

COCOA HIGH CLASS REUNION
April 7, 2010

An Open Letter to the Cocoa High School Class of 1965:

I attended our class reunion a few weeks ago. It was successfully organized by a large team of committee members. In an inspired moment, the committee adopted a great slogan: "We are as good in our sixties as we were in the sixties." Is that not the best slogan you ever heard or not?

But that is not the reason I am writing you. I am writing because there were many of you who I missed speaking with and by way of apology, I must explain myself.

I have never been good at social functions. You may remember me as the quiet, studious type always on the edge of the group.

As I walked into our reunion gathering, something happened that made my shyness worse. I found myself staring at a sea of unknown faces. You had matured, but my mirror had lied to me all these years and never told me I had grown up. Each day I saw the same face of the 17-year-old who walked the halls of our alma mater.

Then I realized each of your mirrors had lied too. I knew this because of the surprised expressions each of you wore when your eyes met mine. I had matured and didn't know it.

But there was something else your former classmate saw. Each of you, in your own way, was successful. It was obvious in those faces. You had relaxed, genuine smiles. They were the sparkles left over from the many lights that made up your lives.

In that reflected light, I saw your spouses and children and grandchildren, even though I would never know them. Your careers, travels, close calls and a hundred thousand laughs illuminated your lives too. I am so glad for you.

On one wall, though, were the photographs of our classmates whose lights were extinguished along the way. They were once like us in flesh and bone. Their smiles never knew how short their journey would be.

However far we made it in life, I began to wonder if some of what we learned in high school helped us along the way. I think so.

For example, Mrs. Cunningham, our Algebra teacher, taught us that life is like a balanced equation. When things don't add up right the first time, try again.

Mr. Young, our History teacher, taught us that the past can teach us how to manage the future. Both the past and future contribute to the present.

Mr. Burgin, our English teacher, taught us that being professional and having fun are not mutually exclusive.

Coach McCoy, a bear of a man, taught us that while all men may be created equal, it is how they exercise what they have that makes the difference.

Mr. Valvanis, our Civics teacher, taught us that political debate can be honest without being divisive. We learned that politics is not religion, and doctrine is as dangerous as tyranny.

Then the reunion's disk jockey brought me back to the present.

He asked us to stand up and do the "Hokey Pokey." You remember, "You put your right foot in, you put your right foot out...."

Then it came to me. At our age and physical condition, it turns out that doing the Hokey Pokey is what it is all about.

Thanks for being my young friends.

Larry Johnston