

T W E N T Y



The Way We Were, And Are

SOMETHING

BY THOMAS HENNING

Someone recently asked me whether the boy I once was would be proud of the man I have become. I thought it not only an interesting question, but a potential article. Thus, pumpkins, I give you my answer. To the witty, charming person with the clever conversation skills, I thank you for the inspiration.

Would the boy I once was be proud of the man I have become? As a boy I was homophobic, puritanical in thought, and vitriolic in judgement. My father knew everyone and my mother spoke to everyone. That meant there was never anything about our lives that people did not know or comment on. It was stressed that one should behave in a manner that society finds acceptable and — more importantly — values. This meant impeccable manners, an ability to smile when in pain, charming wit and observation, and a survival instinct that always ensured a seat at The Table.

The boy I was grew up believing there is one right way to live and only one acceptable dream to follow. The boy I was grew up

were supposed to live like a Ralph Lauren ad. You looked a certain way, spoke a certain way, lived a certain way, and that way was the only correct one. That boy was scared of the outside world and clutched his safe, sterile space

grew up to be someone with principles, compassion, and promise for a future of success and fulfillment, someone who believes in community, family, loyalty, and dedication. I have a generous heart and giving nature, and yes, the boy I was once would be proud of me.

Then again, no, the boy I was would not be proud of the man I am. The boy would be disappointed that, just as I was taught, I use my vitriolic judgements and wit to lash out at those who threaten me. The boy would be upset that I still give those demons power over me, still give credit to those voices that try to hold me back, and still belittle people or push them away as a basic survival instinct. He would not like that I still am intimidated by intimacy, haven't fully realized that I deserve to be loved, and let those fears take control of me. Truth is, he would have every right to be upset. So no, the boy I was once would not be proud of the man I have become.

I think our younger selves always walk with us and remind

us who we dreamed of being and how we envisioned our lives. I have lost many things in my life, and my innocence is one of them. What I hold on to is my faith. I believe in the ability of people to be kind, giving, and just, and I am no exception. I make mistakes and sometimes take a wrong turn. It happens — I am human — but I always try to find my way back. People have the ability to make themselves happy, to improve quality of life not only for themselves but for those around them, and every person has the ability to be kind and giving of themselves.

I don't mind that I haven't reached my perfect self. I think it's healthy that the boy I once was is not completely happy with the man I have become. I am not finished growing, and I will always have room for improvement. The trick is to be committed to improving my life, living my dreams, and being proud of the person I am becoming. It is something, I believe, that we all owe to ourselves. ▼

The boy I was believed you were supposed to live like a Ralph Lauren ad.

believing everyone had a place, a mark they needed to hit. For example, in my family, I am the mover and shaker. I was brought up believing that my social skills and mind were my strengths. I was valued for the attention I received or for how well behaved I was. In turn, I never believed I was attractive or had a right to be attractive or sexual; those were another brother's strengths. I always felt ugly, undesirable, and unworthy of attention. On the flip side, I could dish attitude and opinion like a debutante choosing a dress for her introduction to society.

The boy I was believed you

with white knuckles. On the flip side, the same boy secretly envied those in that outside world — those who just were, no apologies or explanations; those who lived as they saw fit by their moral standards, not their neighbors'.

So would the boy I was once be proud of the man I have become? Yes and no.

Yes, the boy I was once would be proud of the man I have become: the man who does not apologize for being who he is or for believing what he does; the man who could walk into a room and be confident of what he has to say. He would be proud that I

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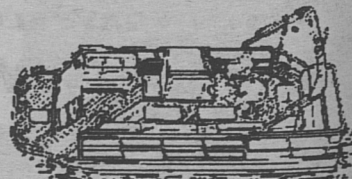
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page 22

SAY YOU SAW IT IN

