

The Orange County Register

OPINION

The Orange Grove: When they're together, it's still the '70s

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It was something in the air the other night, a warm, balmy early summer evening, that caused me to stop and take notice of an intangible something. It was a sweet, seductive feeling that washed over me, taking me back to the summers of my adolescence. Most likely this wave of nostalgia was activated by my anticipating the upcoming visit of one of my dearest friends, Janie. She and I will join up with Angela, the other member of our friendship trio, and it will be as it always is when we get together;

we're still those girls who bonded at Vista del Rio Junior High in 1968.

Angela, Janie and I have been best friends for 38 years. What is it about friendships that are made at that particular phase in a person's development, that cusp between innocence and worldliness that is potent, delicious, and adventurous, that often results in lifelong connections?

When I saw Angela recently she remarked that those early teen years were the best in her life.

"Mine, too," I said without hesitation. Whether our time was spent hanging out on the neighborhood corner with a dozen other kids our age, etching initials into hearts on the eucalyptus trees that lined the "back road" where we walked with our sweethearts, or just baking in the sun to get tans the shade of mahogany, those were the best years of our lives. Never again would we experience the dramas that come with puberty, that first rush that comes from holding a boy's hand, that first kiss. Whether we were experimenting with shades in our Yardley Paintbox eye shadow kits or shopping at RedEye for the latest Dittos or Chemin de Fer jeans, we were laying the bricks for a lifetime of friendship.

Something was unique about the era in which we came of age, realized now only in hindsight. In the late Sixties and early Seventies we had a sense of freedom that our children will never know. There was still a sense of blissful ignorance about that time. Walking around at night wasn't scary, it was invigorating. There was a sense of excitement in the air, innocence turning to discovery, and not without a certain amount of defiance and experimentation.

The Orange County we called home still had orange groves. To this day, the scent of orange blossoms transports me to the groves

surrounding our neighborhood, the scene of orange fights and fort-building at age 13 and makeout sessions at 15.

Early teen romances rank high among the things you never forget or get over. We can still recall the names we wrote on our Pee Chee folders, on our jeans, on our hearts. We can all remember sitting by our Princess phones, willing them to ring. And no one forgets the pain of unrequited love, that staple of teen angst.

We had great music. When I hear my son and his friends listening to Led Zeppelin or Hendrix or Black Sabbath, I feel a little smug. They're a little late to the party but I'm happy to share. Recently I saw an online survey that asked you to reveal the most embarrassing song currently on your MP3 player. It was quite entertaining to read the confessions and poignant to see how much music is tied to distinct memories.

I can hear a song from 30 or 40 years ago and know what year it came out, how old I was and some trivia about what I was doing at the time. Music-related memories allow us to feel and taste those moments anew, no matter how much time has passed, just by hearing the first notes of a song. The wide range of musical trends in the seventies, from soul to acid rock and everything in between, only added to the mystique of that era for me. And, yes, each genre is now well-represented on my iPod.

My friends and I have vivid memories of standing at our school lockers, singing in the choir, playing volleyball in P.E., watching soap operas together, experimenting with hairstyles and fashions together, and riding bikes six miles to the mall. Why else would these mundane activities live in the memory for decades, except that at the time we felt so alive, so hopeful; the friendships pure and unjaded.

We have been blessed with not only a wealth of heartfelt

memories, bonded for life through our shared adolescence, but with each passing year we continue to add to them with new experiences. And, we still rock. You can take the girls out of the seventies, but you can't take the seventies out of the girls.