

Feels *and* Friendship

THE SECRET TO
LASTING CONNECTION



BY DANIEL MUNAR

DEDICATION:

For Michelle,
whose way of connecting reminds us that friendship is both an art and a force of life.



INTRODUCTION

I'm Daniel Munar, Colombian, migrant, and naturally curious. I've traveled through different parts of the world in search of landscapes, experiences, and cultures. In each place, I met people who, at times, felt destined to cross my path. Some became travel companions, others fleeting memories, and a few very few became true friends.

It was on one of those journeys that I met someone who made me stop, observe, and deeply question what friendship really means. That person is Michelle McDonald. Her way of connecting authentic, deep, and seemingly effortless sparked in me a new curiosity: I wanted to better understand human relationships, the emotions behind every gesture, and the bonds we build with others. Thanks to her, I was able to articulate a question I hadn't been able to put into words before: What makes a friendship real?

This book was born from that question and from many others that followed. It is an intimate, almost documentary style investigation, blending a psychological lens with a cultural exploration of the concept of friendship. Because not everyone understands the word "friend" in the same way, and yet we all seem to seek something similar: company, reflection, refuge, motivation.

We ask ourselves:

- When can we truly say we've made a new friend?
- How much energy can we devote to the different relationships in our lives?
- What happens when we connect with someone so naturally it feels like we've known them forever?
- Do friendships need constant interaction to be real?
- Is there a universal language of friendship, or is every bond built from its own unique code?

Feels and Friendship is, above all, a collective exploration from the author's perspective. We'll hear from psychologists, sociologists, thinkers... but also from the people whose lives have been touched by Michelle's friendship. Through their voices, we'll search for patterns, insights, and contradictions.

This is not a tribute it's a quest.

One that begins in affection, but seeks clarity.

A journey to understand the nuances of friendship how it forms, how it's nurtured, and how it evolves.

And even if we don't find final answers along the way, at the very least, we'll have shared a deep conversation about something we all experience but rarely pause to examine: the most free and voluntary human bond of all friendship.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1 – The Oirigin of the blond -What do we mean by friendship?

Is it a social construct, an emotional instinct, or a conscious act? Reflections from psychology and lived experience.

Chapter 2 – The “Click”: instant connection or emotional intuition

Does friendship at first sight exist? How to recognize that unexpected spark.

Chapter 3 – Different vibes, deep connection

Do we need to be alike to become friends? Different energies, profound affinities.

Chapter 4 – When admiration becomes friendship

The journey from inspiration to connection. Learning from the other without hierarchy. From mentor to friend.

Chapter 5 – The love languages of friendship

a new emotional map

Chapter 6 – The invisible threads: how friendship is maintained

Rituals, emotional language, presence, and consistent care.

Chapter 7 – Expectations vs. reality

When do our expectations of another person begin to harm the bond? Is that still friendship, or does it become emotional dependence?

Chapter 8 – Conflict resolution: keys and strategies

Chapter 9 – Long distance friendships: what holds the bond when we're no longer close or available?

Symbolic presence, key moments, connection through absence.

Chapter 10 – New participants

How do we sustain friendship when time and family responsibilities pull us apart?

Chapter 11 – Does true friendship exist?

A collective reflection. Testimonies, thoughts, conclusions.

Epilogue

Acknowledgments

Bonus

THE ORIGIN OF THE BOND

What Do We Mean by Friendship?

Is it a social construct, an emotional instinct, or a conscious act? Reflections from psychology and lived experience.

The first time I saw Michelle McDonald, I noticed a particular kind of energy warm and kind that made it easier for me to talk to her than to most people. One of the first things that struck me was the love with which she spoke about the people close to her, how she connected with them, and how intentionally she dedicated time to those relationships. While many people speak of their friendships in similar ways, something about Michelle made me believe there was something truly special about the way she connected. That sparked my curiosity to understand this bond more deeply.

As I began reflecting on that experience, one question emerged: at what point does someone go from being an acquaintance to a friend? To explore this, we first have to ask ourselves: why do we let someone create a space in our life a place to form that bond? We are social beings, we live in community, and we interact with others daily. But what makes us take that next step?

To examine this, let's consider the work of Dr. Jacob from the Knight Order, who shares a personal perspective on friendship. He describes his friends as a form of chosen family and says: "For me, my friends have done a thousand times more for me than any member of my biological family. Friendship is a connection that goes beyond the labels of family, lover, coworker, or partner. Friendship is a connection between souls between people who truly see one another."

This reflection offers a profound view of friendship one that goes far beyond what we typically associate with the word. For Dr. Jacob, friendship is a soulful connection, something that transcends conventional roles like "family" or "partner." This aligns with a psychological perspective that emphasizes authenticity and mutual visibility in relationships. The idea that friendship exists between people who "truly see" each other implies a depth of empathy and understanding, where both individuals feel recognized for who they truly are without masks, without pretenses.

This authenticity is also what Dr. Larson, an expert in family reunification, highlights as a fundamental pillar. She puts it simply:

"True friendship is when you know they won't just tell you what you want to hear, but what you NEED to hear. And what they say feels real because they've taken the time to love you and understand you."

This view connects with interpersonal relationship theory, which states that the most genuine and meaningful connections occur when individuals feel accepted and valued for their authentic selves. In this same vein, American thinker Dr. T. Lowe expands the idea by stating that true friendship happens when someone, after truly getting to know you, accepts you as you are flaws and all. That kind of deep, unconditional acceptance forms the foundation for bonds that withstand time and change.

Grace, a writer and close friend of Michelle, expresses this sentiment in a moving way when she

differentiates an acquaintance from a true friend:

“An acquaintance only sees you at your best. A real friend sees you at your worst, your in between, and your best. They are someone you can trust with your feelings, your truths, and your secrets.”

This type of relationship fosters belonging, emotional support, and personal growth making friendship a cornerstone of our social well being. Psychology also points out that such connection is rooted in reciprocity and mutual interest, but it goes beyond that: it requires emotional openness and deep respect, allowing people to feel truly seen and understood.

