

A story about growing up in the 1980s, growing older, and witnessing the effects of time on our memories and past. And of the losses we endure.

**Forever 1980s Teenager:
Family, Friends, Music and Memories**
By Paul Tannahill

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FOREVER 1980s TEENAGER

*Family, Friends, Music
and Memories*

Paul Tannahill

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Table of Contents

Introduction	7
Chapter 1: The Family Hub.....	11
Chapter 2: New Discoveries	23
Chapter 3: The Need for Family	33
Chapter 4: Changes	39
Chapter 5: High School	49
Chapter 6: Arizona	63
Chapter 7: The Teenage Life.....	75
Chapter 8: Field Trips and Broken VCRs	87
Chapter 9: Now What?	99
Chapter 10: Finding My Way Through the 90s	111
Chapter 11: Cigars, Pipes, and Monsoons	119
Chapter 12: When Change Comes	133
Chapter 13: Jack.....	145
Chapter 14: Letting Go	157
Chapter 15: Gifts From the Past.....	173
Chapter 16: The Way It Was	187
Chapter 17: When We Were Kings and Queens	197

Chapter 6:

Arizona

In May of 1985 we made our way to Peoria, Arizona. Being a teenager who was already at the age of being able to get his driver's license, it was natural for me to look at all the cars we passed by to get ideas for what kind of vehicle I would like to own. I saw a plethora of raised trucks and cars with roach clips attached to the rear-view mirrors, but what really caught my eye was all the brown, tan, orange, and yellow tri-color accent stripes along the sides of some of the vehicles. Especially the trucks. I wanted to paint those on our 1980 Datsun Pickup, but there was no way that our parents were allowing me to do that. We had to wait a few days for the moving truck to get to our new house, so Dad's work put us up at some fancy hotel for a few nights.

On the third day we checked out and made our way to our new home. The first order of business was to decide which bedroom went to my sister Shawnee, and which bedroom would go to me. I don't remember how it was decided, but I got the room that got the later sun of the day, with a window's view of our side back yard and block fence. On the plus side, my bedroom did have a small but adequate walk-in closet. Shawn got the bedroom directly across the hall from me, which actually had the better view as her Bedroom window looked out to the front yard and main street.

Once the moving truck pulled up, I walked out to the driveway and made it a point to locate my stereo and grab it first. Not my bed, not my desk, not my clothes, or anything else. I grabbed my stereo, sat it on the floor of my bedroom, and told myself that whatever rock

station I landed on first will be the one that I will always keep my dial on. It was a natural course of action really. When we feel out of place, we tend to look for and grab onto whatever we will feel is the most familiar to us. It can either help us to still feel connected to what we miss, or it can make us even more sad for not having it anymore. It was really instinct for me. Some people bury themselves in books, others dive into playing sports, but I have always hidden myself in music and in my family.

My Two Greatest Comfort Zones

Setting up my stereo in my bedroom before anything else was an attempt to help me adjust to our new surroundings. The first rock station I landed on was 98 KUPD. I wish I could remember what song was playing at the time, but I simply cannot recall it. Sticking to my commitment that the first rock station I landed on would be the one that I would stay with, 98 KUPD became my station. Dave Pratt would become the only morning DJ that I cared to listen to.

My bedroom looked like many other teenage bedrooms of the time. I had posters from my favorite rock bands all over my walls and ceiling. Sometimes I just cut out images of bands that I liked from my rock and heavy metal magazines and tape them up on my walls as well. I had a small desk and a nice stereo. I didn't need a dresser because I had six drawers under the bottom of my bed along with my walk-in closet. I was happy with that.

I spent the next few days helping to get things in the house set up so that it would start to feel more like home. Dad had a gate put in the backyard, and Shawn and I watched him as he took a stick and wrote Shawn's name, Ian's name, and my name in the concrete that was

poured there. The concrete is still there. We all adapted fairly quickly to our new home, but greatly missed our loved ones back in California.

