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6 *Life Lessons* from Growing Up in the '70s and '80s

By: Lisa A. Beach

At a recent salon appointment, my stylist commented that she would never want to go back and relive her high school years. That's a shame, because high school rocked — at least for the Class of '82 at my alma mater, anyway.

Yes, even way back in the 1970s and early '80s, we still had to deal with all the teen angst and drama, the pimples and braces, the homework and the high-stakes SAT. That stuff never goes out of style.

But when I reflect on my teen years, I've got nothing but I-finally-got-my-braces-off smiles. The passage of time and my patchy memory seem to have blotted out most of the mortifying moments, the heartbreak of unrequited crushes and the sheer volume of fashion faux pas.

Growing up in the '70s and '80s taught us these six life lessons along the way:


1. We learned delayed gratification. They were called Saturday morning cartoons for a reason — we had to wait until Saturday to watch them. We couldn't binge-watch *Josie and the Pussycats* on Netflix or pull up *The Flintstones* on YouTube. Even if we were watching reruns of *Scooby-Doo* or *Tom and Jerry*, they still only aired once a week. So, after waiting for seven long days each week, we'd fill up our cereal bowl with Alpha-Bits or Sugar Pops, grab a glass of freshly mixed Donald Duck frozen concentrate orange juice, set it all up on a TV tray and zone out in a sugar coma for about three hours.

2. We learned to get along, include others and accept differences.

I went to school with a boy named Mike who had a disability — maybe cerebral palsy, but it didn't really matter. Mike was one of the most popular kids in school. Everybody loved Mike — the students, the teachers, the custodians, the lunch ladies. Why? Not because we pitied Mike, but because we genuinely liked him. He was so funny and friendly — and such a flirt! We didn't need bullying seminars or diversity workshops or character curriculum to help us “play nice together.” I didn't run with the popular crowd, but I was friends with just about everybody — the bookworms (that'd be me), the cheerleaders, the potheads, the dorks (again, also me), the football players, the band geeks, the theater kids. We all just played nice.



**“THEY WERE CALLED
SATURDAY MORNING
CARTOONS FOR A
REASON...”**



3. We learned to live with limits and not feel entitled. We couldn't pick from hundreds of TV channels; we had just three major networks and PBS. We couldn't choose between crispy, peanut butter, mint, pretzel, coconut or dark chocolate M&Ms; we had just plain and peanut. We couldn't choose from thousands of photo-realistic videogames and complain when the downloadable content didn't download instantly; we satisfied ourselves with bare-bones Pong and watched the market slowly expand to include Space Invaders, Pac Man and Donkey Kong. We couldn't appease our every dietary whim; we had one major category called "food" – not organic, diet, lite, low-fat, no-fat, gluten-free, trans-fat free, preservative-free, food-free. So, like the Pioneers before us, we learned to rough it. We ate Slim Jims and Pringles and washed them all down with a can of Tab, and we survived.

4. We learned to be resourceful. Remember when we had this thing called "study hall"? We were supposed to use this free period during the school day to actually study. Instead, we creative little geniuses took a simple piece of paper and transformed it into paper footballs for friendly desktop games (complete with finger goal posts) or created fortune-telling origami to predict our wedding mate simply by choosing a number and a color. Or we collected gum wrappers and (again with origami-like craftiness) made an insanely long Juicy Fruit chain. Like MacGyver, we learned to make do with what we had. It was either that or study.

5. We learned good manners and communication skills. We called each other on real corded phones and talked for hours. We nervously chatted with parents when they answered the home phone that the entire family shared. We walked up to a friend's house and rang the doorbell instead of just texting from our car. We knew the thrill of slipping an actual written note to a friend two seats in front of us without getting caught or the humiliation of having a teacher intercept the note (and read it out loud). You just can't get this kind of experience sending texts. Where's the risky fun in that?

6. We learned that we did, indeed, grow up with the most epic entertainment of all time. From movies to TV shows to music, everything was classic, even at the time it was released. Thank you, John Hughes, for defining my high school and college years with your on-target Brat Pack films like *Sixteen Candles*, *The Breakfast Club* and *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*. Thank you, '80s sitcoms, for giving us *Three's Company*, *Family Ties* and *Cheers*. Thank you, music industry, for filling my proms with *Styx*, *Cheap Trick*, *Queen*, *Bon Jovi*, *Journey*, *Billy Joel*, *Michael Jackson*, *Prince*, *Pat Benatar*, *Blondie* and *Stevie Nicks*. Thank you, MTV, for actually showing original music videos instead of dumb game shows and even dumber reality shows. Thank you, God, for letting me grow up during Mr. Bill and the original cast of *Saturday Night Live*. ✍



WHAT DID YOU LOVE
ABOUT GROWING UP IN
THE '70S AND '80S?

