

[Wall](#)[Info](#)[Photos \(1\)](#)[Friends](#)

*"Facebook is not for you," my adult daughter intoned on the telephone.*

*But if it isn't for me, then who is it for?*

*I am a woman cresting middle age and staring into a vast beyond not yet filled with grandchildren whose adorable pictures I can include in my album. You'd think that living in New York City, a tumultuous, gossipy metropolis that transmits information with merciless speed, would be the perfect training ground for Facebook, but so far I am a disaster.*

*My daughter will no longer discuss my "wall" or whether or not I should wear sunglasses in my profile picture. To off-load the task of decoding Facebook, she found me a temporary stand-in, Maya Rock, someone with the pluck and stamina required to guide a woman of a certain age through a very strange land. What follows are my fretful queries and a provisional daughter's wise answers.*

### Linda Phillips Ashour

Married

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\*

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Mia Magazine

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**Linda:** One of my brothers has 1645 friends on Facebook. My husband receives new friend requests weekly. I had hoped longing to be a popular girl was over, but looking over my modest list of friends, I feel like I'm back in high school. Why would I want to do that again?



**Maya:** It's true. Facebook is like high school. You scrutinize people's appearances, you fret about your reputation (Why did no one 'like' my latest update?) and every day you'll see the grown-up faces of the jocks, nerds, geeks and mean girls whose opinions once meant the world to you. But you have far more control with Facebook. You have time and space to craft witty status updates, or choose an alluring picture and to freely gossip about your Facebook friends while flipping through their profiles —no one's eavesdropping in the halls. Plus you have more self-confidence than you did in high school, right? If you strategize correctly (photo albums with titles like "Cape Cod Summer," updates like "Best Monday Ever!"), you can log off every night feeling as beloved as the homecoming queen — albeit electronically.



**Linda:** I like parties with an attainable goal, i.e. one good conversation. The approach, the engagement, and a gentle denouement with promises to stay in touch with a perfect stranger mark a wildly successful evening. But, sadly, this is worlds away from a Facebook exchange. Basically I'm still wondering where to stand and who to approach next as I balance a plate loaded with finger food. It feels like a party, but not one I understand.



**Maya:** It is a bit like a party—closer to an informal cocktail party than a kegger. You want to show personality while keeping your comments short and breezy. These three words, along with the like button, will get you far on Facebook: "Congratulations!" "LOL" and "Yes!" In our Emily Post-trained real world, it is rude to ignore someone talking to you at a cocktail party; but in the virtual world, it is completely acceptable. Remember, people are dashing off comments and updates in the lulls of their real life (Four minutes to five o'clock freedom; Sleep beckons, etc.).



**Linda:** I love collecting other people's business cards. I have a porcelain bowl where they accumulate until I transfer them to the address book on my computer. I admire friends who have advanced beyond the bowl to post their updates with grace and humor. Whatever ambivalence I feel about self-promotion evaporates when I discover a writer buddy has sold his audio rights. Is this what is meant by social networking?

**Linda Phillips Ashour** ◦

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See All

Wall

Info

Photos (1)

Friends

## FAVORITES

News Feed

Messages

Events

## LISTS

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7

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Family

The Leslie Group

## PAGES

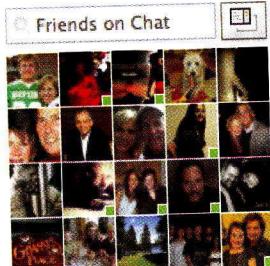
Mia Magazine

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## GROUPS

Family

Create Group...



**Maya:** Social networking describes the function of Internet sites where people maintain online profiles containing information about one another and connect, often through interests or personal history. Check out the movie "The Social Network" to see how Mark Zuckerberg began connecting Harvard students six years ago and quickly expanded his site to include other colleges. Now Facebook is for everyone over thirteen, regardless of education level.



**Linda:** Facebook keeps coming up with baffling new categories. Not only can I create a Smart List, I am now told I can subdivide my pals into Close Friends and Acquaintances. Tell me who, exactly, sees what I post on my Wall?



**Maya:** No stranger can stumble across your Wall from a search engine. By default, the only Facebook users who can see your Wall are your Friends and anyone in your network (i.e., groups based on your workplace, region, high school or college). But Facebook understands you may not want all those network people—potentially the cashier from the supermarket around the block or your boss—checking out your Wall. Here's how to make your Wall more private. Go to the top left of the menu bar that is visible on your profile page and home page. Choose "account" and scroll down to "privacy settings". Under privacy settings, you can choose who will see your status updates, and picture uploads, as well as select what groups can post on your wall and who sees wall posts from your friends. But before you cover up your profile like you're in the CIA, try to be comfortable with a bit of public exposure. Facebook is meant to let you shine. Yes, you would be wise to keep controversial opinions and certain pictures (bikini, mistletoe) private, but there's nothing wrong with sharing your hard-earned wisdom, sparkling wit, and flattering photos with a wider audience. Who knows, as you accumulate presses of the like button and appreciative comments, you may even consider selecting the "everyone" option in the Privacy settings. It lets all Facebook members see your Wall (but still protects you from sketchy random Googlers).



**Linda:** It is curious that a writer should be intensely private (make that neurotic), but so be it. I am. When my friends are on Facebook, it feels like I'm peering over their shoulder, and vice-versa. How can I control the setting?



**Maya:** Try to let go of the paranoia. No one's looking at you. But if the sight of little green dots still scares you, here's how to sign off Facebook chat, (the only way you can tell if someone's on Facebook). Your chat window is in the lower left hand corner of your Facebook home page. Click "options" on the bar

Linda Phillips Ashour's profile page shows her photo, status "Married", and options to Write Post, Add Photo / Video, and Write something... Below these are "People You May Know" and "See All". On the left sidebar, there are links for Wall, Info, Photos (1), Friends, News Feed, Messages, and Events. Under Lists, there are Close Friends (7), Subscriptions (1), Family, and The Leslie Group. Under Pages, there is Mia Magazine (2). Under Groups, there is Family and Create Group... A "Friends on Chat" section shows a grid of user profiles.

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at the top of the window, then, choose "go offline." But consider staying online and see what happens. You'll get more comfortable, I promise. Chat is a great way to connect with people, and you may find yourself conversing with a fun contact—like the former homecoming queen whose profile has a poignant Ralph Waldo Emerson quote, "The years teach much which the days never knew." Now that the ground is more equal between you, a heartfelt chat could be worthwhile.

**Linda:** Let's say this gets easier. Assume instead of agonizing about what to post, I just post it. Pretty soon I'm riffing like some of the Facebook pros I admire, but like all good things, this must come to an end. What's a polite way to say goodbye on Facebook once you've finally started talking?

**Maya:** If you're on chat on Facebook, the best way to say goodbye is by typing TTYL. This means, "talk to you later." Anything else ("goodbye," "see you," "talk later") leaves the door open to continue conversation. But when you write TTYL (or ttly), the person you're talking to knows you are actually leaving the conversation. Also, TTYL should immediately be followed by signing off chat. To type TTYL, then stay on chat and talk to other people is definitely rude. If you want to keep talking to other people, it is perfectly polite to slow down your other conversation, but don't type ttly and then remain on the computer.

**Linda:** Alternately, the worst happens. I risk a comment about vegan running shoes that creates a firestorm of angry debate. I push the "see all" button to read more wrathful back and forth, then can't figure out how to make sixty-five responses retract. How can I make sure I don't commit some huge bloopers for the whole Facebook world to see?

**Maya:** You can't. TTYL.

**Write a comment:**