Still, a question remains one that challenges this entire idea: is it possible to form a bond without a long process of getting to know someone and building mutual trust? Sometimes, we meet someone and, without knowing much about them or even needing that mutual effort we immediately feel the desire to get closer. What explains this phenomenon?

In the next chapter, we'll explore the fascinating dynamic of the emotional “click”: that instant connection that defies our traditional understanding of friendship.



THE “CLICK”

Instant Connection or Emotional Intuition?

Is friendship at first sight real? How do we recognize that unexpected spark?

As I got to know Michelle better, I had the chance to meet Mikala and Nicole two very special people in her life. She described them as sisters, with whom she shares long conversations and an almost exclusive language. When I finally met them, something struck me immediately: their personalities were surprisingly similar. They shared values, ways of thinking, and life experiences. Mikala is a bit more analytical and sweet, Nicole is cheerful and energetic qualities I also see reflected in Michelle. It made me wonder whether their friendship had shaped those similarities, or whether those affinities were what brought them together in the first place.

Driven by curiosity to understand how such a strong bond had formed, I asked them both how they met. I expected a story that explained the beginning of their friendship through a significant event or shared experience. But their answer was quite different.

Their bond didn't grow from a specific moment or a gradual process, but from what we might call an emotional click. This phenomenon refers to an immediate, intuitive connection between two people a deep feeling, more emotional than rational, that makes us sense we've found someone with whom we share something essential. It's not about coincidences or external circumstances, but about an emotional attunement that arises effortlessly, where both people feel seen, understood, and accepted from the very beginning.

Though it might sound trivial or anecdotal, this kind of connection has a psychological foundation. Research in the field of human relationships has identified that this “click” is often linked to mutual emotional resonance. It's not just about having things in common it's a synchronicity in how people perceive, feel, and exist in the world. It's a kind of emotional recognition that opens up a space for authenticity and vulnerability from the very start.

The emotional click challenges the traditional paradigm that deep friendships require time and gradual construction. Instead, it suggests that some bonds are born out of emotional intuition, and that initial spark can be the seed of relationships just as strong as those built slowly.

Nicole, one of Michelle's closest friends, puts it this way:

“In the case of my friendship with Michelle, we connected instantly; I think, in a way, we skipped the acquaintance stage. I had never experienced that with anyone else. We were meant to be friends and soulmates. I think our friendship continued to deepen through meaningful conversations and shared experiences, lost years, and lots of laughter sometimes in the same sentences. Our friendship keeps growing, but I truly believe we reached level 10 of friendship in the first month we met, when normally that would take months or years.”

This perspective contrasts with the view of Dr. Jacob from the Knight Order, who states that “intention is everything.” For him, a friendship is built when someone shows genuine interest: asks questions, shares joy, participates in the other's life, and listens with care. In his words:

“Over time, that person crosses the bridge and becomes someone who is truly a friend.” This approach suggests that a bond strengthens through time, presence, and sustained reciprocity. But that doesn’t invalidate the experience of the emotional click. Rather, it shows us that friendships can begin in many different ways some with a spark that feels magical and unexplainable, others through intention, consistency, and care.

The interesting thing, then, is not determining which path is “right,” but recognizing that the origin of a friendship can be as diverse as the people who create it.

And from that openness to diversity, new questions emerge:

What happens when one person feels the click, but the other needs more time to commit to the bond?

Can a friendship truly flourish if emotional rhythms don’t align?

Do we need to share the same understanding of what it means to be friends for the connection to work?

These questions lead us to a new scenario: friendships between people who “vibrate” differently, but somehow, still manage to connect.



VIBRATING ALIKE OR DIFFERENTLY?

Energy, Authenticity, and Connection

Do friends need to have similar energy to truly connect? Or can we vibrate differently and still build something powerful?

After meeting Nicole and Micala and encouraged by the warmth and openness of all the people I encountered through Michelle—I began exploring different social circles alongside her. Each group was different: with its own rhythm, unique sense of humor, and particular way of communicating. Some were more introspective, others loud and playful, others deeply emotional.

What struck me was how the same person Michelle could flow so naturally in such diverse settings. She didn't act differently or pretend to fit in. Rather, she showed up with total authenticity and still managed to deeply connect with everyone. She was the same person, but her energy and emotional approach adapted to each relationship.

That's when I realized one of the things I admire most about her: her wholeheartedness. She doesn't shape-shift to please others she simply is. And it is precisely that freedom to be herself that creates space for true connection. Looking more closely, I noticed that everyone in her circle had something in common: each person brought the best of themselves, genuinely without needing to share the same kind of energy. Perhaps, because these were not groups defined by external labels, but rather by the simple desire to connect, they became spaces where no one felt the need to pretend or perform.

That's when I understood that authenticity and emotional openness are key to any deep relationship. When people show up as they truly are, their energies or vibrations blend naturally. Sometimes because they are alike, other times because they complement each other. Differences don't divide they can become bridges. We don't just connect through what is similar, but also through the curiosity to truly know the other, to be moved by what is different.

From a psychological perspective, this makes perfect sense. Authenticity is not only attractive it is also a sign of emotional health. Carl Rogers, one of the leading figures in humanistic psychology, spoke of the importance of living in alignment with what we feel, think, and express to the world. He called this congruence, and saw it as essential for a full life and meaningful relationships. In this same vein, Dr. Vierra, a lifestyle coach, emphasizes that this authenticity allows friendship to become "deep, safe, trustworthy, and empowering," creating a space where people feel truly accepted.

This need for authenticity also ties into what is known as "co-constructed emotional regulation" the idea that we feel safer and more understood when we are with people who accept us as we are. In such spaces, the nervous system relaxes, social anxiety decreases, and the sense of belonging is reinforced. That's why we feel lighter when we're with someone with whom we can simply be.

In that same line of thought, Dra. Burson, a specialist in interpersonal relationships, adds that all human beings carry a certain level of "social energy": an individual capacity to connect, share, and sustain emotional interaction with others. This energy is not uniform; some people have naturally

higher social energy they feel energized by the presence of others while others have a lower capacity and need solitude to recharge. What matters, Burson says, is not how much we have, but that everyone, without exception, needs to return to themselves in order to recharge. This self-regulation is essential to sustaining healthy, authentic relationships.

