

The Greatest Vintage

Friendship is the only cement that will hold the world together.

Winston Churchill

At about 5:30 each evening, while the sun is still high in the Connecticut sky, my girlfriend Susan calls me from her home just two miles away. By that time, our collective six children are settled down in front of the television, and our husbands have left their offices and are commuting home for the evening. Dinners are cooking in our respective ovens, and Susan and I can toast the end of another successful day with a glass of Pinot in our hands. We use the more endearing term 'Pinot' because we consider the variety a close friend. A friend who is going to quietly support us as we whittle away the day's tension.

"Got your glass?" Susan asks when I answer the call.

"Clink, clink," I say in return, signaling that I'm ready. Our hectic day of parenting is coming to an end; reinforcements are on their way (and hopefully won't get stuck in traffic). We carefully tap our glasses against our handset receivers and start to gab. Susan's voice warms me more than any amount of alcohol settling in my system. I love being able to commiserate with an empathetic soul about the hardest and poorest-paying job on earth.

We both have three children, all under the age of eight, and each day brings new challenges of potty training, disciplining, educating . . . After ten hours of non-stop parenting, this is one break we consistently give ourselves. It's not dependent upon the weather, or our babysitting budget; the only requirements for this nightly routine is that we are both in our homes with nowhere to go, our kids are safely occupied, and we have a bottle of Pinot on hand.

The first few sips are spaced between sentences that are full of tension. "If one more kid calls my name, I'm gonna lose it!" Susan might say one afternoon. "They're driving me crazy, all three of them!" I might say on another.

After breaking the ice, we talk our way through the day's events and unpack the deeper baggage we don't want to carry with us into tomorrow. Like the time my five-year-old son, Alexander, kissed one of his female classmates *on the lips*; we worked through what needed to be done, and then giggled like schoolgirls. Or when my seven-year-old son, Nicholas, told me he no longer wanted to kiss me in the mornings outside the elementary school doors. Susan cried in her glass, just as I did, at the reality that our babies will grow up too fast.

With each sip of Pinot, our baggage gets lighter and lighter. By the end of a single glass, we're both in a new place. When my two-year-old daughter, Gianna, comes into the kitchen wanting a drink of water, I whisper, "Of course sweetheart," and I get one for her with a smile while listening to Susan's plans for the rest of her evening.

By the time our husbands get home from work we realize we don't need them to relieve us after all. Thanks to a special white grape from Italy, the witching hour in our homes is actually enchanted. But the magic wand that creates the enchantment in our lives? It's friendship, the greatest vintage around.

Karen Mary Lynch