

The Genius of Cynbad

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Language is a toughy. For me grief is a time and place outside of language. No words adequately describe the sorrow, nor do they even touch on what a glorious person Cyn was. Words feel like annoying enemies, needling me when I have no interest in them.

Yet, I want to do right by Cyn. I want to honor who she is. I use the present tense because she will always be a living spirit to me (and I think all who knew her well) because her character is vibrant and life embracing. So I will put aside my self-pity at losing her and tell you a little about the genius I knew.

Now I do not use that term lightly. I am, sadly, an intellectual snob. The grace and intelligence with which she handled life were pure genius.

You should also know that I don't think I ever called her Cynthia. She was always Cyn or Cynbad to me.

I met Cyn early in September 1986 when as the vagaries of the Harvard housing office would have it, we were put together as freshman roommates on the 3rd floor of Holworthy Middle entryway. Cynbad went on to be not just one of my freshman roommates, but a fairly constant companion through college. I was a bridesmaid in her 1992 wedding and she was a bridesmaid for me when I married in 2004.

It's funny what surfaces when the memory is dredged. Here is a little grab bag of what has floated up for me lately.

You may have known that Cyn was born on Feb 29th. The great thing about that is that you only had to feel guilty about forgetting her birthday every 4 years. That also means she only 9.5, and yet she seemed so mature!

Early on we made quite a bit of good-natured fun of Cyn and her long Island accent. "Oh my gwad!" I am from L.A., so I had never heard such a thing as this and I think I was joshed for sounding like a valley girl to the inexperienced east coast ears I encountered.

And my Karmic retribution is that I now live on Long Island!! So I am living proof that you become what you mock. So be Careful!

I learned many things from Cynbad. This seems an odd thing to mention, but I can't get it out of my head, so I will tell you that she taught me about thread-count! Because she had worked at Bloomingdales in high school in the linens department, she advised me on what kind of down comforter to buy when I was a freezing freshman from California. The down comforter I purchased with her advice lasted at least a decade and never lost feathers!

It was from her and her father that I learned that you could put tomato and onions and capers on lox and make the best tasting thing in the world. For years after my brunch visit to the boles home in Syosset, cyn and I would say to each other, "you want a little tomato with that?" As her father had said to us that day. That phrase became such a sign of parental devotion that when we used it, it was a loving tribute to Saul.

Sitting around once in college wondering what we should do with our lives, I remember her saying

that she was a sponge. Meaning that she just loved to learn and that was true. But she did eventually find a way to wring out her sponge to benefit the world.

Cyn was the best person I knew to recommend books. She read widely and voraciously and if I ever needed a book, I just called her up and said, "what are you reading these days?" She first turned me onto some of my favorite authors and for that I am eternally grateful.

I was delighted and amazed when she told me that motherhood had calmed her down. Now, I would not have put her in the category of nervous people, but we all have your anxieties from time to time. This was really a revelation for me because I had assumed that when you have children, you really start to worry! That she found parenting calming, is surely a sign of genius.

I am certain that Cyn's proudest moment in all of college must have been our night of drunk bowling freshman year.

First you should know that we never got to the bowling part. 2nd I can't help but mention my proudest college moment was that I won drunk bowling! (As the person who had the most shots of vodka who did not get sick.) I believe Cyn made a much more sensible showing, for which we can all be very glad. That evening will live in fuzzy legend forever.

You may have suspected that I was glossing over the formative years of the Scott/Cyn relationship. And I have been, because I wanted to save the best for last. The day I met Cyn was also the day she met Scott who lived upstairs from us. Not only was she my freshman roommate, but through more vagaries of the Harvard housing system and our clever manipulation of them, my college experience was a

virtually endless double date with scott and Cyn. Those of you who have known S&C as grown-up professionals, may not have an inkling of what a gorgeous start they had to their relationship. Fairly early in freshman year, they really became not just an item, but essentially a married couple. Boom! Done! I think many of us around them did know even what to make of this. I think the rest of us were bumbling children trying to find out who we were so that maybe we could have a relationship --Someday. They became a given and "scottandcyn" and "Cynandscott" became one word. Scott and Cyn were not gross to hang out with either. They were just fantastic friends we all had endless fun with. This may have been part of Cyn's greatest genius - That she found a great relationship early in life and kept it happy and wonderful for 20 years. To me that is a miracle. I hope many of us will be able to say we hade 20 happy years with a partner.

For me, Cynthia was the best kind of genius there is: intellectually talented, but also emotionally gifted. She knew how to fight the good fight for reproductive rights without ever being strident.

I know she had made for herself a perfect life, happy marriage, miraculous kids, job she loved, & lots of friends who loved her. She had it all, and in perfect balance. That was the genius of Cynbad.