

## April 10, 2010

### Keeping it 'Real': Feisty 'Housewives' star Jill Zarin dishes about friendship in her new book



Who is a real friend? The easy answer would be the person who helps you when you are out of a job, have just lost your biggest client or are going through an ugly divorce. Everyone appreciates a consoling phone call, a sympathy card and someone who takes time to listen. We love these qualities in a friend. However, for the Jewish mother, these traits alone would not make a front-row friend.

You know you have a front-row friend if she will kvell from your nachas. In other words, a true friend is someone who is sincerely happy for you when good things happen.

By sharing your nachas with others, even your closest friend, you do risk the dreaded evil eye. But if you can pick up the phone and brag, and know that the person who answers that phone will be truly happy for you and not send the evil eye your way, then you can call that someone a real friend.

#### **JILL'S MOM GLORIA ON JILL'S CASTING:**

Even though Jill has a wide circle of people around her, she has historically had difficulty discerning good friends and good character among a sea of casual acquaintances. This is probably because Jill has very inclusive instincts. She gives people the benefit of the doubt, but her antenna is occasionally a little faulty. When Jill was cast in "The Real Housewives of New York City," she was thrown in with a varied group of people who were expected to become her friends in real life, as well as on-screen. This had led to some awkward predicaments and surreal situations.

## **JILL ON HER FRIENDSHIPS WITH THE OTHER HOUSEWIVES:**

**BETHENNY** People think that Bethenny and I were very close friends because of our relationship as shown on the first two seasons of the show. However, I really had known Bethenny casually for only a couple of years before the show began. I met Bethenny through a mutual friend when she was on the "Martha Stewart Apprentice" show. She was pretty and smart. I liked her. As it happened, I had been approached and auditioned to become part of a reality TV show that was originally entitled "Manhattan Moms," but we all now know as "The Real Housewives of New York City." The producers asked me to help cast the show with more people who were in my circle of acquaintances and who fit their profile. Bobby and I saw Bethenny at a Hamptons polo event during the summer, and Bobby said to me, "What about Bethenny?" Because of her "Apprentice" experience, it seemed Bethenny wanted to be famous and on TV. We approached her and she was immediately interested. Even though Bethenny was not a mom, she was a mom "wannabe," in a committed relationship at the time and living in Manhattan. Bobby and I thought she would be a great addition to the cast.

Once Bethenny was cast on the show, we got close very quickly, becoming very involved in each other's lives and calling each other many times every day. Our bond, of course, was the show itself, but I believed we had developed a real A feisty 'Housewife' talks about friendship — and, yes, she includes Bethenny 'Real' keeping it friendship. We helped each other and we were there for each other. As I write this, I get very sad, because our friendship has recently hit some tough times. As of this writing, I'm not sure what will happen with our friendship. But no matter what, I will always love Bethenny.

**LUANN** Ah, the countess. I met Countess LuAnn de Lesseps at a party the summer before we filmed the first season of the show. We became casual friends. After I was cast as the first Housewife and the producers asked me to find more potential cast members, I found LuAnn's pink business cards in my closet and said, "Oh my God!" I knew she would be perfect. LuAnn had been on Italian TV and was already a local TV personality. Obviously, she, too, wanted to be famous. LuAnn loves to sing, and I thought she would add class to the show. I have to say that I got lucky when the producers chose LuAnn, because I found a true friend. I can always count on her for good advice, even though I am stubborn and usually don't take it. I also think she is an outstanding parent. We will be lifelong friends, and I am grateful she is in my life.

**RAMONA** My friendship with Ramona is at times both awkward and surreal. I met Ramona through my social circle 10 years ago. I tried to become her friend and was rejected. I even remember her having holiday parties and not being invited. I felt a little hurt but not surprised. When Ramona's mother passed, I sent her a card. I called. I made the effort and tried to do the right thing. I knew that Ramona has been kind to her husband Mario's mother, and that showed me a side of Ramona that I liked and could admire. I always try to look for the good in people. Since she was friends with my good friends, there had to be good, right? But we have a very weird friendship. I don't know why. I think we push each other's buttons sometimes, and perhaps there is some underlying competition between us. It is probably unlikely that we would have become friends had we not been cast together on the "Housewives." Yet we have to see each other often because of the show. One thing we will always have is our shared experience on the "Housewives." All the drama, the publicity, the red carpets. A hit show can be a once-in-a-lifetime experience, if you are lucky. In reflecting on my friendship with Ramona, I have read this chapter 20 times to help me decide whether Ramona is a real friend, and I still can't figure us out. Maybe that's the best answer I can give right now.

**ALEX** I met Alex and her husband, Simon, on the set of the show. I never knew them before. We are very, very different people with different values. I respect Alex as an intelligent woman who loves her family. I still don't know what makes them tick. I have tried to include them in my life for the show, but in reality that is all it is. A show friendship.

**KELLY** I have to admit to myself that Kelly and I would never have met or become friends if not for the show. We simply traveled in different social circles. However, I can already see that Kelly is generous, thoughtful and an extremely good mother. I don't know how our friendship will develop over time, whether we will become close friends or ultimately drift apart. We will just have to see.

**NEW CAST MEMBERS** As of this writing, the producers have added two new members of the cast whom I did not know beforehand. Obviously, it's premature to discuss true friendship with either of them, but I am always open to the possibility of finding another front-row friend in my life. You never know where that person will come from.

**OUR GOLDEN RULES OF FRIENDSHIP** We can't ask people to be our friends unless we are willing to act as real friends. We believe there are four basic rules of friendship. Of course, each of us has ignored these rules more than once (in fact, many times; who are we kidding?), but in an ideal world, we would: 1. Be there. 2. Apologize when wrong. 3. Forgive. Let it go. 4. Not cross the line. There are a few no-nos even a close friend can't forgive.

**IN CONCLUSION** The Jewish mother judges the success of a person's life by the quality of her relationships with others. You don't have to like everybody, and believe us, not everybody has to like you. But when you do find those special connections with people, you need to appreciate them, nourish them and sustain them.

In the end, does it matter how much money you have if nobody wants to take a trip with you anyway? Does it matter how beautiful your home is if you never entertain, never fill it with great conversation and hearty laughter? What difference does it make if your daughter becomes a doctor if there is no one in your life who can kvell over your nachas? Friends do all of that for us.