

INTRO

When people talk about friendship, they usually imagine comfort — people who make us feel understood, relaxed, and safe. But the most important friendships in my life didn't begin with comfort. They began with responsibility. I learned that friendship is not only about who listens to you — but about who stays when things become difficult, uncertain, or painful. For me, this lesson started with the person I once saw as the strongest, most serious figure in my life: my father.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO ME

I grew up in a family where illness was not theoretical. When I was in ninth grade, my father was diagnosed with tuberculosis. Later, he developed lung cancer. As a child, my dad always seemed so serious and larger than life. He was an amazing traditional Chinese medicine practitioner who had saved so many lives — neighbors, strangers, even people from far away would come to him for help. That's why he seemed so larger than life to me, like someone who could fix anything but never needed fixing himself. I thought he was someone I could only look up to, not truly talk to — a figure of greatness, but not of vulnerability. But when he got sick, something shifted. Every morning at 4 a.m., I'd wake up to prepare a hot water bag for him—his body would shiver uncontrollably from the cancer treatments, and he'd lie there, so small and fragile. That's when I realized: he wasn't just a great figure. He was a man who needed care, just like anyone else. Seeing him that vulnerable made me feel like I could finally reach out to him, not just look up to him. I wasn't just a daughter watching from the side; I became one of his primary caregivers. And in those quiet, fragile moments, we had real conversations — about his hopes for me, about what matters most in life, even about his fears. Those talks taught me more about honesty and care than anything else. They made our relationship deeper, more authentic, and they redefined everything I thought I knew about connection. That experience changed how I understand relationships forever. Because when someone's life is fragile, conversation becomes different:

- You stop speaking to win.

- You stop speaking to impress.
- You speak to understand — and to help.

AUTHENTIC FRIENDSHIP, REDEFINED

To me, authentic friendship is not about agreement. It's about commitment to the good of another person.

- It means staying present when answers are unclear.
- It means listening carefully even when emotions are high.
- And it means taking responsibility — not just expressing sympathy.

This kind of friendship requires moral seriousness. And I learned it not from theory, but from care — from sitting with my dad through his fears, from showing up even when it was hard, and from letting him show up for me too, in his own way.

CARE AS A FORM OF FRIENDSHIP

When my father was ill, doctors told us he might not survive. But he didn't give up. He received Western medical treatment, but he also relied on traditional Chinese medicine — the same discipline he had dedicated his life to helping others with. Watching his recovery taught me something profound: Different perspectives do not have to compete. They can cooperate. That lesson — cooperation without ego — became the foundation of how I understand friendship and civil discourse. But more than that, those moments with my dad made me realize that everyone, no matter how strong or composed they seem on the outside, has fears and softness inside — especially when facing illness.

FROM FAMILY TO COMMUNITY

Later, during COVID, I helped run our family clinic. I worked with patients who were afraid, isolated, and mistrustful. Some had opposing beliefs. Some were skeptical of medicine entirely. But I carried that lesson from my dad with me: Before seeing opponents, I see people first. I learned quickly that you cannot help people if you dismiss them. Healing requires dialogue. And dialogue requires respect — even when views differ. Friendship, in this sense, is not sentimental. It is disciplined care for another human being. It is recognizing that beneath every opinion, every defense mechanism, there is a person with fears, hopes, and a need to be seen.

OBSTACLES TO FRIENDSHIP TODAY

Today, we face serious obstacles to authentic friendship. We avoid discomfort. We replace conversation with judgment. We mistake silence for peace. But in medicine — and in life — avoidance doesn't heal. Care does. Friendship requires courage: the courage to listen, the courage to disagree respectfully, and the courage to stay. It requires us to choose people over pride, to see humanity over differences.

WHY AUTHENTIC FRIENDSHIP STILL MATTERS

My experiences taught me that friendship is not weakened by responsibility — it is strengthened by it. When people are willing to carry responsibility for one another, trust grows. When trust grows, real dialogue becomes possible. That is how families survive. That is how communities heal. And that is how civil discourse begins.

CONCLUSION

Authentic friendship is not automatic. It is chosen. It is built through responsibility, honesty, and care — especially when life is difficult. I learned this first as a daughter, then as a caregiver, and now as someone who hopes to serve others through medicine. As someone pursuing this as a lifelong career, I vow to hold fast to that truth: Before seeing patients, I see people first. If we can practice friendship this way — seriously and compassionately — we don't just improve

conversations. We improve lives.