

It Has Been Fifty (and Sixty) Years

It is hard for me to believe, but I just got an invitation to the fiftieth reunion of **The Academy at Arcadia** (aka Arcadia Local Schools) **Class of 1953**. It was only a few days ago that we were freshmen arguing about our Class Motto, “Onward to a Higher Aim,” and seniors trying to figure out what we would be doing after high school.

Fifty years is a long time ago, but it seems like only yesterday that twenty-one classmates were playing sports together for the politically incorrect “Arcadia Indians” and not having a clue about the challenges which were ahead in our lives. I got several of my **Arcadians** (yearbooks) off my book shelf and started to thumb through them...remembering stories about almost everyone included in these half century old books.

The first picture I saw in the **Arcadian** was of **John Kieffer**. Mr. Kieffer was our superintendent/teacher and retired the year before we graduated. He was the only superintendent we had ever known...how would the “Academy” go on without him? He was a big man and everyone respected him. He was the best foul shooter in the school and we had contests with him almost every noon hour. He was a tough-love kind of guy, and I’ll never forget the day in the seventh grade I had to go to his office because a teacher had reported me for using a bad word on the playground. It was a word we hear on TV every night nowadays, but not one we ever dared to use. I had yelled it to an upper classman who had taken our football away from us, and within several

minutes, I was on my way to Mr. Kieffer's office. When I arrived he had a rubber hose lying on his desk. When someone did something really bad, like saying a bad word or talking back to a teacher, he might expect to get several whacks from Mr. Kieffer's hose! Well, it sure got my attention! I wasn't as afraid of getting hit, as I was anticipating the embarrassment of having to be among the people in school bad enough to have received "the hose." He explained what had been reported and said, "Did you say that?"

I said, "Yes." (Mr. Kieffer didn't like long explanations!) He asked why I had said what I had said... and I explained. He said, "Educated people don't have to say things like that, and I expect more out of you." I said, "I'm sorry." He said, "Don't ever let me hear that you have talked that way again!" and told me to go to my room. The next day he asked me to shoot fous with him...and acted as if nothing had ever happened. Mr. Kieffer sure knew how to solve problems! He did so much for so many of us. By the way...the word was damn.

The second picture I saw was of **Mr. Groth**, our principal. He was a small man, but almost twice as tough as Mr. Kieffer. He taught all of the tough mathematics and science subjects and was very demanding. When Jim Steyer, Jim Warren and I told him that we wanted to go to college, he taught us advanced mathematics during study hall. Once in college I was doing very poorly (failing) in an advanced mathematics course and I called him. He said, "Come home and I'll help you this weekend." He spent Friday evening, all day

Saturday and Sunday afternoon tutoring me up to date with the rest of the class. I did well in the course and was able to retain my Navy scholarship because of him. Mr. Groth was a quiet, scholarly man who probably never got the credit he deserved for the way he helped so many of us.

I remember every one of my Elementary teachers! How many people can say that today?

Mrs. Brenner was a wonderful first grade teacher, the perfect person to replace your Mom when starting school.

Mrs. Amstutz (second grade) was very nice to us and encouraged us to learn. She had some of us sit on her lap during reading group...she would probably get into trouble for doing that today!

Mrs. Arthur (third grade) was very lively and even arranged to have our basketball team play the winner of the Findlay elementary tournament...they beat us 2-1, with Larry Myers being our high point man. We even got our team picture taken in one of those little booths at a five and dime store.

Miss Cole was our fourth grade teacher. She was a new experience for me...she was the toughest elementary teacher...I got a "C" in conduct. She didn't like all of my talking...and even made me sit in the hall once! I got my first elementary school non-A from her in mathematics...the report said: Math A, Conduct D, Grade C!

The Fox twins were our fifth and sixth grade teachers. **Rosie** was fun and taught us Art and Math and **Bessie** was strict and taught us the Language Arts.

All of our elementary teachers loved us...I can never remember having a substitute teacher during elementary school. They were the educational rocks in our young lives.

We didn't spend all day with our high school teachers, but many of them made a big impact on my life.

Mrs. Sharninghouse was absolutely the hardest teacher I ever had at The Academy, and I always thought she was kind of mean, until I got to know her after high school. She invited me to her home while I was in college, expressed interest in what I was doing and encouraged me to do my very best.

