

Anam Cara

Anam is the Gaelic word for **soul** and cara is the word for **friend**. So anam cara in the Celtic world was a "soul friend." In the early Celtic church, a person who acted as a teacher, companion, or spiritual guide was called an anam cara. ... This friendship was an act of recognition and belonging

Anam Cara is a phrase that refers to the Celtic concept of the "soul friend" in religion and spirituality. The term was popularized by Irish author John O'Donohue in his 1997 book *Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom* about Celtic spirituality. In the Celtic tradition "soul friends" are considered an essential and integral part of spiritual development. It has been recorded that Brigid of Kildareback in the 6th century counseled a young cleric that ...anyone without a soul friend is like a body without a head.

May you recognize in your life the presence, power, and light of your soul. May you realize that you are never alone, that your soul in its brightness and belonging connects you intimately with the rhythm of the universe. May you have respect for your own individuality and difference. " John O'Donohue

The Anam Cara involves a friendship that psychotherapist William P. Ryan describes as "compassionate presence". According to O'Donohue, the word anam cara originates in Irish monasticism, where it was applied to a monk's teacher, companion, or spiritual guide. However, Edward C. Sellner traces its origin to the early Desert Fathers and Desert Mothers: "This capacity for friendship and ability to read other people's hearts became the basis of the desert elders' effectiveness as spiritual guides." Their teachings were preserved and passed on by the Christian monk John Cassian, who explained that the soul friend could be clerical or lay, male or female.

May you be blessed with good friends.

May you learn to be a good friend to yourself.

May you be able to journey to that place in your soul where there is great love, warmth, feeling, and forgiveness.

May this change you.

May it transfigure that which is negative, distant, or cold in you.

May you be brought into the real passion, kinship, and affinity of belonging.

May you treasure your friends.

May you be good to them and may you be there for them;

may they bring you all the blessing, challenges, truth,

and light that you need for your journey.

May you never be isolated.

May you always be in the gentle nest of belonging with your anam cara.

John O'Donohue, *Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom*

My list of spiritual friends has adapted and changed as I have moved from place to place. Some are spiritual directors whose job it was to companion me. Some are just friends that became more as life gave us the chance to pray together. Some were clergy but most are just regular folks.

I trained as a spiritual director over 20 years ago now. It was the support of spiritual directors and companions that helped me listen to god with new ears. The ears of my heart. Who introduced to the gurus of centering prayer, the mystics, from ancient to modern.

“When you learn to love and let yourself be loved, you come home to the hearth of your own spirit. You are warm and sheltered. You are completely at one in the house of your own longing and belonging.”

My grandparents: Betty and Bob

The good examples of lives lived in transparency and love.

Their story is one of living the challenges of any life and while maintaining the hope that we believe is within us. The hope that is a gift from God and directs us to a life of service.

They were born in 1911 and met in the first grade and were married for 83 years. They survived 2 World Wars, the Great Depression, the Spanish Flu and Polio. They died within months of each other in 2008. My decision to pursue ordination was a struggle and I think it broadened their views of the church they loved.



They saw something in me that I was not able to see in myself. Seeing me, in a sense, with God's eyes. Somehow knowing that I was more than my deeds, more than my thoughts, more than my mistakes.

I am the oldest children of oldest children and so the oldest grandchild! I spent most weekends and lots of weeks in the summer with my grandparents. The lists of all I learned is long, here is the short list!!!!

They taught me to read and write, to fish [and clean what I caught], to swing a golf club and how to behave on the golf course, to walk and show a dog, to use a mangle and polish silver, which fork to use at dinner, to listen for the mourning doves and whippoorwill, how to ski and skate and swim, how to play bridge and cribbage and gin rummy, how to make sage dressing for a turkey, how to ride a bike, and how to set a table for company.

They prayed, not just at meals but often over decisions, out loud, and were faithful about church, and about service. SO from them I learned how to pray and the importance of church going, I learned Bible stories and the rituals of the church.

My grandfather was a cradle Episcopalian and my grandmother left the Presbyterians when she married. They were early adapters of Cursillo and the charismatic movement in the Episcopal church. Superintendent of Sunday school for my grandmother, vestry service for my grandfather. Both started a food pantry in the early 80's at the church where I was baptized, confirmed and married. Through that parish they sponsored a family from Cambodia and later Bosnia. My grandfather participated and then began, in south Alabama, Kairos prison ministry. My grandmother always hosted bible studies and book groups.

It is more than what they did, it was **why** they did it. It was **how** they offered their lives to God. My grandparents also gave me the strength of character to withstand the difficulties of a childhood tempered by confusion and chaos. I wouldn't have called them spiritual friends because they were my grandparents. And many of the lessons learned in their house, or in the woods or on the golf course or with their friends would take years to find a place in my life. Those of you grandparenting now your gifts are important although not probably immediate.