

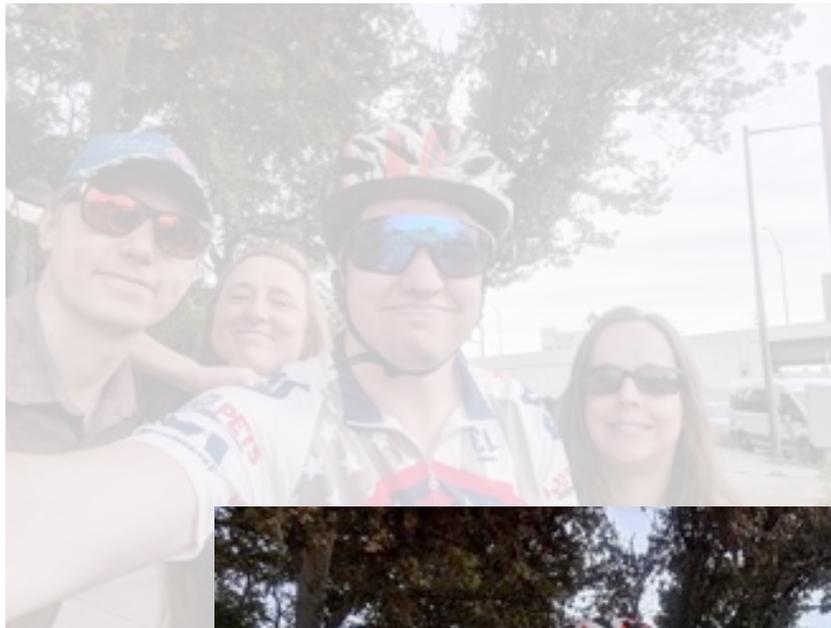
Stepping Into A "Friends" Episode

A study of friendship and love

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I suddenly know I am dreaming...
I'm on a yacht.
Maybe I am on one of
secretary of education
Betsy DeVos' \$40 million yachts
That was set adrift
Mockingly reported on
The Late Show with Stephen Colbert?



As the alarm goes off I think,
"Please, let me just know how to throw
The mooring fenders over the side."
Except in my dream before I google it
I called them buoys.

I jump off the boat
And tie the rope to the dock.
"I did okay!"

Monday morning in my own bed,
Next to my sweetie,
I wake up with
Such a sense of gratitude and love...
For my friend's husband, Anton.
Those little things of sharing his
Bloody Mary that Christine got them
And how he volunteered to drive us
To Philadelphia in THEIR van
To drop Jason off before the 7 am
City De Shore charity ride start time!

I've seen couples sharing and caring before
But it was so long ago,
Maybe they were family
Or coach surfers
Now far away
From our normal weekly interactions.

This is a dream come true
Instead of years past
Me driving to A.C. alone
Walking the beat until Jason rides there.

Sure I loved my boardwalk massage and snacks.

Yet I have such a feeling of gratitude

Of our friends offering to loan us their bike rack
So we can drive to the beach together.

Instead, Anton drives the four of us and Jason's bike
inside THEIR van around 6 am!

Who does that?

People, who want an excuse to go to the beach with friends!

It is touching like a considerate brother
Or a caring best friend's husband.

This day has a different vibe.

It's not filled with a bromance or with a jealous male's competitive streak
Coveting someone's inheritance and "lucky" money breaks
Or a married man's envy of an unfettered bachelor's flirtations
with a new group of friends, some who are married swingers.

Let's shelf, bury or discard that emotional roller coaster, please!!

Sisterless, I have claimed her years ago as mine
I think about all the times
Christine and I thank each other
For sharing such an amazing beach day!
Drama free and fun!

From letting her husband sleep longer in the van
(While I'm monitoring bets
of Facebook friends guessing Jason's
Arrival time.
Gunga Dinn is the closest!
Jason predicted 12:40
And comes in 1.5 hours earlier!
Jason's ride 7:30am - 11:11am

Jason's City De Shore

Distance 64.4mi

Moving Time 3:34:02

Elevation 1,221ft

While Christine and I walk along the waves on the beach

A little after 9 am

Before many families are under umbrellas

Or the shops are open or the place is really hopping.

I take lots of pictures on my phone

Of one of my longest friends

With her golden loose locks

In her long flowing dress

Along the waves

And both noticing the cool perspective

Of standing under the wooden frames of the pier

Which she asks me to photograph as she looks to seaward.



