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Don?t include me

by BRIAN LOCKHART

When I was eleven years old, my best friend from public school transferred to a prestigious, old-school boarding school in a nearby city to start his Grade six school year.

It was a snobby place with snobby students and snobby parents. It also had a lot of rules, including the length of hair that was acceptable ? no hippies on this campus.

One weekend, I went to visit my friend and made my way down to his room through the usual entrance of a rear basement window.

?You have to give me a haircut,? he said.

My friend's parents weren't very hands-on in their parenting duties, and they were out of town at the time, leaving him on his own.

He was errant enough to have let his hair grow to such a length that it covered part of his ears. The headmaster at the school told him to get a haircut or don't bother showing up to class on Monday.

My friend was 11 ? he didn't have money for a haircut and didn't even know a barber, so I was given the job. He found an old pair of shears and a comb, and I went to work.

I took the task seriously, and as a kid, I did a pretty good job. He looked presentable and was happy with the haircut I gave him. He was allowed in class on Monday morning.

A few years ago, I was doing research for some story and went on that boarding school's website. There was a page for applications, so I decided to see what it takes to become a student there.

There were a lot of questions about the family's income and current wealth, which I guess they needed to know to make sure they could afford the tuition fees. However, there were also a lot of questions about the family.

The school wanted to know the family business, family connections, clubs they belonged to, social contacts, and status. There was even a question asking if the kid had a family designation, such a ?Thurston Howell the III,' or even IV. I thought that was a little over the top.

The bottom line is that this was not an inclusive school. They were very much exclusive. If you didn't fit the financial and social profile, your kid wouldn't make the cut.

We have been bombarded with the word ?inclusive' over the past few years. We are told we all must be inclusive in everything we do or be somehow shamed for excluding someone.

The truth is life is far from inclusive, and there never will be a society where everyone is welcome and included.

Many sports clubs are not inclusive. They have tryouts. If you don't meet the qualifications, you won't be included on the team. No club is going to play at a high level of the sport but include uncoordinated kids with less talent ? just to be inclusive.

There are many religions that welcome anyone who comes through their door. But there are some that don't want you there unless you meet their standards. One famous religion will not let anyone into the inner sanctuary who is not a baptized, tithe paying member. That's right, they will exclude you from their services for being of the wrong faith.

A friend of mine went to the funeral of his close friend who died rather young. At the graveside, everyone started a small ritual, which he had never experienced, but figured it was part of the service. When he tried to take part, to honour his friend, everyone else at the service closed in on him and stopped him from being part of it, albeit in a nice way. Yes, they excluded him from this final farewell because he was not born into that religion.

I've been in country clubs for certain events. As a guest, I was treated well, but at the same time, I knew, just from conversations with people there, that even if I wanted to join the club, my chances were pretty much zero because I don't socialize with the right crowd. That's fine by me.

A friend and myself used to attend a local private ski resort. On Mondays they opened the hills to the public for a really good price. They didn't do it to be nice; they did it because traditionally, no one skis on Mondays for some reason and this was their chance to make some revenue.

We were waiting to buy lift tickets when this woman approached us and asked if we were members. When we said, ?No,? she said, ?Well, then you can wait over there,? pointing to another area.

Yes, we were excluded from the short line for being mere visitors.

Personally, I'm a very inclusive guy, and so are my family. If you want to bring your out-of-town guest to my party or a family dinner ? sure, the more, the merrier. We would welcome them.

But many things in life are not inclusive, and despite all the nice ?mission statements' being posted these days, you won't always be included, just because you want to be.

That's life.

As for my friend who needed a haircut, we remained best friends for the next 37 years until he passed away, and that was the only haircut I ever successfully completed.