

# A friend by many other names

by Sabine Eiche

*Richmond News, February 5, 2014, p.14*

What forges a bond between two people? Admiration? Kinship? Something shared? The word for a person linked to another by a bond is friend. The English language has a variety of synonyms for friend, and if we examine these terms we'll find that several stem from words describing such bonds.

Historically, shared food and shared accommodation seem to have been the most common reasons for bonding. In an earlier column, I mentioned that companion, a synonym for friend, is formed from the Latin "cum," with, and "panis," bread, and that it originally meant someone with whom we shared bread. An expression dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century is boon companion (boon stems from the Latin "bonus," good), which we still use to refer to someone fond of feasting and company. In fact, eating or drinking in solitude aroused suspicion – according to an old Italian saying, it meant you were either a thief or a spy.

The word mate was used already in the 15<sup>th</sup> century to signify friend. It stems from the Middle Low German "gemate," someone who eats at the same table – that is, a messmate. As with companion, the bonding was done over food.

Comrade is another word we use for friend. Documented in the English language before the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, comrade comes to us from the Spanish word "camarada," meaning room-mate, particularly referring to a fellow soldier. It has retained its soldierly overtones in a term still heard in English – comrade-at-arms.

Similar to comrade is the word chum, which is thought to be a shortened form of chamber-fellow. Chum began its life as Oxford University slang in the

17<sup>th</sup> century, if not earlier. The corresponding slang word at Cambridge University is crony, first recorded in 1665 by Samuel Pepys, alluding to an old school-friend. Crony's roots are in the Greek word "khronios," long-lasting, and Pepys meant it in the sense of his contemporary at Cambridge.

America in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century popularized the term buddy, which is believed to be an alteration of the word brother. Interestingly, another synonym for friend – pal – also relates to brother. First recorded in 1681, pal means brother in the English spoken by gypsies.

And what about the term friend itself? Like the German "Freund," friend can be traced back to present participle forms of the Old Teutonic "frijon," to love. But there was also another verb for love in the old Germanic tongues – "lufian," from which we derive our word love.

The Latin "amare," to love, survives in English only in words such as amorous, amiable and amicable. Latin had a second verb as well for love – "diligere." Meaning to love in the sense of esteem, prize – or, as one etymological dictionary expressed it, to love with reason – "diligere" is distinct from "amare," which means to love with passion. "Diligere" gave us the English words diligent and diligence, and these certainly speak more about perseverance than passion.

So, what are your intentions this Valentine's Day? Will you be amorous or will you be diligent?