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Friday Night Football Revisited
By Margi Curtis

Full October harvest moon, misty, crisp fall air and the local homecoming football game is on. I don't like sporting events, rather play than sit. I can't help wishing each time that there didn't always have to be losers, and kids who don't get to play because they aren't on "first string".

However, tonight the large young man, who used to be my baby 17 years ago, is playing in a rock band for this auspicious game. It is my first chance to hear his group. (In music there are no losers.) His 11 year old brother and a friend are happy to be where the action is. We three head toward the floodlit field, where the music is already playing.

Walking through the gate, the first irony hits me. As a High School student I went to the vicinity of the game, but rarely went in. Groups of us stoner outcasts wandered the woods behind the field, dimly aware of the hoopla going on inside the gates. The metaphor for how we saw ourselves, traversing the edge of accepted society. Oh, I tried; made my bid for cheerleader four different times. Twice I made the first cut, but failed on the general vote, which translates into a popularity test. So, opting out of the "scene" was maybe sour grapes, or maybe just preferring to be in the trees.

For all that, I am here, not as a student, but as a parent. After 20 years, it all looks the same, and different. The bleachers are full, a good crowd showed up. The football players' uniforms stand out nicely in the flood lights, shiny spandex in the respective school colors. Impressive. The brass band plays, the crowd cheers, there is unmistakable excitement in the air.

I stand on the side, by the rock band, gratefully beyond sight of the cheerleaders. I never do venture over that way for a look. The band is very good, four seniors and their music teacher. My son and his cool demeanor amaze me. He is much cooler than I was at 17. Watching him, I feel vindicated from the past.

Walking through the crowds, I twice pass young, very young girls carrying new babies. One is followed by a somewhat stunned young man hauling the diaper bag. I wonder if they are still in school. I worry for them, and those soon-not-to-be babies. Suddenly I am old enough to be a grandmother. The comforting part of this fact remains that my sons have plenty of interests, options, and honest information, so, chances are good that that title won't be forced upon me prematurely.

Halftime, the homecoming court is introduced. Four girls stride onto the field wearing jeans and school sweatshirts, warm and appropriate attire. The rhinestone tiaras are the only telltale throwbacks. The names of the parents of each girl are announced as well. Credit to the producers. Also announced is the name of the college each girl plans to attend. One has plans to study law. These are the fortunate ones, attractive, self-confident and college bound. I think of the young women I saw earlier with babies, wondering how this scene affects them.

The rock band plays songs by Billy Joel and Sting, the lively beat makes me want to dance. Two girls, about 13 or 14, do just that, while no one else around them seems to notice. They bounce and fling their arms in wonderful abandonment. The shortest one is the instigator. She parodies the song. It makes me laugh out loud. I visualize myself approaching her to say "You're a great dancer!" I don't, might just embarrass her.

Studies of adolescent girls show dramatic changes after the ages of 12, 13, 14. They are surrounded by Media women, impossibly thin, MTV images sadly combining sex and violence, the mortal fear of peer rejection yet simultaneous need for approval. Combine this with a body whose hormonal changes include a natural increase in body fat. Girls who were cheerful, self-confident children, in great

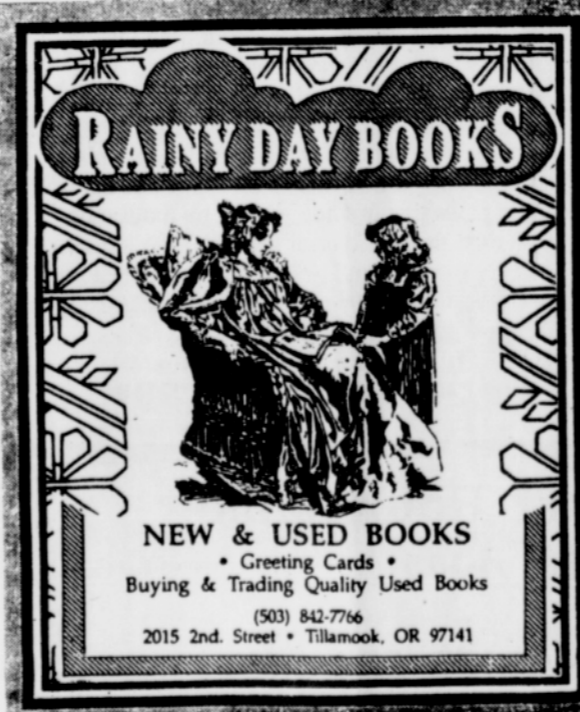
numbers become withdrawn, self-conscious, low achievers in their teenage years. My hope for the dancing young woman is to be one of those who weather the shift. This is no random thought, it is a burning prayer.

Near the restrooms another young girl sits with her boyfriend. Her head droops down, as though her neck is made of rubber. She slurs a response to his question of concern for her. I wonder if I should do something here. This girl has a beautiful face, probably even more so when she is sober. I wonder why she wants to be drunk, what her life is like. I walk away, stunned and frustrated, remembering high school keggers, bootlegged beer, peer influence, desperation.

The crowd roars, another touchdown for the home team. The final score is 26 to 0. The visiting team was from Canada, their side of the bleachers was almost completely empty. I watch them file out of the stadium, wondering how their long trip home will be.

On our way home we stop for gas at the 24 hour place. Suddenly I am in the midst of the football players and their girlfriends. These girls have faces out of "Seventeen" magazine. They could teach me how to use makeup, so perfectly are they done. I look away. Suddenly I am again in a suburban high school, where they really look at the brand you wear, what part of town you live in. The school is divided. There are the jocks, the good looking popular ones, the wealthy, and then there exist the others, quietly taversing the edges, sometimes inside the fence, sometimes out.

I gratefully return to my car and my life as a non-adolescent. The game is over for tonight, the last song was played to an empty field. The moon has risen higher and shines down on this little town. We all get to go home for now.


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