

Three best friends, Eric, Millie and Roger, share their memories...their laughter...their tears...their antics...from their individual points of view. It is a diary of coming of age in the '60s and '70s. The reality is bad things happen to good people and our character is formed by the way we handle those situations. For Eric, Millie and Roger, the bad experiences help build a strong moral fiber and friendship that has lasted through the years.

Popcorn Diaries

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Popcorn Diaries



Popped by
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MILLIE

I met Eric on the first day of kindergarten. I didn't like him at first. He acted like he was a tough guy and I didn't care for that. Now Roger, how could you not love Roger right off? He had a funny way of talking and even though you didn't want to make fun of him, sometimes when he said a word funny you just had to laugh. I didn't know either one of those guys lived so close to me. I was walking home and they were following me. I thought they were going to chase me or do something to me. Boys that age can be such

poops. But I found out they were following me 'cause they lived close by. Soon the three of us were walking to school together and again back home. Eric wasn't the butt I thought he was at first. He was a pretty funny kid and would do stupid things to make me laugh. Eric loved to make me laugh.

We became real close friends fast. We would go over to each others house to play and watch TV. Roger's mom really liked us because we would play with Roger. A lot of the other kids would just make fun of him. But to us he was just another kid who was as silly as we were.

I got to meet Eric's family too. I didn't like Jason; he was always hitting and teasing Eric. Lots of times Eric would just take it but as he got older, he started fighting back. I didn't like that. I mean...I didn't want him to get picked on; I just didn't like him fighting. Jason was a mean person. Lizzy on the other hand, I loved. I liked going into her room as it was so girly. Everything was pink and she had a closet full of pretty dresses and a make up table with real make up. She was a fun girl and she and Eric got along just fine. I kind of looked up to her as my big sister too. My parents only had me as a child; I didn't have any brothers or sisters. That's why I liked Lizzy so much. She was always good to me.

Eric's mom was sweet. She always popped us popcorn, which I never gave much thought to, until I met Eric. He loved the stuff. The two of us, and Roger too, shared a lot of popcorn in our youth. Even today when I smell it popping, I think of Eric.

I remember in kindergarten when we were told to draw a picture and Eric would always say, "Let's draw popcorn." I didn't know how to draw that so we would draw horses instead. Roger liked drawing cowboys. So sometimes I would draw a horse and then give the picture to Roger and he would draw the cowboy on the horse. We were pretty artistic for little kids.

School was always fun for me. Ever since I can remember, I always did well in school. I don't think I studied harder than the other kids; I just comprehended it better. I always had "A's" in school. Eric was slow. We always had to do extra studying with him. Roger was pretty smart too. He did well in school. Just because of his speech problems, kids thought he was retarded or something. Kids can be so mean sometimes. Eric would always get real mad when someone would call Roger retarded. He always stood up for Roger. Roger knew he was different and it didn't bother him too much. But when he got called retarded, it did hurt him. He never wanted anyone to

fight over it so he would laugh it off and pretend it didn't hurt. Eric and I knew differently.

During the summers the three of us were inseparable. We would spend all day together playing and riding our bikes on days the factory didn't smell real bad. Some days we couldn't even play outside the smell was so bad. Then one day, we all asked our moms if we could ride our bikes to Musser Park. It was a nice little park and it had swings and stuff to climb around on. It also had a little kids' wading pool. We would take our shoes and socks off and go walking around in the pool. That was fun. And whatever one did, the other two had to try it. It's just how close we were. Then on the way back from the park, we would stop at the corner grocery and get some candy and a drink. I always got those straws with the sugary stuff inside. I loved those. Roger liked that little wax bottle-shaped candy that had the liquid stuff inside except he didn't like grape and always gave those ones to me. I loved grape.

