

I met Monique when I was 15. Long story short: I was new to Pineview and her then-boyfriend invited me over. Monique answered the door. She turned and curtly informed her boyfriend that, "A girl is here to see you." She enunciated every single word of that sentence, and then flounced off, upstairs. So that was our memorable first encounter. She terrified me.

Eventually, her then-boyfriend faded into the night, and Monique and I became "Beckers" friends. And then barroom friends. And then lifelong friends. The type who could reconnect after decades apart and pick up where we last left off.

In those early years, it was Monique, Tracy and me. We were like three circles in a venn diagram: each with our own lives, and yet somehow circumventing in the middle. JRs was our favourite destination, at a time where \$5 would get you through the door and to your first beer.

Monique's home became our starting place, our hangout, and often my safe haven.

Her dad would at times read our Tarot cards upstairs in the kitchen, and impart his wisdom. Then we would shuffle off into her cluttered basement quarters to listen to music. Fleetwood Mac and The Doors were among our favourites. We would talk about whatever important things that filled our days back then. Nail polish. Fashion. People. Parties. Never school! I remember the many TV marathons that began with a shot of Tequila and ended with an adventure. Monique got me a job at PartyWorld and together during the overnight shift we cleaned up other people's messes. She introduced me to my first pair of three inch heels (which I only wore once) and my first push-up bra (ditto).

I admired her confidence. I admired her fierce commitment, her loyalty, and her strength. I admired beauty. I took her generosity for granted. She saved me from my own struggles. I hope I helped ease her of some of hers. These are the conversations we never had, and perhaps should have.

My friendship with Monique was both bound by time and also timeless. Eventually, life took us in different directions. She married and had a beautiful daughter. I left town. We all lost touch. Technology reconnected us, and through social media I could keep tabs on old friends. I know that life was hard for her, and that it also had moments of joy, laughter and calm. We reconnected in person a few years ago, and in spite of decades of living different lives, our reunion was easy and honest. Friendships like that are precious.

Life is hard. It delivers unexpected blows, and takes us to dark places we didn't know existed. Life also blesses us with family and a few good friends, and some safe havens where we can take a few precious moments to rest. Monique was my safe haven when I needed one. She modelled both strength and grace that perhaps even she didn't fully believe it. But it carried me through some turbulent times. Monique often lived life on her own terms, as much life would let her. And she left on her own terms.

Monique, wherever you are now, I hope there's a kitchen table there and that your dad is with you, reading Tarot cards with that twinkle in his eye and sharing his wisdom. I hope you find the calm and peace and rest that you needed. And so deserve. I am blessed that our paths crossed, that I got to metaphorically rest my tired head on your shoulders, and that we got to dance at JRs. Rest easy dear friend. I loved you. I'll miss you.