

Aquarius: Friendship

“How come you spend so much time with that guy?” asked Gary.

“Because I like spending time with him, and I’m learning a lot from him, and I’m interested in the things he’s working on. Mainly because we’re friends, I guess,” answered Kevin, who was used to his classmates’ often rather scornful comments about his friendly relationship with Dr. Patterson.

“But isn’t it a drag palling around all the time with such an old man?” continued Gary.

“In the first place, he’s not all that old,” retorted Kevin. “Forty-two isn’t exactly senile. And I don’t ‘pal around with him all the time.’ I do plenty of stuff with you guys, and I spend my days at school, as you well know. It just so happens that I enjoy his company, and he enjoys mine — maybe because he has no kids of his own — and I do things with him like I would with any other friend.”

“You mean you really dug going to that science convention with him last week, and listening to those long-hairs read papers or whatever they did?”

“Yes, and you’d be surprised at what I learned from those ‘long-hairs.’ Dr. Patterson introduced me to some very famous scientists, and hearing them talk at dinner was an eye-opener. I think because I’m interested in nuclear physics is one big reason why Dr. Patterson and I are friends. Friendship usually means that you have something in common with the other person, doesn’t it?”

“Yeh, sure,” conceded Gary, “but I still don’t get how you can have that much in common with somebody who’s as old as your father.”

“And I don’t get why you keep dragging age into

it," said Kevin. "You're sixteen, and you don't exactly have much to do with kids only two years younger. But there are some people all of ten years older who you look up to as idols, right?"

"Aw, that's different," muttered Gary. "I wouldn't look up to anyone forty-two years old as an idol, and I sure wouldn't have a friend that old!" Gary stalked off, and Kevin shrugged his shoulders resignedly.

"You're mighty quiet today, Kevin," said Dr. Patterson several days later, as Kevin perched on a stool in the doctor's laboratory observing his latest experiment. "Something bothering you?"

"Well — you don't think there's anything wrong with being friends with somebody who's years older than you, do you?" Kevin looked up quizzically.

"Well, now," Dr. Patterson smiled gently. "You met Dr. Benjamin at the convention. How old do you think he is?"

"Sixtyish, I suppose," ventured Kevin.

"He is almost eighty, and even though he's practically twice my age, he's been one of my best friends for years. Incidentally, I see nothing wrong with being friends with someone *younger* than me, either," Dr. Patterson winked, and Kevin chuckled. "I take it," the doctor continued, "that someone has been riding you about your friend, the wrinkled old geezer, who spends all his time in the lab and has one foot in the grave."

"Not exactly riding me, I guess," Kevin laughed, "but the guys just don't see how I'd have anything in common with a person in *your* generation. I keep trying to tell them that age has nothing to do with it, but they're not convinced. Guess they think I'm some sort of nut."

Dr. Patterson smiled, then grew thoughtful. "Kevin, if you find our friendship embarrassing, I'd understand

perfectly if you decided not to come to the lab or take trips with me any more," he said.

"Oh, NO!" exclaimed Kevin, in genuine alarm. "I'm *not* embarrassed. Being your friend means an awful lot to me, and I don't care what those kids think. I'm just sorry that none of them have a friendship like mine with you. The way they feel, even if they had a chance to do things with an older person, or get to know him better, they wouldn't. I wish I could convince them that real friendship is based on something much more important than age."

"What do you think it *is* based on?" asked the doctor.

"Oh — on common interest, and I suppose on respect and admiration, and on — on — on really *liking* a person so much that you feel good when he's around and when you can do things with him." Kevin, who had never expressed all this in words, although he had often felt it with regard to Dr. Patterson, spoke slowly and thoughtfully. "But you know," he mused after a moment, "I guess maybe you can't tell anyone what real friendship is and expect him to understand just from words. Friendship is something you feel inside, and unless you've experienced it, you can't really know what it's like."

"That about sums up the way I feel, too," said Dr. Patterson. "Friendship is one of the greatest blessings life has to offer, and if you are lucky enough to meet someone with whom you can share a friendship such as ours, it certainly doesn't seem that age or any other such consideration would make much difference. Now, we've got lots to do. How about applying some of your mathematical knowledge and trying to work out this equation?"