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The Cry of Youth

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The time is 2:20 p.m.. It is a time I once longed for, trapped inside some high school class room — biology, pre-calculus or, God forbid, typing — waiting for the minutes to click forward on those high school clocks. (You know, the ones that actually click *backwards* sometimes if you watch closely enough.)

Now, I dread 2:20 p.m., and it never passes on a weekday without my notice. Geography has seen to that. When I bought my house three years ago, I was thinking in terms of resale value. I was thinking in terms of neighborhood. I was thinking in terms of what I could get for the measly loan they'd give me.

And so when I came across the little house right behind the high school, I thought I'd hit pay dirt. Not only was the house exactly what I wanted (read: none of the features I longed for, but the price I could afford) but it was in a nice, diverse neighborhood and close to the high school where endless youthful activity would no doubt inspire me and keep me in touch — at least from a safe distance — with today's youth.

How naïve was I? (Please don't start trying to quantify the answer — it could take you all day.)

At first, it was kind of nice. I would leave for work just as the teens headed for their first class of the day. And as they learned, so did I. I learned, for example, not to back out of my driveway so fast. Teens are groggy and slow to respond in the mornings. (Well, more so than other times.)

But I liked crossing paths with the kids, even for that briefest of moments. I liked recalling that feeling of trudging towards school, at a time in your life where your concerns are mainly about your pants and how close your locker is to your classes. And I liked the fact, quite frankly, that they had to go to school and I didn't.

When I started working from home, however, things changed slightly. While I was awake as these same kids trudded to school, I watched from the window as they traipsed across my front lawn thinking, "What? The sidewalk isn't good enough for you?"

On my first morning at home, I had planned to trade in my dressing and commute time for a little extra sleep. I tried to block out the roar of the school buses laboring down my street. But then, in a half-dream state, I was hurtled cruelly back to my own high school days when, clear as a bell, the morning announcements started.

That's right. It was like being in homeroom again. That barely audible voice trumpeted across creation, followed by a series of piercing bells. I woke up in a panic I hadn't felt in years: I'm late for first period!

By mid-afternoon, I was exhausted. I celebrated my newfound freedom by indulging in a mid-afternoon nap. Although I fell asleep quickly, I was woken shortly by a thunderous cacophony of a desperate rhythm section. It sounded like a friggin' marching band was in front of my house.

I got out of bed, peered out the front window and, sure enough, there it was: a high school marching band, in front of my house. They were having a much-needed practice which, I learned, was not an isolated incident.

Today, I'm used to the roar of the buses in the morning and I don't even pay much attention to the bells that sound throughout the day, signifying a change of classes. But I still dread 2:20, when the teens pour out of the school.

Many of them park on our street and it is their hangout before heading home. They pause to converge into groups, reaching into their backpacks for their smokes, lighting them inexpertly and blowing out the smoke without really inhaling.

And they scream, their volumes maxed out in response to another day imprisoned in the world of higher education. They scream at each other, to each other, regardless of how close they are. Most disturbingly, they scream profanities at the top of their collective lungs before peeling out of their parking spaces and finally, leaving my street in a shell-shocked silence by 3 p.m. or so. My husband calls it the cry of youth. Of course, he laughs when he says it because, after all, he never has to hear it.

I don't wax poetic about my youthful days anymore. Instead, I fantasize about the day when maybe, just maybe, I'll be fortunate enough to sell this place and move somewhere far, far away. Perhaps even all the way on the other side of Big Bend.

When I do sell my house, when potential buyers stop in and admire the hard work we've put into this property, they'll have questions for me about the house and the surrounding neighborhood. We will tell them that we love living in Maplewood because we do. But we will also pause before they leave and ask them in our most nonchalant manner, "You *do* work full-time, don't you?"

Julia Smillie Carey pens the "Ask **Julia**" column, found on the site every Tuesday.

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