



# ESCAPE TO THE SEVENTIES

## Best Friends

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I had never been one to socialize en masse, one or two good friends was all I needed. In fact, one is what I had...right through the seventies.

When I think about Susan, hmmm... yes, what do I think? Well, firstly, and inadvertently I think of her, or thought of her, as criminally slim. She wore the streamlined fashion of the day like a store mannequin. It hung where it was supposed to hang and where it clung it was aesthetically pleasing.

This is always a challenge for a friendship, especially between teenage girls. Couple this with the nasty clothes buying habit and you begin to wonder, how did we ever stay friends?

You see I was curvaceous in a way that was rather too assertive for the seventies what with Twiggy an' all. I had breasts, which thank heavens came to be appreciated, and a posterior. Viewed from the side I was more "S" shaped than "I" shaped. Susan went straight down, but I've said that already haven't I?

So I lived in a family that lived well, in The Moment. There were roasts on the table several times a week, my father insisted, but there were no savings in the bank. My father was a newspaper editor who loved his job more for the creative satisfaction than the salary. My father was also a boy, this being distinct from the rest of us in the family.

As a man-boy he was always taken aback when his women folk asked for clothing. I think he somehow thought that girls laid out for an initial wardrobe when they were born and then never needed further maintenance. The way my sisters and I got a new pair of jeans was a bit like peace negotiations in the Middle East. The process was long, painful and often fruitless, or at least it would have been if it weren't for my dear ol' mum.

My mother was an expert negotiator, well versed in all the

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feminine skills of manipulation necessary for a traditional housewife who needed to extract funding out of my traditional career man father. Like Israel and the Lebanon they would approach middle ground from two very disparate departure points and then my mother would woo my father. I think she was capable of bringing tears to his eyes as she recounted how her beloved daughters were pathetic Cinderellas dressed in tatters and up against a world of well dressed ugly sisters.

How were they ever to get to go to any balls? She'd ask my father, tears in her eyes. Tears were so alien and distressing to my father that he would give in just to stop the sound of weeping and lamenting coming from the female quarters of the house. My father was the only male and almost never there, the female quarters were therefore almost all pervasive. He had his lazy boy and that was it.

So, to cut a long story short, too late, we'd finally get the pair of jeans or the top. There were no multiples in the equation. Just one.

So, back to Susan. We'd get together on Friday night for a sleep over and maybe go out to a movie with her big brother and I'd be wearing the new jeans or the top. We got along well, so she generally enjoyed my taste in clothing that had such sparse expression. I would revel in her appreciation.

Susan lived in a family where they ate cold meats and baked beans a lot. They had savings in the bank and clothing allowances. When we got together the following weekend she would have four of whatever it was my mother had managed to weasel out of my father. She'd have them in all different colors. This was a very difficult problem to get up and over. Almost worse than the slimness.

Why did I stay friends with this slim, well-dressed friend? Sorry, I almost wrote "fiend". Well, she had a whole lot of stuff I wanted. She had a personality that was fun when it was right and serious and intimate when that was appropriate. She had a big brother, Clive, that I was in love with for several years. She had a wardrobe that she sometimes let me try on and occasionally let me wear when we went out.

She had a high single bed and we used to sleep top and tail on Friday or Saturday nights. She had a touch of madness that made us compatible. We both spent our teens passionately involved in severe crushes on sundry boys.

A typical evening would be spent cross-legged on the bed knitting a tiny square, purple on one side and pink on the other, a kind of mini-cushion. We'd stuff it and embroider the

initials of the love of our lives on it and then wear it always and sleep with it under our pillows until it became flat and rather grubby.

But the thing we did most was laugh. We would fall into irrepressible paroxysms of giggles in the most inappropriate places. Often at night we'd spread a blanket outside and play a game we'd invented where one of us would initiate a laugh. This would be false initially. The other would follow suit. We would carry on until the laugh was full and genuine and joy formed a kind of delighted bubble around our prone figures.

While I was laughing, which was more or less all the time except for when I was crying, I forgot that I was heavier than Susan and less fashionably dressed. I loved her with all the passion of a teenage girl under the stars in 1974.

