

Almost Grown

Photography Joseph Szabo
Interview Kin Woo



When Joseph Szabo turned his lens on students at Malverne High in the 1970s, he offered a timeless glimpse into the pleasures and pains of awkward adolescence. Uncovering this world of yearning love notes and secret glances once more, he presents unseen images from the era proving why, in the words of Cameron Crowe, “nothing lasts forever – except high school”

Opposite page: teenage guy sitting on school steps waiting for next class, 1975. This page: teenagers coming to school from lunch break, 1977



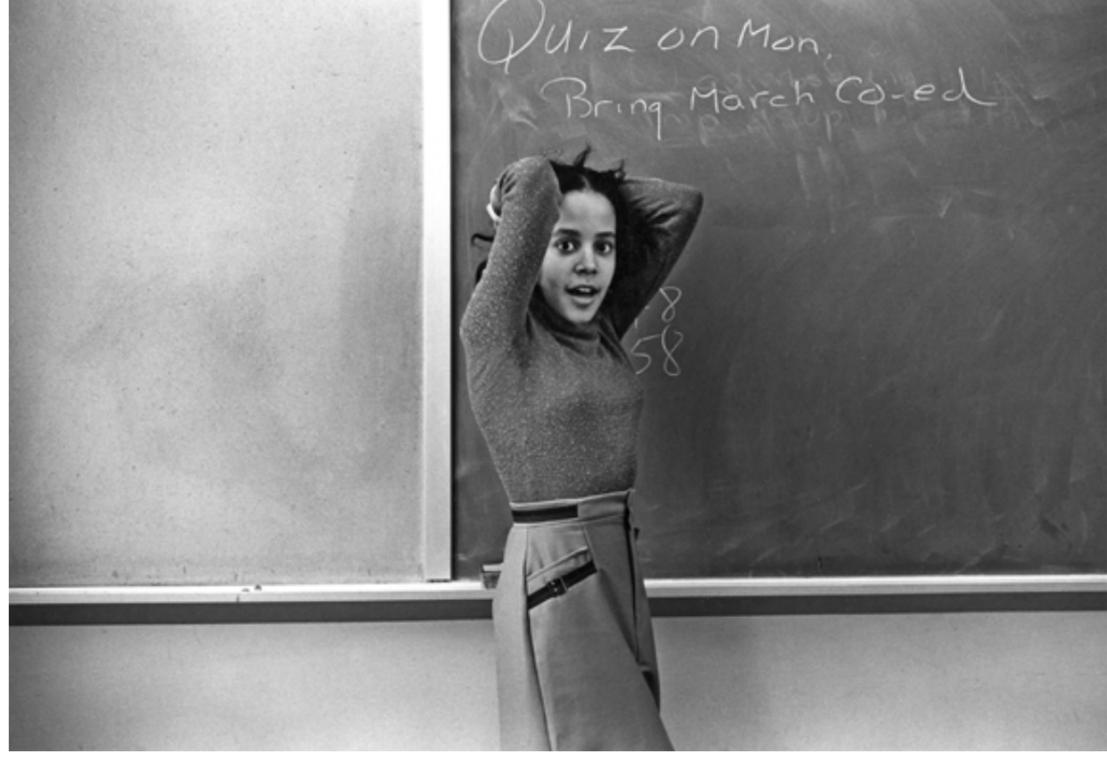
“When I was an art teacher in New York in the early 70s, I came to the conclusion that I had to connect with the students in order to be a good teacher. I was always there with a camera. I would have lunch and then I would go out and photograph. If I had a free period I’d be out there with the students, talking with them, photographing them. I would go out on a Friday night with some of the guys, and they knew that whatever I saw, whatever I photographed, it stayed just with us, and I wasn’t going to tell anybody about it. That started the whole process.

At this time there was a big rock’n’roll revolution. Students were listening to The Beatles, The Rolling Stones and all the many groups that were out there. That music certainly informed their lives, and when I started the photography classes at Malverne High School, I realised we were going to be in a dark room most of the time, printing pictures, developing negatives. So I had a radio on in the background. Listening to their music, I started to understand a little bit about their mentality.

At the beginning, I suppose I photographed students that looked a certain way. And then I realised that I really

needed to be inclusive, I needed to open up to every student, not just the good-looking students or the stars of the school, but to everyone, no matter what they looked like. To me, every kid has a star quality, and I wasn’t going to just pay attention to the ones that were popular. I was always trying to see the beauty in the individual. One of my students remarked one time, ‘Mr Szabo, when you take pictures of us, you see things in us that we don’t see.’ I was always looking under the surface, trying to capture the emotions they felt.

In photographing the students, I would see myself in them – there’s that autobiographical element. After all, teenagers are always teenagers – they’re rebellious quite often, that’s their nature. But by the same token there’s something quite beautiful about them, with their youth and their enthusiasms, and those are two of the things that I identified with. As you get older, you think about your high-school days – what you were like then. There’s always something about high school that comes back to you.” – *Joseph Szabo*



Top: girl in home economics class caught in a candid moment, 1979. Bottom: teenagers between classes sitting on high-school steps, 1975

Top: teenager with Beatles t-shirt sitting on high-school steps, 1982. Middle: shy girl in art class next to her hand-lettered love poem, 1973. Bottom: teenager on Halloween outside of high school, 1982





Top: Tom resting in a park after final exams, 1981. Middle: girl by high-school garage doors, 1977. Bottom: girl sitting on school steps between classes, 1983

Teen couple on Friday night, 1977

