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Friendship is a Ling Voyage

Chinese manufacturers often produce some of the most delightful misspellings in the English language. Sometimes the error is deliberate; other times it is unintentional. Copyright laws try to prevent companies from duplicating the logos of well-known brands. But slick marketers get around these restrictions by closely copying a product's design while changing a single letter of its name. This is especially effective among non-English-speaking consumers.

Take for example the toothpaste "Crest," which is advertised to fight plaque and remove tartar buildup on tooth enamel. Imagine my glee when I strolled through an African marketplace and spotted boxes of toothpaste that looked just like the ones back home in America. But wait—something was different—the name of this toothpaste was *Crust*.

On another shopping excursion, I perused notebooks aimed at hip schoolgirls. One cover featured a modest Muslim Barbie dressed in a long black hijab and head covering. That in itself was a head-turner. But even more interesting was the sappy truism printed alongside the doll. No doubt it was intended to say, "Friendship is a *Long* Voyage." Instead, it read, "Friendship is a *Ling* Voyage." I liked it!

The word *ling* has a lovely lyrical quality. It rhymes with other melodious words like *ring*, *sing*, *ding*, *ping*, and of course, *bling*. A friendship is like a beautiful song with many stanzas and a familiar chorus. I picture New Year's Eve revelers singing "Auld Lang Syne" aboard a luxury liner under the stars. The words to this song, written by the Scottish poet Robert Burns, tell of two friends catching up for the sake of old times or "old long since," as the title is rendered in English.

I associate the word *voyage* with a long old-fashioned journey across an ocean. A contemporary commuter flight from one U.S. city to another is not a voyage; it's a quick jaunt. A voyage requires taking time, promenading along the upper deck, playing shuffleboard with fellow passengers, reading two-inch thick novels in a wooden deck chair, dining at the captain's table, traversing troubled waters, heaving over the railing, surviving cabin fever, and docking amid welcoming cheers. The point of a voyage is not simply to *get somewhere*; the point is to savor the passage itself. Reading a good story is much the same.

A close friendship doesn't feel like a long voyage; it feels like a *ling* voyage. I can reunite with old friends after years apart, and it feels like no time has passed: we can pick up right where we left off. Building a friendship, of course, takes time, but there is a certain timelessness about it.

I recently enjoyed a week in Virginia that I call "Girlfriend Week." While Mark continued to work in North Carolina, I stayed in Bristol and saw as many friends as I could. On one hand, it is hard to squeeze a bazillion visits into a few short days. On the other hand, having time constraints forced me to be deliberate about scheduling breakfasts, coffees, lunches, and dinners.



When you live in the same place year-round, you don't always get around to seeing the people you can see any ole time. After all, maintaining a relationship is not an urgent task that demands your immediate attention. But while many activities seem urgent, only a few are essential—like making friends or brushing your teeth. So, pull out your calendar and pencil in some names. Take a ling voyage. Don't settle for a crust when you can have the crest.



My friend Laura is a retired physical therapist. She is the perfect person to help me to do hard things like clean out my storage unit in small, incremental steps. Slowly, but surely, we are making progress. Decluttering is not so much a physical process as it is an emotional and psychological one.



Sue shared with me the colorful oasis she has created in her backyard. I am inspired that with a few cans of spray paint, I too can liven up my world.



I have shared much laughter and a few tears with Kathy and Janet over the years. I hope they get a kick out of how I neatly cropped my thick thighs out of the photo.



Judy was a dear friend of my late mother. I love to drink her homemade iced tea and reminisce about "June Bug."



One of our pastors used to joke that Leann has been teaching the kindergarten Sunday school class since she was in kindergarten. Leann now has the preschoolers. They bring a whole new—and hilarious—meaning to the word "unfiltered." Ah, the stories she could tell....



Anna serves as Director of Women's Ministry at my home church in Abingdon. By both her words and her example, she motivates me to love Jesus more.



When I have a day free, Sandy and I like to make stuff or visit thrift stores, where treasures abound. But since my time was short, we just shared breakfast. I love how Sandy sees beauty in small things and finds joy in tiny moments.



