

## Love Between Friends

By Eric Gutierrez

When it comes to love, most people think they have it figured out. The immediate thought that comes to mind whenever that infamous four-letter word is mentioned is that of romance or passion. But as the connotation for love is wholly correct in terms of reflecting part of its denotation, the popular meaning oftentimes does little justice for its broader significance. As eloquently stated by Martin Luther King Jr. in his "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence," love is best represented in the forms *eros*, *philia*, and *agape*, representing, respectively, romantic love, a reciprocal love between friends, and an unconditional love for all mankind. The society we inhabit acknowledges *eros*; that fact is not in dispute. Can it be possible, though, to expand the popular idea of love to include love for our family, for our friends, or even complete strangers? The love represented by *agape* is a love all should strive to feel, but before achieving such an ideal, it is necessary to begin with and understand *philia*. As a person matures and ages, it is absolutely necessary for them to discover that friend who embodies their inner voice—a friend who can be their complete equivalent or delightful opposite and still be the perfect complement to share in the joys of life.

I have known Andrew ever since elementary school, but it was not until freshmen year of high school that we really became friends. I sat in front of him in algebra class, and periodically I would turn around and talk to him, at first adhering strictly to math-related banter but steadily growing to include conversations about life and the typical dramas associated with being a freshman. As we started "hanging out" outside of school, I knew that this particular friend was special because he not only listened but also proved he could be there in times of need. One time

I almost panicked about not understanding a book for English, and he, calm as always over the phone, jokingly insisted that the teacher was probably just as clueless to its meaning as I was. I laughed and instantly felt better.

My studies then always came before anything else, but Andrew continually insisted that I strive for a social life—if not in the interest of having fun, then at least in the interest of health, for, as I was told, we are not machines. I had always wanted to go to college (although to study what I had no idea), and I urged him to go too. He always believed in me and encouraged my ambition, my willingness to get away from our comfortable lifestyle back home and venture into a new world ripe with opportunity. But when it came to the idea of him going to college, though, initially he neither affirmed nor denied the possibility but simply nodded at the idea, not ready to dismiss the notion altogether but intimating a fear that he might not be able to make it in college. During his senior year, after improving his grades substantially, he became ecstatic at the reality of going to college. He thanked me for believing in him. I thought then that being a good friend meant having fun together and being concerned for one another. I was correct, although my understanding of friendship then was still too vague and muddled with the idea of simply “being there for somebody else.” It took a road trip to solidify the meaning of love amongst friends.

The summer after high school gradation was a fun-filled time, but like most good things it too would soon be over, for college—and the return of responsibility—loomed weeks away. Andrew was still in the process of deciding which university to attend, and among his top colleges was Vincennes University. In early August he planned to travel down with his mom to Vincennes, Indiana, for the school’s orientation. The night before, though, he called me to say that his mom could not make it, and that he would drive there by himself in the morning.

Without hesitation, I told him I would come along. The long drive could be dangerous for an inexperienced driver, and besides, it was bound to be fun for both of us.

Upon arrival at the university, the "Orientation Ambassadors," as they were called, gave all the prospective students and their parents a tour of the campus. The campus was bigger than I imagined, but I guess ninety-five degree heat will make any distance seem disproportionately huge. They then led us to a room inside the Student Union where they would be conducting a financial aid and housing session. We took our seats in the air-conditioned room, but, as we were informed before the start of the first session, all incoming students needed to leave and take placement examinations in another room. He felt angry about having to miss the information session, but I reassured him, telling him I would be there to listen and take notes. As Andrew walked out of the session room, I felt glad to have accompanied him on this trip so as to be present to hear all the pertinent financial aid and housing information required for a smooth transition into college.

The day progressed smoothly and with much enjoyment. After the college visit, we decided to explore the local historical sites dating back to the times of George Rogers Clark and the Revolutionary War. We took pictures with our camera-phones, and we would have stayed longer except for wild ravenous dogs that followed us around for awhile and then chased us all the way back to our car. Out of breath, we hurried inside the vehicle and locked our doors. We were glad to be away from danger just then, but as we look back on that experience, we cannot help but laugh at our insistence on locking the doors, supposing, I guess, that animals with no opposable thumbs could somehow manage to get in.

On the way home, as the radio played and my hand flew along the currents of air swooshing past the car window, I finally realized what Dr. King had really meant by *philia*. Love

for your friend is primarily the manifestation of unwavering optimism. It is not based on the notion of "cannot" or "may not" but is grounded wholly in possibility and the strength of the human will. I did not continue spewing the message of inferiority that Andrew had been exposed to. Instead I reassured him that he could do whatever he wanted with his life, just as he had always remained positive as to what I could accomplish. Love also commands a moral sense of duty, for hesitation and deliberation on the part of one friend often indicates an unwillingness to help the other in times of need. When Andrew needed someone to accompany him on a dangerous road trip in the middle of the night, I was there for him, just as he had always been there for me. Love also permits an exchange of paternal duties between friends. Like a parent watching over and helping a young one, one friend may be more knowledgeable in an area of life and should be inclined to help the other achieve the same measure of experience. Because I had gone through the college orientation process a month earlier, I knew exactly what to expect and what pertinent information needed to be exchanged between him and the university. That is not to say that one friend always assumes the role of the "parent," as there have been many times when Andrew has helped me, as with becoming a more social person.

These dimensions of *philia* are all very important, but probably the simplest and most valuable cornerstone is having lots of fun together. There were so many times on that trip that we laughed hysterically, oftentimes for no good reason at all. It is this mutual enjoyment that facilitates a deep, personal connection between two people. Despite the hard times, the fun and enjoyment had are what perpetuate love eternally.

There is one other aspect of love that should well be noted. Despite the fact that love between friends represents a reciprocal love, where one friend expects the same love from the other, *philia*, like the other types of love listed above, is not dependent on external ends but is

rather a means to more love. To love someone for a proposed end is not to love at all. I love my best friend, and if he is indeed my best friend, he will love me in return. I neither associate with him nor call him my best friend in order to be perceived as popular or to be benefited by his generosity or to achieve some other shallow end. Love should be had for the sake of having it. With the broader picture in view, grasping this fundamental characteristic of love will allow an individual to comprehend Dr. King's third and most ideal form of love—*agape*, or the love for all mankind. If we expand the idea of *philia* to include strangers for whom we are willing to be optimistic, morally dutiful, educative, and pleasant towards, then a genuine love for mankind can surely be attained.

#### Works Cited

King, Martin Luther, Jr. "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence." *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story*. New York. HarperCollins, 1958. 90-107.