



## And Summer Is Gone

Susie Kretschmer

*Student-written story*

*Susie Kretschmer was a senior at Talawanda High School in Oxford, Ohio, when her story won a Scholastic Writing Award in 1986.*

**W**e're both sophomores in high school now. I'm fifteen; she'll be sixteen in a week. I know when her birthday is, of course, just as she knows mine. Birthdays don't change.

Almost sixteen, yeah, but I can still see her the summer I turned twelve; the day we first met, the day I moved into the newly built house at the end of her street. I was standing half-asleep in the sunlight, looking in despair at the expanse of bare dirt that purported to be our lawn. And suddenly she was there in front of me, all buck teeth and gangling legs and tumbling, tangled blond-brown hair, tall as I was and unafraid to claim every inch of it.

"Hi, I'm Amy," she said, jumping agilely over the exposed water meter and looking right into my face.

"I'm David," I mumbled, but I couldn't help smiling, answering her frankly appraising stare with my own.

Two hours later we were covered with mud, in the midst of a great canal-digging project in the bare gravelly dirt of my "lawn." She landscaped it with wildflowers from the drainage ditch behind our houses and asked if I'd ever been to the creek. I said no, and she showed it to me.

We were friends from then on, best friends that summer. She lived three houses down from me: If I knelt on the edge of the sink in the upstairs bathroom and craned my neck, I could see the lights of her house. I knew how far it was exactly, because with two tin cans and

three balls of string we had once run a message line from her house to mine.

The phones hadn't worked, of course, and the irate lady who lived in the house in between ordered it dismantled at once—pieces of it are still probably tangled in the weeds of the drainage ditch—but I remember how it felt to have that line stretching between us, connecting us even though we were apart, for that was how I always felt with her.

She showed me the creek and we spent most of our summers there, wading in the current, catching crawdads and minnows with my parents' abducted spaghetti colander, building dams and then pushing out the one stone that would send the water flooding through. We dug up creek clay and made pots, and painted ourselves wildly with its blue streaks, pretending to be Indians, Aztecs, or Mayas. I remember her standing in the algae-green water that first summer, her long, tanned legs half wet and shiny, half dry with the cracking clay stripes and dots of an Aztec king.

We took out every book in the library on Aztecs and Mayas. I was an artist, always had been, and I would paint in their style—in reds, oranges and rusts, on the rocks by the creek—geometric designs and the Nine Lords of the Night. Amy would build little pyramids of clay. My tempera always washed away with the next rain, and Amy's pyramids would dissolve when the water rose, but we were content to make them new each time.

And sometimes we would just sit by the creek in the sun. When she grinned, her newly acquired braces would gleam; she'd sit patiently with her mouth open while I peered into it with clinical interest, and we'd shoot her rubber bands at each other. In the summer, she was mine alone, and I was hers.

But she hardly spoke to me at school, ever. I thought a million times that I understood why. Her female friends were the sort that are almost popular, those who get invited to every party but never give any, those who carry gossip but never provoke it, extras surrounding the popular ones for atmosphere and dramatic staging. All of them had names that ended in *-i*, and they all dotted their *i*'s with circles: Kelli, Lori, Shelli, Tammi, Lani, Terri—and Ami. Though Amy wore cutoffs and grungy T-shirts in the summer, during the school year her clothes were the same as theirs.

She moved differently, when she came back to me that summer between seventh and eighth grade. She'd always been more agile than I was, scrambling up on the bluffs far ahead of me, but the way she moved was different now. No buck-toothed, lanky colt-girl now, but

curvy and lithe, proportioned as a woman, not a child. And it disturbed me, upset my world—and I liked it. So I would follow her on the bluffs despite my paralyzing fear of heights, and when she took my hand to pull me up over the edge I liked her touch. It was no longer merely the pleasant, reassuring touch of a friend, but something electric as well.

Yet as her body changed, she herself changed. No longer would she wade with me, or wrestle on the couch, and she refused to play pretend games any more. She got rid of her dress-up clothes some time in seventh grade, and by this, the third summer, they were gone. Well, I hid mine, too—my Dracula capes and Arabian turbans; and I hid away my wooden swords since she'd no longer duel with me. She stopped eating around me, too. We had both been famous for the amount of food we could consume and had demolished entire bags of chocolate chips and monstrous salads together. But now she complained she was fat and affected to eat little. She didn't look fat to me, but she said she was. Increasingly, the popular names crept into her conversation. She always wanted to talk about the people in our grade, but only the ones she knew—and I hardly knew any of them. She stopped listening to her Simon and Garfunkel records, replacing them with Duran Duran.