In this exploration of connection styles, a different yet equally valid perspective also emerged: that of Dr. Larson, a couples therapist. She put it into words with a clarity that made me reflect on another kind of bond, one based more on shared resonance than difference:

“I think attuned energy is the strongest connection at least if I think about my closest friends. We share the same enthusiasm for life and for others, which makes us feel so valued and understood.”

Her view highlights what happens when, even while being different, we manage to attune to one another through a shared joy for life and for people. That natural affinity doesn't require effort it flows, creates harmony, and builds depth through spontaneous joy and understanding.

Both forms the complementarity of difference and the synchronicity of similarity reveal that there is no single way to connect. What seems essential is the permission to be who we are, and the willingness to meet the other person right there.

Thanks to these different perspectives, I was able to not only observe Michelle's ability to move fluidly between different rhythms, but also the diversity of ways in which a friendship can flourish. Whether through instant emotional resonance or through a difference that becomes complementary, what matters most seems to be the willingness to show up authentically and the openness to receive the other as they are.

In the end, it's not about vibrating the same way it's about allowing our vibrations, whether similar or different, to meet in a shared space: authentic connection.



FROM INSPIRATION TO FRIENDSHIP

The journey from admiration to connection. Learning from others without hierarchies. From mentor to friend.

“Don’t listen to what someone says about themselves; watch how they live.”

Michelle is not someone who talks much about herself. She’s someone who focuses on one activity at a time and gives one hundred percent to each one. That’s why, to truly understand her, you have to understand how she spends her time. Among the hundreds of things she does, there is one that defines her in a special way and that I personally find fascinating: attending events to meet new people. But she doesn’t do it to engage in small talk; she does it with the intention of connecting from a place of authenticity, through conversations that invite reflection, depth, and discovery of others and of oneself.

In that shared search for real connection, we found ourselves at an event where we would meet Kristine, the host. From the very first moment, her warm energy, serene presence, and natural charm drew us in. What stood out to me was how, despite the contrast between her calm demeanor and Michelle’s vibrant intensity, they balanced each other in their first exchange in a surprisingly harmonious way. It was as if, without even trying, each offered the other exactly what they needed.

What I expected to be a guided conversation with Kristine assuming a mentor-like role quickly turned into a dialogue between equals. There were no hierarchies, no need for leadership. Just a genuine desire to share from lived experience.

From a psychological perspective, this shift from admiration to friendship can be understood as an evolution toward adult or symmetrical relationships. These types of connections are defined by equality, where the initial power dynamic or hierarchy (like that between mentor and mentee) is replaced by a bond built on mutual respect, reciprocity, and a shared capacity for growth and learning. In this kind of friendship, as Kristine describes it, a deep, safe, trustworthy, and empowering bond is created. True friendship doesn’t require one person to rise above the other in order to teach it calls for both to be willing to learn through their differences.

In this sense, it moves away from the dynamic of the “acquaintance,” which, as psychologist Meersman points out, “only sees you at your best,” and embraces a fuller, more authentic view of one another one that includes both victories and vulnerabilities.

So far, we’ve explored how friendships begin, the different types of connections we can form, and the “triggers” that help us recognize potential bonds. But as Dr. J Knight wisely reminds us, the origin of a connection even one born from mutual admiration is no guarantee of its permanence. No matter how intense the initial spark, it must be nourished. For a friendship to grow, one must feel truly “seen” in their authenticity and perceive a genuine intention to stay connected.

And it’s precisely at this point that a deeper question arises: How do we maintain and nurture that bond over time?

This leads us to our next exploration: the invisible threads that keep the flame of friendship alive.

THE LOVE LANGUAGES OF FRIENDSHIP

As my bond with Michelle grew stronger, she began to share her passion for psychology with me. That's when I started becoming familiar with key concepts of self-awareness tools essential for building healthy, conscious relationships with others. One night, between laughter and late-night conversations, she spoke to me for the first time about the love languages.

We already know them or at least they sound familiar: words of affirmation, quality time, acts of service, gifts, physical touch. But as this exploration unfolded, I couldn't help but wonder: what happens to these languages when there's no romantic bond involved? Do they function the same in a friendship? Do they transfer in the same way? Or do we need to rethink them altogether?

Take physical touch, for instance. In some cultures, hugging a friend is a natural gesture. In others, it might seem inappropriate or intrusive. So, do all love languages need to be adapted in the context of friendship? Or should we construct an entirely new paradigm that allows us to truly understand how love is expressed genuinely within friendship?

To explore these questions, we decided to investigate. We consulted psychologists, pastors, political scientists, professors, and also Michelle's closest friends. The responses we received were as diverse as they were revealing, each contributing a piece to the emotional map we were building, step by step.

Some expert voices agree that love languages can remain present in friendship, with slight adaptations. Dr. Larson, a couples therapist, sums it up in one word: time. For her, the key gesture is dedicating intentional moments to those we care about, letting them know we're thinking of them, staying in touch even with a quick message. That intention to remain present is a form of care and closeness.

Pastor J. Bloss also identifies quality time as the core of her most meaningful friendships. Whether their meetings are virtual or in person, they ensure to be fully present: long conversations, good food, and attentive listening. In her experience, friendship is nourished more by emotional presence than physical proximity.

Not everyone sees it the same way, however. For French political scientist Christopher, the true love language in friendship is respect: being on time, keeping your word, protecting the emotional space of the other. From his perspective, loving a friend is also an ethical practice one where everyday actions reflect the value we place on the relationship.

Others, like language professor F. Caputo, believe there's a language that deserves special attention: humor. The ability to share inside jokes, recurring punchlines, and laughter that only makes sense in the intimacy of friendship. For him, humor isn't just another ingredient it's a genuine way of expressing affection and connection.

Far from contradicting each other, these perspectives invite us to think of friendship not as a mirror of romantic relationships, but as a space that calls for expanding the traditional model. They help us see that affection between friends can take subtler, freer, and more context-specific forms.

Setting the academic framework aside for a moment, we turned to the people who know Michelle best: her friends. We asked them to share, from real-life experience, how love manifests in their friendships. Their responses came filled with tenderness, honesty, and vivid examples that captured the essence of each bond.

