

**RANDOM THOUGHTS FROM A 45TH REUNION
and
FROM THE MONTH OF THE COMPLETION
OF SIXTY THREE YEARS OF MY LIFE**

Hi Classmates. I hope each of you enjoyed our reunion as much as I did. For those of you whom I joined for pizza at Corsi's and the game, it was a fun way to start the weekend and relive old memories. I sat much of the time with Jim Bedson and Danny Freels, both of whom played football so many years ago. How interesting that they both said that if offered a helmet and pads, they would run out onto the field. Probably not as sprightly as they did in 1965 but the old urges were still there. I heard Kenny Chesney's new song, 'The Boys of Fall,' both on the way to the reunion and after and thought how well he captured what Jim and Danny expressed. How well he captured what we would all like to share again.

Maybe we did get to go back just a little bit. And see a future as well. It was great to have Ms. Cohen and Mssrs. Temby, Biermann and Korpi there. They all looked and sounded great and for me offered hope that growing even older might not be so bad. May they remain healthy and well and be at our next reunion.

Kudos to Lillian, Gary and their committee. Job well done.

Sometimes reunions can be awkward. Old feelings can surface. Old problems may not lie dormant. We did well. I saw no issues, no cliques, no old hard feelings. Perhaps we forgot that we were essentially a class of good kids. Cam Nelson, Carol Teman [sorry but it is easier for me to use the names I remember] and Barb Weiss and I talked about how as a group we pretty much did no harm and a reflection of that is how many of us went on to raise children, have productive jobs and become solid if maybe somewhat boring adults. A pat on the back to us all for being what our parents wanted. Good people, good parents, good citizens. I know my parents were proud of our class when we graduated and would still be proud now.

Strange how life works. As we gathered to celebrate making it so far in life, we lost two of our iconic parental figures, Barbara Billings [Beaver Cleaver's mom "June" and Tom Bosley, Ricthie Cunningham's father]. Two people I never met but two people who I feel like I knew because of TV.

If we are fortunate enough to be able to meet again in five years we should all work to find all those the committee could not find [and unless he had a good excuse for being a no-show, some-one should kick Jack Forsyth where it will do him some good] and see if we cannot get more of them to join us.

It was great to have old memories come back. Making a 100,000 [or was it a million] paper flowers at Betty Nichols' house for our senior float; moving the float to the covered walkway at school early Friday morning because it was raining and spending most of the day with several of the girls hairdryers trying to dry and fluff the flowers we had made; racing off to get a burn permit to burn the float after homecoming and then racing Les Swartz to the hospital after he put a nail through his foot trying to stomp out a wayward ember; how school dances were so much better after a victory; summer days at the lake playing touch football and so many more great memories.

But some sad ones too. It was and is sad to remember those we have lost and who could not join us. I wrote much of the following after Gary and Lillian first contacted me about the reunion and then added to it when I got home.

Forty-five years ago this month a few more than 100 other teenagers and myself graduated from Clarenceville High School with a diploma, clear memories and life stretched before us endlessly.

Last month I received word that Judy Labowski [now Becker] had passed. She was sixty-two. But I cannot see her as a senior citizen. In my mind's eye she is seventeen, her hair smells of spray and tickles my cheek as we lean together. I remember a soft voice, gentle lips and a laugh that tinkled like a crystal bell. I remember first kisses and uncertain movements. Nothing dramatic or devastating, but so important to untried minds and souls.

Judy will always be seventeen in my thoughts, even though I know she is gone and later this year I hope to see many of our classmates, all now in their sixties. But Judy and Marvin Beyer and Barry Clemens and Doug Waack and Ray Stamper and several others will always be seventeen or eighteen in my mind's eye. Forever young though no longer growing older.

