



Girl Crazy

A teenager discovers the opposite sex.

It all started in the late spring of sixth grade on the playground of Stevens Elementary School, when Irene Graver had two boys from our class hold me by my arms against the monkey bars while she kissed me right on the mouth. Up to that moment, I had accepted that girls were all *Sugar and spice and everything nice*, but Irene's behavior suggested that there something more going on here and I had better figure it out.

Shortly before my 11th birthday, I was off to 7th grade at Central Junior High School, and a world of social awakening for pre-teen adolescence. In a defining moment, a veterinarian's daughter entertained a group from our class in the lunchroom with a graphic description of how horses made babies. We were both mesmerized and horrified. After school, I tried to tell my mother about the conversation, but she cut me short with a warning, "Stay away from the sex".

For the next seven years, I and my cohort of students would spend much of our waking hours trying to untangle the mysteries and wonders of boy-girl relationships. The school held dances twice a year in the gym with recorded music, dimmed lights and all. For most of us it was the first authorized opportunity to touch someone of the opposite sex and taste the joys of attraction.

There were three other memorable events from those early years. A girl who sat in front of me in class had long braided pigtails. I dipped one in the inkwell (yes, we still had inkwells), I suppose trying to get her attention. I was sent to the Principal's office and a note was sent home to my mother. The girl forgave me and in fact, gave me a kiss that day after school.

That same year, I had a crush on a 13-year old girl in my class and asked her to go steady with me. I even presented her with a ring that my sister got for me at a five-and-dime. Two weeks later, she returned my ring and handed me my first of many teenage heartbreaks. She said her parents disapproved and besides, her braces hurt when I kissed her. And so it goes.

Then in 9th grade, I played 2nd clarinet in the Junior High Symphony Orchestra. A girl who played 3rd clarinet told me one day that she had decided to become a prostitute and offered me a free sample of her wares just because she liked me. I was terrified and declined with trembling lips and sour notes.

My high school years blossomed in the world of American Bandstand – Chubby Checker, Bill Haley, Elvis Presley. We were dancing fools with a wide variety of venues; Churches, the YMCA, the schools, even public parks held dances for teens. My parents gave me car when I

was 16, which widened my dating horizons, introduced drag racing, drive-ins and sub-marine races. The movie *American Graffiti* was more my yearbook than my actual yearbook.

I graduated from high school in 1957, the same year that fins were added to new automobiles, and I enlisted in the US Army not long after my 18th birthday. Shortly before leaving for basic training, I took my summer squeeze to a double feature at a drive-in for the long goodbye. Snuggling and petting through the first feature got serious when the second movie started. The second feature must have been really bad because most of the other cars left during the showing. We failed to notice. We were brought up short by a rap on the driver's side window by a man with a flashlight. I couldn't see him at first because the windows were all fogged up. When I rolled down the window, I was greeted by a scene much like the one in the illustration below. He was the manager and said that he wanted to close up and send the staff home, especially since we didn't seem to be watching the movie anyway. He most likely saved us both a lifetime of regret.



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