

Erica Jong, My Darling Friend

By Phyllis Chesler

Let me tell you about my dear friend Erica Jong—let me sing her praises. As the Bard would have it: in *Julius Caesar*, Mark Antony says: “The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with his bones.”



I will not let that stand.

Yes, being famous meant a great deal to her, but Erica was also as generous as she was extravagant. She had the soul of a poet—a good poet, as well as that of a novelist, but she also wanted to look like Marilyn Monroe. So many women of her generation shared that madness. Oh, she was a prolific writer, both grave and witty. I loved *Fear of Flying*, but I loved *Fanny, Being the True History of the Adventures of Fanny Hackabout Jones*, Erica’s own retelling of *Fanny Hill*. (She told me that she’d fashioned one of the characters after me.) Erica’s *Serenissima*, renamed *Shylock’s Daughter*, was exceedingly bold as was *Sappho’s Leap*. Erica’s own DNA was imprinted in each of her main characters.

I remember when she said that I needed to listen to her and to take her advice to heart. She was worried about my ever-precarious economic situation.

"Look what you have to do is write comic novels, so the men won't kill you."

Oh, I was shocked. I remained silent. She stood there before me, utterly naked so to speak.

We traveled together with our husbands (her first, my second) to the Caribbean. We boarded Errol Flynn's yacht. She had other naughtier things in mind. It was not for me, although once, newly divorced, I relented and lived to regret it. I will say no more.

I remember how thrilled she was when she gave birth to her daughter Molly—an infant in a little basket, already surrounded by more than what was in F.A.O. Schwartz's window. My son was only a few months older at the time.

Erica insisted that I rent a place near her in Weston, Connecticut, for the summer, which I did. It rained nearly every day. She took me around—to meet people like June Havoc. She told me about how worried she was about the poet Anne Sexton, with whom she was close.

Once, when Erica was set to debate another good friend, Andrea Dworkin, on prime-time live, I'd asked each of them to try to say at least three good things about the other woman's writing. Erica did so. Andrea did not.

And when I published *The New Antisemitism*, she and her husband Ken gave me a glorious book party filled with famous and literary powerhouses.

Look: Erica was a poet and a novelist and had a dark side; many artists do. She wrestled with the usual demons. Insomnia. Drinking. Anxiety. Depression. Pro forma. The usual. She was a driven writer, but she also knew how to have a good time abroad, in Italy, in France, pretty much everywhere.

I spoke to her a few times in the last few years. And so, I

knew... She has been living nearby, but shamefully, I've lacked the courage to go and visit my diminished friend.

But I cannot remain silent when others speak only ill of someone with dementia.

Enough said.

First published in Phyllis' [Substack](#)