



I've been stringing together some thoughts about my recent trip to my hometown of South Lake Tahoe for a multi-class, high school reunion, years 1964 through '74. I was in the class of '66, kind of a sweet spot in my opinion. We were lucky enough to make it through during the relatively innocent time before the cultural and sexual revolutions and before weed and harder drugs scrambled more than a few brains and society as a whole. A few beers were about as adventurous as most of us got. Funny how I've come full circle. Once again, I'm a two-beer man.

This rambling essay ended up being about a different, more personal, reunion; one with my younger, high school self. I'm probably an unreliable narrator but it's what I remember so I'm sticking to it.

Everyone had their own unique experience in high school. For some, it was glory days, athletic championships, and homecoming crowns, while for others, it was a gauntlet. I fell somewhere in the middle. I was an insecure kid, certain that my red hair and freckles were a liability if not a curse. They made me stand out at a time when, more than anything, I wanted to keep my head down and fit in. My strict Irish Catholic upbringing didn't help, supercharging my shyness around girls (not counting the Virgin Mary, of course). I had no idea how to relate to my classmates as fellow humans - I was not yet equipped to know that most were, like me, just trying to figure out who they were while navigating that sometimes treacherous terrain.

My go-to response to all this was to act like a smart ass, armoring myself with quips and one-liners. This strategy got me through but also got me in trouble, even got me suspended at least once. At our 50<sup>th</sup> reunion I played a song, "I'd Say I'm Sorry," apologizing to my Spanish teacher, Miss Miyatake, for my egregious behavior. I was never able to get it directly to her but at least my sentiments are out there in the universe. I should also write something, for entirely different reasons, for Mrs. Holmsted, our English and Journalism teacher. She was an object of desire and fascination with her voluptuous figure and wild mane of hair. It didn't help that we were studying the Scarlet Letter which featured the adulterous Hester Prynne and her little daughter, Pearl. Mrs. Holmsted was a divorcee raising a young daughter herself so it was easy to draw parallels. Pretty salacious stuff at the time. On occasion, she would walk up behind me, massage my shoulders, and ask, "How is my favorite cynic today?" Yikes! Needless to say, I froze. Yes, it was inappropriate but not nearly as much as I would've liked. "Bless me father for I have sinned. It has been one week since my last confession and these are my sins; I had 5,462 impure thoughts, give or take."

I was not a great athlete but I did go out for track where I proved to be a lackluster quarter miler and low jumping high jumper. When, in spite of this, I got my varsity letter, I thought, for some sophomoric reason, that it would be a good idea to go to Old Town Sacramento, buy the rattiest blue and gold jacket on the thrift store rack, and adorn it with my brand new, letter "T." The first day I wore it to school, I was dis-invited from the Block T Club. Rightly so. Looking back, I was probably trying to signal that sports were no big deal but the truth was that I was envious of athletes and the ease with which they carried themselves in the halls on game day.

I did find a little bit of identity in my guitar playing but that was mostly a solitary pursuit. (My recollection that I was shy and insecure does not jibe with me standing up in front of everyone at school spirit rallies playing and singing Hang On Sloopy.) The idea that this would become my life's work was preposterous and did not even enter my mind.

I was on the "college track," a decision that was kind of a flip of the coin when my parents signed me up for classes in freshman year. I got OK, not stellar, grades so when it came time to apply to colleges, I had no idea where to even begin. I applied to a few schools that sounded fun and easy, University of Hawaii for one, then thought, "Why not apply to UC Davis?" where my much smarter older brother, Tom, had gone. When, to my and everyone else's amazement, I was accepted, I thought that there had to have been some mistake. This was driven home when one of my teachers, Mr. Phillips I think, took me aside and said "Regan, you are going to flunk out of Davis so fast it will make your head spin." That was the best thing anyone could've said to me. Once I got to Davis, I hit the books and studied like a fiend, certain that I would soon be smoked out for the imposter I was. It was only after being on the Dean's list for the entire first year that I allowed myself a breath. It was gratifying to have those lists posted in the STHS office and I hope Mr. Phillips saw them.

Looking back, my lack of a solid sense of self was kind of a gift, albeit a very well disguised one. I was able to enjoy an extended adolescence while learning about the world and my place in it. My strict, high expectations father passed away when I was just 18, so I didn't feel a lot of family pressure to buckle down and make something of myself. I was able to dabble in college, taking mostly courses of interest: history, literature, anthropology etc. When the aforementioned cultural revolution hit in '68, I was halfway through and I, like so many others, heard the clarion call of "Tune in, turn on, and drop out." I continued to dabble, this time with music and bands and part-time cannery work to pay the bills before finally graduating with a BA in psychology after a mere six years. Some people know early on who they are, where they are going and how to plot a straight line to get there. Others, like me, have to try on a lot of identities to find which ones fit and, more importantly, which ones don't.

Back to the real reunion, finally. I guess these events are as close to a do-over of high school as anyone of us is going to get. We are able relate to old classmates as fully formed humans with compassion, understanding, and good humor. And, 60 years later, I don't think many of us are too worried about impressing anyone or proving anything, only that we are still upright and grateful to be.

I enjoyed talking to many people, some of whom I have seen recently, some not for 60 years: Mike McFarlane. whose family owned the local mortuary and arranged the funerals and burials of both of my parents and attorney Melvin Beverly's stepson, who I was able to thank for his family's kindness towards our mother after my father passed away. It was nice to see Miss Vietes, a reminder that some of our teachers back then were probably in their 20s, not much older than we were. Mike Makley and I reconnected over our mutual writing endeavors. (He is a very accomplished historian with several titles to his credit about Lake Tahoe and Northern Nevada. Look him up if you're not familiar.) I was also aware of the many classmates, parents, and teachers who are no longer with us, making the time we have left all the more precious.

When I got home, I took another look through the class yearbook and I stopped at the picture of Danny Swartz. He was an only child, much adored by his parents as evidenced by his professionally done senior picture. They apparently didn't want to take their chances with the school photographer when having his senior class image captured. A short few years later, Danny lost his life in Vietnam, the only one in our class with that fate I believe. We are all approaching 80 but Danny will be eternally 18.

Thank you to all the organizers and helpers who made this wonderful event happen. If there is another one, I will do my damndest to be there. Hail South Tahoe High.