I remember Marvin, small, slender, always in motion but a great sleeper. From my sixteenth birthday until we scattered a few months after graduation, many of us would pile in my Mom's old green Fairlane on Sundays and head to the lakes, usually Camp Dearborn out in the Kensington area. I would go and wake Marvin up. His instructions were to go in his room and drag him to the car where he would sleep til we got to the park. Then he was ready to play frisbee or touch football, swim, eat and just be together. I don't remember Marvin ever mad but always happy or intense. His eyes will forever flash with youthful joy in my mind's eye.

I remember Barry Clemens. Those wide shoulders and that gentle smile. Barry always looked as though if you needed help he could carry part of your burden on those shoulders and ease the rest with a smile.

I remember Ray Stamper who we lost our junior year. Confident, outgoing and almost always holding Judy Woodward's hand.

I wish I knew all of our classmates as well and am sorry I did not make the time to do so. Apologies do not make up for loss due to callowness of youth or the selfishness of time.

This month I bought a Spenser novel by Robert B. Parker, a favorite author with more than 50 titles including 30 plus Spensers and the Jesse Stone novels which formed the basis for the movies Tom Selleck has starred in about an alcoholic chief of police. On the back inside dust cover it reads "ROBERT B. PARKER, who died in January, 2010..." Seems so little for a man who sold millions of books shared by millions of readers. Yet is that not all we will have left at the end, a simple line of when we pass? I hope for those of our classmates we have lost and for all of us it is not. We each will have the memories we created and shared throughout our lives and those will live on, both known to some and as a shared or vestigial image among some future lives. Our memories of Ray and Barry and Judy and Marvin and our other classmates provides the meaning that far outweighs the words "died on..."

SOME OTHER THOUGHTS

I watched an old movie and was reminded of winter in my youth. It would lay across the land like a blanket, holding the cold against all not protected by shelter. The snow at night multiplied the moonlight and filled our world with a soft, gentle, almost mothering light, even as the cold made life lay dormant.

Do you remember that you can hear the cold? When the earth is still beneath the snow and there is no wind to rustle frozen branches, the cold can be so sharp that the feeling is almost a sound, crystalline in feel and clear within your mind.

I have twice loved and married, each for two decades. In each my love left me and I still have no understanding of the whys and the hows. Do we no longer honor our promises? Does anyone who knows me believe I would have ever left them? Have we become microcosms of our politicians, no longer meaning what we say; in sickness and in health, in good times and bad, for richer and for poorer, for all the days of our lives. Can we ask those we elect to represent us faithfully and to keep their word when we cannot? Do we believe we have people better than ourselves to represent us? Or are we doomed to hope without fulfillment and ask the impossible for us from those we settle for each fall? Perhaps the true failure of man and his fate is to always repeat history, even the bad parts.

The heroes of my youth have faded. I met Dr. King while in college. I worked for Bobby Kennedy after meeting him in a rally. So long gone yet I remember Dr. King dreamed of

equalities that would have included my somewhat distant relatives on reservations throughout our land. I wish that we could have known what he promised and more importantly what we could have all achieved when Bobby promised that he dreamt things that never were and asked of himself and us, WHY NOT?

One friend has suffered with his thoughts throughout this month as doctors tested his wife for cancer. He had lost his previous wife to cancer less than four years earlier. How can he sustain her with such a burden upon him? What resources must he have just to get through each day? And how can he express his relief when the news was good. Certainly he is happy but how could he say he has joy. Because this wife is not mortally stricken while the memory of one who was is so fresh. How terrible a burden to be unable to have joy at life, only relief.

My thoughts upon watching my grandchild reflect back to my father and grandfathers. Life is a circle, not a straight line of goals or goalposts.

My life's circle is I find myself becoming my father as I age and am proud of that. I grow more patient, as I learn words carry more weight than hands felt in anger; yet a gentle touch conveys love far better than any words.

My circle is my father, who was Papa Jack to his grandchildren yet never looked to be the age of the grandfathers I remembered. Now I am Papa John and am told I look far younger than my arthritis feels each morning.

