Betty White Was Indeed A Friend #ThankYouForBeingAFriend

January 17, 2022 By Shawn Decker

On New Year's Eve, fans of Betty White mourned the loss of their adopted celebrity grandmother, who was just a few weeks shy of her 100th birthday. People Magazine released a lush magazine in December, celebrating her birthday early and taking advantage of holiday shoppers being unable to resist a check-out aisle impulse purchase commemorating such a beloved human.

It's embarassing to admit, but I didn't discover The Golden Girls until after COVID-19. Of course, I knew about the show. Even kind of knew the characters name and general schticks. The Girls debuted when I was 10 years old, so my brain was still developing. I couldn't see that Sophia was far more intimidating than Ric Flair or Jason Voorhees, two fictional characters that commanded much of my attention at the time. Whenever I heard aunts, uncles and grandparents discussing a recent episode, they'd usually say, "That Rose is so dumb!"

The heart of the show, in my opinion, was equally divided among the entire cast. And with no living grandparents, I see a little bit of my dearly departeds in each of the Girls. I've probably seen each episode at least twice- faves? Probably four times. The rewatch value of a great show increases when a cast (and the writing that supports them) has chemistry. The characters aren't perfect. But, well, neither are we. Which is what makes the show so endearing and enduring over time.

Bea Arthur was an early supporter of and advocate for the HIV/AIDS community. So when a episode, "72 Hours", aired in February of 1990, people who knew her were probably not surprised. The rest of America? That was a different story. The episode begins with Rose being informed that she had received tainted blood for a previous operation, which necessitates her being tested for HIV. Along the way, the show holds up a mirror to its viewers, challenging them to deal with their own prejudices about HIV and those who were living with it.

As I was diving into the joy of the Golden Girls, "72 Hours" was an episode I kept skipping. Gwenn and I hopped around, not watching the episodes in order. "Let's watch that one later," I'd say, wanting to keep things light. I guess I was afraid of seeing something in the episode that would let me down. Fortunately, it didn't. And I'm thankful for everyone involved in making that episode happen, because it really is a time capsule of how far attitudes about HIV had to go. The Golden Girls did their best to help people move forward.

Thank you for taking on that role of educator, Betty, and thank you for being a friend.

Positively Your,

Shawn

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