Then there was the summer we built a tree house out behind Eric's house. Well, we built one but Mr. Moore wouldn't let us play in it. So he and Jason tore

it down and built us this great playhouse up in the trees. It was fantastic. We three would have lived there if our parents would have let us. We spent much of our youth in that playhouse. We played there; we studied there; we slept there; we laughed and cried there too. It was our sanctuary. For me, it was a place to go to get away from the fighting of my parents and the screaming that my dad always did. I think I have always hated my father. Is that a terrible thing to say? I suppose most of you would think so but it's the truth. I hate him. Eric always says, "Bad things happen to good people." Dad was the bad thing that happened to my mom. Why she ever married him, I'll never understand. The person who marries me is going to love me. He is going to be tender, caring and loving like Roger and want to protect me and care for me like Eric. As a little girl, I think that is what I thought was going to happen. Eric, Roger and I would grow up and always be together. We would all be married together or something...one to love and care for me and one to protect me and love me. Not like my father was to my mother. I was going to have the best of both worlds. Oh, such silly daydreams of children.

I remember in, I think it was 1965; there was a big flood here in Muscatine. People thought the levee

wasn't going to hold and the whole south end would be under water. Thankfully it did hold. They moved our school classes to Roger's church on Fourth and Iowa. We went to school there for a few weeks until the river went back down. I don't know what would have happened to our house if the levee had broken. I suppose no one wants to think of that. We went to live with my Aunt Paula during the flood. My dad stayed someplace else because my Aunt Paula wouldn't let Dad in her house. That was okay with me. I kinda hoped Dad would stay at the house then the flood would come and wash him away. Isn't that terrible? But I do remember thinking that at the time. I'm sorry, but that is how I felt.

It was weird having our school classes in a church. I mean we were in the basement and it looked like a classroom and Mrs. Asp was still our teacher; it was just strange because you knew God lived there. A couple times we went into the real church because they had an organ in there and that is where Mrs. Asp gave us our music lessons. I was glad when we moved school back to Garfield. Things seemed normal once again.

Shortly after the playhouse was built the three of us decided we wanted to be a club. But you needed to

have more than three people to be a club. So we were each allowed to invite one imaginary friend to be in our club. Roger brought a guy named Porky because he was big and fat. We always used to make fun of him. I think Roger wanted him in the club so he wouldn't be the one who was always made fun of. Although Eric and I never did that, I think he wanted someone he could make fun of as a way of relieving frustration.

“But Roger if you don't like people making fun of you, why do you do it to Porky?” Roger never did really answer that so we just went along with him. I brought in Pickles. He was a goofy guy that made me laugh. I guess I liked to pick on him in my own way. I would always pretend to put these funny clothes on him and the tease him about them. Sometimes I would even make him wear dresses. How do we kids come up with this stuff?

Eric's friend was Billy. He was a cool older kid that I think was what Eric kind of wanted Jason to be like. Cool and never mean. More than once, Eric would come to the playhouse all upset and on the verge of crying because of something Jason had done to him. Jason actually hit Eric a lot and sometimes he had the bruises to show for it. I think that is why as Eric got older, he liked to fight a lot. He never backed

down from anyone. Not even my dad once. I was so scared Dad was going to hit him so hard he would hurt him. But Eric didn't care; he stood there and defended me. Later dad came into my room and told me I wasn't supposed to hang out with Eric anymore, as he was a bad influence on me. I told him Eric was my best friend and I would never stop playing with Eric. He slapped me for sassing him. I never told Eric that.

Oh, then there was that stupid show that came on television the night before Eric's birthday. He and Roger got so wound up about that coming on. They were at Roger's house that night. They invited me to come and watch it too but I wasn't going to watch some dumb old cowboy and Indian show. Well don't tell the boys but I did watch it at home. It was funny but not as funny as those two thought it was. We always had to play "F Troop" at the play house. In fact we had to name the play house "Fort Courage." How stupid was that? And those two clodheads always wanted me to be Wrangler Jane...just because I was a girl. Well to heck with that. I wouldn't do it. So I always got to be the Indian chief. Eric was so into the show he made everyone at his birthday party the next day call him Corporal Agarn. What an idiot.

