

A man in a dark suit and light blue jeans is crouching on a sandy beach at sunset. He is holding a book in his hands and looking towards the ocean. The waves are breaking gently on the shore, and the sky is a mix of blue and orange. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

# MAKING *Friends* with CANDY

BY JIM CLARK

I know the title of this article may bring different connotations to mind. Some of the connotations may even seem creepy, but I'm not referring to enticing someone into something through the use of sweets as a lure. But let's break the statement down. *To make friends with* means "to establish a friendship or friendly relations with," and that's simple enough. My dictionary defines a *friend* as "a person whom one knows and with whom one has a bond of mutual affection, typically exclusive of sexual or family relations." Growing up, most of us had friends, and now with modern technology, we can make friends all over the world and communicate them with breakneck speed—many of whom we may never actually meet in person. Lastly, *Candy* is a person's nickname—or even her real name.

Put all of these things together and you have it—the title of my first book, *Making Friends with Candy*. In it, I write my memoirs of making friends with a girl named Candy and her journal of life and love. This is my personal story of an online connection made through Facebook, the social network. Okay, that can sound scary, or even creepy. Meeting people, making friends, and having relationships online can be good or bad. Mostly, I've heard of bad experiences from people looking for companionship through dating sites. Those people said all was good until they found out that the picture of the person they were talking with had been taken twenty-five years earlier. Strange? Yes, it is! There are dating sites advertised for people who have been looking for love in all the wrong places. Those "wrong places" usually involve drinking or they're someone else's idea of the "best" places to meet someone. I'm not afraid to tell you that I have even checked out some dating sites myself. I was curious and wanted to see if it was a good thing for a friend of mine to be doing. Sure, you're thinking I'm the "friend," but in this case it was not I who was actually looking—really! I am still one of the singles out there, even though my friends think I am crazy.

Well, my story is a bit different. Without telling you the whole story, I'll give you a taste of it. First, let's start with this guy—me, Jim Clark. Who is he and why is he telling me about this? If you have lived in the Destin area for the past thirty or more years, you have most likely met me or at least seen me around town. I have been involved with the Emerald Coast Advertising Federation, the Chamber of Commerce, and many other organizations. I have lived through the ups and downs of living in a tourist town: hurricanes, oil spills, and, currently, a bad economy. I have struggled through personal, family, and business issues, and I am still trying to work my way back to where I want to be. My parents live in Northwest Florida, and other family members are sprinkled all over. I'm not sure how to describe myself, but a friend of mine once wrote this about me: "Identified as a dreamer, a romantic, and a creative genius by many, Jim holds a passion for technology and for helping others any way he can. He's also been called 'crazy,'

“Without a  
*wonderful* ending,  
the *beginning* means nothing.  
Thank you for all things  
*Wonderful* xo”

‘weird,’ and even ‘strange’ by those who haven’t had the pleasure of meeting him. If you get the chance, get to know him and make up your own mind. I’m sure you’ll find out you have a friend for life ...”

Okay, back to the story. I was on Facebook again. I’ve been told that you can reach me faster online than by calling me on the phone. A year ago, I noticed a photo of a cute girl with a hat who was commenting on the status of one of my friends. I hit the “Add Friend” button to give myself the chance of meeting someone new. Her name was Candy. I continued working online while talking to other friends through the chat area.

A couple of weeks went by and I forgot about the friend request. Then, out of nowhere, I noticed a post on my Facebook Wall (the area where your status is posted). It was a comment from Candy concerning going to another round of chemo treatments. I hadn’t even said “Hi” to this girl and I already wanted to find a way to help her in her time of need. I decided to send a message asking her to let me know if I could help her with anything. In the back of my mind, I knew I didn’t have the resources available to help very much, but I still wanted to try. She said, “Thank you.”

Now that we had made a connection, I was curious and wanted to know more about my new Facebook friend, Candy. The next day, I sent her a message and asked how she was doing. We began talking and finding out more about each other. I learned very quickly that we had similar interests: music, food, and nature; and that both of us were sarcastic and

playful—in other words, we were both smart alecks. I discovered she was a Southern girl, and my dad’s family is from Alabama—yup, that’s the South, ya’ll. We talked about family and the stuff in our daily lives, and, just like that, we became friends. In one of our conversations, Candy opened up to me about her insane times before being diagnosed with cancer.

The book is filled with my photos, our Facebook posts, and some of our e-mails, and the last chapter includes Candy’s journal, which she sent to me a week prior to losing her battle with cancer. The journal inspired me even more to write and share this story with others.

I’m sure you are asking yourself why I wrote the book. Well, it’s like this: I wrote it to keep her in my life a little bit longer even though she had left this earth. It may have been my way of having closure after losing a friend to whom I had become very close. We talked to each other almost every day, and now that part of my day was missing, I had never written a book before; but I told her that I would do it, so I was committed. Also, shortly after Candy passed, business was still very slow, and now one of my motivators was not there to help keep me going. I started doing research on writing and self-publishing. I followed this with gathering all my e-mails, Facebook messages, and thoughts together while still fresh in my head. It was a lot of stuff for just a three-and-a-half-month time period.

You may think this stuff is too personal. Yes, it is very personal, but when you have something you really like, you should share it with others. We all tell our friends about the good times we have had on vacation, a great concert or art show we attended, and even times spent hanging out with family. We talk about our family members who have passed on to keep them in our thoughts; at least, I do, and you probably do too. My grandfather on my mom’s side played a mean accordion, and my grandmother on my dad’s side cooked up some great Southern food when I was younger—I’ll never forget them. Take a second and think about your family and a smile should come to your face.

