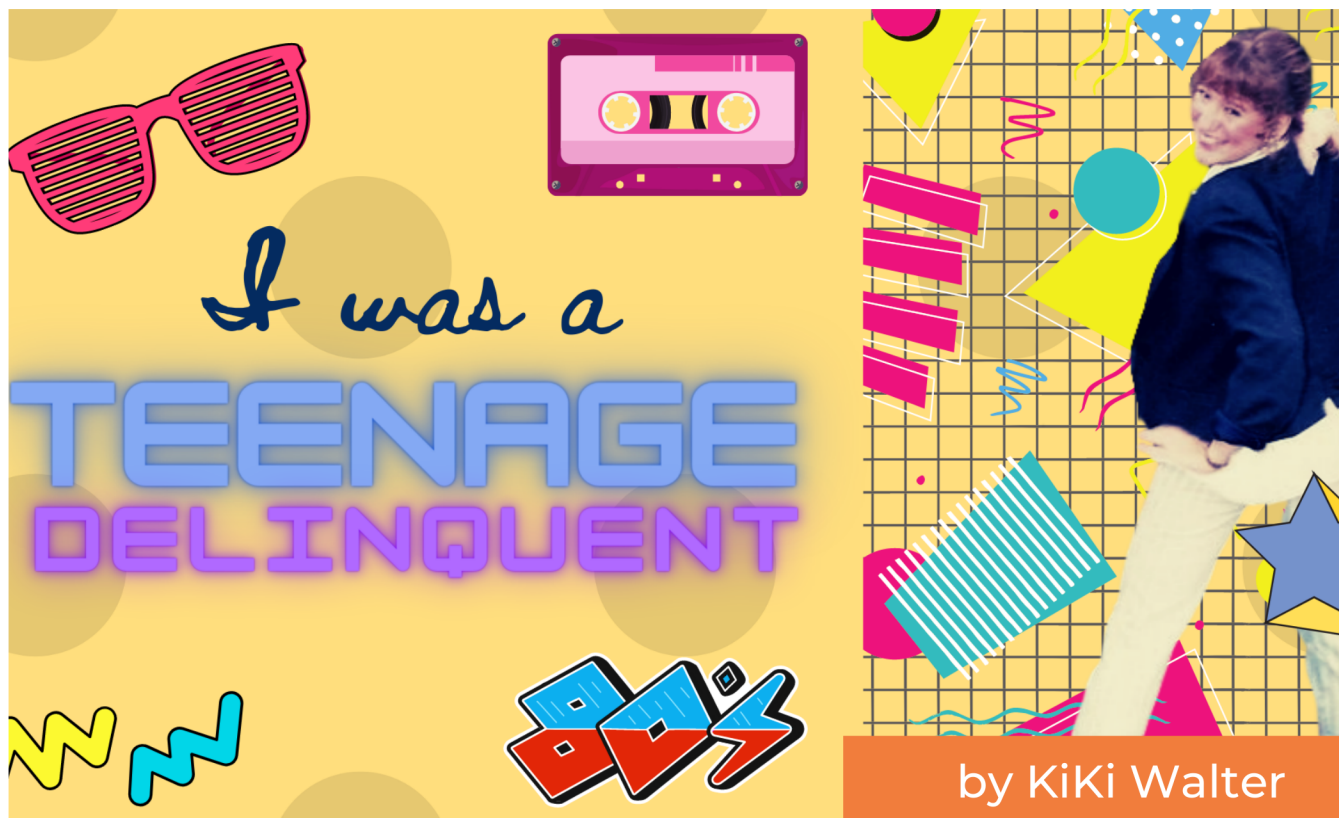


How to Shoplift Beer

(...and other juvenile delinquent shit to make new friends)



I was always looking for new ways to meet boys.

I was what the old ladies called *boy crazy* back in the day.

There wasn't a club I didn't join in high school. Did I take them seriously? Aside from drama and forensics, only as far as they gave me ample flirting potential. I suppose I was what the old ladies called *Molly Ringwald on crack*. (Apologies to Ms. Ringwald.)

The crème de la crème of my boy hunting clubs was AFS—the foreign exchange program. I was a sucker for a thick accent and a new boy from another country. Indeed, I followed more than one new sucker around campus trying to beguile them with my charm. What I didn't realize then was my female aggression was terribly American and often not welcome.

Well, that was with the cute foreign boys. Cute American boys were another story.



Somehow I was chosen — perhaps out of a hat for all I know — to take part in what was called a short-term exchange program. Rather than going abroad, I would be shipped off to another school in the state for a week. In exchange (get it?), the same student I'd be staying with would spend a week with me in good old exciting Malone.

This was the epitome of a chance to arrive at a new destination and wow the pants off of the student body.

