

## A Reunion

By Karina Rollins

We were best friends in grade school. True best friends—the kind where you’re virtually inseparable, and, if alone, classmates asked, Where’s the other? Spending the night at each other’s homes was the greatest treat. Her name was Andrea.

We attended an American school in Germany, where our fathers were both stationed with the military. After fifth grade, Andrea’s dad was sent back to the States. She promised she would write as soon as she knew her new permanent address.

I waited. And waited. The letter never came. At some point, my father, through military channels, was able to get her family’s address. But by the time I tried to reach her, that address was no longer valid. This was in the days before e-mail and the wonders of the Internet, and options for a 13-year-old to find a lost friend were limited. After several years, I accepted that I wouldn’t hear from her. But I never forgot her, and always, I wondered: Why?

The first time I came to live in the U.S. was in 1989, when I moved to Maryland for my last two years of college. Shortly after I arrived, I resumed my search for Andrea by calling directory assistance, in Georgia, where I knew she had lived for a while, and in other states with big military bases like Texas and North Carolina. Nothing.

Fast-forward to 1996. I’m living in New York, working as an editor at *National Review*. That year, we get new computers and make the leap to the cyber age. My colleagues and I crowd around

the computers to try out the Internet.

Still a bit bewildered about exactly what we should be trying to do on this great World Wide Web, a co-worker stumbles across phonebook listings for the entire country, available right there, at our fingertips. “Anyone want to find someone?” he asks. It hits me. “Yes,” I said. “I’m looking for my best friend.”

She could have married and changed her last name, but I had always remembered her father’s name, complete with middle initial, so we tried that first. A single address matched; it was in Seattle. Could this be it? I called the phone number right away. A machine came on announcing that I had reached “Harry and Sabine.” Sabine? Yes, that was her mom’s name, wasn’t it? I left a message. Still, I didn’t dare to hope.

When I came home that night, I found a note from my roommate telling me that a Sabine from Seattle had called and was very excited to talk to me. A shiver ran through my body. Then I became giddy. I had actually found her! I danced around the living room. My fingers trembled as I dialed the number 3,000 miles away. A friendly woman answered, and I announced it was me. “Karina!” she exclaimed. “How are you, dear? How did you find us?” My mind reeled. It had been 17 years. Overwhelmed, all I could do was babble “Is it you? Is it really you?” “Yes of course it’s me!” Andrea’s mother exclaimed. She asked me about where I live, about my job, how my mother is doing, and I answered dutifully. But my brain was pounding: What about Andrea? Why



doesn’t she say something about Andrea?

The longer we talked, a feeling of horrible, terrible dread started to spread over me. Something awful must have happened. Had she become estranged from the family? Had she become addicted to drugs? Had she disappeared? Finally, I couldn’t bear it anymore and blurted out “Do you think Andrea still remembers me?” Her answer: “I’m sure she would, honey, if she were still alive.”

No. God, no. I hadn’t yet adjusted to finally finding her after all those years, and now I had already lost her again. “I’m so sorry” I stammered as the tears spilled from my eyes. Andrea had been hit by a car. She was 14 years old.

But that heart-wrenching phone conversation was not the end. My best friend’s mother wanted me as a part of her life—which is one of the greatest gifts I have ever received. I hadn’t lost Andrea completely after all. We continued to call each other, and a year later, I visited Seattle for the first time. That visit cemented our relationship. We see parts of Andrea in each other.

It is a wonderful feeling, six years later, to answer the phone and hear: “Hello dear. It’s Sabine.”

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# Flashback

To know nothing of what happened before you were born  
is to remain ever a child—Cicero



## School's Out!

As the dog days of summer stretch out in all their yawning glory, you may be sure that somewhere, a man with an advanced degree and a mean streak is muttering under furrowed brow, "Why aren't those kids in school?"

The average length of the American public school term is 180 days, not much more than the 173 days of the 1935-36 school year. Summer vacation remains the golden season of childhood, the mellow months when boys and girls store up memories and explore the fields and hills and streets where they live. But like the metric system and soccer, year-round schooling is a nuisance cause that busybodies will not give up.

Proponents of the August schoolday have frequently regarded children as the ductile means to some great national end, whether economic or military. In 1960, Grace and Fred M. Hechinger warned readers of the *New York Times*, "The Soviet pupil manages to spend about the same number of hours in school during his ten-year program as the American student does in twelve." (These well-drilled pupils would go on to build the Mir space station and conquer Afghanistan.)

The Hechingers referred to American children as an "army of intellectual manpower." In *A Nation at Risk*, the ballyhooed 1983 report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, Americans were accused of committing "unilateral educational disarmament" because we permitted our kids to spend their Julys running through strawberry fields rather than sitting in a classroom under artificial light reading textbooks

about the environment.

Once the Soviet Union collapsed into its deserved junkheap, the summer-school scolds discovered the Japanese, who incarcerate their children in school for 240 days a year. The old bogeyboy of the regimented Russian, learning to design Sputniks while Johnny American wastes his summer catching frogs and playing baseball, gave way to the grim Asian youth mastering calculus before the onset of puberty. "International competition" became the rationale for year-round school.

Today, it is the alleged superiority of school to family that drives the summer-school bus. "Americans don't even know what to do with their children during the summertime," asserts the technocratic economist Lester Thurow.

A "significant learning loss" takes place in summer, or so we are told by the killjoys of the National Association for Year-Round Education. *Time* magazine, which can always be counted on to embrace the statist fad of 40 minutes ago, notes that "the case for the longer school year is particularly acute in the inner cities, where family ties are weak." Minority parents are not to be trusted with their offspring, who are better off in the clutches of mother state. Or as the superintendent of schools in Newark, New Jersey said in 1917 after his district abolished summer vacation, "the ten weeks of summertime given over to idleness and unsupervised activities and associations involves great waste, if not positive peril."

The two sides in this debate don't even speak the same language. The year-round school advocates—credentialed "experts"

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—use the number-studded jargon of the bureaucrat, while the opponents speak in the language of family and love.

Of course there are practical objections to 12-month schooling: Custodians need unoccupied buildings for repairs and painting; air conditioning is prohibitively expensive in muggy climes; summer vacation is so embedded in the culture that only a totalitarian could root it out.

Defenders of the summer sun, of the family picnic, of innocent play, often wax poetic. In 1972, during a previous propaganda push for year-round school, Richard C. Whipple, a bank manager from Sprague, Washington wrote to *Nation's Business*: "Are we so old that we have forgotten the feeling on those warm days at the end of May when we were looking forward to the summer months? .... Let's give these children time to be kids and be with their parents; to lie on the summer grass and watch the clouds drifting by; to think out their small problems and have time of their own. We push, push the younger generation and leave them no time."

Laze on, August.

—Bill Kauffman