

relationships

YOU DON'T MAKE OLD FRIENDS

I didn't realize how hard it was to meet new people until I had to try

by John Stark | Sunday, November 24, 2013

When I made the decision to move from Boston to Minneapolis three years ago, my friends and neighbors wished me well. But not JoAnn: “What *are* you thinking?” she asked me. Old friends tend to be blunt.

I told her I was offered a good paying job there. Money aside, I figured life in the Twin Cities would be easier. No more climbing three flights of stairs to my condo, or fighting for parking spaces. I didn't tell her that I was also thinking Minneapolis might be a great place for me to retire. There's plenty of culture — lots of museums, theater and concerts.

True, winters are size XXX, but you can't have everything. Besides, Minnesotans love to ice skate, snowshoe and cross-country ski. I wouldn't have to worry about not getting enough exercise.

As much as I hated leaving my old friends, I figured I'd make new ones.

I rented a beautiful house with a huge fireplace in a Minneapolis suburb — perfect for entertaining. Comfort was easy to come by — just not friends.

JoAnn's words haunted me. What *was* I thinking?

I knew what I was thinking now: I missed my old friends. I didn't realize how hard it is to meet people when you're older. You're not going to bars and trendy, late-night restaurants. The older I get, the more I like spending nights at home. You don't meet many people in your living room.

Everyone I met at work was deeply involved in his or her own life. As much as they liked me, they didn't have room for me.

The friends I did acquire didn't share my adventures and experiences, which made conversations difficult to sustain. I got tired of trying to explain the “who, what, where, why and when” of my past life. There's a rule in screenwriting that too much exposition bogs down the plot and kills the story. The bored looks on my new friends' faces told me I need to shut up.

I missed inside jokes, which only old friends get.



As the new Kenny Rogers' song says, "You don't make old friends."

When I found out last spring that my employer was going to lay everyone off in September, I decided to move back to Boston.

If I was going to be unemployed, I wanted to be among old friends.

Thank God, I didn't sell my Boston condo. I rented it out. I told my tenants they'd have to leave. I was coming home.

I've been back in Boston for three months now. I've hardly spent a night or weekend by myself. It's not because I've ramped up my social life or bought season tickets to anything. It's that I'm among old friends.

It's old friends that you hang out with. Hanging out can mean doing nothing. You can't do "nothing" with people you hardly know or just met. You need plans. You can't ring their doorbells unannounced. You can't be rude to them or they'll never come back. But old friends do.

The other day I had breakfast with JoAnn at a local diner. When I told her how glad I was to be back, she repeated the question she'd asked me three years ago, only in the past tense: "What *were* you thinking?"

"I don't know," I said, "but I think we should order."

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