

Memories

By Sheila Johnson

There we were: seven of God's most beautifully sculptured creatures sitting and lounging around an open stone fireplace enjoying Jack Daniels, Grey Goose, Coors Lite and other libations along with a delicious variety of "finger" foods, any one of which could have been a complete meal in itself. We rehashed old episodes of *M*A*S*H*, *I Love Lucy*, and the *Ed Sullivan Show*. We laughed at how easy it was that day to remember those television shows that aired on black and white television sets decades ago, yet we could not remember the name of the store we shopped at earlier that day. We described our children's tantrums and drama with ease and almost pleasure, and laughed at the seriousness and near-fateful attitudes we once donned on those dear babies whose lives we could have easily taken without much regret. Oh how we hated those hot, humid southern days that stilled the air and summoned sticky lemonade-drenched shorts, blouses, and shirts. We would have paid top dollar for an around-the-clock diaper-changing babysitter if we could have afforded it.

There we were talking and laughing and, on occasion, frowning and shedding tears for loved ones lost to the Viet Nam War and other freak actions of human nature. We were acting as though we had no cares in the world. We were eating way too much, drinking way too little (according to our alcohol meters of days gone by), and we were happy. There would be an occasional toot or burp which brought on even more laughter and created an awareness that the old gray mare ain't what she used to be. We marveled at the pure beauty of our salt and pepper hair—well salt hair—well hair. We congratulated those of us who had defeated the cancerous Goliath with stones of faith and hope and far too much radiation and chemo, and we toasted those who went to Glory fighting their best fight. We shouted Hallelujahs and Amens for those of us who managed to remain in relationships longer than twenty years or more. And for those of us who didn't fit in any category that was hailed a success, we celebrated anyway and for any reason. We were just happy to have life and love in whatever form they appeared in those precious, treasured moments of sisterhood and friendship.

Too soon, the bright, yellow flames transformed into deep red cinders. Some of our eyes glistened from the reflection of the moonshine that poured in through the windows of the lodge. Yet some of our eyes glistened because we tried to harbor tears of sorrow for those who had reduced our number to seven and were now talking and singing with the angels. But I imagine that all of our eyes were shining because we knew that the beauty and power of the memories we shared in that brief segment of time together would never be allowed to slip into darkness—as long as we could remember.