

## The Value of Female Friendships

The aroma of bread in the oven and sound of cards being shuffled against the table is a scene I can recall in the blink of an eye. Though the memories from my childhood mostly appear in a television-like fuzz in my mind, these I can see almost clear as day. I was approximately 7 years old when I began to become included in my family's card games. Whether it was a holiday or a lazy Sunday afternoon, playing cards was always the form of bonding my family preferred. First it was Spoons, then War, then Texas Hold 'Em, Gin Rummy, the list goes on. Our favored game of choice, however, was Nertz. Though often called different variations of names, Nertz is a fast paced game, played by singles or doubles, full of chaos and excitement.

I would most often play on a team with my aunt Kim. My older sister with my grandma Kaye. And my mom either alone or with my great aunt Kathy. We kept score on a crumpled up yellow pad of paper often with random scribbles throughout. The score was not the point to us, but everyone's competitive spirit arose nonetheless. You could commonly find us arguing points, blaming our partner for not paying enough attention, but most often hunching over the table in laughter when my aunt would crack an inappropriate joke. Or when my grandma would drop a card.

The game itself became second nature to us. We were quick with our hands and our eyes, but even quicker with our mouths. We chatted about everything under the sun. How is school going girls? What books are you ladies reading right now? How is it with your boss? (This one usually includes an eye roll). Did you see XYZ on the news this morning? It was a time for games, but it was also a time to catch up on anything and everything we had missed in each other's weeks.

As I've grown older, the days of sitting and playing Nertz with one another have remained constant. I look forward to these moments when I return home each school break, and I value them more and more as I see my family members growing older. The companionship and togetherness I felt in those moments have shaped me and my life experiences as a woman.

My family, like many others, is held together by the women within it. Myself, my mother, her mother, and her mother before that were all raised by a small village of women. My great grandmother, Eleanor, was tasked with the difficult feat of raising 7 children single handedly on a waitresses salary. She was known for being commanding, (who could possibly raise 7 children on their own without being commanding?) yet compassionate. Her fourth child, my grandma Kaye, then raised 2 young daughters on her own after the passing of her husband, my grandfather. Due to these extenuating circumstances, the women in my family became the head of their households.

Having a matriarch of the family cemented ideas into my being of how valuable the connection between women can be. These women were able to work full-time, cook, clean, and take care of their children. But what stunned me was that's not all they were able to do. They were able to live, learn, have experiences, be creative, all while building family traditions like card playing throughout it all. My aunt and grandmother were central points in my life, living blocks away from my home and coming over every Monday night to cook dinner for us. The aromas that filled the house as I came home from school assured me of what I already knew. That they

would be there for me when I needed it most, and that there was always a place to go if I ever got hungry.

As a kid, I found myself enthralled with the way my family operated. I cared about whatever these women cared about. I was often called an “old soul” because of my inquisitiveness. If they were discussing a book, I wanted to know what it was about, no matter how out of my reading level it was. And they entertained it. They treated me not like an adult, but like a person who truly had something to add to the conversation. I saw levels of compassion and understanding that I didn't know were possible. It was not simply because they were blood related, but because they understood what it was to be a woman.

My mom, aunt, and grandma clearly understood this far before my sister and I. They warned us about the troubles of this world, guided us through our first turbulent friendships, and comforted us during our first broken hearts. They understood us in ways no other could, and my sister and I were blessed to be surrounded by women who nurtured our deepest passions. As I grow older, I see the ways in which their support of us has transformed the female friendships I have today.

Since the dawn of time, or at least since I made my girl “bff” in preschool, female friendships have been a complex entity to me. I can candidly say they have given me the most meaningful relationships up to date, but they have not always been smooth sailing. Society has placed women in competition with one another and at times made it difficult for these friendships to be possible. However, my close relationships with women have shown me that female friendship is not something to burden, but something which adds to one’s life in paramounds.

My first day of freshman year of high school, I met the girl who would shift my perspective on said friendships. She was bubbly and blonde and the most talkative person I had ever met.

Talking to her felt as if I needed a triple espresso to keep up, but I was relieved that someone seemed so excited to talk to me. Years later, I am still maintaining my caffeine habit in order to keep up with her. She opened up the idea to me of what a girl friend could be. Someone to listen to, confide in, stay up all night with. Someone who just appreciates who you are, no ifs ands or buts about it.

I have always, and will always be a “girl’s girl”. This phrase is one I have recently been hearing pop up more often in the media and one I would venture to say describes the phenomenon perfectly. Being a “girl’s girl” means you live for the women in your life. You relate to them and cherish them and feel understood by them. Obviously this does not mean you get along with every single female, but rather there is a basic level of respect for them as people. The emergence of this term is one that I had been searching for. Being raised by females, I found myself connecting with girls instantly in my youth rather than boys. I did not understand why boys did certain things or why my girl friends felt the need to cater to them in certain ways. I see now why people act the way they did, and I don’t judge them for it, as I myself was a perpetrator of catering to society’s gaze. I have now come to understand, however, that female friendships can become so much more than constant competition.

It is because of the way I was raised that I am able to see how much female friendship has added to my life. From the card games with my family, to coffee with my friends, I have learned the

value of what I can give to other women and what they have given to me. To me, the queen is the most important in the deck.