

An Original Essay by Barbara Delinsky: “The Art of Friendship”

Friendship has always intrigued me. Go to a restaurant on a Thursday night, for instance, and you see some tables with eight women, others with two. Watching the women at one of those large tables, all laughing and comfortable, clearly good friends, a tiny part of me is often envious. But only a tiny part. My own preference is sitting with a BFF and talking one-on-one for several hours.

BFF is an easy term. The closest I can find to a documented origin is 1997 in the TV show *Friends*, though there are those who claim that they used it themselves well before that. Me? Many times in books I refer to “Friend with a capital F” versus “friend with a small f.” I believe that while most of us have many of the latter, we’re lucky to have even a few of the former.

What does it mean to be a Best Friend Forever? It often implies a shared past, though one friend I now consider a BFF is someone I met last year! BFFs may not see each other often, or text or e-mail or talk on the phone, but when they do get together, they pick up right where they left off and go on from there. BFFs respect each other enough to put their own needs aside if the other’s immediate needs are greater, and trust each other enough to say anything with the confidence that it will be understood, accepted, and held private. BFFs know each other, warts and all, and love each other no matter what.

From the get-go, I knew that I wanted *Sweet Salt Air* to deal with friendship, and while it also revolves around other affairs of the heart, friendship is key. Nicole and Charlotte are childhood friends who haven’t seen each other in ten years. Reuniting at the start of a pivotal summer, they do pick up where they left off—at least, until Charlotte confesses to having wronged Nicole in a totally reprehensible way. Nicole is devastated. “I thought you were my BFF,” she cries. “A BFF is supposed to be loyal. She’s supposed to be honest and considerate and generous. She’s supposed to sacrifice something she wants if she knows that getting it will hurt the other.” There’s lots of repair work to do, on both sides, at a time when each desperately needs a friend.

I confess. I do have several former BFFs whose life needs evolved into such conflict with mine that we drifted apart and remain so. But the others—ah, the others—are vital to my psyche. I’m busy, they’re busy. But if I needed them, they’d be there in a heartbeat. In this, I consider myself blessed.