Mr. Knight was our vocational agriculture teacher and FFA (Future Farmers of America) advisor. We learned to repair farm equipment and construct items to use on the farm. While in FFA we won the State championship for Pest Hunting. **Jim Warren, Bob Good** and I asked **Mr. Feters**, an area farmer, if we could shoot rats near some old pig coops he had on his farm. He refused our request because the coops were too near other animals he had in the area. He went on to say that several years earlier he had turned down a similar request from other FFA members for the same reason, but that he had done something that might be helpful to us. He explained that over the last few years he had been shooting rats and saving their tails in a brine solution...which he planned to give to the next pest hunters

who requested to assist him in catching pests on his farm. We took the three, gallon jugs of rat tails to school the next morning. Mr. Knight called the state contest authorities to determine if we could use “our” catch for the contest. The pest czar said that the contest rules only stated that the pests must be caught in our district, nor when or by whom. We hit gold, or rat tails, if you want to get picky, and won the state contest hands down. The \$500 prize helped our club with many of its special projects.

Mr. Pittenger was a very good music teacher, but his career was temporarily interrupted by a brain tumor during our senior year. We had to cancel our operetta several weeks before it was to be given. He missed the remainder of the year, but returned the next year. Who can ever forget our twenty-six member band forming what I affectionally call the “Script A?” The stands were so low, and the football field had such a high crown, that no one could determine what formation the band was trying to form!

My only regret about my high school experience was the way several classmates and I treated **Mrs. Wykoff** when she joined the faculty as a new teacher when we were seventh-graders. We were noisy and silly when she asked us to be quiet, and that was embarrassing to her as a new teacher. We thought we were funny, but we were jerks. The truth is... the worst thing we did was to whisper and act silly, but it caused her many painful moments...until one day when we saw her crying in the cloak room. We changed our behavior and urged others to do the same. I have apologized to her many times over the years, but still regret I didn't have

enough sense to “get it” sooner, rather than later. Teachers’ jobs are hard enough without some little creeps making their jobs even tougher. Mrs. Wykoff was an excellent teacher and I’m happy she didn’t kill us, that she continued to teach successfully for many years...and that she even seemed to like each of us who had caused her so much grief in the early days of her teaching career.

Mr. Blauvelt, our history teacher and new superintendent, had a great impact on my life. Practically every day in history class he told us stories about his naval experiences during World War II on an ocean-going tug boat. I ate up those stories, and wanted to become a naval officer like him. He (along with **Mr. Steyer**) helped Jim Steyer and me get into the NROTC program at **The Ohio State University** and we both retired from the Navy after thirty year careers in the Naval Reserves. Neither of us would have been able to go to Ohio State without this assistance.

Coach Bob Robinson and his wife, Elsie, made the biggest impact on my life. My friends and I spent many hours with him during practices and games and many hours at their home just hanging out with him and “Mom” Robinson. He always stood for the right things, and always wanted us to do what was right. He never lost his cool and was a real role model for what is good about sports. Many of my friends and I have kept in contact with “Mr. Robinson” and see him from time to time. I plan to pick the Robinsons up at their home in Avon Lake, Ohio and take them to the reunion. They will have a great time renewing old friendships...everyone will remember them.

My Classmates

My classmates were quite a group! My closest friends were **Jim Warren, Bobby Good and Jim Steyer**. We played all sports together and did everything together.

Jim Warren was the stoic one and we could always count on him to check out every squeak in any car we drove. He was a very good athlete and the biggest one of all of us, so played center in basketball, first base in baseball and end in football. Jim never seemed very interested in academics until he decided he wanted to be an engineer in junior high school...and then he became the best mathematics student in our school. It just shows what having a goal can do to motivate a person.

Bobby, as we called him until he was middle-aged, was also a good athlete and played center in football, guard in basketball and outfield in baseball. He couldn't swim and always sat on the edge of the pool on those rare occasions we went swimming. What am I saying (?), none of us could swim, but at least the rest of us got into the water!

Jim Steyer played all sports, but his real claim to fame was in the sport of swimming, or "sort of swimming." When we went to FFA Camp for a week one summer, we had to pass a swimming test (five minutes of treading water) before we could go out to the dock and use the diving board. Well, none of us could do the five minute thing....except Jim Steyer who could float and passed the test. Jim didn't just

float; he could float like a Spar Buoy (straight up and down!). He paddled out to the dock (vertically, of course) and pretended to be treading water! Well, he got his Trout Badge, while the rest of us had to wear Turtle Badges on our swimming suits. Jim never let us forget about trout-topics...e.g., “We are having fish for dinner tonight, I wonder if it is TROUT!”

He outdid himself when he had his mother sew his trout badges (yes, he bought extras) onto his athletic supporters and wore THE BADGE to every practice and game for the remainder of his high school career. I never saw one as we roomed together for four years at Ohio State, but several years ago he wore one to a golf outing! Yes, a Trout Badge sewed onto his underwear which he made sure we saw in the locker room after our round! He will probably wear one to the reunion!

