

The Coffee Kid Memoirs

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Like clockwork, as the street lights lit, my mind was on drip coffee and cigarettes. Each night I'd drive to the octagon shaped building with its yellow sign, that building was our haven, our hole. Each one of us arrived separately; however, we all had the same grand entrance. I'd walk up to The Hole, swing the door open and waltz through. I'd walk past the hostess because I felt that somehow I had earned the right to seat myself. As I turned left and headed for the booth located near the back of the smoking section I'd smile at familiar faces. I would also glance over to strangers, wondering why they were on our turf.

I would arrive at our booth greeted by a table full of fellow non-conformists on the brink of adulthood. At our particular booth there were four of us. In the other booths sat other members of our group. As the night went on we'd eventually own the entire smoking section. There we all sat, wearing t-shirts with either our favorite band's logo or a satirical comment about life. We proudly, silently, showed off our tattoos, body jewelry, and retro 1980s jelly bracelets (before they became popular again). The Hole was our place in society where we felt we belonged and were accepted.

Usually the first words out of any one of our mouths was, "Dude, before I talk I need coffee with cream and a cigarette." As our cups were filled, and nicotine flooded our lungs we would each take turns venting about our trivial jobs, trivial relationships, and trivial shortcomings. Each night the conversations would turn from our venting about life to our view on: the government, religion, music, books, serial killers, psychology, body image, war, celebrities, and anything else that entered our minds. We would share stories about our first tattoos, first cars, first jobs, and other firsts—it was a place where we could be free from political correctness and judgments.

Many times our conversations that could be deemed inappropriate would be heard throughout The Hole. Once in a while an intruder on our turf would complain about the noise, the language, or the topic at hand. I'll

never forget the moment I heard an intruder say, “I can’t stand those Coffee Kids.” From that moment on we had a name, Coffee Kids, and we honored it proudly—the same way a general in the military honors his stripes.

As time went on each of us grew up, got full time jobs, attended college, started relationships, and raised children. These new ventures took us away from spending much time at The Hole. Our regular visits became sporadic, then seldom and rare. We decided to go back to The Hole for more coffee and more cigarettes. We swung the door opened and entered the same as before, but this time we stopped and allowed the hostess to seat us. As we walked through the smoking section, kids wearing punk attire and drinking coffee stared us down, and strangers occupied our usual table.

We each sat down, ordered our coffee and lit our cigarettes, but no one spoke. Instead we glanced around the room full of unfamiliar faces, and listened to conversations about religion, war, music, first cars, first jobs, and other firsts. I looked down at my business-casual clothing and envied their t-shirts displaying their favorite band logos—bands I knew little about. My friends and I took another look around the room then at each other. I knew they were thinking the same thing as I was, but no one would ever say it aloud. This wasn’t our turf any longer, a new wave of Coffee Kids prevailed. My friends and I looked down at our mugs of coffee and glanced once again around the room. We felt proud as if we paved the way for today’s youth on the verge of adulthood. I thought to myself, we may be adults now, but we’ll always be Coffee Kids at heart.

Now six years later we’ve quit smoking, in addition to quitting many of our friendships. I am in my late twenties, and about to start a professional career. Although I am happy to have moved on from my youth, memories from that period in time often come to mind—and are missed.