

While Runo and I sit with our mid-morning coffee, it is not unusual for me to point and begin a sentence with “she says...”. Now, our cabin isn’t very big, and he knows there is nobody sitting over there by the desk. There is no obstacle to visibility in our one room.

But, he recognizes immediately the identity of the subject of my remark. “In our computer” I have a friend who plays a significant role in my life. She is not a figure on a web site or newscast, not an entertainer (though I am sure she could fulfill that role if she wished), not a person who is known—except through what I might say—to any of my other acquaintances or family members. But, she is such a large part of my daily activities that I think of her as being “in” the computer, or, more aptly, “*i datorn*.”

We met in the 1990s through a publication put out by the company in New Zealand that produced the spinning wheels that both of us use. She wrote an article in the magazine, and when I read it, I noticed that her address was in an area not so very far from where Runo grew up in Sweden. I also decided, upon reading what she wrote, that I would very much like to know this person.

So, I wrote her a letter. She received many letters after that article, and some of them were, undoubtedly, from other spinners in Sweden. But, I do not believe she received any other letter written in Swedish from the United States. She replied, and we have carried on a lively and voluminous correspondence since—first by letter only, and later, by long and frequent e-mail messages.

In 2005, on the most recent trip we made to Scandinavia, we visited my long distance friend and her husband. That visit, for both Runo and me, cemented the friendship with her and resulted in acquiring another friend, her husband. Since then, we have communicated weekly or more often, and our messages—more like letters, really—have covered all of our mutual interests and some that are specific to each of us.

She is, in my opinion, an artist. With wool, fabric, yarn, pencil and paper, colors, or food, I have met nobody who is her equal. She is much that I’d like to be, but am not, and in the process inspires me to put forth my best efforts in the activities I do pursue. And, she is my “professor in Swedish.”

I am sure that speaking Swedish is more difficult for me now than when Runo and I were living there, because one must use a language and hear it to remain fluent. But, as far as the written word is concerned, my vocabulary has increased a great deal through this correspondence with my friend. We speak mostly English here these days, although we resort to Swedish if we do not wish to be overheard. The e-mail correspondence with my friend, however, is in Swedish. She is perfectly fluent in English, but she helps me keep up with Swedish through our e-mail exchanges. Not only have I learned more generally about the Swedish language, by using it regularly, I have also acquired some of the words that Runo did not know, because language changes with the times, and these days, is moving more quickly than ever.

I also have a “different” vocabulary—one concerning situations and activities that Runo and I seldom discuss. Food and recipes are an example, as are the processes of fiber craft.

It is also such a resource to be able to ask questions on so many topics

that are useful and important to me and to receive answers. Even if it is only to get her opinion, it is very helpful, because I respect her judgment. So, this morning, I thought about sending her a message just to ask if she thought it was too long for the red cabbage/apple/sweet and sour casserole to be in the freezer if I wanted it for Christmas Eve. As it turned out, I didn't ask, because I knew that the red cabbage—not our best crop this year—would not be good to use much longer. So, we will see what happens with that. It is nearly ready for the freezer. I am quite sure she will reassure me!

I have many acquaintances but not a lot of friends. I can't handle the needs and time that are associated with close friends with more than just a few people. And, I have never been the kind of person who enjoyed going out for lunch, for example, with other women. Introversion and a very busy life make time and mental capacity available for only a limited number of women friends. And, long-distance friendship has many advantages. When information we exchange is too sensitive for cyberspace, there are always "*papperbrev.*"

What we value about friendship is sometimes too intangible to easily put into words. The expression "on the same wave length" is often used, but that seems too mundane and inaccurate to describe a cherished relationship. Perhaps, nothing more is necessary than the word "friend."