

The Lasting Impact of My St. Joe Education

By Neil McCormick, Class of '70

So much of high school is a blur of fuzzy memories for me... a soft Degas painting at its most clear... a polar bear in a snowstorm for the rest of it.

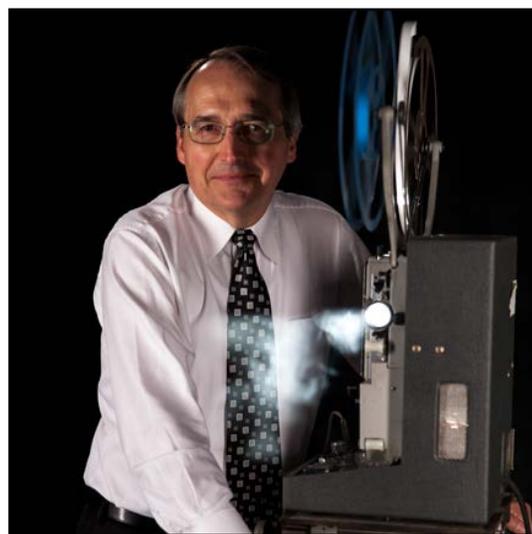
I tend to remember my triumphs and traumas in life. So here are a few things I DO remember from St. Joes...(that I can actually speak about in polite company.)

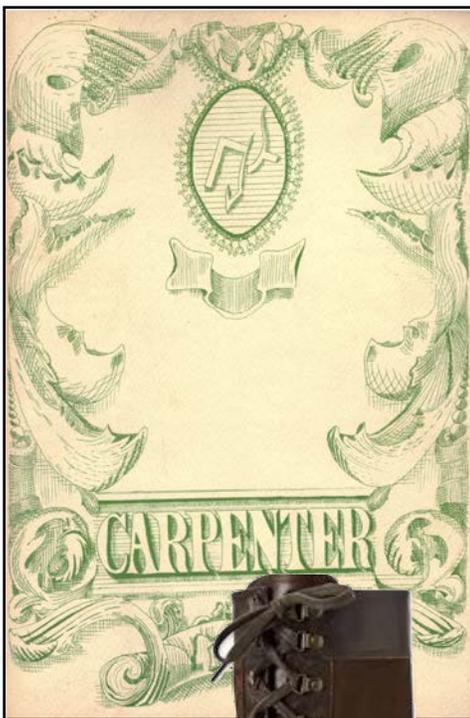
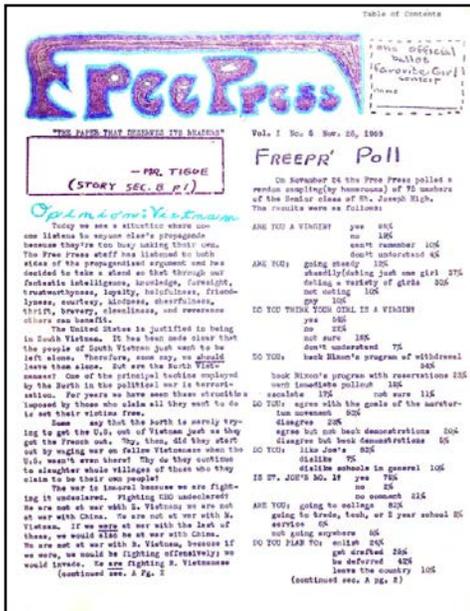
My pride in making the Varsity Tennis Team...though I never played in an actual match against another school. (Frankly, I was not very good.) I bought the Varsity jacket with the little tennis racquets sewn on it, but I never had the courage to wear the thing in High School. (I didn't want to get stuffed in a locker like Jerry Lutkus did. Heck, I was worried because back then I was small enough to actually FIT in a locker.) I still have the jacket. I started wearing it as an adult to shovel snow because it was wool and warm. And it still fit me. Small victories.

