

"NO LADY"

In 1968 Manasquan High School football players were kings, the cheerleaders were queens, and the twirlers were kind of the ladies in waiting. Mr. Holly was the study hall monitor. Each day he walked past the football players, with whom he joked around and exchanged comments. When he made it up on stage, at the front of the auditorium, he'd peruse his audience and purse his prominent lips forward. We called him Duck.

Usually, Lillian would walk down the aisle last and have to walk up the aisle where the football players were seated. She looked down and clasped the books close to her large breasts. Lillian was tall and packed a fair amount of weight. Her hair was frizzy and stood out around her face, thin and unkempt. Her smallish eyes were downcast above skin scarred by acne. Her clothes seemed disheveled and worn, somehow hailing from another era, like a 1950's housedress. The players would start with soft sounds like hisses and boos and barks and then proceed to name calling and sniggering. As Lillian continued down the aisle, the players would ramp up, sometimes throwing little pieces of crumpled paper at Lillian, now loud enough for the whole auditorium to hear. Finally, Lillian would slip into her seat and the gauntlet would end.

This happened day after day. The football players became more emboldened as the weeks passed. One day one of them called Lillian a dog. I stood up and said loudly enough for every player to hear me, "Stop it, just stop it." I looked at all of them and sat down. Miraculously, they stopped. But suddenly, Mr. Holly sprang into action, all forceful teacher putting a discipline problem in her place. He pointed at me and said, "You get up here." I walked up the stairs to the stage in front of about 140 juniors and seniors. My cheeks were burning, while fear washed through me. He proceeded to demand my name and told me I had no right to speak out during study hall, that I was rude and disturbed the study time of others. Above all he said, "You are no lady." When he was finished with me, he ordered me back to my seat. No one that day, or ever, spoke to me about the incident.

That night my father noticed that my face was red and swollen from crying. When he asked me what was wrong, I told him. Dad was assistant superintendent at Middletown High School then. He called Mr. Holly and told him why I had stood

up and spoken to the group of young men. The man said he had never heard a peep, but he would keep his ears open.

The football players were quiet for two more days, before it began all over again. I sometimes wonder what happened to Lillian, and how it had seemed that high school was a place where most of us were just trying to survive.

Angie Cardin

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