

SCHOOL DAZE

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When I read of the bespectacled six-year-old kissing bandit who was considered a sexual harasser by his school administrators, it made me think of the two boys in my second grade class who never failed to make naughty body parts out of modeling clay during art class. Now that it's too late to sue—the statute of limitations, while longer for making naughty clay body parts than for something less serious, such as robbery or manslaughter, having no doubt expired—I realize that my female classmates and I were being sexually harassed. Darn! Another chance to sue for zillions down the drain!

That's about the only thing I remember from second grade, except that it was the year I learned to tell time and also that I was the only girl in my class to wear my hair covering my left eye like Veronica Lake. (Kids: Look her up in the biographical section under really old or dead movie stars.)

In third grade, a boy spit in my hair and I was so traumatized that the teacher sent me home so my mom could shampoo me. I came back to school in wet pincurls with a bandanna folded turban-style around my head. I realize that today the boy would be branded a sexual harasser based on the fact that he was a male spitter and I was a female spitee. He would be suspended from school and I would have lawyers lining up to represent me in court in an effort to heal my humiliation with a dose of cold, hard cash.

In fourth grade, I learned that teachers could swear! Our desks had drawers on one side at shin level and a boy (wouldn't you just know it) had so many books and papers in his drawer that it wouldn't close. When the teacher grazed it with her leg and put a run in her left nylon, she roared, "Get that crap out of your desk!" I was shocked! I thought only fathers, during periods of extreme stress or while singing, were allowed to swear.

I had, in fact, eliminated that very vulgarity from a song I performed earlier in the year for that same class. It was one of my dad's World War II songs which he frequently sang while shaving. I liked the tune and cleaned up the lyrics by deciding it was more polite to "sleep" on the man in the moon. Unfortunately, I didn't realize that a word I left in the song referred to the naughty body parts of a hairy baboon.

It seems to me that too many adults have forgotten their own childhood innocence. My mom tells the story when, as a child growing up on a farm in Oklahoma, she phoned her mother who was visiting a neighbor. "Mama," she said, "our stallion is loose!" Grandma Maud was understandably confused because the family didn't own a stallion. Grandma returned home to learn that the loose animal was actually a bull, and her daughter—conscious that she was speaking over a party line and thinking "bull" was an impolite term—substituted what was, in her childish innocence, a more acceptable word.

See? Even when children think a word or thought is "dirty," they're often wrong. Inappropriate behavior to me is that exhibited by the woman who was asked by a reporter if she thought the punishment for the little "kissing bandit" was too severe. "If it had been my daughter," she stormed, "I'd have killed him!"

She and many other adults would be well-advised to remember the story of the little boy who returned from school and asked his Dad, “Where did I come from?” After a lengthy dissertation on the birds and bees, complete with a viewing of anatomical drawings from a medical book, the little boy said, “I just wondered. The new kid in our class comes from South Dakota.”