

Wilderness House Literary Review 6/1

Chris Allen

The Summer of '86

You know, I never liked Reo Speedwagon all that much, 'cause they were always crying about this chick or that chick who was fooling around on 'em. So, they sounded like saps to me. But one of their songs, after all these years, still sticks in my head. Maybe it was the acoustics of the pool room at the YMCA, which made the song sound so crisp, so clean, the chords bouncing off the water and the walls. It was like they were performing right there.

Or maybe it was 'cause Brenda Franco was there. I was crushing on her hard. She was a year older and already starting to fill out in all the right places. I was 12 and she was 13. She had no idea about my crush, but that afternoon back in '86 at the Y, I saw her do one of the most beautiful swan dives, which seemed to be done in slow motion, as "I can't fight this feeling any more" played. "I forgot what I've been fighting for / It's time to bring this to the shore."

From the deep end she swam to the shallow end, where I was sitting with my legs dangling in the water. "...and throw away the oars / 'cause I can't fight this feeling any more" played on.

And then, as if the record skipped, like at a party when the cool kid arrives, everyone around me was laughing, but I didn't know what was so funny. I didn't pay them much mind 'cause Brenda was swimming towards me and I wanted to say something witty—something funny to her, so for once she'd notice me—but what I didn't realize was that she would never forget that afternoon, and I would learn a very valuable lesson.

She was so beautiful in her bathing suit that fit like another layer of skin. Still swimming right to me, and fast—after all, she was on the swim team—and I would know, 'cause we had an underground window at our school's swimming pool. Many hours I stole the chance to get away from the world, I must confess, watching Brenda practice, all the while choking on cigarettes.

She had a graceful style that gave her speed. And she was on the diving team, too. Once she saw me in the swimming pool window, though she never said anything.

My thoughts came back to the Y as Brenda was just about to come up for air; and as she did, it was like the movies where the girl snaps her head back so her hair would be slicked back and out of her eyes.

Now the solo in the REO Speedwagon song was hitting its climax.

Still not quite sure what I was gonna say—maybe something about how her bathing suit brought out her beautiful chestnut brown eyes that were looking on me now, making eye contact that can mesmerize a boy.

I opened my mouth to speak, but before I could she brought to my attention something I hadn't noticed, but would never forget, nor would any of the kids that were still laughing all around me. She said, "What you hiding there?" and looked at my lap.

At that moment, all the blood rushed from my face as I fell flush. The

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realization came to me finally what she was referring to and what all the kids around me were laughing about: in my lap my shorts had formed a tepee 'cause the blood that was rushing from my head had rushed to my member.

Oh, I made an impression on her, sure enough, as well on half the kids from the neighborhood—and the next—'cause that was the first time that had ever happened to me, and in the Y, of all places, and especially with, of all people, Brenda Franco.

It took me years, but I finally dated Brenda in high school, during my junior year, but briefly, and we both had a good laugh about a young boy coming to terms with his first crush, and realizing the effect it had on him.

At the end of summer I said good-bye to Brenda Franco forever, before she left for college.

And to this day, every time I hear REO Speed Wagon's song "Can't Fight This Feeling," it always takes me back to that swimming pool at the Y, to '86 and my crush on Brenda Franco.