When I was young I thought our linear path included goalposts of important measure such as defending what I believe in and speaking out strongly both to defend my beliefs and to teach others. Now I know that life is a circle and the important parts of life such as honor are measured in small daily doses, that my dad was right when he said the first step toward bravery was being afraid; that the first step toward freedom was binding yourself to the cost of your family and friends; that measuring a man was measuring how he acted toward his community, his family and his beliefs in a higher power, not how often he went to church or proclaimed his knowledge.

Dad fought and was severely wounded in WWII. Yet he lived a full life for more than fifty years after his wounding without ever expressing any regret at his fate. He often told me to measure a person not by their wins or losses but by how many times they got back up after being knocked down.

I now know that the wise men are not those wrapped in towers of ivory or academia but those who live and learn each day, those whose wisdom is hard earned from their own mistakes and whose grace is obtained from thoughtful contemplation and small acts of kindness, not from offering large buildings and splashy shows of religious orders. Tom

Brokaw was right calling my parent's generation the "Greatest" not because it produced well known historical figures but because as a generation they gave more than they received, they offered more than they demanded and they lived their lives as people with purpose and honor, the simple purpose and honor of living well.

I also remember what we thought and wrote of our father when he passed and can honestly say I have learned each day that he was a standard all men should aspire to and my life is lived in the shadow of his as I try to be as good a person. Many of you had parents or siblings or aunts and uncles or cousins who served our great land. For each of them I have attached my thoughts for my father.

My soul cries because our schools no longer reflect upon the character of Washington, Franklin and Jefferson as a means to a national moral fiber. They no longer teach of Lincoln and his great sorrow at the loss of life required to keep this nation as one. They no longer teach of DeToquville, Churchill and others who gave praise to our country's ability to ring the bell of freedom throughout the world.

Our heroes are football players who party rather than humbly give back through charitable acts. We envy the people who live out their desperate lives in the public eye, being famous for being famous, lives without value or meaning. Our daughters hang on every sound bite from women whose sole occupation is selling their image and becoming rich and famous without any skill or talent.

What change we need. If only we could regain the passion and stamina of our youth together!

A Democrat should honor The Bill of Rights. Freedom to honor God, choose a career, speak our minds, be free of military rule, be free of forced "justice" by confession or search. Once again champion those needing a boost without creating a system of entitlements that creates a class of needy that burdens the self-sufficient. Having a gun is not a crime and punishing people by rote without charity in sentence is no justice at all.

A Republican should abhor un-necessary government and remember Thomas Paine. Your God is not my God. Abortion is not an issue of such importance as to judge elections and judiciary solely by their choice or non-choice. My government does not require a national religion and no litmus test of a God is proper. God in the abstract to Bless our Land is honorable and reflects love upon us all. Requiring Christianity or especially a narrow view of Christianity is an insult to our forefathers. Owning a gun is a duty, not a right. Using it properly is an obligation and hunting is not guaranteed by any rule of man.

Both should be citizens first and bring the change we need.

Schools must be redesigned not to have great numbers of cold buildings and massive numbers of baby-sitters masquerading as teachers. Use technology to make a return to learning the basics possible for all. If you cannot cipher and read, you cannot call yourself civilized. Teach children common principals of morality, not one religion's narrow view. The golden rule can accommodate all. Self-defense does not violate that rule. Education is good for all, but not the same education. Artistic talent, mechanical aptitude and great cooking skills bring life achievement and value equal to any college educated salesman or administrator. A life spent preserving your country in uniform should be valued, not dismissed.

Teach children with the fewer teachers who truly inspire by using the technology of computers so-called experts decry and make technology our partner in education: for our children and for us; bring life-long learning back to adults, remind us from where we have come and how well we can live if only we keep living. My classmates remember "Aunt" Bess Cooley not because she was paid as a teacher but because she gave of herself to help us learn about the English language, our world and our futures. Her lessons were from more than a book and we all were better for it. I have written all my life. My mother started me writing and when Ms. Cooley found out about my writing she encouraged me in her own unique way to never stop. Even though most of what I have written has been for my eyes only, a way to bridge nights of restless sleep and more restless thoughts, I have never stopped. I can see in my mind's eye Aunt Bess in my face, stretching to her full height, a finger used as a baton, "John, if you ever stop using and improving your gift, I will be there push you on." Aunt Bess was the best teacher and one of the best mentor's I ever had. I hope wherever she is, God keeps her safe and well always.