So we lay on her living room floor and watched old movies, and I learned to curb my satirical remarks, for what she would once have laughed at had become serious to her now. We went less and less often to the creek.

I spent more time on my art, alone, and didn't show it to her, for she didn't want to see it anymore. And in August she went away to camp. She came back the day before school started and never did call me. And I was alone.

I'd always been alone at school, with a few acquaintances good enough to talk to between classes, or to get assignments from. But for friendship, I had looked to her. And I saw that she had not spoken to me at school, or dared to associate with me in public. I thought, that eighth-grade year, that it was because Amy had grown up, had left behind childhood while I was still immature.

So the first Christmas went by that I didn't give her a present, and soon after, her fourteenth birthday went by, too. I lived in the worlds that I drew.

Amy's grades slipped. We had both been bright, straight-A's, but now she was getting B's and C's. I didn't keep close track, for I never saw her except when we passed on the way to school in the morning. I'd see her leave her house every evening—there seemed no night when she didn't go out. After a while, I stopped watching.

The less said about the summer before high school, the better. I

was alone. But when it was over, we went to high school, Amy and I. She joined the flag corps—I joined the newspaper. She was in my top-level English class but dropped down after a week, and I never had her in a class again. I hung around with some guys from the swim team—I'd joined my freshman year—and went through the motions of studying, dreaming of college.

So we lived, separate. I didn't date at all—she dated ten guys a month. I hid alone—she went to every party, every football game, every prestigious event at school. I was pretty surprised to see her, then, sophomore year, at the local art exhibit where I'd won for the second year in a row. Masquerading as a museum, the local library was filled with people milling about with juice and cookies at the reception for the winners.

Why she was there, I don't really know. I think perhaps some friends of hers had gotten an honorable mention, and they had stopped by to pick her up. But she was there, and she was with her friends.

I was standing next to Danny, otherwise known as fourth honorable mention for his loving depiction of a souped-up red Maserati, when she came to my picture. I had painted a great Aztec pyramid under oily black storm clouds, with nine masque-hideous faces upon it, one face for each tier. The lighting was angry and hellish and red, and an uneasy orange fire burned in each masque-face's eyes. The picture was called "The Nine Lords of the Night."

Amy saw it. One slender hand to her feathered blond hair, the nails polished in coral, a boy's class ring on one finger, she saw it. As she turned around, I met her blue eyes with a level calm stare. Electric our glance, for she knew. She remembered. I had not thought she would forget. And I saw in her eyes that she knew that I saw.

We held it but a moment, for her friend broke in with a mocking harsh laugh. "What a *gay* picture. But everyone knows that all artists are gay anyway."

"Yeah," replied the other one, bored, "and the more they win, the gayer they are."

Amy turned her back on me, but not before I heard her assenting. "Yeah, I know." And they left laughing.

And I stood in silence, and I knew I had lost her. She had been more truly mine than I had ever known, for the person she'd been for me had not existed for anyone else. I watched her go, and I cried within, for I understood that it was I who had grown up and she who had gotten lost. For I have kept who I am, and it is what I always will be. And Amy is gone.

### *Responding to the Story*

1. Is it believable that a boy and girl at age twelve could be as good friends as Amy and David were? Discuss.
2. Did you sympathize with the narrator's plight? Why or why not?

### *Exploring the Author's Craft*

Identify two places in the story where you feel the author should have dramatized a scene rather than told us that it had occurred. What would be gained by having these scenes dramatized—that is, having us see the characters in action?

### *Writing Workshop*

1. "All of them had names that ended in *-i*, and they all . . ." This sentence appears in a particularly telling paragraph; here the author captures, with examples, behavioral customs of the teenage world. Now you do the same. In one simple paragraph, describe the behavioral customs of the teenagers you know.
2. Author Susie Kretschmer created a male first-person narrator. Take on that same challenging task; create the voice of someone of the opposite sex. Do the start, or more, of a narrative. Write four or five paragraphs in that voice. Brainstorm with a small group to come up with a topic for your paragraphs.