

Friends Come and Go, But Who is Here to Stay?

By Brenna Sheets

Boston is a city of leases and legacies. People arrive with suitcases and five-year plans and leave with boxes labeled *winter coats* and *books I meant to read*. It's a place designed for motion, for transition, for the in-between from one phase of your life to the next. Students, fellows, postdocs and young professionals are on temporary contracts with the future. In a city like this, friendships can feel short-term, too. You meet someone, learn their coffee order and just as you master the pronunciation of their last name, they announce they're moving to New Jersey.

I came to Boston three and a half years ago to teach English, optimistic and slightly delusional, believing adult friendships would form the way they did when I was 10: proximity plus time and at least one shared interest equals best friends. I guess a part of me didn't even think about making friends or worry if it would be hard; I just figured it would happen. Instead, I learned that adulthood adds several extra steps, including scheduling three weeks in advance and emotionally bracing for the inevitable moment everyone leaves.

My first real Boston friend was Tutku. We met through work, that classic adult friendship incubator, and quickly graduated from polite coworkers who rode the same bus to real friends — the kind where you go out to eat at overpriced restaurants, explore neighborhoods just to

say you did and sit on the couch playing video games you're no good at in each other's apartments. Tutku was my anchor, my proof that Boston could be home, especially since we had stopped working together only two weeks into knowing each other. I had found a friend, and a really good one at that. Naturally, she moved to Princeton to start a doctorate program a year later. I was proud of her and also quietly resentful of New Jersey.

Then there was Brittney, another friend from work, generous and funny and deeply human. Boston, unfortunately, did not love her back. The cost of living, especially on a teacher's salary while raising a family, made the city feel less like an opportunity and more like an endurance test, making her question the sacrifices one has to make to live here. She moved back to North Carolina, where a home with a backyard is affordable and possible, not just a fanciful wish. Even though we lost touch, now and then I think about Brittney, imagining her in the big cozy home of her dreams, brewing a morning coffee while her kids play in the other room.

Teaching, I learned, is a revolving-door profession here. Teacher friends come and go, often leaving not because they want to, but because the city doesn't make room for them to stay. And work friendships, while meaningful, are fragile. I've found myself at four different schools and one part-time retail job in the past three — going on four



— years, hoping to finally find a workplace that feels like it wants me to stay rather than pushing me to leave. I've realized that every time I leave a job and start a new one, I don't just lose a paycheck; I lose proximity, routine and the ease of daily connection.

Graduate school at Emerson

felt like a good shot. Surely friendships forged in shared stress and group chats would last. And they might. Time will tell. But even here, Boston's transience looms. Everyone has a next step planned somewhere else: Los Angeles, New York, "back home" or just "not here." I've learned to enjoy people while holding them lightly.

For a while, I thought I had solved the problem of friendship in Boston by partially opting out of it. I was in a relationship, and my boyfriend became my default person, my weekend plan, my emergency contact, my built-in social life. It felt efficient, even comforting, like I had everything I needed neatly wrapped into one person. I would go to work or class and socialize, but at times it felt like I only had enough energy for him and maybe one or two more friends before burning out. In a city where connections feel temporary, having a best friend who was also my partner made Boston feel more stable, more survivable. Until it didn't.

When the relationship ended, it wasn't just a breakup — it was a sudden social vacuum, a realization that my best friends were still in different cities hundreds of miles

away, and I had to come to terms with how alone in Boston I really was. I had leaned on one person to be my safety net and comfort, my favorite lunch date, and end-of-day rant person. In a transitional city, putting all my eggs in one basket didn't just break my heart. It left me in search of my best friend again.

Now I live with new roommates who are kind, fun and easy to laugh with. We share inside jokes and occasional late-night conversations that feel like the beginning of something lasting. We've already cried to each other and shared our traumas. But I wonder, quietly, if we'll still text when we move out, or if we'll become friendly strangers like former roommates.

I've even turned to Bumble BFF, a sentence that would have horrified my teenage self. Surprisingly, it worked. I've met other girls who are also tired of temporary everything, tired of seeing friends come and go, hoping for stability and people to count on. There's comfort in knowing I'm not alone in wanting friendships that don't have a pending expiration date.

The truth is, making friends as an adult is hard. Making friends in Boston is harder. I don't know if I'm going to stay in the city. Some days, the math doesn't add up: the rent, the winters, the emotional labor of constantly rebuilding a social life. Leaving would be easy enough. Plenty of people do it every year, quietly and efficiently, with a last group dinner and a "let's keep in touch" that fades after the holidays are over.

But staying is worth thinking about. Because somewhere between the goodbyes and the group chats that go silent, there are people who make you laugh, who show up when things fall apart, who make a transient city feel briefly, stubbornly like home. Maybe that's all any city can offer: not permanence, but moments of connection that make the uncertainty livable.