

Anita Baker

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I know that this post is long but how do you describe these memories in a short paragraph so please indulge me.

In memory of the 70's and celebrating Danville Park Girls High School's 50th Birthday and the year I turn 60.

Written on an iPad by a 1974 Matriculant from that era when computers had not been heard of...

#DPGHS #DanvilleParkGirlsHigh1970 - 1974 (did you notice the hashtags?)

January 1970 the year a gangly 12 year old walked through the gates of Danville Park Girls High School and became part of the incredible "buttercup yellow" sisterhood. Our summer uniform consisted of the famous, buttercup yellow dress with white collar and cuffs, white ankle socks and brown shoes AND the dreaded white panama hat which somehow always landed up looking like a beaten up cowboy hat by the end of our school career. Winter brought out the trendy block pleated (very important fact) small hounds tooth patterned skirts, buttercup yellow blouses, grey knee high socks, grey jerseys and our now institutionalised, grey blazers and that grey felt hat that always smelt funny after it got wet from rain.

The 70's! How did we teenagers endure this era with no cell phones (faint!) no social media (seriously!?!) and no TV. (gasp!) I know! We sewed our own mini-skirts and wide leg bell bottoms, worn with tie dyed tee shirts, crocheted bikinis and pierced each other's ears. We wore hot pants with knee high boots and Moses sandals with Levi jeans or corduroy Wranglers. I didn't have a beauty regime but Vaseline was a great lip "gloss" and my hair smelt like sun silk apple shampoo. We had no conditioner (ice-age) and use to wrap my hair around my head before going to bed at night to straighten it for the next day. We wore our hair in pigtails (with ribbons or bobbles) and plaits or a ponytail for school. Weekends we let our hair down. Far out man!

Durban Drive-in was a favourite for all the wrong reasons. Hot rods on a Saturday Night opposite where I stayed in North Beach, was a hangout I loved. No YouTube but we listened avidly to LM radio Top Twenty Hits which we recorded onto our tape recorders. Everyone had a radio and we faithfully listened to Springbok Radio especially Squad Cars, Men from the Ministry and the Creaking Door. If your boyfriend was in the army, you could send him a special request over the radio on David Gresham's show. Catching a bus into Durban to go to movies was a special treat. Those were the years of huge screens and movies like..... Love Story, where you were given tissues because it was a tear jerker of note. We listened to Cat Stevens, Eagles, Queen, Don McLean, Beach Boys and many that your generation still think are groovy..... erm I mean.... cool today. Theatre made history when Dawn and Des Lindberg brought out Godspell which had been previously banned in South Africa because of how they portray Jesus, but I got to see it. WOW!

We danced to the music from the Rocky Horror movie just a step to the left. And it doesn't matter how old or what era, a matric dance favourite was and always will be, the shuffle.

We were warned to stay away from surfers with long hair who drove a VW combi and had movie star crushes on Steve McQueen, Charles Bronson, Clint Eastwood. David Cassidy was our "Justin Bieber" and we had posters on our bedroom walls... some things never change.

I grew up in North Beach, envied by many who didn't live this close to Durban's Golden Mile. Life was a struggle between juggling the beach, getting that perfect Durban tan and home work. Teachers couldn't understand what it was like studying on the beach and trying not to get sand in between the pages... sigh! But we did it! And managed to concentrate whilst writing those awful exams in the hall, seated in strict silence whilst teachers adjudicated and you hopefully remembered everything you "studied". One thing for sure though, the Kardashians would have envied such an amazing tan. Yay for Durban winter!

Is it still tough gazing out at the ocean during a double period lesson in the afternoons. Sigh what a view.

Returning to attend my class of '74 reunion, I felt like I had stepped back in time. Bar a few amazing changes it was like I had never left. Like the swimming pool we raised funds for but never got to use. The school girl in me gazed fondly at those corridors and classrooms, the courtyard where we sat with rolled down socks to tan our ankles. The 70's were a time of strict rules and etiquette here in South Africa even though we were testing boundaries because of influence from America that brought in the "hippy" age of Aquarius and freethinking to our side of the planet. Our political situation was never really discussed openly and children were still "seen and not heard". Challenging your elders and their belief system was never encouraged and we were taught to honour, respect and obey anyone in authority. It gave us a very good grounding in manners and moral compasses were generally on course. Anything rebellious was frowned upon and we were kept separate from those "naughty" kids.

No one discussed or aired out skeletons in family closets as this was not done. Things were proper and we balanced our Afrikaner/British/European colonial heritage not always understanding the cracks in our history or the pain and suffering so many were facing in South Africa. Reading books or the newspaper did not always bring home the reality that we see today as the internet has drawn us face to face with the real world which is hard to ignore. We as teenagers were blissfully unaware of so much as we went about our very privileged lives. Many had domestic help who became a much needed support system for those who could afford it. Nannies brought up generations of children like their own as they were separated from their own families. We were ignorant and unchallenged in our comfortable lives.

"This" South Africa found me living in a very sad dysfunctional home which we hid from everyone and pretended that life was normal. Smile and wave and carry on. It's during this stage of my life when the cracks began to form where I was unable as a young person to pretend that my life was normal. It is with so much gratitude that I will be forever grateful for my English teacher at Danville Park Girls High, Jean Viljoen (née Gooden) who stepped in on a day when I arrived at school and fell apart emotionally.

Our school was not just a place to be educated but it became a community of girls and teachers who journeyed together for 5 years of their lives. We laughed, learnt, grew up in one of the most blessed environments that most of us only fully realized once we "finally" left school. In celebrating our milestones I would like to dedicate this post of mine to Jean Viljoen (I hope somehow she gets to read this). Thank you for caring for me and taking me to your home in the afternoons during my matric year so I could get food to eat and study in a safe place. Your parents, Mr and Mrs Gooden, welcomed me into their home, no questions asked, and cared for a very broken teenager. I'm also indebted to Mr Gooden who assisted in getting me a bursary to study for a medical secretarial diploma at The Natal Technicon, which I passed with a few distinctions. (I used my Biology Mrs Payne - RIP). I got through that year and passed because someone saw my need and helped me. To my school friends who never knew all the details but loved me anyway..... Thank you from the bottom of my heart

This is what makes Danville great. What makes our memories unforgettable and why we have become women who know how to get through life and all it's ups and downs. This dedication comes with so much love, honour and respect for my school and every single teacher and staff member who assisted me during those important years of my life. You deserve the recognition because without your unwavering commitment to great education, your incredible passion to produce a standard that nurtured "your girls" to become wonderful women, many of us would not be here to celebrate with you. I pray that the next 50 years will see this legacy being carried on to future generations. We might have to make changes to buildings, restructure education policies but one thing will never change the heart that belongs to the "buttercup yellow" girls and the women who shaped their lives. I salute you!

Love and hugs (because that's how we do it now)

Anita Baker (née Beukes)
Class of 1974
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Good Fellowship 1974