Micala spoke of improvised humor and words of affirmation, combined with a shared intellectual curiosity that feels exclusive to their relationship. Grace described their mutual affection as something almost absurd: random phrases and repeated sounds that might seem meaningless to others, but represent closeness and companionship to them. Kristine, on the other hand, pointed to quality time and acts of service as the main expressions of affection in her relationship with Michelle, highlighting the value of being available and present when it matters most.

Beyond the specific words used, all the responses shared one constant: unique codes born from shared intimacy. These invented languages only make sense within the friendship—where humor, simplicity, and the mere act of being near become authentic ways of saying “I love you.”

With all this theory, experience, and lived stories we dared to propose a new emotional map for understanding the love languages of friendship. Not as a rigid formula, but as an invitation to observe each bond with greater attention.

A New Emotional Map of the Love Languages in Friendship

Quality time

More than just sharing physical space, it means being present with intention. It's about dedicating specific moments to connect, talk, or simply be together—without distractions or rushing. It's time fully focused on the other, creating an environment where friendship can grow.

Words of affirmation

Verbal expressions that validate the bond and the appreciation we feel for the other person. It's not just about compliments it's about recognizing the friend's value in our lives. A sincere word can strengthen connection, offer support, or simply make the other feel seen and important.

Acts of service

Concrete actions that show care and availability. Sometimes helping with something small or being there during difficult moments is a way of saying “you matter.” These gestures aren't done for recognition, but to lighten a burden or offer support in a tangible way.

Respect

Acknowledging the other as an individual with their own needs, boundaries, and opinions. Respect in friendship means listening, validating different perspectives, and being consistently mindful of the friend's emotional space. It's about valuing them as they are, without imposing our expectations.

Shared humor

The ability to find joy and complicity in shared laughter and inside jokes. It's not just about laughing together it's about creating a space where humor acts as an emotional bridge, a shared refuge only the two of you understand.

Symbolisms

Every friendship develops a unique way of communicating. These are expressions, gestures, or small routines that naturally emerge and make the bond one of a kind. It's a language created spontaneously, reflecting the authenticity of the connection.

Curiosity

A genuine interest in knowing or learning about the other person in all their dimensions. Asking questions, listening, and showing a desire to understand what the other feels, thinks, or has to share keeps the friendship fresh, dynamic, and adaptive over time.

Sharing space

Being near one another without needing to speak or do anything in particular. Simply being together even in silence or while doing separate things can deepen the connection. This quiet presence becomes a gentle affirmation of companionship.

Silent loyalty, S.O.S.

The friend who may not be in daily contact but whom you know will show up when you truly need them. It's not about routine or physical closeness it's about the unwavering certainty that the bond remains strong, even at a distance.

Perhaps the most important part of all this is acknowledging that every bond invents its own language sometimes with words, sometimes without them, sometimes with gestures, sometimes through silence. What matters isn't whether others understand it, but that both people feel loved within that shared logic.

Ultimately, this new emotional map helps us grasp the wide variety of ways in which love is expressed in friendship. But beyond identifying these "languages," a deeper question emerges:

How do we weave and strengthen the invisible threads that keep a friendship alive over time? How do we ensure that affection, respect, and shared joy continue to renew themselves as life changes? Exploring these questions will lead us into the next chapter: the invisible threads that sustain a friendship.



THE INVISIBLE THREADS

How a Friendship Is Sustained

Rituals, emotional language, presence, and constant care.

One day, Michelle convinced me to go listen to a local artist at a bar in the city one of her many ways of exploring and enjoying live music. That night we met Franny, a guy with contagious humor, and Victoria, a young woman with a radiant smile and mysterious gaze. Michelle often shares quality time with both of them in different ways, but there's a special thread that unites them: music. They deliberately make time for this activity, a shared passion that goes beyond notes and melodies; it's about reserving moments to enjoy together, to connect in a space where music becomes the excuse for encounter. I firmly believe that these intentionally cultivated moments are essential to strengthening any relationship.

The invisible threads that sustain a friendship are often woven through rituals and shared emotional language. In the case of Michelle, Franny, and Victoria, their dedication to making music together transcends simple enjoyment it becomes a powerful act of social support. According to psychology, social support is fundamental to emotional well-being and resilience and manifests in various forms. In their dynamic, shared music acts as a channel for emotional support, where the joy of creating together and the connection through melody strengthens their bond. Additionally, this activity fosters a strong sense of belonging, reinforcing their identity as a group that shares values and passions. These dedicated moments this "making time" for shared enjoyment are the invisible threads that, nourished by mutual social support, keep their friendship vibrant and meaningful.

This dynamic reminds me of the philosophical notion of agape a kind of unconditional and selfless love that shows up as an active concern for the well-being of others. By dedicating time and energy to an activity they all enjoy, Michelle, Franny, and Victoria are practicing a form of agape in their friendship, nurturing the bond through shared experience and mutual support.

However, reflecting on my own experience, there are always some people who seem destined to be there for us, especially during times of change or difficulty. Sometimes, when we find ourselves in different life circumstances, people appear who can fulfill that need for chosen family offering the kind of emotional support that Franny and Victoria also provide Michelle through their constant friendship and presence in key moments of her life.

But what happens when those threads begin to blur? And by this, I'm not referring to examples like the one we've just explored, where the connection is clearly nourished and positive. I'm talking about those other friendships the ones that don't always flow in perfect harmony, where uncertainty and emotional distance can subtly in. What happens to bonds that, despite once being meaningful, begin to weaken or change in ways that confuse us? In these situations, the question of the nature and durability of friendship takes on a new dimension.

At the core of every friendship, there is more than just affinity or shared time there is a bond. It's not a visible object or a fixed structure but a form of connection that is built in the intersection of shared emotional experience, trust, and mutual availability. In relational psychology, this bond is described as the emotional space where two people meet and recognize each other. Unlike other types of relationships, friendship doesn't have external structures to hold it in place there are no

contracts, no social rituals that demand it continues. Its permanence depends on the flexibility of the bond its capacity to adapt, transform, or even renew itself entirely.

