

## Scrolling Through My Youth

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I got my first Phone for my tenth birthday in 2011. As I unwrapped my birthday present, the anticipation built until I revealed what was inside: an iPhone 4s. Those first eight months of having my phone were surprisingly simple. Every night, I'd hand over my phone to my parents to charge in their room and had search restrictions. This routine felt as normal as brushing my teeth before bed. My digital world consisted of basic texts to family, friends, and the occasional game download, a kind of innocence I didn't know was temporary. Fast forward to today, elementary school kids casually pull out the latest smartphones and tablets during recess or lunch. The age of when kids get their first phone seems to have dropped dramatically, raising questions about how early is too early for children to be online. Looking back at my own journey with the internet, I can't imagine willingly giving my future children that much freedom online at such a young age.

My first social media account was Pinterest. I would pin stuff for my future weddings, cute outfits, and inspirational quotes. Then came Instagram at the beginning of 6th grade. My friend/neighbor was using it, and it looked cool. I asked my parents, and they let me get it as long as I only followed people I knew. At first, I mostly posted random pictures from my day like my lunch, my cat, and the iconic duck face or peace sign selfies with my friends. As I got more comfortable with Instagram, I started paying more attention to how I presented myself online. I learned about good lighting and angles for photos. My friends and I would have mini photoshoots at the park or during sleepovers, taking dozens of pictures just to pick the perfect one to post.

In the seventh grade, as my social media world expanded, I developed an eating disorder. Being one of the few Asian students in my predominantly white community, I found myself constantly comparing my appearance to the white girls in my school. Instagram's constant stream of carefully curated highlight reels only intensified these comparisons, and I measured myself against an ideal I could never physically match. Despite being relatively skinny, I was consumed by the need to be even thinner. What started as skipping occasional meals in seventh grade turned into a pattern that followed me into high school, ebbing and flowing but never fully disappearing. Even though I've recovered, those early experiences of comparing my body, my features, and my life to filtered, white-centric beauty standards still affect my relationship with food and self-image today.

Now in my 20's, social media has redefined what relaxation means to me. It's become synonymous with scrolling through TikTok and Instagram. I never wanted to admit I had an addiction to social media, but when TikTok went down for those 12 hours during the "ban" (2025), I found myself compulsively opening the app, only to be met with an error message about service being unavailable. Similarly, while I don't actively use Snapchat, I can't bring myself to delete it. The app serves as a connection to my generation. Everyone uses it and removing it would feel like deliberately disconnecting myself from my peers, even if it's just symbolic.

I've learned to post for myself now, not for others. The endless cycle of seeking validation through likes and comments was tiring. I remember how I used to strategically post at certain times of the day when I thought I'd get the most engagement. Now I only follow accounts that actually bring me joy or inspiration. My feed feels more authentic, filled with real moments from friends and content creators whose content I genuinely enjoy. But posting still gives me a lot of anxiety. On the very rare occasion that I do post something on Instagram, I'll open the app, look at the number, close the app, and then find myself reopening it five minutes later to check again.

It's interesting how these habits are so deeply ingrained. Even when we make conscious decisions to change our relationship with social media, those old patterns of seeking validation are hard to break. Living through this evolution of social media and experiencing its impact firsthand has shaped how I think about my future children's relationship with technology. The constant checking, the anxiety about likes, the compulsive need to document everything these aren't just habits, they're deeply ingrained behavioral patterns that can shape how we view ourselves and our worth. By waiting until high school, I hope my future children will have a stronger sense of self before facing these challenges. They'll have memories of a childhood spent in the real world, building confidence through actual experiences rather than virtual validation. While I know they might resist this decision, just as I probably would have at their age, I understand now that sometimes protection comes in the form of limitation.