Adjusting to School

After about a week of getting settled in, it was time for me to shift my attention to finishing out the school year. Unlike my previous high school, which proved to be a bit of an inconvenience to get to because of distance, Peoria High School is just down the street from our house. Easy walking distance. Of course, being the new kid in school is an automatic target for wonder. Who are they? Where did they come from? Why did they move here? With my longish blonde hair, unbuttoned Hawaiian shirts over rock T-shirts, Levis 501 Jeans, and an earring, I generated instant curiosity—especially when other students learned that I was from Southern California. Many of them asked me what it was like to surf. I would always tell them that I loved the beach, but I never surfed a day in my life. One thing that was really great about being the new guy on campus was that a lot of girls wanted to talk to me, which was great because I could use the confidence boost. I mean, at first it was overwhelming. I wasn't accustomed to that level of attention from girls, but after a while it was clear that the new car smell had worn off and I just ended up blending in with the other cars on the lot.

I did have to get used to a little bit of a dress code though. I don't mean dress code as in everyone was having to wear matching pants and sports jackets and things like that, but a dress code that forbade any clothing that displayed suggestive images or questionable language. There was no dress code at my former high school—at least not one that I ever knew of—so imagine my confusion when I walked onto campus one day and saw other students staring at me as if I was

walking into a lifetime sentence of detention. I didn't find out until about my third hour class that day why they were staring at me like that. My teacher, very nicely, called me over to his desk to explain it to me. It turned out that wearing the T-shirt that my uncle Red gave me, which just happened to proudly advertise his favorite beer, was a not allowed at school, so I had to change into my P.E. shirt. I said "ok" and went to the locker room and changed shirts. It wasn't a big deal really.

There are certain unspoken laws of nature that follow us no matter where we live, or what time in history we occupy. One of these unspoken laws says that we gravitate toward those who we feel are most relatable to us. Whether as a teenager or as an adult, it is only natural that we surround ourselves with other people who are like-minded. Social cliques have always existed and always will exist whether it be at school or the work place.

Our campus had the jocks, preppies, nerds, headbangers, punks, new wavers, mods, goths, and in some circles, there was a clique known as death rockers. Although I identified mostly with the rock and metal crowd to be sure, I found it to be too limiting to only hang with other rockers. I gravitated to anyone who would allow me into their circle, regardless of music, hair, or fashion styles.

Metrocenter

In class one day while sitting at my desk in the very back of the room with one of my heavy metal magazines that I was looking over with some of the other students, voicing my dislike of non-metal bands being included in that month's issue, one of the students asked me if I had been tubing yet. Having no idea what that meant, he explained to me that they would sometimes go tubing down the salt river. It didn't seem like something that I was all that interested in

doing, so I then asked what else there was to do around here. One of the girls said, “Well, there’s Lake Pleasant.”

“Yeah, my dad and I went up there. Anything else?”

“There’s desert parties and cruising Metrocenter,” she answered.

That caught my attention, so I asked her, “What’s Metrocenter?”

“It’s the mall,” she said. “On Friday and Saturday nights tons of us go cruising around it. You should come.”

Back then, for many of us teenagers in Arizona, Metrocenter, cruising, and desert parties were really just a part of life. The parties were not a matter of right or wrong, legal or illegal, smart or dumb, or free spirited or rebellious. It was just what was done back then. It was really like a right-of-passage with your peers. There was so much open space back then that there were desert parties all over the place, but there were also set destinations.

There was 107th Avenue and Camelback Road, Seventh Street and Deer Valley Road, 55th Avenue and Happy Valley Road, 67th Avenue and Happy Valley Road—just to name a few. We were in a giant desert with a lot of open space for goodness sakes—pretty much every dry wash and open desert area did just fine. Some areas were named. The gravel pits, the power lines, or the watering hole, and so on. And yes, the cops knew where the regular spots were; and yes, sometimes the parties were broken up. But of the few things mentioned to me in class that day, Metrocenter and cruising attracted me the most.

I mentioned Metrocenter shopping mall in the introduction of this book, as well as how special it was to so many of us. It’s difficult to describe the specialness for those who experienced it in the 1970s, 1980s, and part of the early 1990s to those who didn’t experience it

as we did. To many people a shopping mall is just a shopping mall, and for the most part, that is correct.

Before we moved here there were three shopping malls I went to on a regular basis. Like most other teenagers back then, mall life was our life. We were mall rats. You can see this in many of the teenage comedies that came out in the 1980s, as many of them had mall scenes in them. They were only shopping malls to me; there was nothing special about them, no character, no life, no soul to them. I did not have any attachments to them. But Metrocenter was different. If you did not live here to experience it in its heyday, then words alone cannot reflect it well enough. If you were here in those days, then no words are necessary. You know because you lived it with the rest of us.

