

Open Friendships... by Marilyn R. Atlas

ROMY AND MICHELE'S HIGH SCHOOL REUNION



George Eliot, a powerful woman writer who had to write under a male pseudonym, said “Friendship is the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person without having to weigh thoughts or measure words.” As a producer, the kind of material that I gravitate towards usually involves a unique friendship between disparate people.

Many years ago, wanting to escape a cold, bitter NY winter, I decided to go to Guatemala. I couldn't get a flight, so I wound up going to a remote area seven hours' bus ride from Mexico City instead. When I arrived, I traveled by bus through the jungle to reach my destination. On that same bus ride, I met my future best friend, Sandy. I was wearing jeans, red cowboy boots, a colorful jacket, and choppy blonde hair. Sandy was clad in sneakers, khakis, a Lacoste t-shirt and a safe neutral jacket. Without being conscious of it, our dress accurately depicted our personalities.

As we began to travel together, it was obvious how different we were. Sandy preferred to sleep with the windows and the blinds wide open, rising at an early hour. I like total darkness, and I dread waking before 9am. So, travelling logistics proved difficult at times. Sandy, like me, loved to travel and explore; however, she would take meticulous time researching to set an appropriate level of expectation. I, alternatively, loved the thrill of spontaneity.

In spite of these contrasts, our times together brought about unforgettable moments. Although Sandy is an excellent navigator (I am not great at reading maps), we would sometimes get lost and, in getting lost, we had some of our best adventures and biggest yuks. On a later trip, we were once in Spain, and as a result of going in circles in a roundabout ten times, we wound up discovering this extraordinary restaurant that we would have missed.

Differences aside, we became fast friends due to the fact we shared the same sense of humor and a combined love of the absurd. Over time, I began to feel like we were living out some of the ups and downs in my favorite female friendships from TV and the movies. Unlike Grace and Frankie, we didn't become friends because we had partners who were friends; and while Romy and Michele, attending their high school reunion, are certainly younger than we are today, our ability to mock our own foibles have only strengthened our friendship. Sandy and I were not only supportive of each other, but no matter how difficult or trying the times we were going through, we could always laugh our way through hardship. Just as important, we've learned from each other.

Sandy, in my youth, turned me onto getting a credit card. I had always just paid in cash, but there weren't ATMs back then, so it could be tedious tapping your funds while traveling. When I had the opportunity to go to Cuba at the last minute many years ago, before the lifting of the sanctions, I knew that my favorite travelling companion should share this with me. Trusting me and knowing how special an opportunity this was, Sandy was able to rearrange things in three days, and she joined me on my adventure.

Serendipity is part of the quirky glue that has kept our friendship lasting through the years. For over a period of three years, Sandy and I talked about having lunch together during the week. We offered up windows of availability and checked in periodically over email. We just assumed that our offices were far from each other, but it turned out that her office building was right next door to my office building. We had no idea, because we spent so much time joking when we spoke that we never got into the nitty-gritty. Often, while we speak, email, and text, we may not see each other in person for a considerable amount of time, until we wind up meeting at the same event.

I feel that my friendship with Sandy is not only gratifying but has given me a lifetime of laughs. I've read that friendship can often outlast love. Long before Alison Bechdel came up with her movie test, one of my favorite aspects of chats with Sandy is that we do not spend much time talking about men. In spite of some great romantic experiences, breakups, and the occasional divorce, we rarely spent time dissecting the births and deaths of those relationships. I think intuitively, even as young women, we knew that an honest and forgiving friendship could sometimes exceed and surpass romantic love.