Every person running for office should be a libertarian no matter to which party they belong.

Honor God as a concept but leave the details to private life. My Grandfather was a Southern Baptist minister, capable of great hell and brimfire oration. But his wisest thought to me was that he could not imagine a God without a sense of humor, otherwise how could God have created us!

Family and children come first but not with intense oversight and control. Absent real abuse, parents have the right to raise their children.

Defend your country. Celebrate those who do for you and our citizens.

Remember the best government is the least needed and taxing ingenuity and hard work means we are all less successful.

Want a gun. Take responsibility for owning a tool that can be misused with tragic results.

Moral fiber is not a naïve concept to be lost to time. Teach our children good from bad; humble and modest pride, not self aggrandized public celebration; strength is how you act, not who you can physically intimidate; and know the joy of being a citizen in the fundamentally greatest country on Earth. In simplest terms listen to Vince Lombardi, who told his players to toss the ball to the referee after scoring? Act like a pro, like you have been there before and expect to be there again. Remember that you got there on backs of your teammates and coaches, not alone. In other words, take pride in what you accomplish, seek to accomplish as much again and be humble knowing your success is the product of many people's efforts throughout your life. Our job is to pass on those lessons to our children and grandchildren [though as grandparents we can spoil them a little].

Growing older may not mean growing wiser but I do find myself more contemplative than I have ever been. Sorry if this seems long or preachy. It is meant to be neither but merely an older guy's ruminations on a reunion that celebrates two and half times as many years as he had when we graduated.

And finally, before I quit these thoughts, and not in maudlin intent, I still occasionally write a poem. This one found its roots in the picture of the same name and my experience in dance with my beloved Jean, not the song written by Leonard Cohen.

DANCE ME TO THE END OF LOVE

Dance me to the end of love, leave me not alone to find my way,
Come fill my arms with yourself, turn night unto the warmth of day;
Sway from step to style, no step taken as one can be wrong,
Our steps from each beat of a drum, lead our hearts to song;
Lifted toward our heart by heels and posture done right,
When our own rhythm is done, we become a couple alone in the night.

Dance me to the end of love, eternity reflected in a quick, quick, slow,
Open style reflects our hearts; in close step we become the one we know;
Step side by side, glide left to right, be separate yet not apart,
A rhythm sways, an open break, but into our stride comes our heart;
A sinuous hip, spun into a turn, an arched leg soon is wrapped,
A body held in song's embrace, as hearts as one soon are trapped.

Dance me to the end of love, for love is eternity for all to hold,
A tango archly done, from dance to step we hustle, humble, not bold;

Two lives mesh the soft and elegant turns of waltz, with purpose held,
The sensual pleasure of bolero well done, its purpose two hearts to weld;
A chin leads, flowing hair flows to swirl past and return, lips in a smile,
Float with steps so soft, a dip to embrace the joy, pleasure all the while.

Dance me to the end of love, for all find life in dance and love in life,
No partner never errs, the steps or beat can be missed, but only love is rife;
She steps when led but both control, yet dance and life are not always set,
On the floor or from day to day, dance is love where strength is met;
One in a solo, done without a frame, is left forever a partner incomplete,
Dance/embrace as one, together at the end, music and you, where in heaven
we meet.

And now, for you my classmates, and because my heritage is primary Irish, a version of an Irish prayer or toast [if your hands are clasped, it is a prayer, if they are clasped around a cup, it is a toast] for each of you:

**May each day's sun bring you the warmth of family and friendship,
May each night bathe you in the gentle moon's loving light,
May your life's path be straight and without rut or fault,
And when your time passes, may you be an hour in God's hands
Before the Devil knows you are gone.**

Your classmate,

John Head