

"A DAY IN THE LIFE OF... ME"

Article six

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Ah, yes, high school! The ever important transition period in your life. You start that transition in junior high, but it takes on a whole new effect once you enter high school. This is the transition period in your life where you start laying the ground work toward your future. Whether you decide to attend college or go straight into the working world, it's up to you and no one else's decision but yours. So, plan ahead and keep your eyes-n-ears open. You never know what you might find out there in this great big world of ours.

All these years you've been Mom and Dad's little clone. That could be good or bad; it all depends on how you look at it. But now it's time to let your own personality kick in. I'm not saying you have to become rebellious or any-thing like that, but stand your ground and don't let people run all over you because they certainly will try.

In most high schools, it's usually divided into two groups: the in-crowd and the not-so-in-crowd. And I'm afraid to say, for us "little people" we get stuck right in the middle of the not-so-in-crowd. But that's where your good sense of humor and personality comes in. Don't let anyone laugh at you; let them laugh with you.

No one can make fun of you but you. And if everything else fails, you can always count on your true



Deanna with her mom on a senior class trip to Atlanta in 1983

real friends. The everlasting friendships you made with the ones all the way back in first grade. They are your real friends and they will always stick by you.

But that's enough pet talk. When I began my sophomore year in high school, it was definitely a whole new ball game for me. Once again, like most of the other schools I'd ever been to; except for the exception of Thomas, they were all two-story buildings. Every year I was promised they were

going to put an elevator in, since the fairly new school was designed for one. But did they do it; no! Instead of the school's principal and two other strong male students picking up my little manual wheelchair to carry me up the stairs, whomever had to push my chair outside on a cement sidewalk up a hill to the next level. Now let me tell you, in the winter months it gets cold in North Carolina and let's not even talk about the rain.

Through the association of Vocational Rehabilitation (I'm sure you've all had to deal with VR at one point or another in your life), I was granted with my very own private care aide in the 10th grade. It had it's good points as well as it's bad. For one thing, I never had to worry about getting to my next class on time or having to ask someone to take me to the bathroom ever again. But the down side, she was always there. Now don't get me wrong, but when a 50 year old woman starts sitting in class with a bunch of teenagers, there's something wrong with this picture. And this wasn't just one class but all of them for a full year.

Unfortunately, on a sad note, though. I just read recently in the local newspaper where Ms. Whittle had passed away. I couldn't believe it. We had become such good friends within the year she was my care aide. What really shocked me? She was 70 years old. Well, it was over 20 years ago that I was in the 10th grade!!

By my junior year in high school, VR did away with my private care aide and went back to hiring someone that already worked in the school. So, I wasn't quite a stand-out anymore. But the poor lady, they ran her ragged. She was an assistant in the special education department and no matter where I was, she was always there to make sure that I made it to my next class on time. I made sure I gave that woman a great big Christmas present that year as well as the year after that, because she was my care aide for the final two years in high school.

Well, I know these series of articles I'm supposed to be writing are based on "what my life was like when I went to school". But once you're in high school, your life starts branching out in all different directions. During my junior year, my parents separated and eventually got a divorce. Now, most of you are probably thinking that must've been the most traumatic experience of my life. But it wasn't. I used to joke that I probably knew my parents were getting divorce even before they realized it.

My parents' divorce wasn't that big a deal to me. Maybe it was because by the time they divorced, most of my friends parents' were already divorced. I used to feel like an outcast, because my parents were still married and they were talking about their parents' messy divorces. Well, I didn't feel like an outcast anymore, because I could finally understand what it meant to be a child of divorce. To protect the privacy of my parents, I won't go into the details of their divorce. All I will say it wasn't about being unfaithful, but a major lack of communication. But my mother made sure when the divorce papers were written up that both of my parents were granted joint custody of me. My grandfather pretty much ran out on my Mom and her two sisters when they were very young and she always vowed she wasn't going to do that to her child. That's why my parents stayed married for 19 years, so that I would grow up around my father.

By the time my parents divorced, I was 18 years old and I hated this joint custody mess worth a passion. It might work when you're a little kid, but when you're in high school it's an entirely different ballgame. I hated being thrown from one parent to the next every two weeks. I owned two of everything back in those days. But I have to hand it to my mother. She knew my father and I never

really got along. I might look like my Dad, but I act like my Mom! It wasn't that I hated my father. We just never saw eye-to-eye on anything and we had to have a long hard talk in order to make it work.

My senior year in high school was really no different than the other twelve years that I had gone to school. I still had the same care aide that I had in my junior year, so nothing really changed.

Even though school violence has taken on an entirely different meaning these days, it was just getting started back in the days when I was still going to school. The biggest concern would be the fights between the guys over who had the best girlfriend. But the girls could fight just as nasty as the guys; especially with those long fingernails. I heard there was some bloodshed at a couple. Ah, too bad I was never around to see any of them.

But the funniest act of violence that I can ever remember when I was in school occurred when some jerk called the high school and reported a bomb threat. It was so scary it was funny, because most of us knew it had to be a joke. Who would want to blow up Richmond Senior High School? Thank goodness it was during late September or early October, before it started getting cold as the entire school had to march in a straight line early that morning just as first period was getting underway all the way up to the football stadium; which was about a mile away from the actual school building. But what was really funny was how the school bandmates had to go out on the field to practice. But because it was so early and they didn't get a chance, all the instruments were left in the building. So, they pretended to play using air instruments.

As I always said, I was a late bloomer in everything. From puberty to everything else. Hey, even my own mother said I was born two weeks late. Well, love was no exception to the rules. I didn't meet my "first love" until toward the end of my senior year in high school.

To make a long story short, we used to share the same table in the cafeteria at lunch time. It was getting toward prom season time and I needed a date, so out of the clear blue I got up the courage to ask him. Wouldn't you know he accepted and we went on our first official date. On the very last day of school, he asked me to be his girlfriend. Ah, it was the start of a year long romance. Would you believe it took him four long months before he even kissed me for the first time and that was because I was leaving for college the very next day.

But our little romance didn't last very long. It's so hard for any long distance relationship to work; even when you're only 30 miles apart. Coming home every weekend just to see him got to be a drag; especially when he had to work all weekend and we never got anytime to see each other. So, eventually we broke up. But I tell you, I was totally devastated.

But let's get back to the Year of 1983 for a minute before I start jumping to the present. For some of those who believed I couldn't do it, well, I showed them all. I graduated from high school in June of '83; along with 560 other graduating seniors that year. Of course, I was the only one in my class that was in a wheelchair, but as you can see, that didn't stop me one little bit. There was no big fanfare that night; except when my name was called and someone pushed my manual chair up to the stage to receive my diploma, I was given a standing ovation by fellow classmates. It took every little thing I had in me to keep from losing it that night as I was so overwhelmed by emotion.

Well, that pretty much covers it for my 13 years in the public school system. But that's not nearly the end of my journey. It's just beginning as next time I'll start telling you all about my college life and

who knows what else. So for now, stayed tuned for further adventures of trials and tribulations of “A Day In The Life of... Me”

Bye!! J