The fun we shared the night before, lingers
Picking out beer at their local distributor.
I grab my one porter
And sit at a tasting table waiting to go.
Missing half the fun on discovering and conversing
Waiting for the other
"Three kids in a candy store"
Strolling the isles much longer
Savoring the multiple selections
And comparing their "cool" o.k. room temperature choices.

In the car to their apartment,
I confess this month's Netflix binge-watching of "Friends"
Something I never got into originally.
Anton enthusiastically chimes in that's how he
Learned English shortly arriving here from Russia!
And I smile as we are now Rachel, Chandler, Phoebe, and Ross
In our mobile coffee shop couch.

Returning to their new inviting apartment,
I am already tired from 6 out of the 8 hours
Of my normal massage Saturday
That dragged on because it was
the pinnacle of summer
Beach day!
Wiped out like a kid ready for a party to start
That couldn't start soon enough
I steal a quick nap waiting for Jason to come home.
We are already running later than I had hoped!

Then I drive us to Christine and Anton's
Arriving after 9 pm
Following Jason's afternoon
Charity drinking event
Beers For A Cure.
He comes home grumpy, loud and animated
Simultaneously
Gathering his cycling gear...

I pull our bed sheet over our head
To block out the halogen hall light
activating the stigma in my eyes
And the whining husband in my ears...

Exiting the van
After the beer outing
The four of us chat on two couches.
Joey and Monica are just around the corner, right?
Enjoying strong shot glasses
For the first time of
Of Brazilian cachaca
That makes my head spin.
"How you doing?" Joey smiles between my ears.
Christine sets out chips
And her "secret" sauce...
Sourcream and hot sauce dip.
"Not cream cheese?" Jason guesses.
Her secret no longer.

Due to my long day Saturday spas work schedule
And Jason's early Mondays at the office,
He and I had never gone
To any of the Brazilian/ Russian couple's former apartments
Two hours away in New Jersey on the edge of the Big Apple
In all the years we've known them.

Christine and Anton were the ones
Who just visited us on the way to pick or drop off Gabe
at the grandparents and stayed over at our house
To hang in Doylestown on Sundays.

Weeks earlier Gabe who I knew as a baby
Graduated high school!
Finally, Gabe, Christine, and Anton moved close
To Bucks County Community College for Gabe in the fall.
And big smile
Jason and I are told our friendship was a factor

For choosing the location.

Suddenly it really sinks in
As Jason and I look around the newly assembled apartment
How years earlier they lost everything
During Hurricane Sandy in October 2012,
Less than a year after they married
On International Corduroy day 11.11.11
Where Jason and I attended their wedding
As the only impish "clowns"
Dressed In brown, ridged velvet pants and jackets.

As they proudly discussed all the super "new" furniture "finds"
I hadn't really realized that the water
Went so high up the wall near the ceiling
Of their old apartment!

I stared at
One of the only remaining possessions
From that time
The dark ceramic Buddha in prayer position
Sitting higher than me now near a window
Had been found floating in the black sewage
After the storm that had drowned
At least one door banging child
Who couldn't get out of the hall
And wasn't invited to safety by a neighbor
On a higher floor during the flood.

While Anton, Gabe, and Christine were safe
At her mom's house.
Jason and I didn't have any water damage
Just a couple day stay at a friends
During a power outage.

Unlike Christine's spicy dip,
Jason and I kept our "telepathic" card trick
A mystery as we did rounds of

Jason or I covering our eyes.
Anton and Christine picking a card
Then Jason and I "guessing" one of the 10 cards
On the coffee table.
Anton had his theories
Of how we communicated
The unseen suit and face or number to each other.
As Christine was enchanted by the unknown
Imagining years into the future
Still being in awe of our indescribable card game
Connection.

We almost made Jason's
12:30 am imposed "go to sleep" curfew
5 am came around so soon
As we were greeted with
Stovetop cooked fruit and nuts stirred into oatmeal
Along with coffee and fresh mango slices
Before gathering all our beach and bike stuff
For the day's adventures.
We couldn't give a fair assessment of the new sofa bed
Being the first guests to use it

While the memories of the last 48 hours
Loop forward and backwards
On themselves
As time ticks on
The memories you make
With friends are the
Gifts you take with you.

There was some debate
How close to the beach to park
I assured them we we're plenty early.
Yet we still managed to park one lot away
From the closest \$10/day
A street over from where Jason was riding to
On his 65.5 mile charity ride

To help families of
fallen firefighters and police officers.

We decided to let Anton sleep some more in the van
And get Bloody Marys at Caesars.

The outdoor seating has not opened up yet.
So Christine suggests we play the machines.
We wait a while for them to come around with free drinks.
During our car ride and walk on the beach
Christine wants a Bloody Mary.
I give her \$5 in ones.
\$2 for the tip and couple more to gamble.

