

## A Girl Passing by the Coffee Shop

That was me outside the coffee shop in Gig Harbor the other day. I didn't mean to yell and I'm sorry if I scared you. I guess you didn't recognize me. I don't blame you for running away, who wouldn't run from a crazy old guy who doesn't look anything like he did more than fifty years ago.

But you, you look exactly as you did back then when we talked on the bleachers of the basketball gym waiting for the JV game to start. I never forget the conversation we had when you asked me why I acted the way I did around the other kids. Why I let them kick me in the shins to show I could take the pain. Why I let them push me around when I was bigger than most of them, just to show I could take the pain.

You saying "You're smarter than that."

You had only been at our school for a couple of months. You had moved from L.A., but I saw you. I remember the first time you smiled at me. You were so pretty, and mysterious. We only had one class together since you were in with the smart kids. I was in the middle group, and still you smiled at me.

I had asked Sarah out before you sat down beside me. Sarah had responded by asking me to go with her to the LDS church in Westwood. She left to change into her cheerleading clothes. You said, "You won't be happy with her, she's so fucking boring." I had never heard a girl say that word before. Then you said, "When that happens, come get me."

When that did happen a couple of weeks later, you were gone. You didn't say goodbye, you were just gone.

I wanted to tell you I couldn't get your words out of my mind, that the reason I allowed those things to happen is that I used to be Polio Boy, but something in your words changed that. Something about your words loosened his grip on my self-consciousness. Polio boy became opaque, then almost transparent. I took stock of myself and began to understand that I was no longer in braces. Hell, I

was a starter on the football team and played on the basketball team. I was who I was and not who I had been. Those words, your words, changed my whole perception of myself. You threw a paradigm shift at me and I caught it.

But then you were gone. Your family moved away. There was so much of you, so much about you I wanted to know.

Later in life, when good things happened to me and Polio Boy had all but disappeared, I would think of you, and your words. I wanted to tell you that I'm ok, that I stopped being dumb.

That's why I got so excited when I saw you passing by the coffee shop. That's what I was trying to tell you before you ran away toward Ben and Jerry's.

When I came back into the coffee shop my friend John asked who you were and what was I doing and said that I had probably just scared that fifteen year old girl half to death. He didn't understand.