves.

Here are twelve of the most annoying types of *Facebook* users:

**The Let-Me-Tell-You-Every-Detail-of-My-Day Bore.** “I’m waking up.” “I had Wheaties for breakfast.” “I’m bored at work.” “I’m stuck in traffic.” You’re kidding! How fascinating! No moment is too mundane for some people to broadcast unsolicited to the world. Just because you have 432 *Facebook* friends doesn’t mean we all want to know when you’re waiting for the bus.

**The Self-Promoter.** OK, so we’ve probably all posted at least once about some achievement. And sure, maybe your friends really do want to read the fascinating article you wrote about beet farming. But when almost EVERY update is a link to your blog, your poetry reading, your 10k results, or your art show, you sound like a bragger or a self-centered careerist.

**The Friend-Padder.** The average *Facebook* user has 120 friends on the site. Schmoozers and social butterflies—you know, the ones who make lifelong pals on the subway—might reasonably have 300 or 400. But 1,000 “friends”? Unless you’re George Clooney or just won the lottery, no one has that many. That’s just showing off.

**The Town Crier.** “Michael Jackson is dead!!!” You heard it from me first! Me, and the 213,000 other people who all saw it on TMZ. These Matt Drudge<sup>1</sup> wannabes are the reason many of us learn of breaking news not from TV or news sites but from online social networks. In their rush to trumpet the news, these people also spread rumors, half-truths, and innuendo. No, Jeff Goldblum did not plunge to his death from a New Zealand cliff.

**The TMler.** “Brad is heading to Walgreens to buy something for these pesky hemorrhoids.” Boundaries of privacy and decorum don’t

<sup>1</sup> Creator and editor of the *Drudge Report*, an online news and gossip site.



seem to exist for these too-much-information updaters, who unabashedly offer up details about their sex lives, marital troubles, and bodily functions. Thanks for sharing.

**The Bad Grammarian.** “So sad about Fara Fauset but Im so gladd its friday yippe.” Yes, I know the punctuation rules are different in the digital world. And, no, no one likes a spelling-Nazi schoolmarm. But you sound like a moron.

**The Sympathy-Baiter.** “Barbara is feeling sad today.” “Man, am I glad that’s over.” “Jim could really use some good news about now.” Like anglers hunting for fish, these sad sacks cast out their hooks—baited with vague tales of woe—in the hopes of landing concerned responses. Genuine bad news is one thing, but these manipulative posts are just pleas for attention.

**The Lurker.** The Peeping Toms of *Facebook*, these voyeurs are too cautious, or maybe too lazy, to update their status or write on your wall. But once in a while, you’ll be talking to them and they’ll mention something you posted, so you know they’re on your page, hiding in the shadows. It’s just a little creepy.

**The Crank.** These curmudgeons, like the trolls who spew hate in blog comments, never met something they couldn’t complain about. “Carl isn’t really that impressed with idiots who don’t realize how idiotic they are.” (Actual status update.) Keep spreading the love.

**The Paparazzo.** Ever visit your *Facebook* page and discover that someone’s posted a photo of you from last weekend’s party—a photo you didn’t authorize and haven’t even seen? You’d really rather not have to explain to your mom why you were leering like a drunken hyena and French-kissing a bottle of Jagermeister.

**The Obscurist.** “If not now then when?” “You’ll see . . .” “Grist for the mill.” “John is, small world.” “Dave thought he was immune, but no. No, he is not.” (Actual status updates, all.) Sorry, but you’re not being mysterious—just nonsensical.

**The Chronic Inviter.** “Support my cause.” “Sign my petition.” “Play Mafia Wars with me.” “Which ‘Star Trek’ character are you?” “Here are the ‘Top 5 cars I have personally owned.’” “Here are ‘25 Things about Me.’” “Here’s a drink.” “What drink are you?” “We’re related!” “I took the ‘What President Are You?’ quiz and found out I’m Millard Fillmore! What president are you?”

You probably mean well, but stop. Just stop. I don’t care what president I am—can’t we simply be friends? Now excuse me while I go post the link to this story on my *Facebook* page.