
Iris R. Dart

Beaches

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Q: When you wrote *Beaches*, did you have any idea that it would become an iconic fictional representation of female friendship? How was your book received when it was first published?

A: When I first tried to get *Beaches* published, no publishers were interested in a book about two little girls meeting on a beach. They asked if I had any ideas that were commercial. So instead I presented them with a proposal for a book called *The Boys in The Mail Room*, a trashy Hollywood novel about young men making their way in Hollywood. When that one became a huge success, then they decided maybe *Beaches* was commercial after all. As far as knowing how huge it would become I can only say this. In the Talmud it tells us, "When you speak from the heart, you penetrate the heart." I could only tell a story of how crucial my women friends are to my well-being, how their love has guided me through this life, how I don't think I could have made it without them. Now I see that by telling my truth I told the truth of so many.

Q: What was the extent of your knowledge of Broadway and Hollywood when you created the character of Cee Cee Bloom?

A: I was a child actress, like Cee Cee, when I lived in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, growing up. I was and still am in love with the Broadway Theater. I was an acting major in college at Carnegie Mellon University and wrote two full-length musicals while I was there that were produced by the students. My writing partner was Stephen Schwartz who has just been nominated for all those Tonys for *Wicked*. When I graduated, I was going to go to NY, but a close friend had moved to Hollywood and invited me to come for the summer. I went and stayed 25 years. I worked as an actress, then a writer in the television and film business, and know both very well. So I don't write about them in my books because they are glamorous, but because that's the world where I grew up and the one I know the best.

Q: Were you inspired by any other novelists or fictional friendships in your portraits of Cee Cee and Bertie?

A: I wasn't inspired by any other novelists about the characters. The inspiration for the book came when my cousin Sandy, who is one of my very closest friends said, "When one of us dies, I hope it's me first, because I couldn't stand to live in a world that didn't have you in it." That's a pretty powerful sentiment, and one that made me think I had to tell the stories of my devoted friends and my devotion to them. The other novelist who helped me very much when she read early chapters of *Beaches* was Elizabeth Forsythe Hailey who wrote among other novels *A Woman of Independent Means*. Betsy Hailey said, "Don't give up on this idea: It has a lot of meaning." And I have always been grateful to her for those words.

Q: In *Beaches*, you chart one friend's devotion for another, even beyond the grave. Was it difficult for you to kill off one of your central characters?

A: When I was writing *Beaches*, my cousin Sandy would call me and I would be crying and she would say, "Who dies, you or me?" And I would try to maintain my composure and say, "It's not you or me. It's Cee Cee and Bertie. It's characters. Not real people." And then, just to tease her I dropped on her, "And you die." We both laughed hysterically over that. But the truth is someday the day will come when one of us buries the other, and it will be exquisitely sad.

Q: In *Beaches*, Cee Cee and Bertie have positive encounters with men, but they also have decidedly unhappy marriages. Was it your intent to show that romantic relationships are transitory and platonic friendships are life-long commitments, or are Cee Cee and Bertie just unusually unlucky in love?

A: I think that marriages can last. I hope so. I have been with Steve Dart for 23 years, and I am deliriously happy (Everyone please knock on wood now). At the time I wrote *Beaches*, I was unhappy in love and saw a lot of it around me, so it seeped in to the story.

Q: Cee Cee convinces Bertie to give birth to Nina, even though her decision to raise the child as a single mother will complicate her life. To what extent does Cee Cee feel responsible for Nina's life?

A: In the sequel to *Beaches*, which I hope will be re-released as well, (*I'll Be There*) we see the years of Cee Cee raising Nina, and how responsible she does feel for this child she helped usher into the world. Cee Cee never had a relationship with anyone like the one she had with Bertie, and it meant so much to her she felt she had to give back and do everything she could for that child. I was a single mother for six years between my marriages and believe me, it is a killer job. My son, who is now an adult, and I laugh now about how we got through some of the incredible hardships.

Q: Cee Cee and Bertie are blessed with talent and beauty and each makes life choices that seem characteristic of utterly independent women. Would you characterize these characters as feminists?

A: I characterize a feminist very simply as a woman who wants equal rights for women under the law, equal pay for equal work, etc. In that case, they and I are all feminists. I think each of them had their dependent sides, Cee Cee with John, Bertie with Michael, but in the end they had to save themselves and find their own way in the world. That was why it was so good and so necessary that they had each other.

Q: Is there a female friend—Cee Cee Bloom or a Bertie White—in your life that you borrowed from in creating such memorable characters?

A: Sandy, my cousin, was definitely the model for Bertie, because she always lived a very straight down the line life, pretty and popular in high school, married very young, (she is still married to the same man forever) and raised two perfect kids. I was the one who had the crazy Hollywood life, dating all the Hollywood jerks, and hanging out in Malibu. I worked for Sonny and Cher for four years and wrote their TV show, and sat in Cher's dressing room every week yakking with her, and Sandy just thought my life was so cool. But I thought her life was cool. I envied the placid peace of it, and she envied me at the studio, hanging with the stars, etc.

And when I only had three chapters and an outline of the book, I met Bette Midler, and she said she wanted to play Cee Cee some day. So, after that I certainly had her in my mind as I created the character.

Q: What are you working on now?

A: Taking us back to the topic of Broadway, I am going back to my first love and writing a musical. But I am also thinking about writing *Beaches Three*, the real story of what it's like to be aging in Show Biz, What it's like for Bette and Cher these days and a lot of other stars their age.