

Legend of a girl named Priscilla

Wed. July 2, 1986

The day she was born there were fireworks and parades, cook-outs and concerts — all across the country.

Her parents were surprised. They were expecting a boy.

"What'll we name her?" her father asked. "It'll have to be something patriotic."

"Definitely not Betsy!" her mother declared.

After much debate, they settled on Priscilla — after Priscilla "Speak for yourself, John" Alden.

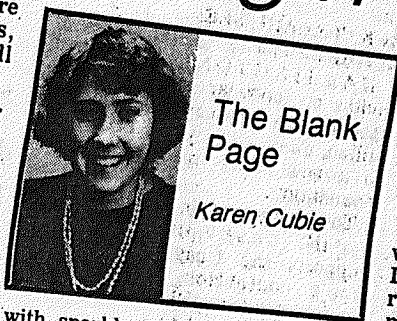
Unlike most Priscillas, ours was never called Prissy.

She was a rough-and-tumble tomboy, and when she grew up she was going to be a doctor or a fireman instead of a nurse or a teacher.

She never wanted to be a cheerleader.

"I want to play football," she'd declare. She would beg Dad to let her try out for the Pee Wee team. He compromised, and she played soccer instead.

The nation continued to celebrate her birthday. Everywhere we went there were parties and cook-outs. Little kids ran around



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Karen Cubie

with sparklers, and the teenagers set off firecrackers.

She never felt shuffled about or ignored.

"Hurry up, Ma!" she'd shout as we waited impatiently in the car.

"We can't miss my fireworks!" For us, the Fourth of July became Priscilla's Day — it still is.

Unlike my parents, I knew I was getting a little sister. I wanted to name her Judy.

Priscilla was different from most little sisters. She was more independant. She never followed me around or clung to me.

Like most older sisters, I guess I tried to boss her. It never worked,

though. No one could push her around. She always gained the upper hand — and fast.

Sometimes she could be a bully, but most of the time she confidently and succinctly put anyone who needed it in their place.

I remember one fight while we were on a long, hot, summer trip. I was in the middle, and for some reason or other she was jostling me.

I grabbed her nose. She blew.

"Ohhh, Gross!" I yelled. I never touched her nose again.

Always a tall, strong, and athletic girl, she was the neighborhood hero. The younger kids — girls and boys — would come to her for help when they needed it.

Boys from the other side of the neighborhood heard about Priscilla, and she was constantly being challenged to fights.

She never started a fight, but she never backed down, either.

In our neighborhood, the name "Priscilla" did not symbolize dainty femininity. Rather, it evoked

pictures of strength and solidity. She always had a forceful way of getting her message across.

Always the lady, she never liked swears.

"Damn!" another little kid would mutter.

Priscilla would wind up and sock him in the stomach.

"Don't swear around Priscilla," the other kids would warn. "She doesn't like it."

Public opinion never swayed her. All through elementary school, she refused to unbutton her top blouse button, and she would never wear a dress. To her, all vanity was a sign of weakness.

By the time her 16th birthday rolled around, she was beginning to grow up. She was interested in clothes (still no dresses), and she would sometimes try to get a tan.

Her 16th birthday was probably the most disappointing day of her life. The Fourth was the day she returned from basketball camp, and the next day she was leaving on another trip.

We had planned a surprise party for her the following weekend, and had completely forgotten about any pretense of a birthday celebration.

About an hour before she was supposed to come home, Mom realized our mistake.

"Grab a strawberry pie from the downstairs freezer, Karen!" she ordered. "Try to find some candles, Rob!"

When she got home, expecting at least a cook-out and birthday cake, a puny strawberry pie surrounded by 16 miscellaneous table candles sat on the porch table.

"Happy Birthday, Priscilla!" we shouted.

She tried to hide it, but I could see the disappointment in her eyes. That night we went to see the fireworks, but it just wasn't the same.

Although her party was a lot of fun, I think she missed the spirit usually involved in the joint holiday-birthday celebration.

Friday will be Priscilla's 20th Fourth of July, her 20th birthday, and our 20th annual Priscilla's Day.

The patriotism surrounding her day was contagious because one year ago she joined an Army Reserve Unit.

She now unbuttons her top blouse button, she likes dresses, she wears a little make-up, and she even has her ears pierced.

On her birthday she still wants to see the fireworks, but she doesn't call them "her fireworks" anymore. Inside, though, I still think she believes they're in honor of her.

Some things, however, never change.

Even now, no one ever swears around Priscilla. It's too painful.



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