

May 18, 2007

Dimples...If I close my eyes...the first image I see are those dimples and that sweet, warm smile.

Most siblings are known to fight and make-up...I honestly can not remember 1 time, ever having even an argument with my sister...I can not remember ever hearing her speak badly about anyone. She was a very special gal, and we had a very special relationship.

Renee used to call her Mary Poppins...Ilene loved everyone...in fact, Renee admitted to after we were engaged that she had been a little wary of Ilene at first...cause no one that cute could possibly be that genuinely good and sweet!

She was my big sister that everyone loved and I adored. Voted by her peers at Hyde Park high school; she was Freshie Queen...and Senior Prom Queen. A lot of those life long friends are here celebrating her today.

She was adorable with a radiating smile punctuated by those infamous dimples, and beneath her warm and sweet caring nature there was a profound inner strength she drew on to carry her through extraordinary challenges.

She loved happy colors, knitting baby sweaters for all the kids in the family, Frank Sinatra and The Sound of Music...but more than anything she loved her family...

She loved and fiercely protected her children unconditionally.

And she loved to laugh. Not just a little laugh...but a let it out of the box, full, hearty, fall down on the floor laugh, that was so infectious it made you laugh with her. And what would strike her funnybone was not sophisticated humor; but the humor she saw in the human experience...like... someone passing a little gas, a good poop story, or someone or herself, tripping over something or falling... like the time Wayne jumped from their boat onto the pier in Michiana...and missed. As soon as she saw he was ok in the water...she started laughing hysterically.

On another visit to us in Michiana, while waiting for me to pick them up in the parking lot of the Michigan City harbor... Wayne was standing too close to the roadway and didn't see a car towing a boat trailer that ran over his foot... putting the kabosh on their planned trip around the lake... Ilene... falling down... laughing.

One more example... as a newly single mother of 2 young children, she had just moved into Imperial Towers on Marine Drive just a block from our apartment. I would by stop each nite on the way home from work to wrestle with Jim, color with Debbie, and check on Ilenes day.

So one nite she asked me to help her hang a wall arrangement over sofa... we carefully layed out the pictures and glass covered prints on the floor in front of the sofa until she was satisfied... I was standing on the sofa hanging up the pictures one by one, when she questioned the height... as I leaned back for better perspective. I lost my balance fell off the sofa, and regained my footing on the floor right in the middle of the glass covered pictures, smashing them to pieces... Ilene... on the floor holding her belly laughing uncontrollably.

I guess it was then I became the big brother, checking out the guys who were calling... and then came Wayne... Wayne dazzled her... he was different from all the guys she had known. He flew planes, was a sailor, a hunter and fisherman, and swept her off her feet... within a few months they were married.

For their first anniversary he bought her a shotgun... can you just picture my little petite sweet sister in waders fishing, in Kanora, Canada. When she tried to shoot the shotgun, it flew out of her arms and she fell down, laughing. She may not have been the best sportswoman... but she was the best sport.

She was open to everything... they traveled all over the world together.

After our mother died, Ilene became the Ballabus of the family. The communicator, the glue, keeping in touch with all sides, her home was family central... anyone who was in town, ended up staying at Ilene's. Her albums are filled with pictures of family gatherings 30-40 people or more... and she loved it... the more the merrier.

During these past six years she has called on that inner strength to endure the most difficult and frustrating challenges one should ever have to

face...without complaint, with great dignity and grace. Mr. Myogi, a practitioner of Eastern medicine who came to Ilene twice a week to give her massage therapy would speak to her softly, of the balance of life...the Yin / Yang.

We feel those opposing forces today...

I am so profoundly grateful she is no longer suffering ...and so sad not to be able to hear her laugh again.