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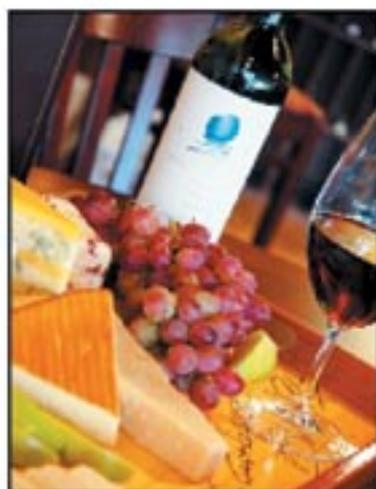
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Best Friend

I'm listening to the words of a Lee Ann Womack song called, "I Hope You Dance" as I write this tribute to my friend, my sister, perhaps my soul mate? How do you describe a person who has shared every emotion on the planet with you? Whose life has been lived in parallel with your own as we experienced together every failed relationship, the death of parents, the loss of best friends either by accident, disease, by chance and even by their own hands. All the disappointments, the failures, and of course all the sorrow and pain, which brings suffering then there's the loss, yes, lots of loss.

Sharing the good times is a piece of cake. Experiencing all of those negative emotions together is a major part of the responsibility and the measure of being a "Best Friend" for over twenty five years! Bonnie and I met weeks after a devastating automobile accident I was involved in and even though she was five years younger, actually my younger sister's friend, she became my caregiver by chance? Oh, I don't think so, but what held us together all these years is of course the inevitable downside of any relationship I've just described, but let me share with you the "BEST" part of who Bonnie-Applegate-Rivenbark is. Not just to me, I might add, but to everyone who has had the privilege of knowing her.

I'm going to be selfish as I read this tonight because it's my tribute to her on her 50th Birthday and I know there are many people who feel the same way I do, so let me be so bold to be the 'Voice' for all those friends and family members who wish they had this opportunity to tell her how we all feel!

I've included some pictures I found of my friend Bonnie when she was the person I met all those years ago and now some new photographs of who Bonnie has grown to be. No, she may not have wanted to experience growth this way, but if there was ever a model for strength and courage it would be my pal Bon, Bon. As you'll see in the pictures how we lovingly referred to her as a nappy headed girl, due to genetics, but imagine the pain of growing up with naturally curly hair in a world of style that dictated long, straight hair. A young girl who reached a physical height in today's world models would kill to have been born with, and what we now regard as an elegant stature, came too young perhaps, when kids can be so cruel if you're taller than everyone else your age.

I'm not telling stories out of school when I tell you Bonnie is a Breast Cancer Survivor, not to say she would have allowed me to even mention it in a room of two or more when first diagnosed. But that's the essence of Bonnie, the epitome of how I would describe the attributes of a true "Lady!"

From a physical perspective a real lady has class, beauty, grace, and displays good manners regardless of the circumstances. A lady doesn't talk too much or talk too little. On a spiritual level a true lady makes you feel comfortable just being in her presence. A lady doesn't openly complain about their lot in life or place blame, but will always think of others first, making sure you know she's OK, so you don't have to suffer or worry on account of her, even though her mother and aunt both died of breast cancer. She never owned that disease and actually refused to say it out loud. She did announce quite matter of factly, "I don't have breast cancer, they cut it out!"

I'll never forget how she told me. She made absolutely sure I understood she was perfectly fine! Fine with the diagnosis, fine with the months of chemo and radiation she knew inevitably lied ahead of her and was actually thrilled with the long, dark brown wig we found that looked exactly like her own beautiful hair. In the end she was fine with the gorgeous short, silver, somewhat straight hairstyle that grew back in. Actually the style on her could be termed "Stunning!" Quite frankly, the best she's ever looked.

So Bonnie, remember when you couldn't believe I turned fifty? How old it seemed to you at the time? Well, I can't believe you're fifty as you look thirty-five! ("Chemo becomes you," a statement only a friend could get away with.) Thanks for being such an inspiration to me and to all your friends who watched you glide through this part of your life with grace, style and now such beauty! Happy Birthday my friend, there will be no rhyming tribute reminiscent of your wedding day. No rapping with a full band behind me, no stage performance in front of over 200 people to honor you and your wonderfully supportive husband, Sam Stone-Rivenbark. No, this is between you and me this time and oh gosh, did I mention the 100,000 (MOL) potential readers on my website? I also felt my familiar cadence would not reflect my love and admiration, but I did feel of all the people I could write about in my new magazine, Best in St. Pete, you Bonnie Rivenbark are the Best! You're my "BEST FRIEND!"

"I hope you never lose your sense of wonder, never take one single breath for granted. Feel small when you stand beside the ocean, give faith a fighting chance. If you get the choice to sit it out or dance, I hope you dance!" by Lee Ann Womack



Bonnie

I am uniquely St. Pete.
Bonnie Rivenbark
Entrepreneur/Survivor



