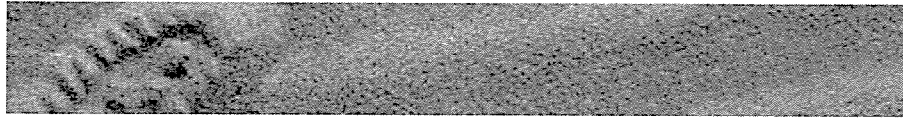


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Six Friends and a Funeral



karen amster-young :: The Beach Chair Chronicles

...weekly observations & discoveries from manhattan to the east end...

“When you are single girls sitting around a coffee shop, you have the luxury of time, and when you’re a little bit more grown up, it’s a luxury just to talk.”

New York Times, November 25, 2007 (from an article about *Sex and the City* – the movie)

A week or so ago a wonderful man passed away. My dear friend’s father died after a short but painful battle with cancer. Unfortunately I did not meet him more than a handful of times, but I felt like I had. I felt his energy because I know his daughter so well. During the last twenty years, I have been a part of a group of six women who met in college and continue to share our lives. Despite busy schedules and the challenges we face each day, we manage somehow to talk about our families, our frustrations, our issues and our dreams. Sometimes we just get on each other’s nerves. Most of the time the in-person stuff occurs only about once a month – sometimes it takes even longer to get us all together; but we all know we are there for each other and are just a phone call or an e-mail away. We share recipes, advice, doctors, jokes and laughs. There have been weddings, a divorce and dates; some of us have had children; some haven’t. A few have important, successful careers and continue to thrive in the workforce despite exhausting schedules and tough choices. A few of us live in Manhattan and a few are in the ‘burbs. There have been vacations, a college reunion, fights, tears, thousands of e-mails, dinners and drinks. And, of course, a lot of laughs in order to get through the day, the month and the years.

I cried when I heard my friend give a moving, heartfelt eulogy to her Dad. I cried because I hated seeing a good friend in so much pain. I cried for the loss of my own father. I cried because I wish I knew this wonderful man, her Dad, better. Images of him at her 40th birthday a few years ago flashed through my mind. I know she has many, many memories of him that will help her get through the coming months and years but as I unfortunately know, the void never really goes away.

On the last day of the Shiva period, she sent an e-mail to all of us entitled, “My Mom is Killing Me”. She was going crazy at home. She needed some space. Days of mourning in your childhood home can transform even a model daughter into a monster. She was also heartbroken and trying to figure out how to ease her Mother’s pain. How do you comfort someone who just lost the love of their life? From what I have been told, they had a fifty-year love affair. The e-mail advice from the five of us started flying in cyberspace immediately. I stopped and thought how amazing it was to have this instant support network right there. Perhaps true therapy is overrated? Why do we need to go spend \$200-plus an hour for advice from a stranger when some of the people who know you the best can dispense words of wisdom with the click of the mouse?

The funeral and the long gray days of December made me step back and think about friendship. I get frustrated when I get bogged down in day-to-day minutia and do not spend the quality, in-person time with some of the most important people in my life – especially family. Then there are old friends. It makes you think about the passing of time. Do I really know these girls twenty years? We used to share college dorm rooms and cheap beer. How has our friendships survived through all of life’s up’s and down’s and the passing of time? Perhaps there is more phone and e-mail now rather than the luxury and pleasure of actual in-person, quality time. But there is always that connection; and when we really need each other the Blackberry and cell phone get tossed aside if at all possible.

Carrie, Miranda, Samantha and Charlotte may have been younger when the series was on the air. I know, I know — it’s a T.V. show. But their fictitious, leisurely lunches were an accurate reflection of a less complicated time of life even if they did not realize it. After a certain age, it seems to get harder to find that time to get together and just shoot the breeze, bitch, and laugh.

I know my friend’s father had a great life. I had heard the stories over the years but my friend and her brothers captured his essence eloquently and movingly at his funeral. I learned that he loved fixing things and doing things for people; I learned that he had lunch with his daughter (my friend) almost every day when she was in Law School (I did not know that); I learned, not surprisingly, that his smile lit up the room when he saw his children and grandchildren. I learned about how he watched the kids when they were young so his wife could go back to school at night. I heard about his love of a good debate and the Civil War. I heard about car trips with the family and his overall love of life. I heard about his love of teaching.

That day, the day of his funeral, he gave another lesson without even knowing it: he reminded me – and all of us I think — about the importance of making time with friends and family. It really shouldn’t be a luxury. It is a necessity. Because (and we’ve heard variations of this same idea before) what everyone remembers about you isn’t really how great you juggled errands on a daily basis or how dexterous you are with your Blackberry. It’s the memories you create and the mark you leave with your time. And, of course, never underestimate the importance of instant advice dispensed via the internet with the click of a mouse!


Just remember to reach out anyway you can.

Thank you Julian.

Karen Amster-Young, formerly principal of Amster-Young Public Relations, Inc., is a freelance writer living in New York City. She lives with her husband, Ben and 6 year-old daughter, Alison. She continues to work as a public relations & marketing consultant and is currently working on a non-fiction book. Her work has appeared in a number of publications, including magazines on the East End. She can be reached at atkaren@thehamptons.com

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