

This is NOT About My 50th High-School Reunion

It seems that at some point all aging journalists insist on writing about their 50th high-school reunions, should they happen to survive that long. But not me – this is about my sister's 50th.

The reason you should care is because for the longest time Iowa City had only one high school; the aptly - if not imaginatively - named Iowa City High School. City High for short.

What later became Central Junior High School was the original Iowa City High School, but it was demolished in 1983 in favor of adequate parking for Mercy Hospital. When I was in junior high there, I had the elderly Mr. Parker as my science teacher. Amazingly, he had taught my mother the same course in the 1940's.

I attended City High's 2019 graduation ceremony at Carver-Hawkeye Sports Arena very recently, and they have a procession of representatives of previous graduating classes during the commencement. My 89-year-old mother carried the placard for her graduation year, 1947. She was first out of the gate, being the oldest one there ("I'm always the oldest, no matter where I go," she says).

Another piece of trivia that maybe only I care about is that long ago my maternal great-grandfather was the President of the South Ottumwa Savings Bank and member of the Board of Education. He donated the land for what was then the "new" high school, and it is now the C.D. Evans Middle School.

My maternal grandfather was a member of the Iowa City Schools Board or Education when the site for the new high school was selected. It was a great spot, on top of a hill, but was on a dirt road far from the center of town and perceived to be halfway to West Liberty. He had to use a newfangled invention called commercial radio to help sell the radical concept to voters for the bond issue.

My siblings and I were born and raised on the west side of town, so there was no doubt we'd all be going to West. "Cow-Pie High" was built on former farmland that was way west of town, then perceived to be halfway to Williamsburg.

My older sister Cindy - a former School Board member herself - was a senior when West High opened in the fall of 1968. By then she had already spent her sophomore and junior years at City High with all her friends. Suddenly their class was split in half, and a conflicted rivalry was born. Since both schools are/were in the same IHSAA class 4A, football players (for example) who played side-by-side the previous year were now facing each other across a line of scrimmage.

The seniors-to-be lobbied the School Board at the time to be able to opt out of the new school and graduate together but were denied. This option was made available to seniors-to-be at City and West when the new Liberty High School was opened in August 2017.

Back in 1968 everyone moving to West had to ditch their red-and-white wardrobes in favor of green-and-gold. A new fight song had to be created for West, and it was oddly replaced some years ago with a completely different fight song. Occasionally a few of us old-timers will loudly sing the original song at a West sporting event, much to the amazement of the students (and almost all the current faculty).

The 1969 graduating classes of both City High and West High have always held joint anniversary celebrations, as they were all together longer than they were apart. As always, they are trolling for lost classmates. Out of 477 graduates, the recent count was 113 missing and 64 (!) deceased. If you or someone you know qualifies, email IC69ers@gmail.com.

My own 50th (yes, I lied about not mentioning it) is already scheduled for June 12, 2021 at Brown Deer Golf Club. I'm sure I'll attend and have the same question that I did at our last reunion; "Who invited all these old people?"

Writers Group member Dave Parsons joins our community in mourning the recent passing of Bob Hibbs, unofficial Iowa City Historian and author of four books on the subject.