MER

It was probably a couple of months after that; in November I think, that my dad and mom had a big fight. He hit my mom a lot and made her look terrible. He left for a few days which was fine by me. He could stay gone forever as far as I was concerned. I guess back then that wasn't a big deal. We called the police and they came and took a report but nothing ever became of it. A week or so later my dad came back and said he was so sorry and he didn't mean to hurt my mom. That was the only thing I didn't like about my mother. She always believed him when he came back saying he would never do it again. Then eventually he would. I don't like Eric's fighting all the time, but he does stand up for himself. I like that and am going to be that way too. Any man ever hits me and I will defend myself.

That next year, I guess, Eric had problems with his parents splitting up too. He told me once they fought a lot but when Lizzy got pregnant that really set things off. It looked like they were going to get a divorce. That was sad because I think they really liked each other. My parents on the other hand...I wish they would have divorced.

That was a tough time for Eric. His parents were splitting up, his sister was expecting and Jason kept

beating on him. I think it affected his school work too. Roger and I would spend a lot of time at the playhouse helping Eric with his school work. We would play school sometimes and that helped. We would make him do actual assignments from our books. He wasn't a dumb kid, just had a hard time understanding. Roger, he was a genius. I loved that boy so much. He was so even tempered, always funny and always trying to make peace. He didn't like turmoil either but unlike Eric, he would try and talk things out. Sometimes this only made things worse because when he would talk, sometimes he sounded funny and it made the kids ridicule him all the more. But Roger would laugh along with them, easing tensions with humor. I loved that about him.

Mom had three sisters; one lived in Cedar Rapids and the other two here in town. My grandpa and my uncles loved to go fishing. The Mississippi or the Cedar River...they didn't care...they just loved to fish. They would come back with their catches and clean them and then grandma would freeze the fish. When there were tons of fish at the end of the summer, Grandpa and Grandma would have these huge fish fries. The whole family would get together and Grandma would spend a couple of days making potato

salad, macaroni salad, a crock of baked beans, sometimes fresh snap beans, fruit bowls and all sorts of food. The day of the cookout we would have fresh corn on the cob, squash, fried fish and all the sides we could eat. We would set up the croquet set and the badminton net and we would play and eat all afternoon. Grandpa had a horseshoe pit in the very back of the yard and the men would wander off to play that. Then Grandpa and my uncles would take turns hand cranking the ice cream maker. It would take about an hour of continuous cranking but it was worth it. Homemade ice cream has got to be the most delectable thing on earth. I loved those times. Grandma would even have fresh strawberries or blueberries to put on the ice cream. What wonderful memories. After Grandpa died, my uncles would still go fishing but the fish fries were never the same and soon we didn't have them anymore. I sure do miss those. What wonderful memories.

I think it was the December after my grandfather died that Lizzy, Eric's sister, had her baby. Ella Sue was the most beautiful baby you ever saw. She was such a happy baby too except when she was hungry or needed changing. But I guess that how it is with all of us. Eric was scared of the baby at first. I don't know if

he thought he would hurt her or if the baby was going to poop on him. But he was always so kind and gentle with her. I even got to hold her quite a bit when Lizzy was off getting her bottle ready and stuff. Jason just seemed indifferent toward the baby. He was too wrapped up in his own life to care. Jason didn't seem to care about too much, except his sports. He was a strange guy.

Now Roger...he's going to be a great dad someday. He loved holding the baby and playing with her and making funny faces at her to make her laugh. He would feed her a bottle and burp her. And if Ella Sue happened to throw up on him a little, he never got upset. I loved Roger. Eric would always start yelling. "It's not going to hurt you, wimpy," I would say to him.

"It's just gross, that's all; get it off of me." Lizzy and I would always laugh at him. He always portrayed himself as this tough guy, but a little baby spittle and he was a wimp.