Deanna shares my enthusiasm for parties. Yay! She is a gifted artist who has painted banners for my special events, helped me make fun table decorations, and even styled my hair for celebrations. This year she painted me a picture of a frog—an image dear to my heart, as my Christmas letter readers will understand.



I am incredibly proud of Amanda and the wonderful mother she is to her four children. Whenever she shares something fun her kids are learning, I say to myself, "I wanna be in her classroom!"



Here are Amanda's children and two small friends (whom I shall leave unnamed since we live in a crazy world). They gave me a tea party with apple juice, zucchini muffins, and unicorn cakes. Everything tastes better when seasoned with a child's enthusiasm.



Julia, I believe, could become a stand-up comedian. The way she tells stories about everyday life makes me hoot. One of my favorites is about the sculpted fabric nativity set that her mom gave her son Ben when he was a boy. Just before her mother was to visit, Julia noticed that the baby Jesus was missing from the nativity set. Oh, no! She looked everywhere and asked Ben if he had moved it. No, Ben, had no idea where it was. Julia knew her mother would be upset if the most important member of the nativity set were missing. But sadly, Baby Jesus had vanished. A day later, Julia let their dog Emma out in the yard for her "constitutional." Surprise! Baby Jesus emerged after a harrowing journey through Emma's digestive track. That's when Julia called me to see what she could use to clean....



Brenda is a retired English teacher, so I look forward to telling her all about my adventures at our English center in Africa. Joy is not complete until it is shared! Brenda listens and recounts her own experiences in the classroom. I have learned much from her. She encourages and cheers me on to success.



Over the years, **Terri** and I have often lunched at Olive Garden and shared life—the good, the bad, and the hilarious. She often encourages me in my writing endeavors and always blesses me with her wisdom.



Sandra and I first met as neighbors and instantly hit it off. She is one of my musically-gifted friends. She plays the Celtic harp and sings beautifully. I also like that she dresses up in costumes for the festivals and events where she performs. She's a star!



Abingdon Bible Church, my home church, allows me to decorate for our annual **Ladies Summer Brunch**. This year's theme was cacti and the desert. We had a sweet time. Our speaker was a fellow church member, Dana. She shared her experience with cancer and how she spent a total of 50 weeks in the hospital. At the time, she still had preschoolers at home. Dana told how God gave her peace and provided for her and her family's needs. Our church set up a meal train and fed her family for a year and a half! Other members, who owned a laundromat, collected her family's dirty clothes and washed, folded, and returned them every week for a year and a half—for free. They even folded the boys' little Spider Man underwear, Dana recounted. Having a loving church family is like stepping into a warm bath on a cold winter's day.



I enjoy having friends of all ages. Elaina is the daughter of my pastor and his wife. She is interested in doing the kind of work Mark and I do, so we have much to discuss. I am impressed by Elaina's spiritual maturity and her servant heart.



I credit Daryl Ann with giving me the encouragement I needed to finish the first draft of my book. She helped me come up with the idea for this "Just About Anything" blog. And she reads everything I write and gives me feedback and suggestions for improvement. Daryl Ann has a beautiful creative spirit. She comes up with such interesting connections that I like to take notes during our delightful conversations.



Stacy, Katherine, and Anna have blessed us the past few years by taking care of our cars while we are in Africa. They have also hosted us in their home for some delicious meals. This year they made homemade pizzas. My favorite was the barbecue pizza with barbecue sauce. I have to stock up on those pork delicacies while I'm still in the States. Muslims, like Jews, don't consume any pig products.



Beth and I have been friends since high school, and we share a lot of history. Together, we've run student government meetings, organized dances and parades, traveled, celebrated slumber parties, birthday parties, graduations, and weddings. We grew up knowing one another's families. And happily, Beth is now rooted in North Carolina, so she doesn't mind driving over to see me.



My dear college friend Thea invited me to take a road trip with her this summer. We share the same sense of humor, which has turned several misadventures into delightful experiences. In the next issue of "Just About Anything," I will begin a series of articles about the quirky sights we saw in our "Only in America" Tour through Texas and New Mexico. Stay tuned....