

Dear Helen

by Estelle Bruno

Dear Helen,

I haven't been in touch with you for many years, but I'm sure you will remember who I am after you read this letter. The last time I saw you was perhaps 30 years ago. We were on a beach in The Rockaways.

I watched you knee deep in the water with a little boy you were hitting. You didn't see me. I watched as you walked back to your sand space.

I counted six other kids, a mix of boys and girls. Seven in all.

So let me reminisce a bit.

We were about 11 years old and you would whisper to me, "Come over tonight, my parents always go to the movies on Thursday night, and we can smoke."

They kept a box on their coffee table filled with cigarettes. I wondered why it was called a coffee table. Maybe they had their coffee on it while they smoked. My family didn't have a coffee table and no one would have been allowed to smoke. My father was very strict about that.

So you and I did this smoking for a few weeks, me choking and hating and loving it at the same time. The last time, I took one of those cigarettes home, went into the bathroom, opened a window and proceeded to smoke, being careful not to inhale or they would hear me choking. Even after all the precautions, one of my sisters came into the bathroom and yelled "She's been smoking!" loud enough for the whole block to hear.

Now when I remember how frazzled you looked that day on the beach, trying to keep track of those seven little kids, all I could think to say to myself was "Thank you God."

When I got married, you and MY EX-BOYFRIEND came to the wedding. He kept looking at me with a forlorn look on his face. I remember you saying to him, "You promised that we would get married, so when will it be?" I felt sad for you then, Helen. In a way.

The best part of my life has been my 3 lovely, talented children.

And blessed be, I don't have to chase 7 children all over the world!

I do hope by now that you are happy and well rested.

Signed your anonymous ex-friend