Now the boys had their show, "F Troop." I had a show I fell in love with, "That Girl." Oh, I so wanted to be Ann Marie...a beautiful, young, independent woman who had this really great boyfriend. The only

difference between her and me was she had a good loving relationship with her father. I didn't; I hated my father. The boys would always make me play "F Troop" with them so every once in a while I would make the boys play "That Girl" with me. Billy always played Donald, my boyfriend. I had Eric play my father as I knew Eric would never do anything to hurt me, unlike my real father. But the boys just didn't get into it as much as I did their games. So I ended up imagining things more than really acting them out. I spent a lot of time alone in the playhouse pretending I was Ann Marie and that was my apartment. Then the boys would usually show up and shatter those wonderful daydreams.

I loved Roger. I mean, I loved Eric too but Roger was so special, so gentle. I used to think that he fought with his brain. Eric would just fight. But Roger always was a gentleman. He would talk his way out of situations whenever he could. Then when he couldn't, he would let Eric take over. One day at lunch these two kids were picking on Roger, calling him dumb. Roger asked them what made him dumb. Any subject they would mention Roger would expound some fact or truth about it. Mind you his speech was slurred a bit but what he was saying was right on. Finally one of the

kids out of frustration called Roger a retard because of the way he spoke. Roger started to explain what a cleft palate was but before he could finish, Eric came flying across the table and knocked the two boys to the floor. He then punched each one of them. Mr. Yanson had to come over and pull Eric off them. They all went to the principal's office. Eric was suspended from school for a week. He also got in a lot of trouble with his parents too. He was grounded but good. Roger and I were allowed to bring him his school homework but that was it. No visiting, no playing, just explain the assignments and that was it. But I would always write him these long notes about what was going on and about what Roger and I were doing and I would slip them into his school books. So we kinda kept in touch. We didn't even get to tutor him that week. I guess his mom helped him with his schoolwork but she didn't fully understand the assignments like Roger and I. It was a tough week for Eric. Later Roger told me he wished Eric hadn't have punched those guys, but was glad he did. Roger wanted to punch them himself, but wasn't brave enough to do it. We admired Eric for looking out for us the way he did; we just wish he didn't go straight to fighting. Sometimes a little talking and understanding can go a long way. Roger sure managed to do that a lot and things turned out okay. I loved Roger.

Then in March of '67, I think, something really terrible happened. Jason was killed in a car accident. It was so sad. I hate to say this but a small part of me was glad because of the way he treated Eric. I suppose that is a terrible thing to say and I never told Eric I thought that. But Eric and his family were really sad and for about a month after it happened, I hated going over to Eric's house. I mean, everyone was glad to see me and all; it was just a sad place to be. Eric took Jason's death real hard. He became withdrawn and introverted a bit. I was worried about him for a while. There were a couple of times kids taunted him and he didn't fight them; that's how out of it he was. I know! I often wondered about God and things like that. They just had a new baby in the family and then Jason dies. Does that mean for every birth there is a death? I often wondered about that. Little Ella Sue never got to grow up and know her Uncle Jason. I don't know; maybe that was a lucky break for her. What a terrible thing to say.

A year later Eric, Roger and I were at the playhouse and Eric was sad and moody. We asked him what was the matter and he started crying. He said he missed Jason. Then he told us something that he had been keeping inside of him for a year. He had said

something to the effect that he was happy Jason died. But he really didn't mean it and this whole past year it had been gnawing at him that he had said something like that. He cried horrendously that day. Roger and I cried with him. I didn't have the heart to tell him I had similar thoughts myself. Roger later shared with me he had the same thoughts too. We both felt kind of guilty about it. I think Eric thought of himself as a monster for saying something like that and that bothered Eric for many years after.

