

My St. Joe's Manifesto

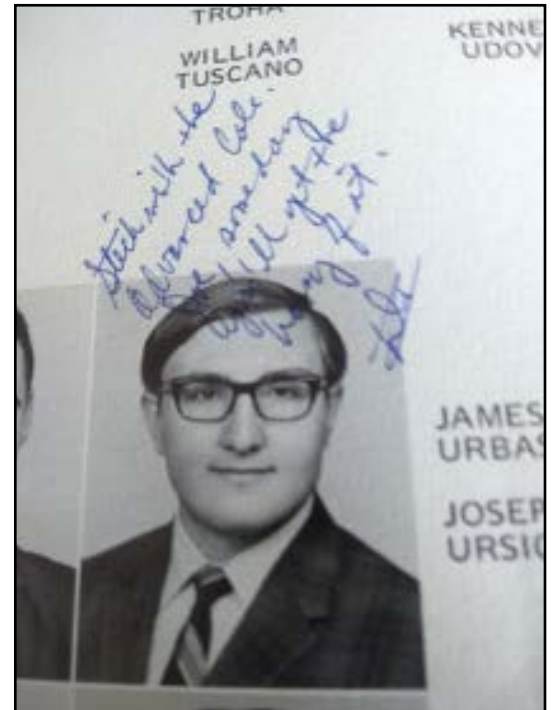
By Joe Ursic

Since my Slovenian brother Joe Vidmar did one of these Class of 70 homework assignments that Pete Apicella keeps reminding us about, I guess it couldn't be that hard.

Recess was the only subject I excelled at during grade school, running up and down the dirt mounds at St Clare's with fellow Vikings, John Nicholl, Ken Lelii and John Frato. Always had that high red line on my report card and always underperformed. To get out of the high reading group in 6th grade I intentionally bombed a standardized test and achieved a 1st Grade, 9th month reading level score. I remember trying to keep a straight face as Sr. Johanna quietly informed me they were going to move me to a different reading group, the easy one, LOL. After nine weeks of ease, I decided the experiment had succeeded and scored an 11th grade level on a follow-up test, got moved back to the high reading group. I scored high on standardized tests, scored low on applying myself in school.

Evidently the high schools noticed, I applied to four Catholic schools, two west side, one inner east side and Joe's. Got accepted at all, but then my father came up to my bedroom one night and had a "talk." He didn't want me to cross to the west side or go to the inner city school. He had gone to East Tech, so I figured he had his reasons, besides, not knowing anything about the schools or neighborhoods, Joe's would have been my choice simply because it had my name. So Joe's it was, the easy choice.

Next came the letter from Joe's saying I had to go to summer school my first two years for advanced Math and English. Summer vacation would never be the same let alone explaining to my brothers summer school wasn't just for dummies. So there I was at a bus stop at Ivanhoe and Euclid at 7 AM every morning waiting for the #41 bus to take me to Joe's after being dropped off there by my father who worked at a factory on Euclid. Little did I know how close I was to the happenings in the Summer of '66 Ken Polke



Doing homework on a TV tray in the living room



Band memorabilia



Chess Trophy and math books

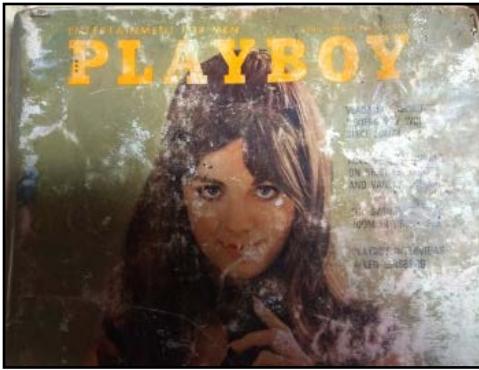
had written about in his book. The math was not so tough, but wow, I'd never been in classes with the likes of Don Steiner, Tony Palella and Jim Meil, these kids were smart! English was a different matter for a kid who only read Hardy Boy books; poetry, literature, you've got to be kidding. Fortunately I had older sisters from whom I could plagiarize poems at the last minute for a forgotten or procrastinated assignment.

