

The good life is just a zipper away

When I was a kid, the worst age to be was around 14, give or take a year or so. That delicate age was difficult for both boys and girls alike. The demands of society and nature called for interaction between the sexes in ways that were nothing short of confusing.

To make life extra uncomfortable, schools held chaperoned dances to allegedly introduce young teens to the social graces and the adventures of life as budding adults. You know the time — when all your friends were going through an identity crisis and the style of a boy's hair suddenly became more important than baseball. And for girls, everything was a catastrophe. The cars their parents drove and the clothes they wore, and the mundane, uninteresting jobs their fathers had, were all major embarrassments.

The problem with being 14 was that we were too young to drive. At that time, nothing could be less cool than having a parent drive us to a school function, or anywhere else for that matter. When we went to a dance, we either went stag or asked a girl who lived within walking distance from school — anything to avoid being seen with a parent.

My little gang of social misfits decided that for the first dance it would be better to meet girls there, or just go stag and hope for the best. None of us had ever asked a girl to anything, and everyone, including the girls, felt awkward.

The girls were dressed up, wore make-up, and looked older and sophisticated. We had never seen them like that before. It was scary. We stood in groups trying to think of something to say to each other that wasn't stupid. Few succeeded. Nobody wanted to dance. We didn't know how. So we pushed a couple of tables together and sat around eating popcorn and drinking punch while the older kids danced.

Pookie Grossberg asked a really cute girl to meet him. Everybody was shocked because Pookie wasn't exactly a prize. They seemed to be getting along fairly well though, and they set the tone for everyone else to relax and have fun. After a while, Pookie excused himself to go to the boy's room, but he was gone for a long time. His date asked Kinky Boswell if he'd go see what happened to him.

When Kinky walked into the restroom, he found Pookie grunting and tugging on his zipper. "Whadda you doin' Grossberg?" Kinky asked. "That cute little girl sent me to look for you."

Apparently, Pookie caught his shirttail in his zipper and couldn't get it out or zip up his pants. He asked Kinky to help, but there was no way Kinky was going to take a chance on somebody walking in while he was trying to fix Pookie's zipper. So he told him to take off his trousers. Pookie said



You can't beat a system you can't understand

By Sam Bari

he couldn't get them off because the shirttail was caught in the zipper. Kinky told him to unbutton his shirt and take that off too.

Kinky couldn't fix it, so he said he'd give the clothes to Darlene, who was known for her sewing skills, and ask her to help. After Kinky left, the principal, Norman Justice, commonly called "No Justice" by the student body, stormed into the boy's room to see if he could catch somebody smoking.

All he found was Pookie standing in his sports coat and underwear. "Where are your clothes?" Justice asked. "Kinky Boswell took them," Pookie replied. Before he could finish explaining, the principal stomped out muttering to himself.

Meanwhile, Darlene and two of her girlfriends took Pookie's clothes to the sewing classroom so she could fix Pookie's zipper. Kinky was telling Chilly Mac and Louie the Lip what happened and the three of them were laughing hysterically when No Justice grabbed Kinky and demanded to know where Pookie's clothes were.

Kinky was so surprised that

he just blurted out, "Darlene has them." No Justice turned beet red and said, "You mean the girls are involved in this, too?" Then he stomped off again and found a pair of gym shorts for Pookie. He went to the boy's room and told him to put them on and go home. Pookie was too embarrassed to go back to the dance, so he just walked home and hoped Kinky would explain what happened to his date.

No Justice found Kinky, Louie the Lip, and Chilly Mac and ordered them to come with him. He took them to the office and called their parents to come pick them up. Then he went back to the auditorium where Darlene and the girls were returning with Pookie's clothes, zipper fixed, and everything as it should be.

No Justice grabbed Pookie's clothes from Darlene and directed the three girls to the office. When they tried to explain, he told them to sit down and not utter a word. He called their mothers and instructed them to pick up the girls. He told all the parents to come to the office on Monday morning with their children and they would deal with the situation appropriately.

As it happened, things worked out in the end. Explanations were given, and nobody was reprimanded. However, No Justice never apologized, nor was he expected to do so. Not in those days. It just went down as a misunderstanding. Nonetheless, we knew. The first dance was our first clue that life would never be easy living in a system we can't understand.

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