People ask me: “Did Candy know you were going to write the book?” Yes, she did. We talked about it and she asked, “Why would anyone want to read about a broken-up girl like me?” I said that it wasn’t just about her—that it was about us. She laughed, and I said that her life would make a crazy movie. She said, “It’s not like I am going to be able to stop you when I am gone.” I laughed and told her to save me a seat next to her in heaven, and she replied, “You got it!”

Why did I get involved with her? This is what I wrote in the book: “My commitment to do what that voice in my head, as well as my heart, said was the right thing to do.” That “voice” has to be my conscience, my “heart” is the love for another being, and “the right thing” would be how I would want to be treated if I was in the same situation. Sure, it is hard to make a friend and become close when the person is going through tough times. But this situation was beyond just tough times. I guess I’m stubborn like that—thanks, Dad. Candy knew she wasn’t going to be living much longer. She needed a friend. No, she needed many friends at this time. I was just lucky to be one of a few close friends she told.

#### CANDY WRITES ENCOURAGING WORDS:

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I will remain in the sands on the beach.

I will be in the tide that runs to the shore  
and tickle the toes of my friends.

I will be in the soft gentle rain that kisses the  
cheeks of those I love and there with them I  
will dance and laugh.

I will be the butterfly who shows up unan-  
nounced to bring a smile on fluttering wings.

I will be in the seashells by the shore to be  
held and adored.

EXCERPT FROM “MAKING FRIENDS WITH CANDY”, JOURNAL ENTRIES PUBLISHED IN THE LAST CHAPTER OF THE BOOK.

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I will kiss the face of Jesus then bow at his feet. I will thank my Heavenly Father for his love, his love, his mercy, his grace.

No more will I be lonely or sad. No more will I be in pain. My heart will be finally free to dance among the stars. My soul for once can rejoice and be at peace. I'm letting go of my yesterday and all of their misery. I'm holding on to my eternity and it's joy.

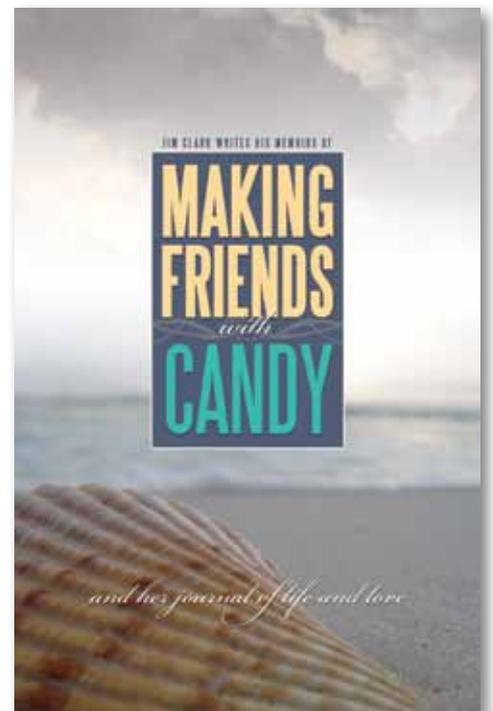
I have been loved. I have been cherished. I will go on in the hearts of those who love me.

Now I'm sure you're wondering what I got from the relationship. I was not really looking for anything other than to get to know her. I didn't have any expectations. When you find someone who has similar interests to yours, it feels a little like you are looking at yourself in the mirror. I spent many hours trying to figure out how to do something to help. I am not a doctor—I didn't have a cure for her illness. All I had at that time was the ability to talk, to joke around, to spend all day and night with her online. I would go take pictures of the beach for her while she was at the doctor's office having treatments and then post them online for her to see. It was my way of giving her something she loved but couldn't have because of the side effects of the drugs. One of Candy's friends told me to keep doing whatever I was doing because it was working. She also said that Candy's mood was better when she was talking to me and that she wanted to keep fighting to see another day. As for me, Candy helped my days go by when business was slow and I was looking for new work. She was one of my best friends during my “blah” time.

Would I do it again? Sure, I would! Everyone can use a few more friends, even if they are only friends for a short time. Don't be afraid to meet someone new. I am a shy guy, but when I decided to start living for myself and stop worrying about what people think about me, things changed. I still make mistakes, but today I

am saying, “I'm broke 'n' happy,” and that sure beats just being broke any day. Plus, all of us need help at different times in our lives, even the stubborn ones who don't want to ask for it. People tell me that it's a sad story. To that I say, “I wouldn't trade my experience for anything in the world.” If you are ever blessed like I was, I know you will understand what I felt as well. Plus, if you want another friend on Facebook, just add me: [www.facebook.com/Ad3.org](http://www.facebook.com/Ad3.org) and introduce yourself.

So the next time you hear the saying “Making friends with candy,” I hope you think of the strong-willed, independent, beautiful, “broken-up girl” that I had the pleasure of knowing. And, I hope, too, that thinking about her persuades you to use your head and your heart to do the right thing for someone—anyone—that needs your help. The little things you do may end up being the last thing someone remembers. You could bring that person love and happiness. ▀



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Order book online at [www.makingfriendswithcandy.com](http://www.makingfriendswithcandy.com)