I'm glad Eric and I were such great friends...one, because I truly loved Eric and two because of his sister Lizzy. I didn't have a bigger sister so I was glad that Lizzy and I were able to become friends. I mean, she was a lot older than me but she was a great big sister, to both Eric and me. There were times I would go over to Eric's house to see her. He thought I came over to play with him. But Lizzy and I would go off into her room and close the door and we would talk about all kinds of things. Girl stuff mostly. I loved my mom but lots of things I wanted to talk about, I couldn't talk to her. Lots of times they were about her and Dad. I guess I just didn't understand the relationship they had. They fought so much and seemed to hate each other, yet Mom wouldn't let go of him. Lizzy kinda

helped me understand that a bit. Lizzy had some issues of her own. She seemed to be very disparaging of men. Well one got her pregnant and didn't stick around to be the dad. She was really hurt by that and thought all men were pigs. She often told me to be careful about the kind of boys I hung out with. Eric and Roger were okay because they were like brothers. "But other boys just want to use you to get their jollies," she would say. I didn't really know what that meant until one of our girls talks later on. Oh! I kind of learned that to be true in high school.

Now my mom's sister, my Aunt Dana...I could talk to her about anything. But she lived in Cedar Rapids and I didn't get to see her as often as I would have liked. So Lizzy was someone I confided in. I made her promise never to tell Eric what we talked about because I knew if Eric knew, he would be over trying to fight with my dad. And I didn't want to see Eric get hurt. He was tough but I don't think he had any idea what my father could have done to him. I hated my father.

Especially after he would hit and hurt my mother. Then a few days later, she would let him come back home. I would yell at her not to let him come back but it did no good. So that is usually when I would go and cry on Lizzy's shoulder. She was such a source of

strength for me. Aunt Dana's husband, my Uncle Buck, was a police officer in Cedar Rapids. Once after Dad had hurt Mom real bad he came down here and he and dad left together. Later I found out Dad was in the hospital, beaten up really bad. I don't know if Uncle Buck did that or not but I was glad it happened. Dad didn't beat on Mom to much after that...until...well...

One night I was over at Eric's house. He and I were babysitting Ella Sue. He asked my about my stay with my Aunt Dana, why I had to go. I told him the truth. I think that changed our relationship forever. We were still friends, good friends but after that night he changed. It's like he wasn't a kid anymore. I felt like that too. Ever since my dad did what he did to me, I looked at everything differently. It is as if my innocence was gone. I was still the twelve year old little girl, but I saw things with a different vision. My dad started touching me in places I didn't want to be touched. He put his hand up my shirt and down my pants. I screamed real loud and my mother came in and tried to get him to stop. He hit her real hard and then he beat her. I ran and jumped on his back to try and get him to stop hitting her. He just threw me on top of her. I laid over her and when he would come close I would kick at him to keep him away from

Mom. Oh, how I wished Eric had been there. I kicked Dad in the crotch and he left. I went to the phone and called Aunt Dana. She came right into town. I also called Mom's other sister, Aunt Paula, and she came right over. She called the police and they came quickly with an ambulance. I was so scared my mom was really hurt badly. I was also scared my dad would come back. I didn't go home that night; I stayed in the playhouse. Eric came and held me that night and made me feel safe and protected. I don't think he will ever understand how much that meant to me that he did that. That next day is when I left to go live with Aunt Dana for the summer.

She was the best thing that could have happened to me. She and I would talk and laugh and cry and whenever I wanted to talk, she would be right there for me. She is a special person to me. I missed Eric and Roger that summer, I wanted to come back and visit. But I was more afraid I would run into my father again. I didn't know then that the police came and locked him up.

I had to go to a trial and tell people what he had done to me and Mom. I was embarrassed to tell some things but I did. I never saw him again after that. My mom and I became real close. I mean, we were close anyway but with dad out of the way, I felt I could talk

to her and open up more about what went on. That was very therapeutic for me. I loved talking to Aunt Dana and to Lizzy but something about talking, sharing and crying with Mom just made us so close. We became best of friends. The thing is we still are today.