As adult attachment theory suggests, secure bonds are those that allow movement: closeness, distance, reunion. And within that movement, what matters most is not maintaining the original form of the relationship, but preserving the intention to keep connecting even if the coordinates have changed.

When a friendship shifts, the bond that held it together may no longer work in the same way. And yet, the sense of connection can still be preserved if both people are willing to meet again from a new place. As Dr. J. Knight told us, what sustains any bond is intention: the conscious will to keep seeking it, even in a different form. Applied to friendship, this means asking whether there is still mutual desire to keep sharing, even if the context is no longer the same. Sometimes it's not about preserving the same bond, but about letting the relationship evolve into a new "species of connection," where both people feel comfortable, recognized, and free.

In that process, what matters is not replicating what once was, but building something that makes sense now. Something that, though different, still holds that quality of aliveness that defines real connections: the ability to adapt, transform, and if both parties are willing be reborn.



EXPECTATIONS VS. REALITY

“Expectation is the root of all heartache.” — William Shakespeare

Connecting with someone often involves building an image of what that bond should look like. We expect attention, closeness, reciprocity. But when what we assume is normal turns into an expectation—and circumstances change due to external factors what happens then? Are we facing a fault in the other person... or a projection that doesn't match reality?

Sometimes it isn't the other person who changes. The situation changes, the priorities shift, the timing is different, or we ourselves are no longer the same. And in that gap between what we imagined and what actually happens, conflict arises: not just with the other person, but also with our own emotions. Something deeper is activated: are we in a healthy friendship, or in a bond sustained only by memory?

I remember one afternoon at a café with Michelle. She seemed a bit distant, her face slightly downcast. She's not the type to hide her feelings. She shared openly that she was hurt by the attitude of someone she used to feel very close to, but who now seemed to be drifting away. Someone from her inner circle who no longer responded with the same presence.

It wasn't a superficial complaint; in my view, it was a justified one. Michelle is someone who gives a lot of herself, and it's natural that part of her would feel frustrated when there's no clear intention or reciprocity in return.

Looking at that situation from a distance and reflecting on similar experiences in everyday friendships we call “close I began to wonder: how much do the labels we give our relationships affect them? Being “close friends,” for instance, can load a relationship with unspoken expectations that the other person may not be able or know how to fulfill. Maybe you once shared something profound at a particular moment, but now the context has changed. Today there are other priorities, different ways of being.

So when does holding onto a relationship start to hurt? Is it due to expectations others placed on me? Or ones I placed on them? Or simply a lack of interest from one side?

Author Brené Brown, an expert in vulnerability and human connection, offers a few questions to help explore what we feel in a bond not to judge, but to understand:

- Do I feel seen and understood by this person?
- Do I feel emotionally stronger after being with them, or more drained?
- Can I talk about what I need without feeling guilty?
- What was the bond that once united us... and what is it now?

It's not about demanding or necessarily cutting ties. It's about looking honestly and gently at the role that relationship plays in our lives today. Because even the deepest affection can transform. And sometimes, letting go of an expectation or realizing someone else has one of us—can be the first step toward releasing tension... and reclaiming peace in the relationship.

Many tensions between people don't arise from outright conflict, but from the mismatch between what we silently expect and what the other person can or wants to offer. When that gap persists, it begins to hurt: it creates discomfort, confusion, even distance.

Realizing a relationship frustrates us, hurts us, or no longer nourishes us like it used to doesn't always mean letting it go. But it does invite us to examine the framework from which we're relating. And in that process, conflict isn't the enemy. It can be a chance to adjust agreements, open up sincere conversations, or simply name what was once assumed.

Avoiding conflict, on the other hand, tends to reinforce a kind of silence that wears down the relationship more than difficult words ever could. As Harriet Lerner puts it:

“Unresolved conflicts don't disappear; they become part of the relationship.”

That's why understanding our expectations is only the first step. The next, if we want to care for the bond, is to learn to express ourselves clearly, set boundaries without guilt, and open the door to dialogue not to prove a point, but to reconnect from a more real, more human, and more possible place.



CONFLICT RESOLUTION

How Do We Care for a Friendship When There's a Difference?

After the initial stage of my bond with Michelle that period of discovery and excitement where everything flows naturally some tensions began to emerge, the kind that come from spending more time with someone. As happens in any meaningful relationship, the first differences soon appeared. Unlike Michelle, who was raised in a culture where expressing feelings is an essential part of mutual care, I grew up avoiding conflict in the name of harmony. I always believed that not talking about what hurts was a way to protect the bond, but over time, I began to feel its weight. That's when Michelle helped me see a different way: prioritizing the communication of needs as an act of care, not confrontation. That's how we began to build a more honest relationship, where disagreement wasn't a threat but an opportunity to understand each other better.

Sometimes we think that if we argue with someone we love, something must be wrong. But the deepest relationships aren't built on the absence of conflict they're built on how we move through difficult moments. Psychologist Meersman puts it clearly: "Disagreements should be addressed with open and honest communication, as well as active listening." For her, there's no need to fear conflict if it's faced with healthy tools. Friends, like couples or family members, are not exempt from clashing. No matter how much affinity there is, each person is a different universe, with stories, wounds, and ways of seeing the world that sometimes don't align. It's in those differences where friction can arise. But also, as Coach Vierra says, "We often cultivate and strengthen friendships and relationships through disagreements and difficulties."

To be in conflict doesn't mean to fail. It means to be engaged. It means something matters. And for that reason, if it's done with respect, a conflict can be a turning point toward a more conscious and authentic relationship. I also learned this by watching others. I saw friendships break because people didn't talk in time, because they kept things to themselves, because they assumed what the other thought or felt. But I also saw others mend, even grow stronger, after uncomfortable conversations. Because it's not about winning arguments it's about better understanding each other.

Dra. Burson offers a very useful idea: "Applying the same conflict resolution tactics from a romantic relationship is a good way to approach this: remembering that it's you and your friend against the problem, not you against your friend." That image both people on the same side, seeing the conflict as something external seems to me one of the most important keys to any relationship. As engineer Alarcón, an expert in friendship dynamics, notes, "It's necessary [to have disagreements] to learn about the other's conflict resolution style. I believe speaking calmly and clearly is key."

