

FINDING CONNECTIONS

For me, New York is home. That feeling goes beyond the familiarity of the chaotic streets and knowledge of local places. We go there often, but a recent trip clarified the feeling of lifetime relationships that are there.

My niece got married and in a room of 250 people, I shared a special intimacy with a few people in the room. The familial relationships that are cherished go beyond "relatives"—they are my friends. We travel to New York often, but for some reason, on this trip, I viewed those relationships with an enhanced appreciation. We continue to "grow" more each day, and this trip involved a family wedding, my father's unveiling, and special time spent with family and friends.

My nieces, both sisters (the bride and the maid of honor) chose to wear some jewelry of mine. It wasn't just about the fact that they liked them, but they shared a history with me that was more than special. The bride got married in my grandmother's wedding band. My grandmother was my lifeline and role model. Her sister wore jewelry that was given to me by my husband.

Rita and I grew up as siblings. I spent many hours with her and her mother, Rozzi, and no matter how old we become, nothing has changed. We have a bond like no other. We bicker as though we are still to and can almost read each other's minds. It's not competitive. It's really a mutual demand that we need to be the best we can be. It happens when we don't share the same opinions on what the "best" is.

Rozzi watches us and is a wonderful bystander in this relationship, since she always agrees with me. She continues to be an influence in my life, as she was when we were younger.

Donna is my confidant. We share our feelings and thoughts safely and unconditionally. She is my "go-to person." We also have a unique way of trying to help each other resolve any inner conflicts.

While in New York, my husband and I spent an afternoon with long-standing friends. One couple we hadn't seen in years. We all picked

up right where we left off. It was a comforting and wonderful time.

Jacinta helped us raise our children. She knows every family "secret" of our nuclear and extended family. She participated in our joys and sorrows, as we have with her family. She also offered many opinions and guidance. We speak every three weeks and see each other every time we are in New York.

Technology is great. There now is a three-hour time difference but we can maintain close contact by email and texting. I only wish they would all learn how to use Skype!

As we left our old home "Back East" and returned to our newer home in the West, I realized how lucky I am to experience newer connections with similarities of my longer-established history. I have the comfort of the familiarity of the East, and the ability to be in a position to establish new friendships in Arizona. This move opened a new focus of learning for me. I learned new ways of connecting with people who had a more diverse background than where I came from. Their familial backgrounds, life experiences and socio-economics are different than mine. When people have similar backgrounds, it is easier to relate to them in one way or another. People who come from diverse backgrounds take more work, tolerance and understanding. You just have to care enough about that person to provide the support and loyalty of friendship in both good and difficult times.

All relationships, both long-standing and more recent, teach us something new about others and ourselves each day. The lesson here in "relating" is that it is very important to stay and feel "connected."

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