I think my dad beating on my mom is why I hated it when Eric would fight. He never fought to be mean or to just pick on someone; he only fought to defend someone or something. I loved that he was willing to stand up for others; I just wish he didn't go straight to fighting. I mean, there is something to be said for talking things out. That was Roger. I loved Roger. He could talk his way out of bad situations with reasoning and common sense. He was a smart guy. The other kids teased him about his speech and called him brainiac and nerd, but he just let it roll off his back. It was hard to provoke Roger. Roger was really funny. Because of his speech problems, he became very shy. I knew he had a crush on this girl, Wendy Tavish, and I would egg him in to going and talking with her. I even talked to Wendy and found out she kind of liked Roger. These two silly kids liked each other but were too shy to talk to each other. The two of them would write notes and letters and pass them back and forth. But they wouldn't hold a normal conversation like two intelligent people. When it came time for the senior prom, I had to ask Wendy if she would go with Roger

as he was too nervous to ask her himself. We went together, Roger and Wendy and me and my date. Roger and I danced a couple of slow dances together. To tell you the truth, I wanted to go to the prom with Roger but I knew he had that crush on Wendy. I loved Roger. I loved dancing with him that night. I loved that we held each other as we did. Years of friendship coming together for a single dance. It was a magical moment for me I will never forget. Roger drove us to the prom so after the prom we dropped off Wendy first, then my date, Dan. He kissed me good night and then Roger and I went to my house. We sat on the porch swing and he held me. We slowly rocked and there was a gentle breeze, and... well, things were just so romantic. We ended up kissing for quite a while. I was so in love with that boy. But I never dared to tell him. We were just good friends, even though I wished it could have been more.

On graduation night a bunch of us friends ended up at Susan Thatcher's house. They had a farm off of route 22 and had a small lake on their property. We built a big bonfire by the lake and roasted hot dogs and marshmallows and just had a great time. Of course, Roger and Eric were there too. Roger and I went over together. Eric didn't want to ride with us; he drove

himself over. Roger and I shared a blanket together and cuddled a bit. Then I went over and sat with Eric for a little while. He wasn't as jovial as the rest of us. We had just graduated and had the whole summer to enjoy before we had to go out into the real world and start life. I didn't know that wasn't the case for him. He had been nursing the same beer most of the evening. The rest of us were drinking pretty good but Eric never drank much. A beer was about the most I had ever seen him drink. I often wondered if it had to do with Jason.

I cuddled up next to him and hugged him. "Listen, I know I have been drinking and that you probably think I am drunk. But I'm not. I just want to tell you how much I love you. You have been my best friend all my life and I love you for it. I love the fact you are a man of honor, of principle, a man who is so willing to help others in need. I have always loved that about you. I don't always agree with the way you get things done sometimes but I love the spirit within you. You are a very special man to me Eric Moore and I love you dearly."

"I love you too, Millie."

"MER," I said.

MER

“MER.” he repeated. He got up and walked away. That was the last I saw of him for three years. I found out from Roger that a week before graduation Eric had gone down and enlisted in the Marines. He left two days later for boot camp. I never got to say goodbye.

I was very hurt, that someone I loved so dearly would leave me and not say goodbye. I knew we had drifted apart during high school but enough to be treated like that? I cried for a week after I found out he had left for boot camp. Here was someone who was one of the most important people in my life, whom I loved dearly and he wouldn't even say goodbye to me? Roger spent hours trying to console me. Ever the peacemaker, he would try and explain that Eric's leaving had nothing to do with how he felt about us. Eric had even distanced himself a little from Roger. Eric had confided in Roger the couple of months before he left how he felt pulled away. He had to get out of Muscatine and get on with life. He didn't want to be a kid any more. He didn't just want to be a bully to the bullies anymore. He needed more than Muscatine had to offer him. He had to get out into the world and prove things to himself. I guess that's why Eric didn't go to the prom; he felt it childish.

“Eric grew up into a man faster than me, I guess,” Roger said. “Somehow I think Jason still haunts him. I think the Marines will be good for him. They will give him discipline and structure and maybe even help him control his anger. Maybe they can even chase away some of the demons Jason left behind. All his fighting is just a manifestation of him fighting with himself over what he said about Jason when he died. I think he fights because he thinks he deserves to be punished for what he said about Jason’s death. He’s never forgiven himself for that.”

