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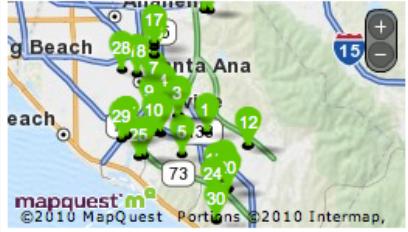
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**in the '60s**

their peers simply because they were different.

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ith these gals, but sometimes, groups of women

For many of us, grammar school was a wonderful experience. Playing with your peers, going crazy at recess, and shooting spit wads were all a part of the jolly grade school life, blending into the fabric of growing up.

But what about those kids who were bullied on the playground? How did they manage? If you were different, wore glasses, braces or didn't look like most of the other students, you were probably harassed.

What is bullying? I guess it's some weird version of Darwin, where those who conform survive. Those who don't, have to fight for their place in the

sun.

Back in the '60s, bullying was something many had to endure. For those who didn't fit in with the popular cliques, painful memories punctuated grammar school where incessant teasing took place, with social omission, blatant cruelty, and many forms of exclusion.

They say that most bullies have also been bullied by others. I've heard many stories about kids who have been tormented by parents, older siblings or other associates who end up taking out their anger and frustration on those around them by bullying. For some, homophobia often manifests itself through bullying.

I was very athletic in school, so I was never bullied physically. But many who were not into sports were often the brunt of jokes from their peers.

One fifth-grade teacher at Carpenter in the '60s was notorious for singling out artistic students with her cruelty. How's that for building a child's self-esteem?

My sister and I were bullied in a different way. A flock of girls can be very cruel and vindictive when they band together. There's always the popular ringleader who inspires others to join in with the mockery and frenzy.

Perhaps this is why I didn't have many close female friends at Carpenter, but preferred the company of guys or other tomboys. My sister Teresa reminded me of episodes where the girls in school would make fun of our hand-me-down clothes. We were embarrassed that our home looked like it was right out of "Angela's Ashes," so we rarely had friends over to visit.

When we went to camp one summer, it was one of the worst weeks of my life, having to endure the cruelty of several 10-year-olds holed up in a tent. I still remember them whispering and giggling in the corner and then pointing at my sister and me because we dressed as tomboys, and came from a broken home.

I was so glad when that week ended, so I could go home, get lost in the gully and feel good about myself once again.

In my teens, I began to gravitate toward the brainy kids in school, and those who were artists. Although I was always the class clown, I preferred being around other outsiders who made me feel more at ease. I even ran for homecoming queen in high school, knowing it would be a real satire if I were actually elected.

To this day, I'm still uncomfortable around a flock of women. I still wonder if they laugh at my outfits, make fun of my tomboy style, or wonder why I don't wear much make-up.

Thankfully, my sense of humor helped me through some tough times when I was young, but I wonder how others who were bullied endured their pain.

I hope they found a healthy way to get through it all.



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