

Returning to Alhambra High School: The Legend Comes Home

When I moved back to Arizona and re-enrolled at Alhambra High School, I wasn't just another returning student—I was a bit of a legend. People leave town all the time, but they don't usually come back with stories of attending school with rich kids, Hollywood models, and a world completely different from what we knew. For a lot of my old friends, California might as well have been another planet.

Most of the kids I had grown up with never left town, and I was the rare exception. So, when I walked through those halls again, I wasn't just some guy coming back—I was the kid who had seen another world and returned with stories. People wanted to hear what it was like. They wanted to know if the rumors were true, if life out there really was like the movies.

And the truth? It kind of was.

I told them about my time in auto shop, how I had implemented a jumpsuit system that was in place throughout the district. I told them about my first car, found abandoned in a pile of dust, and how I had the entire class working on it as their semester project. I told them about hanging out in parking lots, reading my short stories to a small but loyal group of kids who were actually invested in my weird little worlds.

But I left out the part about stashing a leather jacket and cigarettes in a drainage tunnel every morning so I could swap out the dorky clothes my uncle made me wear. Some secrets weren't for sharing.

My Brother and My First Car

By the time I got back to Arizona, my first car was long gone. I had poured my blood, sweat, and cash into that thing, only to give it up because my older brother fed me some sad story about needing a car to get to work. He had gotten into the elevator union, but without a vehicle, he was stranded. He convinced me that, if I just let him have my car, he could get his life together.

So, being the nice little brother, I did.

The next time I saw my car, it was trashed. Dirty. Uncared for. It was like seeing an ex with someone who didn't appreciate them the way you did. And to make matters worse, when I asked if I could borrow it—just once—he shut me down.

That's just the kind of guy my brother was.

Steve Moves to Arizona

One of my old friends from California, Steve, had graduated and decided to go to an automotive tech school in Arizona. By complete coincidence, the apartment they assigned him was right next to Alhambra High School. Since I was still underage and not exactly rolling in cash, Steve letting me have a key to his place was a massive deal. It was like having my own apartment at

16. I didn't have to worry about my uncle's rules, a 6:00 PM curfew, or anyone questioning where I was.

Naturally, it became the go-to hangout spot.

We had parties. Lots of parties. And since I had a car, a job, and a place to crash, I finally had the kind of independence I had always wanted.

Denise and the Romeo & Juliet Story

For a little while, things with Denise were great. She was my girlfriend, and we were solid—except for one major issue: her parents hated me. And I don't mean the normal “we don't really approve” kind of thing. I mean full-on, active sabotage.

The problem? I wasn't Tom.

Tom was the guy her dad loved. Tom was the guy they went fishing with. Tom was the golden boy who could do no wrong. And as far as they were concerned, Denise and I were a mistake they needed to correct.

It didn't matter how much we liked each other; the constant interference made it exhausting. There were only so many hoops I was willing to jump through.

And then I met Jill.

Jill was 21. She had her own car, her own place, and most importantly, no parents trying to break us up. She could buy alcohol, go to clubs, and live the kind of life that seemed a whole lot more appealing than sneaking around and fighting a battle I couldn't win.

Denise was the better woman—no doubt. But 16-year-old me wasn't thinking about long-term decisions. I was thinking about freedom, fun, and the path of least resistance.

The Buick Opel Manta and Domino's Pizza

After giving up my first car and bouncing between a few vehicles, my dad helped me get a \$900 Buick Opel Manta. It wasn't flashy, but I fixed it up the best I could, put a stereo in it, and made it mine.

And with a reliable car, I was no longer flipping burgers—I was delivering pizzas for Domino's.

That job changed everything.

At Carl's Jr., I was just another kid in a paper hat, making minimum wage and going home smelling like fryer grease. But at Domino's, I was making real money. Tips added up fast, and the crew there was a wild bunch. It was work, but it was also a party.

Life in Arizona in 1986

Arizona in 1986 was a weird mix of suburban normalcy and pockets of absolute lawlessness. There were desert parties, where kids would drive miles into the middle of nowhere with kegs and stereos, knowing the cops couldn't bust something they couldn't find. There were underground music scenes, garage bands trying to make it big, and classic cars cruising down Central Avenue like it was still the 1950s.

MTV was everything. If you weren't watching *Headbangers Ball*, *Yo! MTV Raps*, or *120 Minutes*, you were missing out on the cultural heartbeat of the time. Madonna, Prince, and Van Halen were kings, and every party had the same mix of *Back in Black* and *Slippery When Wet* playing in the background.

Moving in with Joseph and Jill

By the second half of my senior year (1985-1986), I had moved in with Joseph and Jill.

Joseph had always been my best friend, and now that we were back in the same place, it felt like things had snapped back into place. Our adventures picked up right where they had left off—concerts, parties, and all the ridiculous situations teenage guys get themselves into when they have just enough freedom to be dangerous.

Living with Jill was... interesting. She was older, independent, and didn't live by high school rules. That meant I didn't really have to, either. We had our own place, our own schedule, and for the first time in my life, I wasn't operating under anyone's watchful eye.

I had a car. I had money. I had friends.

High school wasn't about grades anymore—it was about figuring out how to live on my own terms.

And somehow, despite all the distractions, I still managed to attend school.