Roger’s words made sense to me but they couldn’t take away the hurt of Eric’s leaving without saying goodbye. I now had a huge void in my life.

Roger and I spent the summer together. It was the last summer I would be spending at home and we wanted to make it special. He and I went and hung out in the old playhouse every once in a while and pretended Eric was there. Roger and I also spent a lot of time kissing and cuddling and being very friendly.

We would stop over to the Moore’s house and visit with Lizzy and play with Ella Sue. Roger is going to make a great daddy someday. If I didn’t know better, I would almost think he loved Ella Sue more than me. I mean he never “splurtzed” me. Roger would capture Ella Sue and then pull her shirt up and put his mouth

on her tummy and blow real hard. Ella Sue would always laugh and yell, “Don’t splurtz me!” Those two were hilarious to watch.

I spent a lot of time with Mom that summer too. It was time for me to go out into the world and become a woman and I only hoped I could be just a shadow of her. She was my best buddy. During my first year of college, I called her every week just so we could talk. I missed her so much during that time.

Roger and Eric wrote to each other every week. Roger would share with me his letters from Eric. He seemed to be having a difficult time adjusting to the Marines. But he was working hard at it and I knew he was too stubborn not to succeed. I wrote Eric one letter that summer but I didn’t tell him how hurt I was. I guess he had other, more pressing things to deal with. I didn’t want to be a distraction in his life right then.

That fall Roger and I left for college. He went for one year and then joined the Peace Corps. I eventually graduated.

The summer between my Junior and Senior year, I came home from college to see my mom. I had missed her so much. I went over and visited Mr. and Mrs.

Moore and Lizzy. Ella Sue was now in school and don't think that didn't bring back memories of my starting school and meeting the boys for the first time. Boy, could that little girl talk! She never shut up. She always had something to tell you or questions to ask or explanations to give. What a chatterbox; she was hilarious.

Roger was somewhere in South America building a water treatment plant or something like that. I had been out on my own since I left for college but somehow being back home without the boys made it seem really lonely. I loved spending time with my mom and Lizzy and Ella Sue, but I felt like something was missing. It was the boys. Thomas Wolfe wrote, "You can never go home again." I started to understand what he meant by that. It was Muscatine, but somehow it wasn't the same Muscatine. It wasn't the home I remembered.

Roger and I wrote monthly and I wrote to Eric a couple of times. I even sent him a "care" package with plenty of microwave popcorn. I got a letter back thanking me and how that was the best care package he got since joining the military. Both of my boys...men...seemed to be doing well. Roger seemed to be learning a lot about construction and engineering. I don't know what all goes into a water treatment plant

MER

but Roger was learning and loving it. He was learning to speak Spanish, too. Eric loved the regimented life of the military. I wrote and asked him if he was still fighting. He said only in boxing matches and judo and karate tournaments. Fighting in a controlled setting is better than fighting out of anger, I suppose. But it's still fighting.

Then one day toward the end of the summer I went over and knocked on Lizzy's door. We three girls were going to go shopping for school clothes for Ella Sue. I rang the bell and the door opened. There stood Eric. He was home on leave. My God...what a hunk! There was nothing but muscle on that guy. And oh, what a butt! He was leaner and taller and had one of those Marine buzz cuts. I was shocked. I just grabbed him and hung on. I wasn't going let go. I had my Eric back. I cried and cried I was so happy to see him. I hugged and kissed him for an hour. An hour later the doorbell rang and there was Roger. The two of them knew I was coming home for the summer and decided to take leave and come back too. I was home again with both of my boys. I was ecstatic. We all spent the next week together and we were inseparable. It was the happiest week of my life. Well, second happiest. MER together again.

Three best friends, Eric, Millie and Roger, share their memories...their laughter...their tears...their antics...from their individual points of view. It is a diary of coming of age in the '60s and '70s. The reality is bad things happen to good people and our character is formed by the way we handle those situations. For Eric, Millie and Roger, the bad experiences help build a strong moral fiber and friendship that has lasted through the years.

Popcorn Diaries

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