



## THE SECRETS OF SISTERHOOD

By Stephanie Wilson Chapin

The official dictionary definition of sister is "a female offspring having both parents in common with another offspring – it's miles apart from the sister ideal that's celebrated in books and movies such as *Little Women* and *Pride and Prejudice*. You know, the completely devoted, selfless sisters who would throw themselves under a bus (or barouche)

for their sibling. All of the 'sisterless' women out there see these movies or read the books and think this is the amazing relationship they're missing out on. What they may not realize is that many women who are sisters long for the same thing. These women wonder why their relationship with their sister/s is more 'Irritating and Irrational' than 'Sense and Sensibility'. It's fairly easy to accept that no sisterhood could ever be perfect, but many sisters would be happy if they could count on each other once in a blue moon. The unconditional, selfless devotion seems totally unattainable.

That's why Julie Albert and Lisa Gnat are a bit of a novelty. The women are not only sisters, they're best friends who seem to get along 99 percent of the time. What's the proof? How many sisters do you know can spend 24/7 together for months and write a cookbook that actually gets published – and still be on speaking terms? In fact, they had such a blast creating it that Julie and Lisa's second cookbook is already in the works. Put in the same situation, some sisters would struggle at the least and tear each others' hair out at the worst. While it's amazing that Bite Me, the sisters' terrific compilation of easy home cooking and beautiful foodie pictures, made it onto shelves at Indigo bookstores across Canada, what's more compelling is the sisterhood that brought it all together.

### "If she tells me she feels nauseous, I take a Gravol®."

This was Julie describing how close she is to her sister. "We call ourselves twins born two years apart because we really have that sixth sense." Lisa actually has twins and she agrees that they share "that twin sense." Seems logical when you consider the women speak about six times a day, beginning with a check-in at 8:30 a.m. Julie explains, "Some of my friends know 'Don't call my cell at 8:29 because I'm not going to answer. My sister is calling at 8:30.' At 8:35, if I don't hear from her, I'll call her and ask 'What is wrong with you? Where are you?'" It's as if Julie must point her compass in Lisa's direction to move forward in her day. How does a relationship this tight develop over the years? Is there a magic recipe parents can use to make sure their kids support and like each other into adulthood?

### "Family first, family first ..."

Growing up, 'family first' was the mantra in the Tanenbaum home. Julie and Lisa sat down for dinner every single night with their parents and brother – and they were fortunate to be able to travel often as a family. "We grew up in this close knit family. We never looked elsewhere for happiness or a sense of security," Julie says. In fact, friends are "icing on the cake." "No offense to all of our friends but, as long as we have each other, we're fine. It doesn't matter how many friends we had ...we always had each other and it's still that way today," she explains.

Since family togetherness worked so well for them growing up, Julie and Lisa try to create similar environments in their own homes with their own kids. Lisa explains, "Our kids aren't over-programmed so they're in the house. We like to do things with them so they're not always getting dropped off at programs. That's a conscious decision on our part." And Julie adds, "You have to sow some seeds when your kids are young or there's no hope. I don't believe that two siblings will come together in adulthood after never speaking or never doing things together for 20 years."

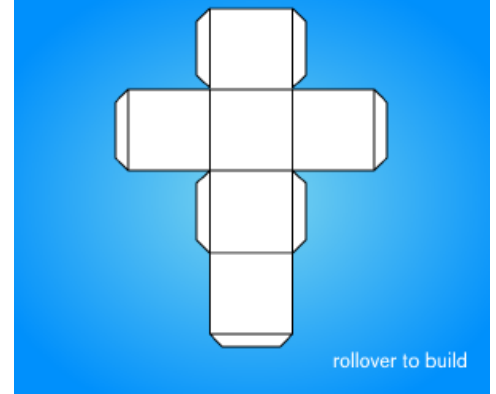
### "My greatest competition is me"

It's true that women can't repeat childhood and get back all of the time they didn't spend with their sisters, but attitudes in adulthood can make a real difference. "We don't compete with each other. We're not competitive with other people. We compete with ourselves," Julie says. "I am the hardest on myself. I am most competitive with myself but, for [Julie] I want everything good," adds Lisa. Both women seem totally sincere. Perhaps sisters (and brothers for that matter) who are distant should honestly ask themselves how happy they really are for a sibling's success. Does it warm their heart to see a sister succeed? Or does sibling triumph feel like a jab in the pit of the stomach, a reminder of personal inadequacies? "I'm thinking of sisters I know and I think when it doesn't work it's because there's either jealousy or competition," Julie says.

### "We just have an understanding. Whatever you need, I'm there."

Julie talks about empty offers – you know, when people ask you what they can do for you instead

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of just doing it? They bank on your response being "Oh, it's ok. I don't want to put you out." She explains it this way: "When a friend of mine has a baby, I bring them a bag or two of groceries. I don't say 'What can I get you at the grocery store?' because I know they'll say 'Nothing.' I just show up with groceries and say, 'Here. This is for your fridge.'" When it comes to her sister Lisa, none of her offers are empty – and vice versa. Their relationship is such that needs are understood and answered. All sisters might not be able to reach that level of intimacy but they could probably get pretty close if they were honest about who they are and how they relate to each other.

### A recipe for sisterhood

To start on the road to sweet sisterhood, Julie and Lisa's book *Bite Me* contains a signature cookie recipe that is so good you should need a valid ID to make it. It's like eating cookie crack. Julie bought a similar cookie at a bakery three years ago and, once she tasted it, high-tailed it to Lisa's house, stuck it in her face and said "Make this." Aaaaah, the beauty of sisterhood. Homemade treats might not take your sister relationship to the next level right away, but chunky, white chocolate, cranberry cookies are a great peace offering or an excuse to catch up over coffee – talk about a need understood and answered.

### Chunky White Chocolate Cranberry Cookies

#### Ingredients

- ½ cup of butter
- ½ cup of sugar
- ½ cup of packed brown sugar
- 1 large egg
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 ½ cups of flour
- ½ tsp of baking soda
- ¼ tsp kosher salt
- 1 ½ cups white chocolate, cut into chunks
- 1 cup dried cranberries or dried cherries

#### Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper
2. In an electric mixer, cream butter, sugar and brown sugar together on medium speed. Add the egg and vanilla, beating until fluffy.
3. On low speed, add the flour, baking soda, salt, white chocolate and cranberries, mixing just until the flour disappears. Do not overmix.
4. Drop heaping tablespoons of batter on prepared baking sheet. Bake 10-12 minutes, just until the edges begin to brown. Cool cookies on a wire rack.

Yield: 16 large cookies

Source: Albert, Julie and Lisa Gnat. *Bite Me*. Toronto : Pinky Swear Press, 2009.  
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