

I clearly remember the 1st time I met Donna...

I had just returned from hiking with her daughter, Katrina, and upon dropping her off, Donna graciously invited me to join her, her husband Mike, and Katrina for dinner and drinks. We feasted on Kentucky Fried Chicken and Coke with Rum (or was it Rum with Coke?). Donna welcomed me into her home as one who had known me for years...and ever since she has always made me feel like part of her family.

I remember the 2nd time I met Donna, this time in Fresno...I spent the weekend with her and Katrina...it was a great time. She was so excited that her daughter had started dancing again...her excitement was infectious.

Donna flew out just to see her daughter dance and spend time with her...she also took care of all the little things that made the weekend that much better: she always had lots of food and plenty of drinks on hand and she was a gracious hostess who kept us full of food and drink. She even thought of little and seemingly insignificant details that, in the end, would end up saving the day...that was Donna. She would sit next to the dance floor and watch Katrina dance, she would talk to anyone who was willing to chat with her and it always seemed that people felt at-ease and comfortable around her. She was bigger than life and certainly full of it. (Life that is)

In Fresno that year Donna and I shared many conversations and developed a friendship. I felt I could talk to her as I would my own mother, and that feeling never changed over the time that I knew her.

Donna seemed to have a real zest for life and a love for her daughters - and her husband Mike - that knew no bounds...it was an inspiration to see. I knew that Donna's life hadn't always been the easiest, but her love for life and its experiences seemed boundless. She was always open - letting those around her "know how it is", she was like an open book and would share her thoughts and opinions freely if asked...and she could do it without seeming the least bit harsh or hurtful.

She was caring and kind and when it came to her daughters she was proud as only a mother could be. I remember being as engrossed in watching Donna as she watched Katrina's return to competition as I was in watching Katrina dance...the pride and joy she felt as she watched her daughter dance was clear each and every time Katrina danced and it was a joy to behold. And while I knew that it was a source of great pride to see her daughter succeed, she'd have been equally thrilled at watching her dance even if she didn't do well.

I remember Donna and Mike meeting me in Tacoma for a pool lesson at one of the pool halls and her patience in explaining the intricacies of pool playing as I did everything from shooting the wrong ball, to scratching, to firing a ball across the room. She was a gracious and patient teacher, never showing signs of losing her patience as I bumbled through the exercises she and Mike gave me.

I remember teaching Donna and Mike lessons in dancing at the 'Y'. She enjoyed dancing with Mike simply for the sake of dancing with Mike...she never pressured him to be excellent or to do anything fancy. She was just as happy simply walking around the floor in time to a song as she would have been executing the most intricate patterns. And for no other reason than that she was dancing with the man she loved.

I remember long conversations about things that seemed like big problems to me, and her ability to put things into perspective. I remember her invitations to parties and to holiday dinners...and I wish I had taken her up on more of them because I always had a great time with her and Mike.

I remember Portland Dance Festival and Bridgetown - her and Katrina and I getting drunk together, flirting with the bartenders (well, they did anyway) and having the best time together.

Through time and circumstance, life got busy and I wasn't as close to Donna, but she was always like a second mother to me, though she never really seemed that old...and she wasn't. It's funny how the months slip away so quickly...

I remember Katrina's call a couple months ago, and knowing that something was wrong from the first word she spoke, before she told me that her mother had fallen ill and was in a coma at the hospital.

And now it seems an eternity since we all sat at the bar enjoying drinks together...yet every memory is as fresh as if it happened yesterday.

It's easy to feel sadness...it makes no sense that someone so young and so full of life would be taken from a life that seemed so happy and full...but I know that Donna would not want us to dwell on that. Donna would not want us to spend precious time being sorrowful or mourning our loss. She would want us to celebrate knowing her, to carry on and enjoy life as she did - to eat, drink and celebrate life and each other. She would want us to love and support each other and to honor her memory by keeping it alive - and in so doing keep her alive - as we live out our lives each and every day...that was Donna.