

Not So Great Gatsby: Why I'm Leaving Facebook



Dear Nick,

I'm often conflicted when this time of year rolls around. I have so many things to be thankful for, yet I find myself pining for the latest car or the newest gadget. And maybe, in a way, that is what Thanksgiving is all about. We sit around the table and spend less than a minute telling our friends and family what we are thankful for, and the rest of the day gorging ourselves on food and drink. Then the following day we wait in line to trample others to race to buy things that we probably don't need. It's conflicting and confusing and, I guess, part of being human in the modern world.

But I am very thankful for everything I have and all the relationships I have with my family and friends who are like my extended family. All 2,137 of them. Yes, according to Facebook I have what in mathematically technical terms one would describe as a "buttload" of friends. Now, it all started out innocently enough, with real friends and family members, and then grew to work colleagues and people I met who I thought were nice. And then I started accepting friend requests from people I met and of whom I had no opinion. I never accepted friend requests from people I didn't like. It wasn't until after I became Facebook friends with these people that I began to dislike some of them or feel bad for them or disagree with some of them. And I now know way too much about some people. What they eat, where they go on vacation, what their ultrasounds look like.

There is a false sense of importance when you have 2,000+ fake friends. You begin to believe you are more important to people than you are. There is something really exciting about having someone "like" a picture or status you post, and it's even more exciting if you receive many "likes." I would be lying if I told you I didn't sit around and try to come up with witticisms or compose pictures with the intention of having them liked by the Facebook community. I pictured all my new and old friends reading what I wrote, chuckling softly as they thought, "I have got to give that a thumbs up." It was fun, exciting and addicting.

Facebook is not bad. I am not saying that. I have reconnected with old friends and actually forged new friendships through the site. But personally, I have come to terms with Dunbar's number and know that I can either be a crappy friend to over 2,000 people or I can be a great friend to a select few. When I considered what I was thankful for, my friends were at the top of my list, old sport, and I realize that I

was in some imaginary competition to collect a book of faces. I feel that I would rather collect memories based on relationships, and sometimes relationships need work.

It's only been a week or so, but only three of my 2,137 Facebook friends noticed I left the social media community. At least only those few have asked me about it. I have been calling friends and emailing folks and actually getting together, and I tell you it's been liberating. I haven't seen a picture of anyone's lunch or read an inspirational quote or humblebrag about anyone's kid in over a week, and I can't believe I lived any other way. I love my friends, and the actual effort I will need to exert will be like re-learning the muscle memory in some ways of being a friend. It's on my terms and less voyeuristic, and more respectful of my personal space and theirs. If more people would try it, I am of the opinion that not having Facebook would become the new Facebook.

Yours Truly,

Gatsby