

Five Star Message

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Here's a little story which underlines, not just for BA alumni but, for reasons I'll set forth below, especially for BA alumni, the importance of attending alumni functions. The impact that a single encounter at some event or another can have upon the life trajectories of the graduates may just be the watershed event of their lives.

Now, speaking just for myself, and speaking as a "lifer" at The Academy (1963-1976), my ABE/BA experience I've always considered to be The Watershed Event of my life, exceeding such things as college (Marquette University) or the myriad donning of the career hats I've worn in the decades since. The thing that most forged the 68-year-old man that I am today was my Academy experience. It made me different from others, and I have learned to stand tall (both literally and metaphorically) in that difference. But let me not imply that it's all been peaches and cream. The differences of outlook, worldview, perceptions and expectations that this institution inculcated in me, it turns out, after two separate failed attempts at marital bliss, have made of me a lock that's receptive only to a very specific key. Now, perhaps thirteen years at the Academy (don't ask) have made me too idealistic- my expectations of seeing the Five Stars reflected in everyone's character - too high. And so it was that I arrived, bedraggled by two divorces, at my first reunion of the Class of 1976. That was in 2003.

It may or may not, depending on the era of your BA graduation, surprise you to hear that in my graduating class there were, count them, only four young women, all of outstanding virtue, elegance, and intellect, and I, of questionable virtue, klutzy inelegance and vast reserves of social awkwardness, managed to date one of those four. That young lady was Cathy Oster. In Drama, we played the roles of Mr. and Mrs. Kirby in the play titled *You Can't Take It With You* (1936) by Kaufman and Hart. Ironically, or not, we were made up to appear as a late-middle-aged couple, greying and refined, and as such players often do, we translated our on-stage relationship into a date, then another. We were cute. Then we graduated. Cathy went her way (Duke University), and I went mine, and never the twain did meet again until that reunion in Brookfield in 2003.

Once again, a watershed event in my life occurred due solely to the crucible that was the Academy experience and what it did to both Cathy and me. The connection was immediate. The life experiences we shared with each other over all those years of living as Academy grads, negotiating the rest of the world, were like harmony arising from dissonance. Truly.

As I contemplate the contrast between the conflicted and unsettled life I lived from 1976 until 2003, and the serenity and cohesiveness of life after I rediscovered someone with that unique worldview and philosophy that really, as far as I can tell, comes only from the Academy, I can only thank God, from whom all blessings flow, and my stoic parents and teachers and beloved country. The Academy prayer is never far from my lips, and never has it been more heartfelt than since that evening when I reconnected after all those lifetimes with my Academy girl.

As one of the first classes to gather around the flagpole and now return as alumni, I look forward to watching Brookfield Academy's alumni events grow just as the school has. We had an opportunity just last month to attend the first annual BA all-alumni reunion, in the exact spot where I stood in 1963, just tall enough to look out through a wall of adult legs, crowded onto the front porch of that old farmhouse on the hill. My five-year-old impressions notwithstanding, there were likely only a handful of parents standing there that day. At this time in history more than any other, I think, any institution like our Academy, whether, like me, you think of her as ABE or as BA, deserves and needs our love and support. She's unique and made us unique. And if, like me, you've struggled a little bit with the wide, wide world of the madding crowd, then I prescribe your attendance at the very next reunion opportunity, or just make your own opportunity to visit and reminisce. You just never know what monumental change awaits.