Then came band camp before freshman year, my father had given my brothers and I a choice in grade school, we could play the accordion or the accordion. I begged to play something different, all those keys and buttons looked hard, so he conceded and let me take trumpet lessons (three buttons, had to be easy) at Petromelli's at 185th and Neff while my brothers took accordion. Didn't know at the time it would place me in Band 5A homeroom away from my buddies from St Clare in the normal homerooms. Band camp wasn't so bad, I was a boy scout, loved camping, attained eagle scout, band camp was fun, well except for the testing on music and marching at the same time, but I faked my way through that. Our freshman cabin was fun at night with Dennis Minichello, Ernie Brown and Joe Occhionero climbing the rafters after lights out. Somehow I acquired a nickname of "the Bat" as hanging from rafters was my thing.

Freshman year gave me some insight into the haves and have nots, after orientation my father took me across the street at Joe's to Robert Hall and bought me a clearance tan sport coat. I wore it every day with a tie until sometime in late November when an upper classman in band lifted me up from behind by my two shoulders and shouted, "Is this attached to him permanently?" I asked my older sisters for some sweaters for Christmas that year and never wore that sport coat again. I had it on for my 5A class picture in the '67 yearbook. I was so glad that dress code ended our junior year. I eschew ties and was glad the Engineering life had adapted a casual any day attitude by the time I retired.

The bus rides to Joe's provided by the SE-Lyndhurst BOE were interesting, the upperclassmen in the back of the bus constantly vandalized the bus, even had CTS undercover inspectors follow the bus as disassembled seats and parts were tossed out the windows. We in the front were just happy they weren't bothering us and so much different than the band bus rides. Being in the band was an education in exuberance, I had never experienced the enthusiasm of a group chanting and shouting slogans as we traveled to and from football games as well as in the stands. Good times when the cheerleaders would do high leg kicks, bad times fleeing the East Liverpool game dodging eggs and who knows what else.

And then there was French, the counselor recommended it, I was "whatever", what a mistake, had a kid in class who had lived in France, learned from others how to read from a cheat sheet on your desk when you had to stand and speak French. Two years of straight D's



My first Playboy

influenced my major in college as Physics didn't require a foreign language while Chemistry did. I really only got in trouble once during Freshman year, Mr. Delano walked into history class just as I was making some antic in the back of the room while a serviceman who had returned from Vietnam was standing in the front of the class. He dragged me into the hallway and told me to write an apology and get it signed by my dad, which was tough, but deserved.

Sophomore year, my friends from St Clare talked me into joining the space science club, something about launching rockets attracted me. It was lots of fun especially with frozen Lake Erie providing a landing zone for the rockets that I had no fear climbing over ice chunks to retrieve after landing. 40 years later, climbing over and attaching instrumentation to NASA rocket engines out in LA prior to live hot fire must have been my destiny. I also won the intramural chess championship between St. Joe's various clubs sponsored by the Chess club, earned myself membership on the Chess team. I think I went to one competition and won my match by forfeit when the other school's participant didn't show. Mr Bacha was the Chess club moderator; he was a lot more fun there than in advanced English.

I ran for treasurer of the band my junior year and won, every morning standing in the front of the band room collecting dues but mostly just socializing. My younger brother was in the reserve band that year, (no accordions so he was learning trombone), he was a fill in at the Ed's game, dropped his hat in the mud and then scooped it up with his trombone to the cheers of the audience. Mr. Novak was not impressed and had him washing windows in the band room after school as punishment. My appeal to him for leniency fell on deaf ears, apparently no pull as treasurer. Junior year also included my first plane flight to New York City's St Patrick day parade. My brother and I worked stuffing license plate stickers into envelopes for the State of Ohio in the Cafeteria to earn cash for the trip. We worked enough to pay for our trips plus \$20-\$30 bucks of spending cash, never had that much of my own cash in my pocket. Don't remember much of the parade but do remember attempting to take the subway out to Central Park, a cop on the train looked at us boys when we told him where we were headed and said get off here and get right back on the return train, you're not going to Central Park at dusk, we were like, "OK." Bought my first Playboy magazine there in NY, April, 1969 issue, still have it, but a bit worn.

Junior year also brought my first period of "study hall" and a choice of an elective class, options that didn't exist due to the time constraints of band the first two years. I choose accounting and aced it as it was all easy math and logic, the accounting sheets were much like a computer program with several loops. But the most memorable item of the class was sitting next to a longer haired, hippy-like senior who informed me through the year about different forms of sex and drugs. Towards the end of the year we discussed our plans for the summer of 69, I was going on a chaperoned Boy Scout canoe trip to Canada and he was



My first McDonalds



My First (and only) wife

taking his car and girlfriend to a week long concert in upstate New York, our lives couldn't have been more different. Couldn't wait to graduate myself, little did I know my summer of 70 would mean 70+ hour work weeks.