Mom and I decided one day to go up and check it out. We entered through the bottom level of the Sears store taking the escalator to the upper floor. As soon as we entered the main mall, I looked to the left of us and saw what I thought was an entrance to a store. I looked closer and saw that it looked like a section of the mall that did not actually belong in the mall. It looked like its own unique shopping area. It looked like a series of shops that were situated in an alleyway. And for good reason. I would later learn that it was a series of stores that were tucked away in an area of the mall called The Alley. We didn't go in at that time, but it looked so unique that I put it as a top priority to check out when I came back on my own or with some friends. I saw the same stores that were in every other mall: record stores, book stores, toy stores, shoe stores, clothing stores, novelty stores, and everything else in-between. Just like any other shopping mall. We continued exploring and then turned right and found the food court. What made the food court stand out to me was that it surrounded a

wide-open view of the ice-skating rink down below on the first floor. We walked up to the guard rails and looked down at a few people who were ice skating. To this day many people still speak fondly of that ice skating rink. After some more walking around and exploring with Mom, I knew this mall was going to be a major hangout for me.

I was anticipating Friday night. I wanted to see it when it was full with people. I wanted to check out Golf-N-Stuff across the street when it was all lit up and packed. I wanted to see and be a part of the cruise life on the weekends. Yes sir, my mind was made up. I was going to spend a lot of time here.

Cornerstone and Saint

I had noticed a Christian bookstore on the upper floor called Cornerstone and on my next visit to the mall, I went in and starting flipping through their record selection. I came across a group called Saint. The album was called *Warriors of the Son*. I had no idea who they were, but could tell they were metal: black cover, the band wore black leather, and the word “Saint” written in red letters with the “t” in the form of a sword. Nowadays we can watch videos online to help us decide on whether or not we want to buy an album, but back then, unless it was a band on the radio, you just spun the wheel of chance and bought it hoping that you would enjoy it. When I got home and played it, I was blown away by it. It was not a well-polished, heavily produced album. It was raw and aggressive. And I loved it.

Of all the Christian rock bands that I would come to enjoy over the years, Saint, who I first heard in 1985, are still to this day one of my top three bands and they still make albums.

The Alley

When you walked out of the Christian store, you could turn right and head towards The Alley. It was designed like a small, narrow, cobblestone street alley with street lights, and on each side were different shops—smaller shops—much smaller than the bigger stores that were in the rest of the mall. I can't recall them all, but I know that at one time there was a hat or leather store where I bought a tan leather floppy hat. There was an old-time photo store where my sister Shawnee and I had a picture taken of us. She was dressed as a young girl from the 1800s while I was dressed like a Union soldier from the Civil war.

In 2020 when it was announced that the mall was getting ready to close, a flood of pictures that people had taken in that shop hit social media. Man, a lot of us had pictures taken there back in the day. Shawnee and I went back to the Alley and had our picture taken; the picture was then engraved into a piece of heavy plastic or plexiglass. We gave it to our parents one year for Christmas. I have heard many different names to describe the process but still am not certain which one may be the correct one. I have asked others if they remember the name of the store, and have heard a few possible names, but given that no one I asked knew for sure the name, and internet searches have yielded nothing, I can't say with complete certainty what the correct name of the business was, but I still have the image in my display cabinet.

First Summer

I had a lot of fun here my first summer. I did a lot of swimming with my friends, mostly at their houses as our pool was shockingly warm. I'll explain why.

Mom and Dad had decided early on that we were going to get a swimming pool. This may have been because we always enjoyed Pat and Dale's pool and didn't have one of our own. I guess living in a desert made having one particularly inviting. I was wishing for the same design as theirs, diving board and all, but Mom and Dad decided to go with a shallow pool. It was only five feet deep in the center, and about four feet deep on both sides. It may not have been a deep pool, but its shallowness was good for water volleyball. Later I had learned from Mom that Dad had a relative who had an accident while diving into a pool one time and was seriously injured. That may be why our parents didn't want a diving board. But there was a downside to a shallow pool and I was the first one in our family to discover it.

One day while doing some work in our backyard, I threw off my shirt and jumped into our pool expecting to cool off. As soon as I hit the water, I was smacked with a shock to the system. We were unaware at the time at just how warm a shallow swimming pool can get in this state. Usually when one jumps into a swimming pool brimming and sparkling with clear water, it is expected to cool one off. That was the most uncomfortable dive I ever made. I was actually hotter in the pool than I was before I jumped in. From then on, most of the time I was swimming at friend's houses.

