

STONEWALL BABY

A high-school story

*Here's a Valentine for the girl who knew—
but helped a gay boy save his all-important reputation*

by Will O'Bryan

This is a story in honor of St. Valentine's Day. It's a tale of love and remembrance, both sordid and endearing. This year marks the 11-year anniversary of losing my virginity.

Supposedly, you never forget your first. I believe that. Her name was Jenni. Surprise! My first sexual liaison, barring "if you show me yours..." was a heterosexual one.

My late '80s were spent on Florida's west coast, a few miles north of Tampa. It's where I went to high school—with Jenni. Florida's so-called "Sun Coast" shouldn't draw up visions of the lambada or even Disney World. It is sunny and there are beaches, but it was a monumentally dull setting for a teenager.

While Tampa was full of hedonistic flavors, Port Richey offered little more than a sleepy shopping mall filled with geriatric "mall walkers" who kept the discount cafeteria in the black. To amuse ourselves we adolescents had to be creative.

Jenni, a healthy 16-year-old girl, entertained herself with sex. You can imagine my chagrin when she turned her sights on me. Had I been an All-American hetero football player, I'm sure I would've been thrilled.

But I was not the football player. I fantasized about him. I also passed the time waiting to get a response from my Morrissey fan mail and wondering if the members of A-Ha might be gay. Imagine a mid- to late-'80s gay-cliché teen and you'll see me.

At first, Jenni tried to be subtle. She was subtle enough that I could ignore her. She reasoned that I was just an idiot who had no grasp of innuendo, but that made me no less attractive to her. Judging by some of her other conquests, she may actually have had a moron fetish.

Her big gun came in the form of the legendary high-school note, the kind teenagers pass to each other between classes. That I was an enthusiastic note-passer should've tipped her off that I might be a bit femme, but not until long after puberty were any of us that sophisticated.

Jenni wrote that she was at her wits' end trying to win my interest. Perhaps she got an earful of advice in the girl's bathroom after second period or maybe she simply had more nerve than I'll ever have, but she literally spelled it out: "I want to sleep with you," read the note.

I was trapped. There were only two ways for me to stay in the closet: feign severe dyslexia and pretend I couldn't read the note or sleep with Jenni. I didn't know what to do, so I stalled.

Later in life I came across lots of queer guys who said they'd slept with girls in high school. A seemingly commonplace act. Considering a teenage boy may be at his sexual peak, it doesn't seem absurd that even gay boys would consider such mainstream diversions. I really wanted no part of it, though. The experience of trying to have sexual intercourse with a girl would, I feared, cause insanity. I'm not kidding. There was a line about to be crossed that I thought would be so horrible I'd go mad.

For a while I used heavy petting as a diversionary tactic. I thought Jenni might be less insistent as long as she was enjoying herself. To this end, I put to use my knowledge of the "G-spot." (That nugget of insight was nearly all I got out of the

Playboy subscription my father sent me every birthday. You can be sure it's no lie when I tell you that I did read the articles and ignored the photos.)

The pack of wild teenagers I ran with in the Golden Girls suburbs was a sort of social commune. Members of this clique rarely enjoyed any time by themselves. Weekends were group events. Usually we'd drive to a paved cul-de-sac in one of the yet-to-be-built subdivisions—a paved court in the sand. Here we'd drink. I was grateful for the company. Groping under these conditions made me look unashamedly brazen. The butch football player could eat his heart out.

But my stalling couldn't last. Circumstance is only ever kind to a point.

A member of our collective worked at the local Days Inn motel and discovered a way to secure keys to unoccupied rooms. He left the door wide open, literally and figuratively, for evenings of pubescent debauchery. He would simply give us a room number early in the evening. Generally three carloads of us would arrive and pile into the particular little room—with its queen beds, Formica table, chained TV and wrapped cups—cheap beer and hard liquor in tow.

It was on one of these nights that Jenni had me at her mercy. I had my little condom and a lot to drink, so I couldn't have been more prepared. She ushered me into the bathroom for a modicum of privacy.

I didn't realize I'd left my reservoir-tipped, lubricated, latex (terms that baffled me at the time) Trojan in my pants with the rest of the revelers until I was already naked.

"Hey!" I yelled out to my comrades. "Slide my wallet under the door!" Teenagers being teenagers, what I got from under the door was an unwrapped, unrolled condom. Jenni was insisting that it really wasn't necessary. But my mother had warned me that girls would want me to impregnate them and support them for all their years. That warning added another layer of terror to the experience.

After struggling with my unrolled, likely beer-soaked, prophylactic, the intercourse began. I remember lying on the floor with my feet up against the bathtub and my head bent against the vanity. It was painful. I felt as though I was being raped—Jenni towering above me, surveying my face for signs of ecstasy. After fumbling like this for about five minutes, we gave up, blaming my lackluster performance on the cramped quarters.

Having a 17-year-old boy's ego, I really did feel ecstasy once my ordeal was over. My relief at ridding myself of dreaded virginity was immense. It was like climbing a mountain. I'd walked through the most daunting rite of passage and survived. Ridgewood High School gossip would have to re-evaluate me now.

A few years later, after Jenni knew I was queer, we were reminiscing at a party. She said she hadn't been fooled. She figured out in the bathroom that I was just a big queen and stopped her pursuit. My acting was not so great, she said. She knew I was faking.

So this column is for Jenni, who could've destroyed me in the cruel high school arena but did not. And because I never will forget my first: Happy Valentine's Day, Jenni.



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