

Letter No. 3

It is said that two people bring something different to a marriage. In our case, very dissimilar record and book collections; however one album repeatedly played was Carole King's *Tapestry* and the resonant track ***You've Got a Friend*** has become an anthem across the years of our marriage. Friendship. Uniquely we were childhood friends, not suspecting that in our late teens, romance would insinuate itself, making a permanent if somewhat rickety lodging, before cementing in a swift post-graduate wedding.

Now looking back over thirty-two years of marriage, we can track a friendship which has thankfully, strengthened and secured. Seamus Heaney captures perfectly our experience in his poem *Scaffolding* where he states:

***So if my dear, there sometimes seem to be
Old bridges breaking between you and me
Never fear. We may let the scaffolds fall
Confident that we have build our wall.***

...and confident we are. In spite of, and sometimes because of the difficulties: career paths, financial constraints, illness, disputes, expectations; our connectedness has deepened. In exploring the contours of life's friendship together, love in all its guises and forms, is at the heart of our marriage. A robust, self-giving, committed love, softened at the edges by enduring romance, under-pinned by an understanding of a sovereign God who guides, corrects, sorts, overrides, assists and graciously forgives. Ultimately, it is He who inspires our confidence.

In the Biblical book of Ecclesiastes, the writer suggests that two are better than one noting, that if one falls down, the friend can help him up, undoubtedly one of the benefits of close friendship. At the end of this section, the author enigmatically writes: ***A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.*** The third strand in our marriage is God; a God who has been and continues to be with us. We believe that marriage is God's idea and his purpose for our lives. The cord of his love has countered the stresses from within and outside of our life together. To paraphrase the song, when we've been down and troubled and no-one seems to care, God through his amazing capacity to love and engender love, has brightened up even our darkest night. Together with God, our lives have been deeply blessed by marriage.

Ferran and Jean