It's not about minimizing pain or differences. It's about validating what we feel without hurting the other, about seeking agreements without demanding that everything go back to how it was because sometimes, after a deep conversation, the relationship changes. But it can change for the better.

And what if there's no response from the other side? What if the conflict can't be resolved? Not all friendships survive their conflicts. Some fall apart, others cool off. But even those leave a lesson: not every story has a happy ending, but there is always something to learn. And sometimes what we learn isn't about the other person, but about ourselves: how we apologize, how we set boundaries, how we react to discomfort, how much we're willing to care for a relationship.

Resolving a conflict isn't about covering it up or forgetting it. It's about going through it with res-

pect, with courage, and with the humility to recognize that in friendship, as in love, sometimes the bravest thing you can do is listen.



LONG-DISTANCE RELATIONSHIPS

What Holds the Bond When We're Not Close?

The day I met Michelle, she was 24 years old. It was in a Spanish-speaking country in the southern part of the continent. I couldn't help but ask her: "How did you end up here?"

With the energy that defines her, she told me she had decided to leave her country and start from scratch, without a clear plan just the genuine urge to live a new experience. And so her life took a turn.

I had always heard stories of people who emigrated to places where they knew no one and didn't even speak the language. And although I had made similar decisions, I always tried to move within spaces where I could communicate. Looking back, that's why I find what Michelle did so admirable: choosing uncertainty as a path.

When she spoke to me about her university years, she did so with special affection. During that time, she shared a lot with Grace, someone with a sharp, clear, and deeply honest sense of humor, whom she describes as "the person with the best intentions in the world." And also with Ali, someone charismatic, with a huge smile that seems to light up any room. Over the years, Grace and Ali continued to grow their personal and professional lives, both individually and alongside their partners. Michelle, on the other hand, dove into travel, language learning, and new beginnings.

Even so, something caught my attention: she spoke about them with the familiarity and enthusiasm of someone who had just come back from a recent get-together. There was no emotional distance in her words as if time and physical separation hadn't affected the bond at all.

I asked her how that friendship worked, considering many people believe that bonds need constant time and physical presence to stay alive. Her answer gave me a new perspective: for her, quality time doesn't mean always being together it means nurturing the connection when it really matters. She told me that every time she returns to her country, she finds the moment to reconnect with them, and when she does, everything flows as if no time had passed.

From a psychological point of view, this can be understood as a kind of "secure attachment friendship." These are bonds in which both people feel trust, emotional stability, and a solid foundation of affection—even when there's distance or periods of silence. These friendships don't suffer from absence because they're grounded in the emotional certainty that the other person is still there—available and open to reconnecting. It's not about constant closeness, but emotional permanence.

Grace expressed it clearly when reflecting on this kind of bond:

"Distance may stretch the time between conversations, but it never erases love and care. True friends can pick up right where they left off."

This type of friendship doesn't require explanations or keep track of how much time passes between meetings. It trusts in the emotional permanence of the other and the ability to reconnect as if there had been no pause. Michelle, Grace, and Ali not only share memories from the past, but a tacit commitment to care for the bond with mutual respect and choice even when their paths don't

cross often.

And maybe that's what matters most: knowing that there are people for whom time doesn't erode affection it strengthens it. Recognizing that friendship doesn't always need constant physical presence, but rather the certainty that the other is still there, ready to walk the shared path again.

This reflection still holds true today. Jessie, another one of her friends, puts it simply:

"Distance certainly tests friendships because you can't rely on bumping into each other at the gym, the grocery store, church, etc., to keep the friendship afloat. But distance offers the invitation to choose whether the friendship is important enough to each person to make an intentional effort to keep it alive and thriving. Michelle is the gold standard example of how to live that well!"

This comment sums up what defines Michelle in her relationships: the commitment to care for the bond, even when life takes them in different directions. It's not about measuring shared time, but valuing the emotional space each person holds in the other's life.

However, there's a subtle threshold we can't overlook: what happens when one of the people starts to feel that distance becoming too heavy? Is it still friendship when the bond turns into a constant emotional need?

This question invites us to reflect on the limits between secure attachment and dependency. At what point do our expectations of the other begin to distort the relationship? Maybe the real challenge lies in finding that balance: knowing when mutual affection can withstand distance, and when the desire to maintain the bond starts turning into a burden.

Long-distance friendship tests our ability to let go of control over the everyday and trust that—even as time passes—the genuine connection remains. In the end, as Jessie says, distance invites us to decide whether the effort is worth it. And in Michelle's case, it seems like it always is.



NEW PARTICIPANTS

How Do We Sustain a Bond When Time and Family Responsibilities Pull Us Apart?

After two years of friendship with Michelle, I began to notice how her visits to her home country started to change. What used to be shared plans, group outings, and long conversations among friends gradually turned into weddings, baby showers, and gatherings with growing families. Michelle often tells me, with genuine excitement, how happy she is to meet her friends' partners and accompany them in these new chapters. For her, the shift in dynamic seems natural, even hopeful.

But I wonder: is it like that for everyone? Does everyone go through these transitions without feeling a sense of loss, without nostalgia for what used to be? What happens to those of us who remain somewhat on the sidelines, watching how the other's life takes on new directions—ones that no longer leave as much shared space as before?

Starting a family, moving cities, finding a long-term partner, or entering new professional rhythms these are all experiences that reconfigure our priorities. Suddenly, friendships stop being the gravitational center and become satellites orbiting other structures. And even though we understand this is part of growing up, something becomes emotionally unsettled when the other is no longer as available as before.

In this regard, Dr. J. Knight notes that while friendships inevitably evolve over time, the fundamental pillars that once united people tend to endure, even if they express themselves in new ways. The essence of connection can transcend life changes.

Dr. Caputo adds that "true bonds find their place, even as the context shifts." He argues that even when time and life physically separate us, deep friendships retain a "three-story VIP attic in the heart." There's a kind of connection that doesn't need constant contact to stay alive—a single signal, a shared memory, a message at the right time is enough to reignite the sense of closeness.

