

Zane Yearbook Story  
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My 9th grade year at Zane Jr. High was nearly over. Not a bad year. Still, I am pretty much stalled near the bottom on the Middle- School Socio-Economic Scale of Coolness (It would be nearly 5 more years before I would ask a girl on a date, 6 years before one would go). About the boldest thing I could think of at this point would be to get my yearbook signed by that girl in my French class who had been nice to me. She was always smiling.

I noticed She was most vulnerable right after the bell rang, but before she had gotten out of her seat, so that's when I approached her with my red Falcon yearbook. She smiled, that heart-stopping smile. This was going to be good! Then she turned to a picture page, and wrote across my face the word "fool". She smiled again and handed it back.

And I'm thinking, OK, sure, I get that sometimes, but doesn't yearbook etiquette require at least something like, "Fool, have a great summer!", or maybe, "Fool, stay cool". Nope. None of that. With "Thanks for that good solid kick-in-the-stomach" written all over my face, I walked away from that moment, and moved on with life..

Fast forward to 33 years later. My 16-yr-old daughter discovered the yearbook and has questions about every reference to her dad. She turned the page to reveal my 9th grade photo at the top. The ink had faded, but it was still there, an unwanted, unfriendly piece of graffiti on my yearbook picture.

I sheepishly tell her the story of how ink came to paper that day. Without sounding bitter, I told her that I simply didn't know why the girl had done this; that I thought she had been a special friend.

She looks at the picture.

Closer

Squinting.

Smiling.

"Dad, that doesn't say 'fool', that says 'fox'!"

A moment of awkward silence.

Oh, the difference that one simple word can make.

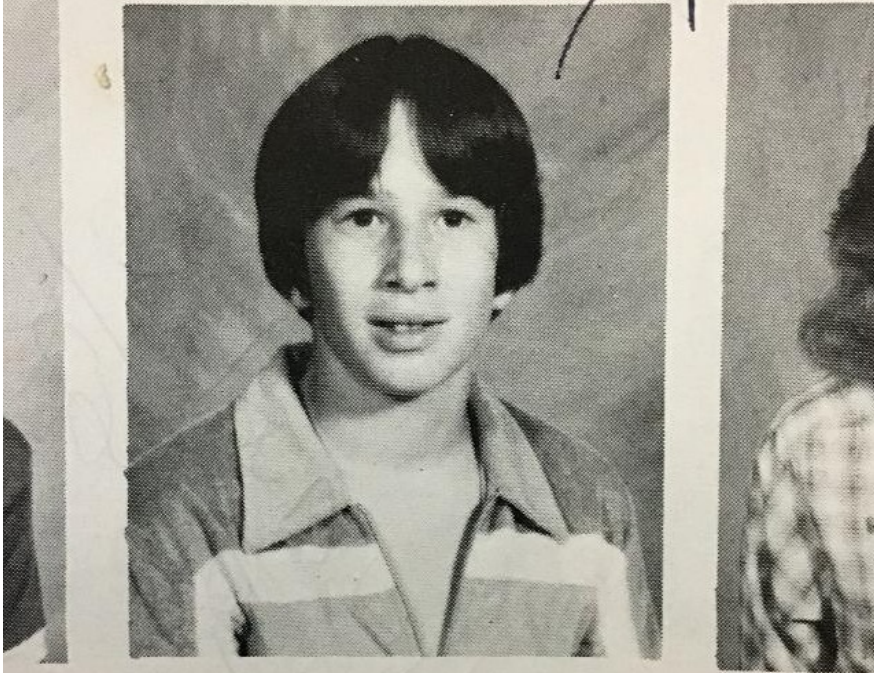
This story ends well. Both the yearbook owner and signer have long since married their perfect matches and at last report, both were very happy in their separate worlds.

Still, my thanks goes out, over considerable time and distance, to that young lady and her efforts to buoy up my spirits with just one simple word. Though it was right in front of me, I lacked the self confidence to read it . On that dark day now 44 years ago, I surely could have used it.

Here's to all teen-age kids who have the compassion and maturity to notice when one of their own needs a hand up. Kids like my own son, Easton, who, along with a couple of his buddies from their state champion baseball team, chose to spend their senior prom with some special needs kids. Those kids had never been to a dance before, but were treated with kindness and dignity and they will never forget it.

On a smaller scale it is amazing what can be done with just one simple word

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YOU BE THE JUDGE