

Queen For A Day



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Aleigh Acerni

I was surrounded by boxes recently, unpacking from my move to Savannah, when a fond memory of grade school came back to me. I opened a box filled with yellowed and sundry papers, and the aged-paper smell reminded me of another time when I had been sitting on my bedroom floor, shuffling through the papery remnants of my school-aged self.

I was 18 then, and I was packing for two moves at once: first, (and most important), I was moving to South Carolina to go to college; and second, I was packing to move the things I didn't need with me at school for my family's move to Colorado. I had piles everywhere—college pile, Colorado pile, trash pile, Goodwill pile, “undecided” pile—and I stumbled upon a sheet of large paper with my name written neatly in purple across the top. The “i” in my name had been dotted with a lovingly-drawn daisy.

I recognized it instantly, and I found myself giggling with excitement as I unfolded it and smoothed out the creases.

For one month out of the year, each student in my first-grade class was chosen as queen (or king) of the day. The queen was treated royally: She got to be first in line on the way to the cafeteria for lunch, could stand and begin the pledge of allegiance in the morning, was allowed to choose between Red Rover and Hide and Go Seek at recess, and was given various other little “special” tasks to perform.

But the best part, the one that still makes me smile when I think of it, happened at the end of each day. The queen was asked to stand in the front of the room, where the teacher had taped up a large piece of paper with her name on it. And as the queen surveyed her queendom, her fellow students would each say one nice thing about her, which the teacher would copy down, word for word, and mark with the students' names.

“She is very pretty,” one of my sweet classmates had said about me.

“She smells nice,” said another.

“She always shares her crayons—even the blue ones,” said my best friend, Diana.

I came home from school that day feeling lighter than air. It didn't matter that at age six, I was the smallest kid on the bus and was nearly the last one to be dropped off. It didn't matter that my mom had forgotten to cut the crusts off my peanut butter and jelly sandwich that morning. It didn't matter that I'd played a bit too aggressively on the playground at recess and managed to get my hair tangled in the chain of the swing set, or that I'd laughed so hard at lunch that milk had come out my nose and stained my shirt, or that the boy I'd had a crush on had only added, “She doesn't talk *too* much,” to my queen of the day paper. (I did, and still do, talk too much. Perhaps he *did* like me after all?)

I remember running up the stairs shrieking, “Mom! Mo-om! MOOOOOM! I got to be queen of the day! And Diana thinks I share good!”

So much for the queen's English.

I don't think I'll ever forget that day or how hearing such nice things from my classmates made me feel. Sometimes, even now, I think about that time in my life—how slow life seemed, how perfect the days could be, and how something so small as a compliment lifted my spirits, my self-esteem, my sense of pride. I learned the power of kindness and compliments that day, and it's a lesson that has benefitted me ever since, at work, at home, and at play.

I never give out an empty compliment, but I do make a conscious effort to tell a person when I like something—whether it's the work she's done, the clothes she's wearing, the card she picked out, or the way she laughs. And I've found over and over again that people respond positively when they realize that you genuinely care about them. They appreciate one-on-one attention in our world of drive-thrus and one-size-fits-all.

I think I may soon have that paper framed and hang it where I'll see it every day. It can serve as a daily reminder that it only takes one person to make a difference—through a smile or a kind word. It's not always easy to remember to tell someone why you think she is special when the world is moving at lightning speed all around you. But it's always worth the time.

ALEIGH ACERNI IS EDITOR OF SKIRT! SAVANNAH, AND POLISHES HER CROWN AND SCEPTER DAILY. EMAIL HER AT ALEIGH.ACERNI@SKIRTMAG.COM.