However, Dr. Meersman offers an important nuance: "The dynamic of a friendship must change over time and it should. Evolving together, and also as individuals, is part of the bond. If we stayed the same forever, everything would become very boring!" This idea may feel uncomfortable because it implies accepting that some forms of closeness may fall away without meaning the friendship is over. But it also opens the possibility of creating new codes, new ways of being together.

Pastor J. Bloss also offers a reflection that invites us to embrace the natural movement of friendships:

"It is normal and natural for friendships to come and go. People move, enter new life stages, their values change, and so do the people they spend time with. I think it's important to grieve friendships that end for any of these reasons, but also to accept that it's part of life. In my experience, friendships that feel forced never last."

Her words bring something essential into perspective: sometimes, letting go of a bond doesn't mean failure—it means acknowledging that it has fulfilled its cycle. Clinging to a fixed idea of friendship can lead us to hold on to relationships that no longer fit our current lives. Accepting change doesn't mean losing affection; it means recognizing that the context has shifted.

It's true that when our friends start building families, certain topics dominate the conversation. Schedules, plans, and priorities change. And those of us who aren't in that phase yet may feel we no longer have as much in common. But is that a sign of the end—or an invitation to reconnect from a new place?

In regard to this adaptation, Dr. Larson, an expert in relationship development, suggests that successful friendships are those that evolve in response to life changes, such as starting families. The key lies in finding new routines and ways of connecting that align with changing priorities, understanding that less frequent contact doesn't necessarily mean a decline in affection or the importance of the bond.

In Michelle's case, something I deeply admire is her ability to create new forms of closeness. She puts great intention into connecting with her friends' partners, integrating herself into new group structures, and creating shared spaces even amidst change. And while that reflects deep social sensitivity, it also brings up a necessary question: what place do one-on-one bonds have within this expansion?

Perhaps this is where a powerful act of care resides: while friendship should adapt to the new structure, it can also seek intentional, more intimate moments that rekindle the original connection—where the bond between two people doesn't get diluted in group dynamics. It's not about resisting change, but about reminding each other of the value of what brought us together in the first place.

Thinker T. Lowe puts it clearly:

“Friendships, like people, change and evolve over time. Embrace the change. Grow.”

Perhaps the real challenge lies in understanding that growing doesn't necessarily mean drifting apart, but it does require letting go of certain expectations to make space for a new form of the bond.



DOES TRUE FRIENDSHIP EXIST?

A collective reflection. Testimonies, thoughts, conclusions.

After going through all these stories, perspectives, and emotions, I continue to believe now more than ever—that true friendship does exist. But I no longer imagine it as something perfect, unchangeable, or always present. I see it more as a living bond, one that breathes, evolves, and sometimes transforms.

I began this book with a clear question: What makes a friendship true? And while I didn't find a single answer, I did discover many ways in which that bond can manifest. Sometimes it's born from an immediate, almost magical connection. Other times, it builds slowly—with patience, with shared rituals. Some friendships are nourished by humor, others by silence. Some survive the passage of time and distance, and others need to be redrawn when life changes pace.

What I've learned most of all is that there is no one way to be a friend. That what matters isn't how often we talk, how frequently we see each other, or whether we're still the same people we were before. What matters what makes a friendship true is the intention to keep showing up. To keep choosing each other, even when the forms change. To care for the bond when it's worth it, and to let go with love when it no longer brings good.

This book isn't just about Michelle, nor about me. It's about all of us who have ever wondered whether a connection is still alive, whether it's worth holding onto, whether we're being truly seen. It's about the people who, without knowing it, leave a mark on us through the way they love. It's also about you if, while reading, someone in particular came to mind.

Maybe that person is someone who's no longer close, or someone who just arrived. Maybe they held you silently, without grand gestures, or maybe they showed you a new way of being there. If any part of this made you look at your own friendships differently, then this book has already fulfilled its purpose.

And if you're in that stage of life where you're seeking new connections, I want to tell you something: with a little luck and a lot of presence you may come across someone like Michelle or one of her friends. Someone who sees you without filters, who laughs with you for no reason, who listens even if they don't fully understand. People like that do exist.

And if you're even luckier as I was you may find that they not only choose to be your friend... but also your partner.

And then you'll discover that the most beautiful parts of friendship can also live in love.

Dr Jacob (of the Knight Order)



One sentence!

You suck. Just kidding, I love you lots!

Memory with Michelle

So many. She lingers like a quiet fart sometimes. Lots of moments have stuck with me. Yelling at demons together. Dancing together on the dance floor. Talking shit about assholes from high school. Being in the same bed just scrolling on our phones. Surviving interactions with her family. Countless voice memos. Pulling wheat from buttholes. Her love for Dairy Queen and Taco Bell. Dressing up in wigs and winning Dance King and Queen. Polar Plunging. And honestly, just getting pictures from her when she plans a picnic, attacks her boyfriend's body, or goes somewhere fun-- just witnessing her life sticks with me

Dra Victoria Alarcon (wine expert)

Memory with Michelle

When she prepared a surprise going out to cheer me up after something bad happened to me.



One sentence!

I love you and am so happy we met

Kristin Vierra (Lifestyle Coach)



One sentence!

I'm SO grateful that you coming to BA Colectivo was the bud of our friendship

Memory with Michelle

Honestly, it's the fun we have at our events! Even when things get stressful or something goes wrong, we still end up laughing and enjoying the moment. I just love that!

Grace Meersman (reincarnation of kindness)

Memory with Michelle

The suitcase story will always stay with me (lol). Also, I will always remember how Michelle made me feel on our graduation day when she created me the most heart felt video of all my loved ones congratulating me. That was the most thoughtful gift anyone has given me and it made me never want to let her go as a friend.



One sentence!

Exuberance - she is the most lively person I have ever had the honor of meeting and loving.

Dr Franco Caputo (Small people specialist)



One sentence!

Flap them titties

Memory with Michelle

There was this one time Michelle and I were dining in a cruise and we were playing this game where she had to finish my sentences and I said “my favorite chip flavor is salt and vi...” and she finished it off yelling with, well, you know....And when she realized what she had said she was horrified and I was laughing my ass off.