I packed my very best long plaid skirts, suede booties, and fedora hat for the whole new world of Carthage, New York. This was 1985, so we did not have cell phones and we did not have the internet. So a school in another

county may as well have been in another country.

Kind of like waiting to find out who your college roommate will be, the anticipation of discovering if I'd get along with my host student was nerve-wracking. And when I landed in Carthage, I soon discovered that my new sister Jennifer was just as outgoing as I was, and we were two peas in a pod.



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Landing in that new school was like something out of a teen movie. Molly Ringwald, indeed. It was everything a young 1980s teenager would imagine could happen if she suddenly found herself at a new school and the hottest thing around. I was a shiny, new, flirtatious toy. It did not take long to land the affection of Andy, who was friends with Jennifer. We would sit next to each other in class exchanging bedroom eyes and little notes. He was handsome, funny, smart, and even romantic.

Oh. *And popular.*

For the first time in ever, I found myself surrounded by football players, cheerleaders, and the “it” crowd. And, like, they wanted me around. I wasn't the weird, different theatre chick here. I was the cool new girl!

That weekend was their football homecoming which would be preceded by a parade. Jennifer and I were going to walk in the parade alongside the football team. I recall putting on those cute little suede booties to do so and freezing my friggin' toes right off. (I don't think I ever wore them again!)

The day was filled with festivities. I'd be leaving to go home the next day, but we still had one last event to attend. The homecoming game after-party.



Jennifer and I showed up at the huge blue victorian house and we were ready to go. She quickly went off in another direction while I burst into the kitchen like a manic Kool-Aid man.

With a wry grin and mischievous glint in my eyes, I cooed, “Hello, boys! I'm here and I can drink every one of you under the table!”

The football players moved in playfully with their challenges. I beelined for the table where Andy sat in his letterman jacket playing a drinking game with a few others. They grabbed me a chair and I set forth in trying to prove my claim.

I was a fairly heavy drinker for a fifteen-year-old, so I gave them a good run for their money. It wasn't long before Andy led me outside where we sat on a lovely old porch swing together. He held my hand and kissed me sweetly. He told me that he wished I really lived there, and I echoed his feelings.

There were no promises of letters or phone calls. Back then, it just wasn't a practical thing. But we enjoyed the time we had for what it was. When it got too cold to remain outside much longer, we walked back in — hand-in-hand.

He went to grab us some drinks, but one of the guys quickly yelled, “we're outta beer!”

“We need a run. Where's Tim?!” (Tim being that one guy who somehow got all the beer.)

“He left, man. What are we going to do?”

“I think we're done,” responded another.



And somewhere out there, stories are told of the girl who breezed into town and left like a storm in the night.

I was not about to have my evening with Andy come to an end. I looked at the circle of big football players before me and asked, “is there a grocery store nearby?”

Andy shrugged and said there was, but they checked IDs.

“Let’s go!” I chirped. “I’ll show you guys how to get beer.”

I don’t know if it was the alcohol talking, the romance, or my inner Molly Ringwald on crack, but we suddenly found ourselves piled on top of one other while one of the guys drove us toward the store in his parents’ sedan.

The group of about seven of us wandered into the empty grocery store. One cashier was working, and some of the lights above were buzzing and flicking on and off.

Marching in a line toward the beer, we didn’t *at all* look suspicious.

Stopping in front of the cool shelves where the beer awaited, I smiled at my new friends. Being the popular girl in school now (for a day or so anyway), I ordered confidently, “do exactly what I do.”

I looked around, leaned in, and grabbed a couple of bottles.

As they watched, I shoved the beer down my pants.

“Now *you* do it.”

I stood amused as this group of football players followed my lead and shoved beer

bottles down their pants. What power!

When we were ready, we walked back out in a single file line — balancing our beer bottles in our waistlines, astonished that we were getting away with it. When we were all out of the store, we ran to the car laughing and exhilarated from our juvenile delinquency.



Back at the house, the guys continued to rave about how I was a legend.

Me. A legend. *Me!*

Andy continued to hold and stroke my hand with an occasional kiss on the neck.

In the morning, Jennifer emerged from a room with her boyfriend. Kids were scattered asleep around the living room, including Andy and I on the sofa hand-in-hand. We didn’t sleep, we stayed up all night talking.

“It’s time to go,” she kindly said, knowing that I didn’t want to leave Andy. “I’m sorry.”

He stood up and led me lightly by the hand to the door where he gave me a long lingering hug and said, “I’ll always remember you. You’re a legend.”

I went back home to Malone, the non-legend that I was, where I was known as a quirky, goofy girl. But I had my Molly Ringwald high school moment. I finally had my moment of being a high school queen.

And somewhere out there, stories are told of the girl who breezed into town and left like a storm in the night.

Like a legend.

