

Me and My Friends

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At the Zane Jr. High School cafeteria in 1980, you could buy a large, hot square of pizza, attractively wrapped in aluminum foil, for 75 cents. That turned out to be a pretty good deal, considering the fact that there was no competing square-of-pizza vendor on campus. So it was inside the cafeteria that I sat nearly every day with a lunchtime friend group ranging from four at most seven different guys.

On one of my last days of my 9th grade existence, I was sitting on a bench in the cafeteria with two other lunchtime regulars, Ken and Chris. Another friend, Jim, was directly behind us, sidestepping between benches towards the end of our little row. Jim couldn't help but notice our exposed collars and the critical fashion information contained therein. He started reading each of them out loud as he sidestepped by us between tables.

"Ken: 'Yves Saint Laurent: Impressive.

Chris: 'Lacoste': A bit dated, but still a strong brand name.

Steve, 'Chess King' !!!"

That got at least small chuckles from everyone in earshot. I laughed along with them, but for even bigger reason that I had no idea what brand name Jim was about to read and how many points for style, be they positive or negative, might be awarded to the wearer of "Chess King" apparel.

Jim himself always looked great, like a cut out of *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, a magazine Jim himself had recently introduced to us. It was elusive knowledge that I was born without, and never investigated beyond the narrow confines of a few of the 1980's music/fashion genres I had heard of. A younger friend, Patrick, could be consulted for questions like, why do some British musicians dress like pirates, and what was that Rock-a-Billy hair cut called.

My friend Ken brought more to the music side of the equation. I was just one of many kids who depended on Ken's visionary music collection. He made me a number of mix tapes which would directly influence the rock and roll I would listen to and play in bands for the rest of my life.

But were those the only reasons I rolled with these guys? Could it be as superficial as the clothes they wore or the music they listened to? I think it was more than that. Let's play back some events of the last week of school.

I must first set the context to tell you about an end-of-the-school-year tradition that I had watched with curiosity in Eureka: Some (presumably) graduating high school class members would assault with sloppy graffiti, such highly visible places such as the town's water tower, the high school itself, or the elementary school on "J" street. Without judging too harshly this bizarre behavior I'll just say that me and my friends had other plans.

The plans began with the fact that Ken was an extremely well-connected 9th grader. By that, I mean that he seemed to have all kinds of friends who were adults who had resources that were useful to teens. One such example was a janitor at our school, who, on request, could conveniently forget to put away a building access ladder. In a preliminary weekend night-time raid, a few of us got on top of the roof of the large building

seen as you enter the school. We measured carefully the dimensions and coloring of the marquis sign:

*"Zane Junior High
Home of the Falcons"*

We went back to Ken's house and created identical lettering out of painted cardboard:
"Class of 1980"

Then it was back to the school the next night, climbing the ladder and using small push pins to secure our signage.

Monday morning, as I turned on my bike off of 'S' street towards the parking lot, I couldn't help but pause at the top of the hill to look at the beautiful job we had done. Our addition to the marquis was seamless, yet impossible to miss. I took my time locking up my bike in a high foot traffic area where I heard all kinds of crazy chatter about the sign and what might happen to the culprits once they were caught. This was too much fun. What my friends and I had done wasn't fashion or rock and roll. It was a tiny bit of the stuff they are both made of: Taking ridiculous chances to defy authority, without hurting anyone or getting caught. And simultaneously, with our own original mojo, we put a stamp on our time at Zane Junior High. Me and my friends.

Mr. Mitts was the Vice principle with responsibilities in disciplining kids who strayed off the middle school path. That Monday morning, He acted as if he thought it was a great idea. Maybe even his idea. Sure, he was glad they wouldn't be cleaning up graffiti, but this story would not have ended well if he or the cops catch us on that roof . The school administration proved to be either better sports than we had imagined, or low on the facilities budget; they left our sign up over summer. The summer sun then smiled on our fun and bleached out the brown painted wood around our raised cardboard text. Eventually, that reversed text "Class of 80" finally faded or was painted over. But those

fun times with my friends haven't faded and remain with me still.