My experience in the Chess Club was pretty similar. It was very competitive. I would regularly get whipped by Jay Bitner, or Jim Meil. Never made the top 5 who would compete against other schools. The Chess Club was so competitive that I barely made the Chess Club intramural touch football team.

I have a vivid memory as a Sophomore being at a St. Joe's mixer lined up along the folded bleachers on one side, eying a young Villa Angela girl across the gym and getting encouraged by some buddies to FINALLY go talk to her. Learning a lesson that courage is taking action in spite of your fear.

I was president of the Art Club one year. I think I was the only member. We too painted spirit signs before football games. We being Brother Hoffman and me.





My Junior year was simply traumatic. My widowed mom remarried and we moved from 152nd and Lake Shore Blvd to Chesterland (26 miles from St. Joes). I wasn't old enough to drive. I had to quit my job at Euclid Fish Co. No money, no car, no life. (Apparently I survived.)

One delightful memory was being honored with the Literary Award at graduation along with my dear friend Bill Gabrenya for work on the Carpenter. Getting up with Bill and receiving the award from Brother Aaron at Music Hall is a moment I have not forgotten. I think it was planned irony from the St. Joe's English Department, but I enjoyed it immensely.

I didn't really emerge in High School. I was more like a tree that takes some years to bear fruit after all the cultivation work the faculty poured into me during my 4 years. But in college at BGSU, I was able to evaluate my own initial career direction, (art teacher) realize my art skills were bottom 1/3 of my classmates and that I should instead find and pursue something at which I actually excelled. I started working at the University TV station in the Art Department my Freshman year. (I needed the money.) But I was drawn to the excitement of TV studio and the meshing of talent and technology to make TV.

The influence of Bob Hollis payed dividends at the college level for me. My St. Joe's education primed me for that initial direction (art teacher) and my redirection (radio-TV-film major), and ultimately the good things that resulted for me in my career.

I was blessed to have great teachers that shaped my teenage brain.

- **Joe Radican**, the skill and art of critical thinking
- **Tim Robertson**, Analysis can be fun, really (Pushing your brain to think logically, modus tollens and modus ponens, if p then q)
- **Mike Bacha**, English could be cool! His beard and those English riding boots were the coolest look ever. I bought a pair of boots like that for college. I've still never ridden a horse.
- **Brother Phil Hoffman**, working at your craft in Art or anything.
- **Bob Hollis**, Christian Communications. Put a camera in your hands who knows what might happen.
- **Roger Lancaster**, you too can memorize a 80 line poem by William Cullen Bryant (Thanatopsis) and still remember the first several lines 50+ years later. "To him who in the love of nature holds communion with her visible forms she speaks a various language...." Bryant's speech at Cooper Union pushed Abe Lincoln to the Republican nomination.
- **Tommy Corrigan** who got me to taste a piece of litmus paper to test if I could taste a specific something. Some people could taste it others could not. It was a DNA thing as I recall. The 'something' was urine! I learned to NEVER trust teachers with litmus paper.
- **Brother Aaron**, for suspending me and Bill Gabrenya for our Free Press foolishness, and ultimately giving me my 15 minutes of "notoriety" in High School, (I cannot call it "fame").



Not remembering many specifics or details does not mean that my four years at St. Joe's didn't have a life changing impact on me. It gave me a solid foundation and set me on my life journey having made a number of friends that would last a lifetime.

Being a part of the 40th Reunion committee, thanks to Greg Patt, was a blessing, rekindling faded memories, and actually making dear friends out of old acquaintances late in life. Fifty years after graduation my St. Joe's experience is still having a wonderful impact on my life.
###

Editor's note: Since the 40th class of 70 reunion, Neil has made a real commitment to SJH as a born again Viking, with his time, talent and treasure producing some great recruitment, promotional and storytelling videos along with event support for the Classic Mixer and Continue the Dream.

The 50th reunion committee felt it was entirely appropriate to nominate him for the VASJ Hall of Fame. The winner has yet to be announced by the school, but we are all pushing for Neil to win!