

Did you know I used to get beat up in jr. high and high school? Yup, my lunch money was stolen more times that I can remember and some classes I was teased mercilessly for no other reason than I looked different dressed different and didn't fit in. Luckily, I was too tall to shove into a locker (they tried), but I did have a friend that was shoved in one. At lunch time, you could find me and a few of my fellow misfits playing Dungeons & Dragons (2nd edition), at the local comic book shop or in the Physics classroom playing cards. I basically learned two things in jr. high and high school:

1. Don't stick out.
2. Shut-up.

Outside of my group of 4 friends, I tried (and failed) not to draw any attention to myself whenever possible. Then Y&G happened to me.

My boss at the Y told me he was starting up a new teen program he had heard about called the Model Legislature & Court. As a favor to him I agreed to go. To say the MLC was a mind blowing experience for me, would be an understatement. I went from a place where I had been as an outcast/loser because I was different to a place where I was actually encouraged to speak my mind and be myself. The environment at the MLC was the exact opposite of the one I was in back in "the real world".

With the confidence and self-worth I gained during my junior year, I started to break out of my shell I had worked for so long to create. Gone was the shy, quiet kid who couldn't speak in front of a group of people or talk to a girl. In his place was someone who wasn't afraid to speak his mind, to answer back to the teasing bullies who picked on me since 7th grade. To say my senior year was different would, again, be an understatement. It was the one year I fun, because of what Y&G gave me.

Over the years, I tried to keep in touch with my pre-Y&G make-over friends (keep in mind this is pre-cell phones and Facebook). One ended up finding himself after a period of wandering around. He's now gainfully employed up North. Another is still around, but can't hold down a job and is kind of a mess. One fell off the face of the Earth after graduation and the last one got into drugs and disappeared. If it wasn't for Y&G and the phenomenal people that participate in it, I probably would have been one of those no name people that faded away into nothing and no one ever heard about again. That is why I will continue to invest my time and money in Y&G until the day I die. To repay a debt to Y&G that I will never, ever, be able to repay.

I am Y&G