



1. Kelly Flaherty sucked her three middle fingers well into elementary school. They were always dry and a bit withered from the abuse. Eventually her parents bribed her to give up the habit by buying her a bright yellow cassette tape player.
2. Helen Min and I were nest builders, tree doctors, petty thieves, horses, and hamburgers. She was braver and more co-ordinated than I was, and could stand on swings and do the monkey bars. My strengths were in naming our invented games and designing backyard obstacle courses. As an added bonus, her parents owned a Mac's convenience store, so we got free Coke Slurpees and frequent viewings of a cheesy movie about a dead rock 'n' roll singer (one of the few videos her store carried that was suitable for children).
3. Henry Joel Stevens was probably the smartest kid in Grade Six. Definitely the smartest boy. And nice, too. He had a very round head. Basically, he was Charlie Brown with more freckles.
4. Gretchen had very curly blond hair and a comically high voice, and played lead trombone in the school band. Despite all of that, she had successfully navigated her way to that tween-age social apex: The Back (and best) Seat on the Bus. She was a firm but kind alpha female who kept her small kingdom in check with judgmentally squinty eyes, rarely needing to resort to more extreme (or humiliating) tactics. I think we got along because I made her laugh, which, I have to say, felt fantastic.
5. Candy Flunn had a hilarious name and a bad attitude. In retrospect, I realize she probably had a really terrible home life. I'm not sure if knowing that about Candy would have made me feel sorry for her at the time. Mean.
6. Ana and I played *Girl Talk* in her bedroom and *Nightmare* in her family room, where their caged lovebird lived. Ana's dad developed M.S. when we were about eleven and wasted away very rapidly. I eventually stopped going over to their house.
7. Mike was an amputee and had a prosthetic arm. My mom babysat him at our place a few times. Once, at our kitchen table, under my mom's stained-glass hanging lamp, we cut out paper owls and coloured them

with pencil crayons. Mike always wore navy blue velour sweatpants. I had a tiny crush on him.

8. Katie was a woman by the time she was in Grade Five. Her mom was dead and she cried about it in class once when the teacher forced us to discuss "loss."
9. "Step on Brown, your pants fall down
Step on White, get a million dollars tonight."
10. Roxanne is one of the funniest people I have ever known. She was very deft at mocking others. She gave everyone creatively vague nicknames like "Brown Paper Bag Eyes." For some reason, people are surprised when I tell them that the funniest person I have ever known is a girl. Why?
11. I met Sarah in Grade Eight. Along with Roxanne, she spearheaded "Nerd Power," a two-person coalition dedicated to ironic buttons and flashcards, giving out "Winner" certificates and, perhaps most significantly, creating a series of jokes and riddles whose punch line was always "Nerds." I think I may have been an honorary member.
12. Children are the cruellest, most ruthless beings on earth. Everyone acknowledges this, but very few fess up to their own offences. Boys don't talk about beating up nerds, and girls pretend they never psychologically tormented others to the point of tears. We might admit to a few youthful misgivings, but generally pretend we were "good kids." The truth is really uncomfortable to admit. Impossible, maybe.
13. Tom was poor and everyone knew it. He also seemed kind of unlucky. Bad combination.
14. Faith Wotherspoon was one of those overachievers who harboured pure hatred for anyone whose ability, in any activity, approached her own. She also had a solid gold flute.
15. Rami was a raging dork* in elementary school, but by the time we entered high school, she had blossomed into a super-hot young woman with a great figure and a sexy, deep voice. That itself was reason enough to hate her, but the main source of our truly epic rivalry involved my offhand

comment that Michael Jackson was a "freak of nature." The fact this was even a source of drama is clear evidence that all Grade Ten girls are crazy.

16. Jemal liked romantic R&B "slow jams." And Rami.
17. Nora was the fairest of fair-weather friends. When you're ten, it's hard to resist the seduction of attention. In fact, knowing you'll be unfashionable again in a few days made it all the more delicious. The rumour at school was that Nora's dad went crazy. Apparently he was missing for a while and they found him sleeping on a beach in Florida.
18. Stephanie was from Montreal, and exuded sexiness in a way only Montreal girls can.
19. After years of disinterest, Hamid eventually took a Mormon girl to grad. That was probably the clearest sign I was going to get.
20. Ten-year-old Bryce Jennings had the shiniest, roundest of mushroom cuts and a really cool, neon-pink ski jacket. He was, in the simplest of terms, a dreamboat.
21. Samuel Hogarth is now a very famous soccer player living in Europe. He probably makes millions of dollars and lives a fabulously glamorous lifestyle. I think the girls could sense his potential because he was deemed crush-worthy. He used to make fun of my name. My mother unhelpfully suggested I call him "Samuel the Farmer" as a rebuttal.
22. Gina Gyzz had a horrible name and was an unabashed nerd, which takes guts in junior high. Daily torment didn't seem to affect her. Maybe she had a truly sunny disposition or maybe, by high school, she had perfected her coping mechanisms.
23. Maggie was a tattletale who couldn't take a joke. And she had horse teeth.
24. Goth kids are funny because they're just as dorky and awkward as your typical run-of-the-mill teenager. Behind closed doors, they cautiously pluck "Yesterday" on powder-blue Fender guitars and paint their bedroom walls with delightful cloud motifs. They have guilty pleasures like 1960s folk ballads and cheesy dance music. They make Betty Crocker instant cake mixes and lick batter off spoons. I've seen it.