Senior year was life changing, at orientation my father left my brother and I in the gym while he went off to pay the tuition. He came back and ushered us both out to the car, he told us Joe's had changed the tuition rules, the second child was no longer half price and he couldn't afford to send us both so he had paid my tuition but my brother would go to Brush. My first bus ride home from school that year I stayed on the bus through Lyndhurst and got off in South Euclid by the McDonalds, went in and applied for a job. I was asked how my math was and the manager cut me off when I starting explaining calculus, adding was sufficient as they still added the prices by hand. So I started the 4-8 shifts after school and 4-close on weekends. \$1.30/hr to start, whatever, it was real money. My first day was during an evening rush, I was assigned drinks, keep the root beer, orange and cola syrup filled and pour the drinks as ordered by the six people working the windows. The owner, one of two millionaire brothers, was watching all his low paid labor work and noticed I had a chance to take a breath and shouted "Don't just stand there, grab a rag and clean something." Never worked so hard for so little money in my life, a life lesson and my senior year turned out to be either band or Mickey D's. But not all bad, had my first beer at 17 in a bar two doors down from the restaurant after close, met some people who knew how to play the system, gave out lots of free food to the S.E. police through the back door, which did pay off a few times when they recognized me and let me off with "What would Ronald McDonald say?" Also found a cigarette machine at a nearby gas station I could buy smokes at. No need to steal them off of my older sister, but I did stick with her Salem lights. Downside, went from 170 to 215 pounds as I developed an addiction to free filet-o-fish sandwiches.

A great memory my senior year was of cutting out of school mid-day with Bob Schultz in his Camero convertible and smoking as we tooted around Euclid High. Irony was as a band officer my junior year I had voted to cut the senior drum major who was caught smoking in uniform down at Ohio State stadium. Senior year included a band trip to Pittsburgh, roomed with Bill Ujcic, alphabetical order. I brought a bottle of wine, but told Bill I had found it in the room, he wouldn't drink any not knowing where it had been, I knew, but didn't know him well enough to trust him. Being a wino in a Pittsburgh hotel room wasn't much of a thrill. I signed up in the Joe's office for my selective service number in April and checked the box for conscientious objector; they sent me paperwork asking why, I never returned it thinking "Turn on the TV." Ernie Brown summed up my senior year at Joe's in what he wrote in my yearbook, "You kind of fizzled out this year, what happened? Remember first year of band camp!"

But McDonald's provided enough money to get myself through two years of college, plus a small loan from my brother to fix my 68 Ram-



Favorite Restaurant today



To prove my shoulder was fractured

bler's transmission, until ROTC provided me with a monthly income and cash to pay for my final two years of college. That 68 Rambler was a rusty heap and the first thing to go when I got married in 75 to my wife, Joan, she always hated the multi-colored spray painted rust. One person who I never appreciated at the time was my dad who would always be there to pick me up if I stayed late at school or he'd be waiting after 11PM in the parking lot for away buses to arrive back from games and make the ½ hour drive home to Lyndhurst. I thought of that 25 years later as I sat in the dark waiting for the band buses with my kids to arrive back to their high school from Friday night football games or Saturday band competitions. It was also a reason I had cars for my kids their junior year, something my parents could never afford.

To sum things up, this poor, under performing, white kid from Lyndhurst got away with a lot of shenanigans and was still able to get into college where he actually learned the value of education and aced all his graduate physics courses. My grandkids know I'm a prankster at heart and my kids are wary of my babysitting. I've also developed a bit of a wanderlust having visited close to 80 different countries. And this is already as long as my Master's thesis in Physics so I'll shut up now.

Oh, wait, one more item, if I wasn't in Band HR 5A my freshman year, I most likely would have ended up in HR 1M with Dave Taft. I never knew Dave in high school and didn't really meet him until Bocci nights at Chuck Giomuso's these last few years, but he stepped up and volunteered to re-hang the shutters on my house when I fell, dislocated and fractured my shoulder 8 weeks ago; our class has produced a lot of honorable Viking men.