

## 'Til Death Do Us Part

*By Sheila Johnson*

I can remember how critical it was to my peers and me to be able to declare the name(s) of our best friends. Everyone wanted the privilege of feeling valued and special. To many, it was even a sign of being part of a unique or elite group. As children, best friends often changed; ugly words were exchanged; notes were written in class describing our hurt feelings; the green monster known as “jealousy” showed up; and anger raised our blood pressure. This was all a part of the “best friend” experience. Tears were even shed. Oh the drama of it all! The downside of changing “best friend” status could last as long as a week! But as we grew older, the depth and meaning of “best friend” status changed as well. Besties, best buds, buddies, and amigos, became our confidants of real, true-to-life trauma.

“My parents are fighting again.”

“My sister is pregnant, and only my family knows about it.”

“My brother is planning to run away.”

“I started my period.”

“I got my girlfriend pregnant.”

“Something is wrong down there and I’m afraid to go to the doctor.”

“I borrowed my neighbor’s bike and left it on the playground. I can’t find it now.”

Yes, being a confidant, confessing your sins to someone you trusted, and honoring that blood promise you made with someone (you know, placing your pricked finger to your friend’s pricked finger), were serious and delicate matters. It’s a wonder that we survived the trauma of childhood break ups: fights (both verbal and physical), keeping secrets, and blood transfusions!

But in today’s jargon, Best Friend Forever (BFF) denotes a cherished relationship and a loyalty beyond question. My personal experience defines a BFF as one who:

- Keeps their arms around you at the altar, when your tears are flowing and never asks, “What?” or “Why?”
- Helps you safely pack your belongings to escape an abusive relationship.
- Financially helps your children advance through activities that require funds beyond your budget.
- Reminds you that God will always love you and never let you go.
- Sends you unsolicited prayers.
- Keeps your “real” secrets.
- Puts money in your hand when you are too proud to ask.
- Honors you in spite of your past.
- Does not say, “This too will pass,” when you are grieving, but helps you to pass through the grief.
- Knows your value, and tells you what a gift you are to the world, even if you don’t believe it.
- Gives you their umbrella when it’s raining.
- Honors your sex, race, creed, sexual orientation, religion, and political choice.
- Remembers the loss of your loved ones with a brief phone call, card, or flowers.
- Says, “Grandma you look like you need a back rub. I’ll give you one.”

Real, true BFFs are hard to find, easy to keep, and impossible to let go of—‘Til death do us part.’