

Polaroid

This is the only polaroid I own. There's no deep psychological reason for that, I just don't have many friends with polaroid cameras. It was taken on the last day of high school by a girl named Halle Wyatt, who worked as the feature editor for our school newspaper, *The Riptide*. I think she wanted my job, but I don't fault her for it. Most of my classmates had been toiling for two years before I joined the paper as a junior with a head full of stories and a mouth full of interview questions. I never felt like I fit in with the newspaper kids. They occupied different social circles and talked about different things, but we all liked writing articles and procrastinating so I only stuck out a little. Halfway through the year I applied to be Editor-in-Chief. Halle Wyatt did too. She was

the obvious pick: already a content editor, she filled my opinionated and unformatted stories with red highlighting and frustrated comments. Halle was also the *fair* pick. She had put in the time, and a just universe would have given her the job ten times out of ten. But I talked more, so despite my relative inexperience the job went to me. It probably didn't hurt that our advisor, who would be busted two years later for grooming a 17 year old boy, liked me better than any of the girls in the class.

We were on the beach with Halle's polaroid camera to celebrate the end of our senior year of high school. The pandemic had derailed our little newspaper, sending us into lockdown before I could receive any instruction on how to edit-in-chief and forcing *The Riptide* online. I compensated by tightening our deadlines, collaborating with the big-boy local newspaper, and releasing articles weekly instead of monthly. Our readership soared, but it did nothing to make me feel less isolated. I was the boss, and no one likes their boss even when he's 18 and failing calculus. By the end of the year Halle was the closest I had to a friend on the staff, and she told me how excited she was to use her polaroid camera. I stood with my back to the water in my fancy hoodie and fastidiously coiffed hair and tried to smile in a way that didn't reveal how uncomfortable I felt around the people who were her friends and my unpaid, overworked employees.

I haven't talked to Halle in about a year, but I saw her last week when I was coming up to college. She was sitting upstairs on the ferry that separates our island from the mainland. I was sitting forty feet to her right. I didn't talk to her, because I felt

nervous that she would look at me and see the hair and the false bravado and think I hadn't changed a lick since high school. I felt like saying hi would be awkward. It probably would have been, but I should have done it anyway.

Thanks for the photo Halle, it's the only polaroid I own, and for two and a half years it's sat on the magnet board hanging beside my desk – reminding me of old me, and old you, and the newspaper we used to run.