

These were the “Best of Times”



There I am, graduation from 8th grade from the now-defunct Park View Elementary in Huntington Beach, 1982. I love this picture, braces and all. It brings back that afternoon in June so many years ago with crystal-clear glee.

It was one of the happiest days of my life.

Don't you remember that feeling of being young and completely unfettered and joyful? School was over and I had the new world of High School waiting for me after a summer of going to the beach and hanging out with my friends. I wasn't hammered by the worries of adulthood, or even the jittery angst of a teenager.

I would give anything to have that feeling just for an hour today, but I think it's reserved for kids of a certain age, as it should be. Every cliché about youth seems to reveal itself as true as the years pass.

The innocence and simplicity of that time is best personified in the inscriptions and signatures in my old Junior High yearbooks. It's funny, I found I was drawn more to the signatures than to who was voted “Class Flirt” or who won the baffling “Citizenship Award.”

In my yearbook inscriptions, the girls professed their undying friendship and the boys proclaimed, with astonishing clarity, their true feelings. I remember the honor and slight terror when handed a yearbook to sign; its owner hovering above me with a look that said, “This better be good. I wrote an entire three paragraphs on the back page of yours and claimed you as

a FF (Friend Forever)."

While reading my yearbooks, one thing that popped out at me was the request for me to "Stay Sweet." This was written over and over again: "Suzanne, stay sweet." So, either my friends thought there was a clear danger of crossing over to the dark side or it was just a filler comment like "Have a bitchin' summer. See ya at the beach," which also habitually appears in every Orange County yearbook.

Some of the comments were touching and sweet. Reading them now, I wish I would have known more about what was going on behind the Vuarnet sunglasses of my Van-tennis-shoe-wearing contemporaries. In some of them, little stories peek through and remind me how important even the most fleeting relationship can be when you are young.

You can look at my yearbooks below, just click to enlarge them, but here are some excerpts:

Yep, Chip said I was "the prettiest girl in 7th grade" but, I found out later in my first lesson in the brutal reality that was adolescent boys, he signed that same thing in two other girl's books.

"You have been the best friend a guy could have. When I first came here you were the first one to make friends with me. I always want us to be friends. You are the BEST! and I mean it." Danny.

"I'm sorry I was so mean to you sometimes. I wish we could have been better friends, but I know it's my fault...PS sorry for being such a jerk." Sean

"I like you because you aren't stuck-up like some people!" Nichole

"In 7th grade we weren't good friends and then in 8th we got to get to be good friends and now we are just friends..."

Bridgette

When our class graduated, we choose the song by Styx, "The Best of Times," to accompany us down the aisle. We were the first year to break from the standard, "We've Only Just Begun," by the Carpenters.

I remember when they called my name, my older brothers and all of their friends cheered wildly from the back row. I can still see them jumping, whistling and waving their arms unabashedly in the late afternoon sun. I acted as if I were embarrassed by their show, but deep inside I embraced the great honor of even being acknowledged by high school boys.

"Our memories of yesterday will last a lifetime...these are the best of times."

