

RAINBOW ROWELL

Living well away from the edge

I've been 20 for almost a year now, and it just occurred to me. I'm no longer a teen-ager.

It probably should have hit me sooner, but it's been a busy nine months. I've had more to think about than the end of my glory years.

It's not that I mind leaving my teen years behind me. I don't. For the most part, they sucked rocks.

But I don't know if they were really bad in and of themselves—or if I just didn't take advantage of them. I don't think I lived them to their fullest potential.

I experienced only the lamest aspects of adolescence—the mood swings and the acne. I didn't do any of the good stuff.

I never smoked cigs in the corner stall of the ladies' room or got drunk under the bleachers at a football game. I never wore spiked jewelry or dated a tobacco-chewing biker just to tick off my mom.

Darn it, I never rebelled.

When I was supposed to be practicing my rebel yell, I was saying "I'm sorry if I've disappointed you" over and over to my trigonometry teacher.

I never sulked or swore or gratuitously tortured small animals like frogs and kittens.

High school was fun, but I missed out on so much angst. Angst. Just typing that word makes me feel like James Dean.

Maybe my mistake was hanging out with the wrong sort of people—overachievers and people who went to church on a regular basis.

Saying no to alcohol, drugs, irresponsible sex and most other traditional outlets of adolescent wackiness forced us to find creative ways to act immature.

Mostly we drank liters of caffeinated beverages and then refused sleep until we were delirious. You can only live that lifestyle for so long, though, before you burn out.

It's been years since I could touch a Coca-Cola Classic without getting



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sick.

After a really wild weekend, I might even put my homework off until Sunday night. Live hard, die young.

But I never did anything that I can blow out of proportion and tell my grandchildren about. I still don't.

I guess I jaywalk ... a lot. And I cheat at miniature golf and Monopoly. But that doesn't make for good oral tradition.

Maybe I'm being presumptuous, assuming that I'll actually mate someday. But if I do have children and grandchildren, I don't want to have to tell them about the time I got really wild and made a left turn without using my blinker.

The trouble with crime and rebellion is you can't do it without hurting somebody. Rebellious and criminal acts are usually considered such because they're harmful.

I may want to be a rebel, but I don't want to ruin someone's life, or even their mailbox. There's nothing left that's socially unacceptable for no good reason.

Especially if you're a girl. I grew my hair out and pierced my ears three times. Nobody even blinked.

I don't want to be forever branded as a Bad Girl, but I wouldn't mind if people thought I was a tiny bit wicked every now and then.

And I'd like it if those bands of rock-throwing small children would stop following me around and screaming "Goody Two-Shoes."

Why, I wonder, is being bad so exciting?

Maybe I'd be more content with my uneventful benevolence if I hadn't watched "Grease" so many times. Year after year, like clockwork, it appears on network television, and year after year, I watch.

Sandra Dee, the consummate Australian virgin, wins the hearts of everyone at Rydell High by being sweet and good and pure.

The Pink Ladies tease her for a little while, but after a while they see that being a prude beats unplanned pregnancy or beauty school.

To top it off, the man of her dreams leaves his torrid past behind him, goes out for track and sings through his nose.

And then, what should be a huge victory for nice girls everywhere, goes suddenly wrong, very wrong, when Sandy shows up in leather pants at the end of the movie, badly permed and wearing open-toed spike heels.

Sandy, my darling, you hurt me real bad. You know it's true. Just when I thought that the nice gal was finally going to carry the day, you turned into a "Solid Gold" dancer.

Thus, the evil media socialized me to have an unnatural desire for badness ... and an unnatural desire to look like Olivia Newton-John.

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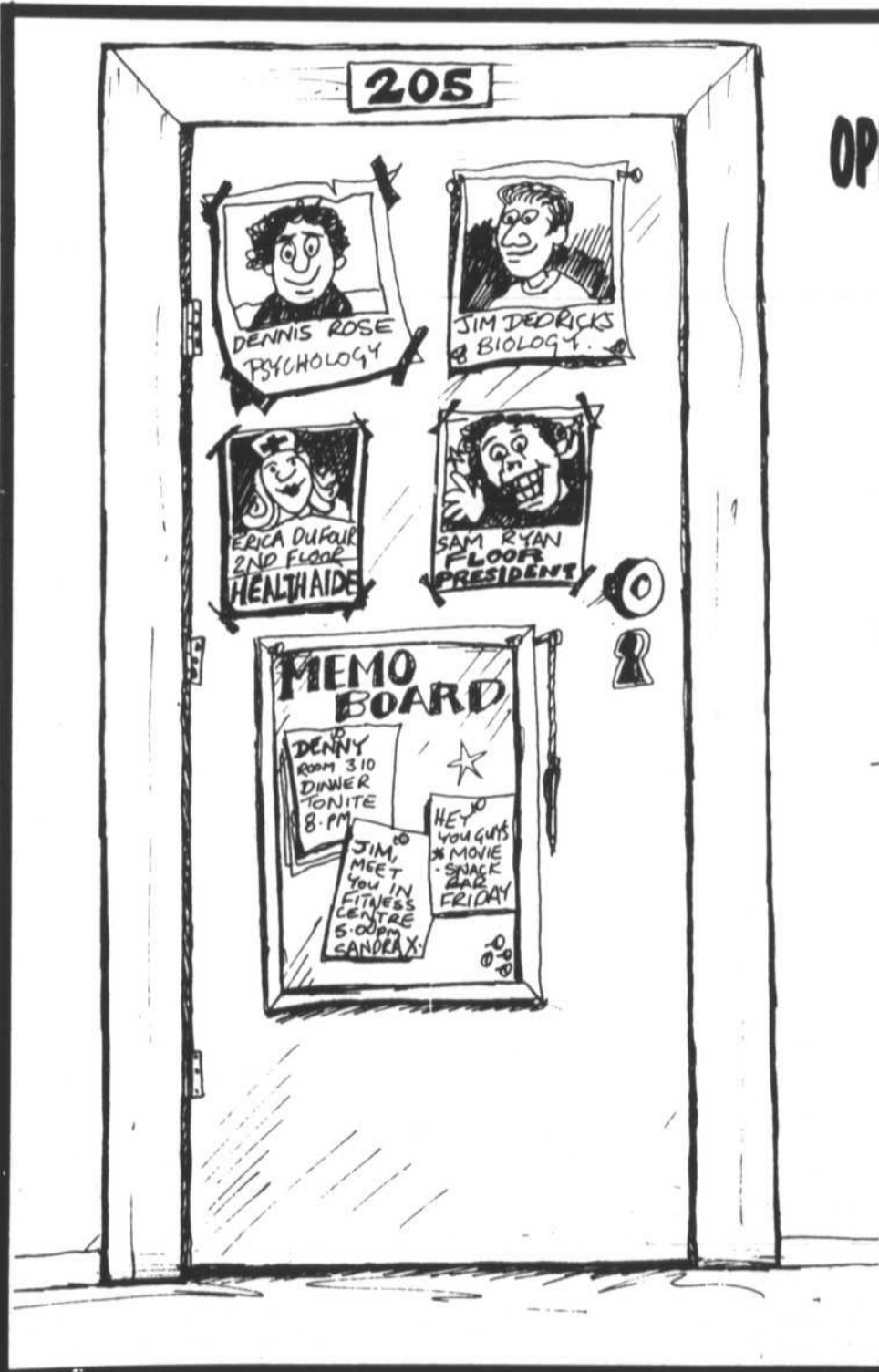
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