

## The Website

By

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I'll never forget my 50<sup>th</sup> high school reunion. It happened the night before Super Storm Sandy hit the northeast, and while we were celebrating, ominous clouds were gathering that would wreak havoc on our region. But we were intent on enjoying the evening together as we re-kindled old friendships, and we were fortunate to have several of our former teachers present.

Another decade has passed since then, claiming friends and some of those teachers, but thanks to the introduction of a class website in 2012, we are able to communicate with one another. The credit for the development of the website goes largely to a former classmate, Vincent Gorman. Vinnie learned about technology during a six-year stint at IBM and retired as Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer after 32 years at Brookdale Community College.

Although many organizations cater to the nostalgic memories of older Americans by organizing reunions and websites, ours (under the aegis of Class Creator) has enabled the surviving members of our class to connect online with one another, share important life events like birthdays, mourn the passing of former teachers, friends and classmates, and celebrate the educational and athletic accomplishments of our grandchildren. We swap everything from news, recipes and photos to announcements that herald changes in our life-styles. For an annual cost of \$400, which we voluntarily contribute, and with the support of Vinnie and several other classmates who promote the website, we have been able to keep in touch with one another over the years. Perhaps our continued association was the result of having twelve new teachers at APHS when we attended. They were affable and encouraged camaraderie among us. Then, too, many of my high school peers were members of the Asbury Park Boys Club, an organization that was integrated and promoted interethnic relations—something we could use more today.

We just celebrated our 60<sup>th</sup> class reunion. It was attended by about a quarter of our class (over a third have passed). A team of classmates spent months identifying the whereabouts of their peers and encouraging them to attend the reunion, led by retired police detective, Bob Villapiano, retired teacher, Elizabeth Mela, and retired public utility worker, Oliver Jones. One of our hardest workers, Steve Klitzman, was, at the last minute, unable to attend because of a health issue. But we were fortunate to have one of our former Latin and English teachers, Dr. Lawrence Mione, attend the celebration at the Shore Club, which committee member Nancy Viati lined up and decorated for us. Earlier in the day Dr. Mione put many of us to shame as he outpaced the group on our early morning romp on the revitalized Asbury Park boardwalk.

Having a dedicated website allows us to survey former classmates. We found that many of the men entered a variety of occupations and professions—lawyers, physicians, educators, and 53 of the 191 respondents (there were 384 in our graduating class) entered the military. Several served in Vietnam, and a few made the ultimate sacrifice. Some of my classmates have made important contributions to the business, medical and scientific fields, while others became stalwarts in delivering services to their communities e.g. first responders. In addition to being housewives, many women entered what were

traditional female-dominated occupations at the time: teachers, secretaries, bookkeepers, service workers and nurses, and some broke through the barriers and became distinguished educators.

Although we have drifted apart geographically (one of our emcees, Jed Gaines, regularly makes the trip from his home in Hawaii, and others, like our co-emcee Lynn Frankel, managed to overcome the adversities of Hurricane Ian and joined us from their residences in Florida), the website provides us with an opportunity to re-connect on a regular basis and exchange information. Over 114,000 log-ins have occurred since its inception. And we have managed to stage class reunions every five to ten years despite the vagaries of age. Even though high school may have been a difficult time for some of my peers, having the website and class reunions provides us with a regular reminder that we can overcome our differences and celebrate our lives as we grow older. I'm looking forward to our 65<sup>th</sup>!

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