Shirley Rainey and **Janet Boes** were the smart ones in our class. They always got good grades and never did anything bad that we knew about.

Floyd Hissong was also very smart (our valedictorian), but he got in trouble all the time! His favorite trick was to carry a large stack of books and as he walked down steps or in an aisle, pretend to trip and fling all of his books around. Mr. Robinson was the only one who seemed to catch on to what he was doing...and just ignored him every time he fell. On one occasion, after a particularly spectacular fall, Mr. Robinson merely said, “Pick ‘em up Floyd.”

Larry Myers was one of our best athletes. He was the pitcher and fastest runner. He was lots of fun...there was never a dull moment with Larry around. He moved to Findlay before our junior year.

Richard Kelly always seemed to have money to spend! He was the only one of us who always had candy and gum! When we were in the fourth grade, he got hit in the head with a baseball bat and was knocked cold. Differently than today, we waited for him to wake up and went on with the game. He even played some more after resting a few minutes!

John Bushong and **Richard Smith** were a pair! They were buddies and managed all of the sports teams. They were always pulling tricks on everyone in the locker room...probably their best was putting red-hot liniment in our athletic supporters one night. After about 10 minutes on the practice field, everyone started screaming in pain and had to go into the locker room for new clothes. Coach Robinson acted like he was mad, but I think he thought it was pretty funny.

Patty Emerine and **Peggy Fox** were very good in music and played in the band and orchestra. Patty was my first girlfriend, in the second grade, and always a great friend. Peggy played clarinet and went around me in the orchestra, as did Janet Ziessler. I was first clarinet in the eighth grade and slowly moved to the third chair. The Academy had standards!

Shirley Farrell was my girlfriend in the third grade, and although I bought her a chocolate bunny for Easter that year, I don't think she ever thought of me as her boyfriend!

Normajeane Ritter and I were study hall friends in high school. Normajeane was our drum majorette for all four years of high school.

Lanny Semler and **Carl Ziessler** were hard workers, didn't seem to like school much, but both were tough as nails. They both played football and we weren't close until I started to play on the football team. We became good friends then and I liked both of them a lot. Carl was the only person I ever had a fight with in school and afterwards we became even better friends. I can't even remember what we fought about, but I was probably sticking my nose into his business.

Janet Ziessler, Peggy Fox and I played clarinet in the orchestra (and band until I played football) together for many years. Janet was my good school bus friend. While I had had a fight with Carl, I never had an argument with Janet. Janet, Carl and I rode together on the school bus for all twelve years.

Marion Peters was the younger brother of my sister Ruth's husband Carl. We played together in the summers when my brother-in-law and his brother did farm work together.

John King was a relative newcomer to our school, having only attended Arcadia for three years. He played sports and was in the music programs.

Marilyn Plotts and **Shirley Lenhart** were my favorite cheerleaders and I dated Shirley during my junior year. They always had the cheerleading spirit and were very popular in school.

John Carter got a scholarship to University of Louisville for his senior year and we all missed him our senior year.

Carol Kuhn was involved in musicals and plays and was everyone's friend. She dated (and eventually married) **Winfield Ziessler** (Janet and Carl's older brother). "Windy," as we called him, played clarinet and helped me get through my first performance in the orchestra at a high school graduation when I was in the third grade, by pointing out the note we were playing on almost every line of music.

If the above sounds like we were a family...then I have written it like I meant to write it. Our teachers were like parents and our classmates like brothers and sisters. Even the parents of our classmates played a role in our development. Several more folks need to be included in our class. Bob Good's dad, **Mr. Good**, was our custodian and he was like a father to many of us. Bob's soon to be wife, **Carol Lee Kieffer**, was a year behind us, but was one of us, as was her older sister, **Kay Kieffer**, and her soon to be husband, **Duane Beamer**. Carol Lee, Kay and Duane were "members" of our class.

We knew everything going on in everyone else's life. We joked that we didn't need turn signals in Arcadia, because

everyone knew where you were going. Ten of our class of twenty-one (Marilyn, Janet, Peggy, Shirley, Shirley, Patty, Bobby, Jim Warren, Lanny and I), spent all twelve years together. I have lived away from the Arcadia all these years and have not been in touch with many of my classmates in the last forty years. I'm excited to go to this Fiftieth Reunion to catch up on what has transpired during all of these years.