Like most other teenagers, I also went to the mall and saw a lot of movies. The movie theatre I went to most was inside Valley West Mall because the tickets were so cheap. When I wanted to rent a movie, I simply hopped over my backyard wall and crossed the street to the open field and walked right over to the small strip mall to a little mom and pop video rental store. I applied for my first job there but never got an interview.

Our state does get a bad rap for its heat during the summers and for an understandable reason: it gets very hot here during the summer time. But, to focus on the heat is to ignore all the wonders of this state. We know how to look past the summers. Once the summer is over, our weather is unmatched. Speak with anyone who has lived here long enough and they will tell you that these cooler days are why we are willing to put up with the heat.

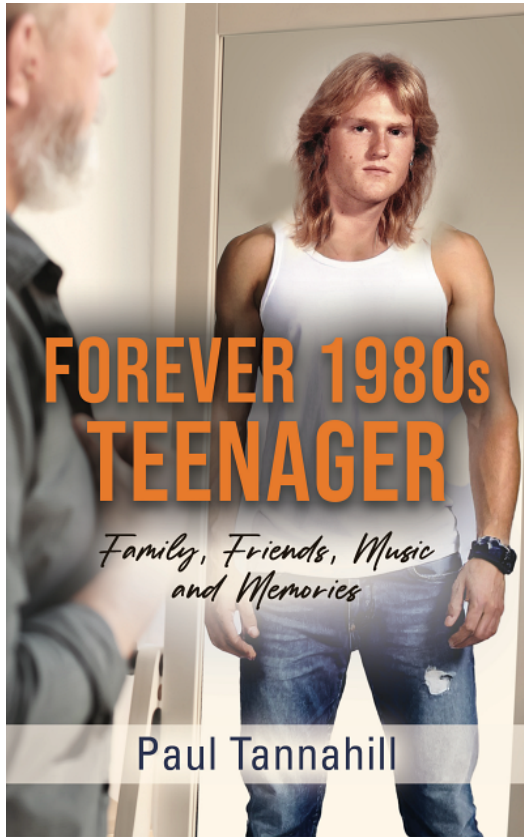
As teenagers, many of us didn't really think of the heat very much. We would walk in 115-degree heat just to go up to a fast-food joint, video store, or the grocery store. We also explored the new house construction that was going up around us. At nighttime, a few of us local teens would go from house to house and climb around the trusses, or sit on top of the ledges that had just been drywalled. One time we even went back to our friend's house to grab a ladder, brought it back, and leaned it against the house so we could climb up and sit on the roof for a while. I mean, we were a sight to see: teenagers walking down the street at night carrying an eight-foot ladder, and no one ever called the cops on us! Everybody knew that this is what we did in new homes being built around here. Plus, someone always seemed to know at least one of us, so once they saw us out their windows they just laughed and went back to doing whatever they were doing. It's funny really. Almost daily I walk by the same houses that almost forty years ago I was climbing around inside and sitting on top of while they were still being built.

Dirt Bike Riding in Arizona

I also rode my dirt bike our first summer here. Where we lived in California, we had to drive for over an hour, sometimes two, just to get to where we would ride our dirt bikes and camp for a night or two. But

not here. I just loaded my bike onto the back of Mom and Dad's truck, a few of my friends climbed in the cab with me, and we just drove to the New River wash bed and took turns riding my dirt bike. The next time we went out, we loaded up my buddy's bike, along with my mine, drove just north for less than ten minutes, and took turns riding them. We were out there most of the day. Due to the natural landscape, we were able to find some nice dirt ramps for quality jumps, hills to climb, and soft dirt to kick into the air behind us.

When my buddy tried to climb a hill, he flipped his bike three quarters of the way up. He rolled himself out of the way as his ride came crashing down. Smudged, but no damage, to either him or his ride, he swore that he would never ride again. He was so insistent on leaving that we loaded everything up and headed back home. I don't know if he ever rode again after that, but I never saw him ride again. Those were the days, man. It is hard to believe that many of these areas have been so altered with earth movers and dump trucks that much of the original landscape is now gone. Many of my old riding places are now littered with houses and businesses all up and down and on both sides. But back then, these places were an off-roaders paradise, and they were close to home—a short drive there, a day of riding with friends, and back home for dinner.



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