Memories :’)

Jessie Bloss (Pastora)

Memory with Michelle

So many! When her and I were photos-hopping boobs on a frog while Jack and Micala were philosophizing really was a hilarious juxtaposition. Every pina colada club gathering was an absolute gift to get to share together! I loved painting on the back porch together during covid at our lake house. I loved celebrating your DIY WWU graduation. I love our meaningful phone calls.



One sentence!

I love you!

Chris (Politologo in the bathrooms)



One sentence!

Happy birthday Delphine

Memory with Michelle

Once she walked into a poop

Dra Ali Coker (anti bear league)

Memory with Michelle

Oh my goodness so many! I do want to highlight just how deeply Michelle cares for her friends and puts action to her words. If she says she wants to see you, she will do anything possible to make it happen. When she comes to visit the States, she is hopping from one state to another, flight to flight, to see the people that matter to her. What a gift it's been to be on the receiving end of that. My most favorite recent memory of Michelle is when she came face to face with a bear in our neighborhood when she went for a morning walk. She was very brave and tried to scare that bear off!



One sentence!

You are already enough, and every day you make people feel seen, heard, special, and loved.

T. Lowe (Philosopher)



One sentence!

Michelle, you make me smile!

Memory with Michelle

I remember when I puked in Michelle's coffee mug and fell asleep on her couch. I had too much tequila in the bars at Pozas, and I was really going through it, but Michelle was so kind. She even made breakfast for me and everybody else the next morning. I'll never forget that!

Dra Nicole Bruson (family reunification specialist)

Memory with Michelle

There are so many. So hard to choose— I will choose a recent one! Having her stay with my family for a week and truly be apart of my family means the world to me. It's proof that she's more than just a friend to me, she's family and so much more.



One sentence!

You sexy turnip, I will love you with my whole heart for as long as I live.

Ms Goble (alpaca conservator)



One sentence!

Michelle, thank you for being the truest, most genuine, most loving human bean in this world - and thank you for sharing all of you with me

Memory with Michelle

I don't think that I have had a single moment with Michelle that isn't memorable. She fills each and every moment of the day with joy, enthusiasm, and pure love!! Together, we have climbed Macchu Picchu, skied the Andes, flirted with strangers (and each other), fallen asleep snuggling, celebrated each other and those we love the most, danced on table tops and beds, and had moments of calm, quiet, peaceful, and intentional conversations. Life with Michelle is the truest, most wonderful adventure! The only fault in our friendship is that we are both, sadly, hetero. I love you Michelle!!

Mr Chule (poop expert)

Memory with Michelle

comida, paseo, pelota pelota, comida paseo, comida, basura, pelota, comiidaaaaa, comida comida paseo?!



One sentence!

Paseo?

Drs Larson (specialist in couples' conflicts)



One sentence!

You are my very best friend, my favorite conversation buddy, my musical soul sister, and you will always have me in your corner; you are good down to your core, loved more than you know, and have an ass that literally won't quit

Memory with Michelle

There are so many that make me SO HAPPY and are SO ON BRAND for us! I will name a few:

1. When we met in the WWU library and had our first real convo and sparks flew and within 15 mins of talking, we went over some serious trauma stories. And that was when I realized she was a little insane and also the most genuine person I'd ever met, and I was in love instantly!
2. When we spent like 8 hours driving around bham and just finding places to eat food and talk□ She is the BEST PERSON to have a conversation with and makes me so happy
3. Every single time we sit in a car in a driveway and talk for an obscene amount of time, even though the front door is RIGHT THERE
4. HER BIRTHDAY PARTY IN SPOKANE!!!! Jello shots in mailboxes, chalk penises, fireball margs, "scattilite!!", Josh's posture lessons.... perfection
5. Micala's car song

Guapo (amazing president executive)

Memory with Michelle

I remember when you told me to steal from an old lady because you thought it would be fun. In the end, I didn't do it and ten minutes later, you came back with her purse. Thank you for being my best friend.

Tambien eres la mejor persona del mundo y te amo, te admiro, te respeto y tienes una energia unica



One sentence!

siempre seras mi alpaca electrica del amor..
Saaaur!!!

EPILOGUE

Learning Through Her

It's curious how sometimes we don't realize how much we're learning just by watching someone be.

That's what happened to me with Michelle.

It wasn't that she gave me answers.

It was that, by seeing how she connected with the world, with her friends, with people she had just met, I started to notice things that used to pass me by.

Michelle has a way of being that transforms.

Not because it's loud or grandiose, but because it's honest.

It's in the way she looks without judgment, listens without urgency, gives without expecting—that's when you start to understand that friendship isn't a contract or an obligation.

It's an act of presence, a daily gesture, a way of saying "I see you" without words.

Through her connections, I learned that being a friend isn't always about being constant—it's about being consistent.

It's not about how much we give, but about where that giving comes from.

And when someone offers us true friendship, they're also giving us a chance to grow.

This book began with a question, but it found a guiding light: Michelle's way of connecting.

She's not just a friend she teaches others how to be one.

And those of us lucky enough to cross paths with her carry in our hearts a new way of seeing relationships.

I hope that as you close these pages, you feel that too.

That something in your way of being with others has shifted, softened, opened.

And that, in some way, Michelle has touched you too.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To those who made this book a mirror of true connection.

I am deeply grateful to all of Michelle's friends, whose generous commitment to friendship gave life and light to this project.

Each of your voices, memories, reflections, and emotions have woven together this map of connection that now becomes a book.

Thank you for opening your hearts, for trusting, for sharing without filters what it means to be a friend.

This book would not exist without you.

And undoubtedly, neither would friendship.

— Daniel Munar.

What is it that truly connects us to another person?

Is it time, proximity, shared history?

Or is it something subtler, almost invisible

Feels and Friendship

an an emotional and reflective journey
into the mysteries of true friendship.

Invites readers to insights from
experts, and moments shared
with people from different
parts of the world, true
presences, spontaneous
affect, conflicted sincerity,
and everyday rituals.

Because friendship doesn't
always shout—but when
it's genuine, you can feel it.

Not a guide. Not a formula

An open conversation about what
it means to choose someone
again and again.

BY DANIEL MUNAR