The Reunion

On Saturday, April 12, 2003, Ruth and I picked up Coach and Elsie Robinson at their home in Avon Lake and headed for Arcadia. Mr. Robinson retired a number of years ago as Superintendent of Schools at Avon Lake, where he had also coached basketball for many years. He spent two years at The Academy and went directly to Avon Lake in 1953. I guess he couldn't fathom coaching there any longer without the Class of 1953! After all, we had won all of those State Championships (at least that is what I remember). When we arrived in Arcadia, we made a small side trip to take pictures of the Robinson's first home, to send to their three lawyer-sons. Then to the Academy.

The Academy looks just like it did fifty years ago, except for the additions on the back of the school...new gymnasium, classrooms, cafeteria and shops. The athletic fields and stadium are entirely different. If one were to drive past the front of the building, it would look just the same as it did fifty years ago.

Fourteen classmates: **Janet Boes-Steinmetz** (John), **Floyd Hissong** (Jeannine), **Carol Kuhn-Ziessler** (Winfield), **Shirley Lenhart-Collins**, **Ron Mattox**, **Marion Peters** (Nancy), **Marilyn Plotts-Cunningham** (Rex), **Shirley Rainey-Etoll** (Lawrence), **Glenn Saltzman** (Ruth), **Lanny Semler** (Betty), **Jim Steyer** (Marilyn), **Jim Warren** (Marna), **Carl Ziessler** (Jean), and **Janet Ziessler-Hanna** (John) were in attendance.

Janet Steinmetz lives in Tiffin; Floyd Hissong is retired and lives in Oil City, PA; Carol Ziessler lives in rural Findlay; Shirley Collins lives and works in Richmond, VA; Ron Mattox is retired and lives in Fostoria; Marion Peters is retired and lives in Port Clinton; Marilyn Cunningham is retired and has moved back to Arcadia; Shirley Etoll lives in Findlay; Glenn Saltzman is retired and lives in Twin Lakes, OH; Lanny Semler is retired and lives in Clarksville, TN; Jim Steyer is retired and lives in Lewis Center, OH; Jim Warren is retired and lives and farms in Arcadia; Carl Ziessler is retired and lives in Upper Sandusky; Janet Ziessler lives in Findlay;

Mrs. Martha Brenner (First Grade) and **Mr. Robinson** (Coach) were the teachers present.

Three classmates, **Pat Emerine-Droll** (Upper Sandusky), **Norma Ritter-Rantz** (St. Petersburg, FL) and **Shirlee Farrell** (Riverside, CA), were unable to attend.

Eight classmates, **John Bushong**, **John Carter**, **Peggy Fox**, **Bob Good**, **Richard Kelly**, **John King**, **Larry Myers** and **Richard Smith** are deceased.

Jim Warren was the General Chairman for the evening and 194 Alumni and guests attended. **The Class of 1978** (25 years) was also honored. It was a wonderful evening of reminiscing about championships, special events and friends. The Academy, and our classmates, hold special places in many of our hearts. We started our life journey there...and most of us are very proud to be Alumni of The Academy of Arcadia. The strangest thing about the entire evening was that none of us had changed!

April, 2003

Note: The numbers of classmates do not always total the same because of transfers and moves to other schools.

Postscript: Ten Years later...Attended The Sixtieth Academy Reunion (2013)

Ruth and I attended the Sixtieth Academy Reunion, held in the Arcadia High School cafeteria, in April 2013. Marilyn Plotts-Cunningham hosted a reception for a few of us at her home prior to the banquet and it was good catching up with classmates and a few guests from other classes. It was especially nice to see Vern Synder with whom I played on many sports teams.

Attending the Sixtieth Academy Reunion was a bit sadder as only four class members were in attendance; Carol Kuhn-Ziessler; Marilyn Plotts-Cunningham; Lanny Semler and me.

Coach Robinson did not attend, but I have regular telephone conversations with Elsie and him.

As of this date, only thirteen of our class of twenty-one are still alive (Patsy Noel-Russell, Pat Emerine-Droll, Norma Ritter-Rantz, Janet Boes-Steinmetz, Carol Kuhn-Ziessler, Carl Ziessler, Shirley Lenhart-Collins, Shirley Rainey-Etoll, Marilyn Plotts-Cunningham Lanny Semler, Shirlee Farrell, Marion Peters and me... thirteen of twenty-one from 1953...nine women and four men. Some classmates could not attend as they were involved in family activities and others were combatting health issues...time moves on. Since our last reunion, Janet Ziessler-Hanna, Ron Mattox, Jim Steyer and Jim Warren have died.

As Ruth and I drove home to Twin Lakes (OH), we talked about the many years that had passed and counted our blessings. We are both grateful for our high school experiences (Ruth at Findlay (OH) High School) and are also grateful that the many years that have passed since our graduations have generally been kind to us.

April 2013