

Memories of Sonia

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By Sara Mackay

In a reminder of the frailty of human life, Sonia Foster is gone at 45. I'm sure I'm not alone in being sad and mad and hurt that she left us so early. We've all lost a friend in a shared-busy-life kind of way, a member of our swim community. But Jodie, 16, and Janelle, 13, lost their mother, the best friend of their life. And Peter, his beautiful bride.

Sonia was a beautiful woman, with a great big smile, and eyes that danced mischievously, when she smiled. She was completely devoted to her girls. She had a busy life; a serious job, was continuing her education, mothering teenage girl swimmers with a lot of driving thrown in! She was a woman on the move. She kind of tossed her head when she laughed, in accent.

Sonia laughing. What a vibrant thought.

Sonia was sort of fierce about instilling good values in her girls. That's part of why she supported their swimming so much. In retrospect, she was right to be in kind of a hurry. She did an incredible job, knowing the lovely, sensible, well-spoken young ladies Janelle and Jodie already are. One can only imagine how much they'll have learned and cherish all that travel time of chatter, driving back and forth to Bodden Town.

She loved to travel; to swim meets, (especially Carifta where the Caribbean comes together), back home to Jamaica, anywhere. I really got to know her on a swim trip to San Jose, California; 'Far Westerns'. Jodie was quite young to go that far, so at the last minute Sonia and Janelle came along. Janelle was just a tyke who beautifully behaved the entire trip.

We spent long HOT (over 100°) days on the pool deck, cheering, organizing, driving back & forth, and shopping. She loved it when I fussed at Dave + Dom + Jim when we got left once, and she always came along on the shopping expeditions and made the most of them. After 5 days of swim meet, we piled all the kids in a van for a day's excursion to San Francisco, setting the coaches loose.

She LOVED San Francisco. I remember her declaring; 'now THIS is a CITY'. We walked with the kids everywhere, all of us beaming all day long. I hope that photo of her on Lombard St (the zigzag one) still exists. There was a bit of chaos getting onto Alcatraz with not enough tickets, then a reunion of sorts. Later, we ran into the coaches, had to pry the kids away. A great, great day, and we were buddies ever since. After that, she let Jodie go on swim trips without her, 'cuz she knew how they worked and approved.

Several years later, in 2004 (pre-Athens for our little Olympic team), 'Far Westerns' we're back in San Jose. American Airlines cancelled our flight home, so it turned into an opportunity to take a night flight and again walk the kids all over San Francisco! By then everyone had cell phones, they all called their parents with a 'guess what'. Sonia was delighted.

Sonia had a lot of time for other people's kids, was an astute observer and judge of character. She could be a tough cookie when the occasion called for it. When a young Jodie acquired a nick name she didn't like, Coach Dave heard about it from Sonia big time and it stopped. You knew where you stood with Sonia.

We knew little about her professional life at the prison, but I'm sure she was a force to be reckoned with there too.

One time a melee/attack broke out in the car-park outside the Lions Pool. Most wouldn't have gone near it, but Sonia, a trained professional, watched from her SUV 'til the right time and went in with no hesitation. She broke it up; put two big kids in a head lock, one under each arm. She had it completely under control; it was the only time we ever saw her hair messed up.

This will be a lasting memory, of a smiling friend in a parking-lot where much of our friendship was shared, waiting for swimming children. Funny how much parking-lot friendships of shared busy lives grow to mean. Damn we're going to miss her.