

My Memories of Sheryl Jacobson

I first met Sheryl almost 25 years ago when she came to Colgate Palmolive to work in oral care R&D. I was a marketing manager for oral care products. Most people had a pretty distinctive reaction to Sheryl when they first met her, and for some she was an “acquired taste.” But for Sheryl and me, it was more like “love at first sight.”

We were both strong women in an environment filled with testosterone. But we both loved clothes. And shoes. Especially shoes. With her figure and her height, she looked stunning even in a business suit. I would have killed for legs like hers. Hell, who am I kidding—I would have committed a terrorist act for just one of her boobs.

Sheryl—Dr. Jacobson—had fabulous credentials—a DDS from Tufts and an MS from the Sloan School at MIT. She was smarter than any of the men she worked with, which was a heavy-duty handicap at Colgate. She’s one of the few people I’ve ever met whose mouth could get her into as much trouble as mine did for me.

Our friendship deepened, and when Sheryl was transferred to the Park Avenue headquarters, she moved into my house in New Jersey and commuted with me. Or more accurately, with our mutual friend Charlie and me. A regular part of our commute was the walk from the Port Authority across town to Colgate. I can still picture Sheryl in her Louis Féraud suit and Saucony running shoes that she most certainly bought at a tent sale at their outlet.

I can also hear the admiring comments that various gentlemen made as she breezed by. Actually, they were more like sidewalk vagrants, but it was always Sheryl who caught their eye. We came to have our little routine: Charlie would tease her about it; she would laugh it off, and I would say: “It’s pheromones, Sheryl. Pheromones.”

Sheryl was naturally flirtatious. Some people took it the wrong way, like a come-on. But she flirted equally with everyone, no matter the situation. She just liked people. The less responsive they were, the more she took it as a challenge to get them to smile. Combine that with her pheromones, and almost everyone was eventually lured into Sheryl’s web.

Once Sheryl became my “roommate,” I learned a lot about her likes and dislikes. For example, she absolutely could not abide cilantro in her food, though unlike Fred, she would eat mushrooms. Few people knew how much Sheryl loved ironing. After she moved back to Rhode Island, she and Fred would sometimes break journey at my house on their trips to Florida. On one occasion, they arrived before I got there from work. When I came home, Sheryl was ironing blouses she found hanging on the basement doorknob. Problem was, they were on their way TO the laundry. Sheryl was happily ironing my dirty clothes.

Sheryl had incredibly eclectic tastes—from Asian cuisine to Central American handicrafts to Portuguese street festivals, and from Ferragamo pumps to hand-painted Ikons to Teva sandals. She loved her Donna Jessica outfits as much as her micro shorts.

And how she loved to travel—Turkey, Guatemala, the Grand Canyon. She could pack two weeks of gear into a suitcase the size of most people’s lunch totes. And she still had room for their travel meals, because she insisted they bring food along. I haven’t checked Wikipedia, but there must be something about Sheryl under the entry for “thrifty.”

Sheryl never met a schmata sale she didn’t like. And she was equally excited about finding a huipile from Guatemala as a St. John Knits jacket. Whatever product or service you needed, you could save yourself a lot of time by just asking Sheryl where to get it. She could tell you whether the peaches were any good at Price Rite this week and she’d call you when East Side Market had a fabulous sale on fresh asparagus. She probably knew about Trader Joe’s plans to come to Rhode Island before the managers at Whole Foods had a clue.

It wasn’t just groceries about which she was an expert. Sheryl was the “omni maven.” She knew the best place to go for everything. And I mean everything... from snow tires to a colonoscopy. Trust me. I know.

But the one thing at which Sheryl really excelled was being a true and loyal friend. She knew about my addiction to Marshmallow Peeps. When the season was over each year and I was twitching from withdrawal, I would often find a plastic bag tied to the handle of my back

door. Inside would be packages of Peeps that Sheryl had turned up somewhere on a super sale.

Sheryl was with me at my raucous 40th birthday party. She was with me at my quiet 50th birthday dinner. And she was with me during my 60th birthday “moment of silence.” Milestone birthdays—midlife job searches—health crises and financial hiccups — Sheryl was there for all of them. De-cluttering to prepare for downsizing— dieting to offset UPSizing. Whatever the issue *du jour*, she was there.

She was a sympathizer, an empathizer, a motivator and an instigator.

And yes, sometimes she was a royal pain.

She told you exactly what she thought, even when you didn't want to hear it. But she made us be honest with ourselves. And I shall miss her terribly.

Sheryl would want me to finish on an upbeat note. So herewith, the top ten reasons why it was good to be Sheryl's friend.

10. I burned a lot of calories trying to keep up with her long strides.

9. She salvaged a great cat condo from somebody's upscale trash.

8. She thought my feet were cute.

7. She could reach my top shelf without a step stool.

6. Did I mention that she loved to iron?

5. She was a walking Zagat for Rhode Island restaurants.

4. Fred was part of the package.

3. Maggie was part of the package, too.

2. Three words: Home Baked Bread.

And the number one reason it was good to be Sheryl's friend...

1. If you have to ask, you obviously didn't know Sheryl.

Finally, I'd like to report that peaches are lousy at Price Rite this week, but the romaine isn't half bad. Whole Foods has organic grapes for just \$1.99 a pound. That's a whopping 40% off their normal price. I think Sheryl would approve.

Elaine M. Decker September 4, 2008