

originally posted to:
<http://rhizome.org/editorial/2013/sep/5/letter-jennifer-knoll/>

Dear Jennifer,

Sometime in 1987, you were sitting on a beach in Bora Bora, looking at To'opua island, enjoying a holiday with a very serious boyfriend. The serious boyfriend, John, took a photograph of you sitting on the beach, not wearing your bikini top. John later became your husband and father to your children Sarah, Lisa, Alex and Jane.

This photograph of a beautiful moment in your personal history has also become a part of my history, and that of many other people; it has even shaped our outlooks on the world at large. John's image of you became the first image to be publicly altered by the most influential image manipulation program ever. Of course, this is why I know the names of your children, and this is also why I know about the cool things you do trying to get a [.green](#) top level domain name to promote environmental sustainability. (Although, personally, I believe that the importance of the domain name has been reduced to a nostalgic, poetic value).

I still wonder if you felt the world change there on that beach. The fact that reality would be more moldable, that normal people could change their history, brighten up their past, and put twirl effects on their faces? That holiday image was distributed with the first demo editions of Photoshop, and your intimate beach moment became the reality for many people to play with. Two Jennifers, no Jennifer, less clouds, etc. In essence, it was the very first photoshop meme—but now the image is nowhere to be found online.

Did John ask you if he could use the image? Did you enjoy seeing yourself on the screen as much as he did? Did you think you would be the muse that would inspire so much contemporary image making? Did you ever print out the image? Would you be willing to share it with me, and so, the other people for whom it took on such an unexpected significance? Shouldn't the Smithsonian have the negative of that image, not to mention digital backups of its endless variations?

All these questions have made me decide to redistribute the image 'jennifer in paradise' as well as I can, somewhat as an artist, somewhat as a digital archeologist, restoring what few traces of it I could find. It was sad to realize this blurry screen grab was the closest I could get to the image, but beautiful at the same time. How often do you find an important image that is not online in several different sizes already?

I have two exhibitions opening this coming Saturday in Berlin, Germany. Both of them are called *Jennifer in Paradise*. And you, or at least your depiction, play a central part in these exhibitions. A faint, blurry, pixelated focal point. To celebrate the time that you were young, and the world was young, as it still naïvely believed in the authenticity of the photograph.

Sometimes, when I am anxious about the future of our surveilled, computer-mediated world, when I worry about cultural imperialism and the politics behind software design, I imagine myself traveling back in time. just like the Terminator, to that important moment in technological world history, there on the beach in Bora Bora. And just sit there with you, watching the tide roll away.

Sincerely,

Constant Dullaart