

Brush with Brad Pitt: 'It's for a part, you guys'

I share so much with Brad Pitt. A Springfield, Missouri upbringing, presumably a soft spot for the local Mexican Villa (the one on National Street, not the new one) ... and one happy hour in December 1990.

My then-boyfriend, we'll call him Kenneth, had grown up with Brad since grade school, and they had remained friends — enough so that we were meeting up with the old gang while Brad was home from L.A. for Christmas.

Brad was a budding actor. He had been in a few things like "Head of the Class" and I think "Dallas" and some other small roles. Though he was older than me, he had gone to a rival high school and had younger siblings with mutual friends, so I knew who he was.

Brad entered the sports bar at the Lamplighter Hotel on the busy corner of Sunshine and Glenstone, trying way too hard to look like he wasn't trying way too hard. He had chin-length hair, sort of slicked back; a goatee; a turtleneck; and a blazer — only bail bondsmen and school principals wore blazers in Springfield — with elbow patches. Suede.

He stood out like a sore thumb.

My best friend from third grade, Shannon, was with us, and the cheap beer was flowing. Kenneth got up and greeted Brad, then started to mingle with some of their other Kickapoo High School friends. Brad sat down with Shannon and me in our booth.

Shannon. Me. In a booth. With Brad Pitt.

Since Brad was just a moderate celeb at the time, we weren't overly starstruck. Just havin' a few Bud Lights with a townie, albeit a townie who would go on to become "People Magazine's" Sexiest Man Alive. Twice.

Now, this was 1990, and at least back then, Brad was the nicest, most polite Southern Baptist kid you could ever meet. But still, at age probably 27, he was also a little cocky. And I think he was mildly offended when, after his name-dropping culminated in an anecdote about his fling Robin Givens, Shannon slammed her beer on the table and yelled drunkenly, "If you're so famous, how come *we've* never heard of you," while I did a little chair dance and mocked, "*Ooooooooooh, Mister Hollywood.*"

Most of that night is a blur, but I vividly remember the following: We began making fun of Brad's longish hair — both of us mussing it and taunting him — "Nice hair, *Braaaaad*. Nice goatee, *Braaaaad*."

He replied with that acquired Cali "dude" affect: "It's for a part, you guys." We retorted, "*Riiiiiiiiiiiiight, it's for a part, you guys.*"

I never saw Brad again, well, certainly not in person. But a few months after that holiday hoedown, I did see him on the silver screen — as "J.D." in "Thelma and Louise" — his huge, huge break. No blazer, but scruffy facial hair and that same muss-able mane.

I sheepishly called Shannon. Guess it was for a part, you guys ...