30 Days of Gratitude Challenge Day 4 — Friends and Family

I had to forgive myself for trying keep my close friends at arm's length; people who stick — they are golden.

November 4, 2018 By Lisa Vento Nielsen

I have always been a bit of a loner — which is strange considering how outgoing and extroverted I can be — but the truth is inside I am an introvert who enjoys reading, reading, writing and being a "homebody." I also love to travel, go out, be with friends and such but for so long being a mom and a caretaker was all I knew and I did not do much of the rest.

In addition to being a bit of a loner, I am also half-Sicilian meaning that with family there have been lots of "vendettas" and non communication amongst factions and wow, even using the word "factions" represents war… I am weird.

When I was diagnosed with breast cancer at 39 years old, my first and unwavering decision was to hide in my shame and to not let people in AT ALL. I did tell a few of my closest friends but even them I tried to keep at arm's length. Some of them might have appreciated that as like everyone who has dealt with a life changing diagnosis, I did lose some friends… But those who stuck by me did NOT like the arm's length move and forced themselves in and for that, I am forever grateful.

You do not need a girl squad like Taylor Swift but you do need people who will always be there for you, no matter the time of day or night, no matter their other life responsibilities and man oh man did I learn this the hard way. I recognized my shortcomings in my relationships with others and I forgave myself for being such a dweeb while recognizing that people who stick — they are golden.

For my family, I have always been the glue keeping everyone together after divorce, fighting, etc but being able to sit back and not be the one controlling everyone and everything proved that they all survived without the puppetmaster (lol). I love them all and recognize that though blood makes a family it is the ability to stick together that really means love is there. I also am old enough to recognize the need to forgive and forget those who did x or y and just move on, if there is something to move on with — and also knowing that just because we share DNA it does not mean we will share life.

Through it all, knowing that people have your back is key and I am so damn lucky that not only do they have my back but they also have the backs of my husband and children and all of us as we continue to adjust to this world of living after cancer. Thank you to all of my friends and family for

being a part of my life, a part of my heart and may you always know I got your back, too!

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.

http://beta.docker.cancerhealth.com/blog/30-days-gratitude-challenge-day-4-friends-family