



22. DIARY 1980s ~ TYLER, A YOUNG AMERICAN

This archive includes a bag of letters, some photographs and the diary or journal of a teenage boy living in the United States in the mid-1980s (as far as we can tell, he is

aged between 12 and 15) called Tyler.

This collection was found at the bottom of a mixed box of books and other papers picked up at an estate sale during a trip to Boston, Mass. in 1999. This mixed bag of Tyler's effects includes drawings on notebook paper, love letters and breaking up letters from various girlfriends, indications of a great deal of personal anxiety, some minor profanity, some poetry, and an interesting and moving letter he wrote to his father, who lived separately from the family. There are also several photographs, a letter from an African penpal, and Tyler's personal journal. Here he writes about a sequence of relationships. As soon as he breaks up with one girl, he's on to the next. Despite this ability to pick himself up and move on, Tyler seems very finely-strung. As these letters and his short journal show, he tries to express emotions and make sense of experiences that would challenge anyone, let alone a boy in his early teens.

Here are some samples from the letters and Tyler's journal:

"Tyler, I am not acting like I like you. Do you like me? You know what I mean. And no, I am not using you. OK. To just get your answer. Who used you before! Call me, O.K.? Write Back, Love Jamie. Don't Show Anyone!"

"For whatever reason, we were brought together to be close and we used these years to love, experience and allow ourselves to be totally vulnerable with one another."

"I think about you all the time. Don't take offense that your name

isn't on my shoes anymore."

"I hope she wants me to kiss her at the roller-skating party."

And here's what Tyler calls his 'BR':¹

"Man, if girls knew this is how pubescent boys felt about us, we'd have saved ourselves a world of hurt ... Never speak to her, never make eye contact with her for more than a second, never purposely touch her in any way, never call her ... Only speak when spoken to and never answer questions with more than 2 sentences ... Resume normal peacetime activities, act as if nothing happened ... Call her all sorts of names ... Ignore her real bad.... Flirt with the Bitch and let her know..."

As the story unfolds, we find through his poetry, that Tyler is secretly in love with one of the girls he is writing to, and that has no idea of his feelings. How did it all turn out? And what is Tyler doing now, in his late 30s.

Anyone studying this diary will have to look into the sort of life a young middle class American boy might have led in the early 1980s. It would be necessary to look into the way young people were brought up at the time, and the music and fashions (especially the hairstyles) of the day. The photographs should be helpful in this respect.

Study of this diary could be interestingly paired with an essay on Alan Clark (Week 8) or Joan Wyndham (Week 7), both of whom seem to have been in love with the idea of being in love, but are perhaps fundamentally more cynical and world-weary than Tyler – and not just because they are older (or British). Whoever chooses to study this archive will surely be driven to ask what it is that drives people who live life at such intensity? Do they lack certain qualities (insight, moderation) or do they suffer from an excess of others (vulnerability, passion, exhibitionism)? We might also wonder where Tyler is now and how he is getting on.

¹ 'Bitch Resolution'