She pockets the money and feeds the machine a \$5.
The second dollar and the screen lights up and flashes \$62!
Halfway through the excitement I use my phone to make a video
Of Christine's machine racing up to the dollar amount of \$62!

She makes sure to tell me it was her dollar
And not mine that went in the machine at that moment.
I immediately became her financial advisor
After we celebrate her luck for a moment.
I insisted that she takes half the money
And put it where she wouldn't spend it today
And certainly not gamble it.
Throughout the rest of the day, she buys me food and drinks
And feeds another \$7 dollars into the machines.

This little winning basically pays for food and gas for the trip!
Christine debates whether to tell Anton of her winnings
But in the end it bubbles over on our walk from the car
When we wake him up to walk back to the pier.

Hungry after waking up Anton
We hold out for the \$1 hot dogs
That aren't available until 11am.

In the meantime Christine gets two more Bloody Marys
One for her and Anton and hot, fresh fries for us.

By that time we wait for Jason to find us outside Caesars Casino
My phone is about to die from so much Facebook activity posting updates
On Jason's finishing time with over 40 engagements of friends
Betting his bike arrival time in Atlantic City.

When I see Jason walk his bike towards us
I almost forgot to give him a heroes welcome.
Then Jason and I borrow the keys and walked his bike back to the van.

Using a sarong wrap in the parking lot we all change out our suits.

It's afternoon and I finally lay my towel on a huge bed sheet sheet
And sunbath while Anton, Christine and Jason jumped into the ocean.
Meanwhile, I listen to the couple behind me go on and on
About their favorite rapper in the earlier days versus now
And I think it would make Afro-American thirty-something sitcom dialogue.

Being in my white suburban bubble I look around at all the diversity of families
Having, peaceful rest and relaxation on the beach.
How could our recent and current state of the union be so divided?

Christine lucked out again when she found
Us a free rented umbrella that was just about to be abandoned.

We're no longer easy to spot in front of the red tent that was behind us.

We do a couple rotations of watching Jason
Passed out on the beach blanket
And Christine and I wave jump
Then it's her and Anton swimming
Or just Anton, (who looks like the adult version of
Antoine de Saint-Exupéry "The Little Prince".)

Christine gets a chocolate treat from the ice cream cart

Passing us on the beach.

I noticed how judgemental I become of
How hungry Christine seems to be
I turn down the ice cream
Realizing I'm hungry too
I scarfed down a quarter of one of the two the large hoagie sandwiches
Jason scored for us at the finish line good tent.

Jason and I waded to our knees one last time
Before beginning the trek home.
Christine offers our free rented beach umbrella
To a nearby family and the love spreads.
I mumbled something about passing the salt water taffy
And Anton shushes me.
So back at the car it's no surprise
Christine wants to return to the pier to get some.
I get five pieces for a dollar and she gets double.

I really had to pee, so we cross the pier sidewalk
We get ushered into the men's bathroom
While the women's room is closed for cleaning.
An authoritative superintendent directs a line of women
Passed the urinals
Passed the showering men
Passed the little children
Questioning why they are in the men's bathroom
To the stalls in the back
While our chaperone yells at the men to stay back and wait
To use the facilities.

On the way home Christine grumbles
At all the flea markets and farmer stands we passed
So Anton pulls over and our hosts have a "chinese fire drill".

Christine stops at a large outdoor stand
She and I split an order of white sweet corn, peaches and nectarines.
The only thing I wanted but no one cares to split are

Big fat, locally grown, vine ripened tomatoes.

Is there anything more fabulous than a beach day with friends?

* Anton - "A Russian name that means "Highly praiseworthy. From a Roman clan name. In the 17th century, the spelling Anthony was associated with the Greek anthos meaning flower."

* Christine - "Derived from the Ecclesiastic Late Latin christiānus which is from the Ecclesiastic Greek christianos (a Christian, a follower of Christ)"

* Jason - "is a common given name for a male. It comes from Greek Ἴάσων (Iásōn), meaning "healer", from the verb ἰάομαι (iáomai), "heal", "cure", cognate with ἰασώ, Iasō, the goddess of healing and ἰατρός, iatros, "healer", "physician".

* Ruth - From a Hebrew name which was derived from the Hebrew word רֵעָה (re'ut) meaning "friend". This is the name of the central character in the Book of Ruth in the Old Testament. She was a Moabite woman who accompanied her mother-in-law Naomi back to Bethlehem after Ruth's husband died.