

A Few Memories and Plea to Consider Supporting VASJ

Greg Lieb

What I remember from my time at St. Joe's is little of what I actually experienced. Most of my experiences I have forgotten, some special memories I have retained but each experience helped shaped who I became and who I am. Let's mention the most important thing first. Without St. Joe's I probably would not have married my wife (Carol Subel) who I asked to the Homecoming dance my Junior year as our first date. We have been married for 47 years, have four grown children and soon-to- be 9 grandchildren.

From the day I was born, my parents knew I would attend St. Joe's. You see I had four older brothers who went there and an older sister who went to Villa Angela. Every time I walked to or from Holy Cross, I passed St. Joe's and knew I one day I would be a Viking. I looked forward to it. I was fortunate to grow up about a half mile away from St. Joe's in a neighborhood called "Beachland". Most of the kids either went to St. Joe's or Collinwood. The era of the 60's was certainly before the time of IPHones, IPads and PC's which capture kids time with "Egames". Back then most of the kids in the neighborhood came down to the park near the lake to play the sport that was then in season. In the Spring and Summer it was baseball and basketball; Fall was football and Winter was hockey (Yes we had an ice rink in the park). That neighborhood produced a lot of high school athletes, and I played most of the sports, with football being my favorite.

I remember when I was in eighth grade some kids I competed against in the CYO league were getting scholarships to go to St. Ignatius, or St. Edward, or Cathedral Latin and I kind of wished I would be offered one too. But even if I had been offered a scholarship, I knew I would end up at St. Joe's (thank God). As it turns out, one of our rallying cries was "Beat the scholarship boys", and we did.

So, In June of 1966, I became a Freshman in the Class of 1970. I didn't know then, but later this class would be referred to (mostly by us) as the 'Greatest Class ever of St. Joe's'. My brother, Jim, was a Junior at the school and he looked after me to make sure I



wasn't bullied by too many upperclassman. However, I do remember I bought an elevator pass from a senior. He told me it was the last one! I recall that the school had an enrollment of nearly 2,000 boys and it was intimidating just to survive the crowded hallways when we had to switch classes. Although academics was not one of my strongest assets, I knew I had to get decent grades if I wanted to be eligible to play sports and if I was to realize a goal (my parents set for me) to attend college. So I developed a discipline to study at least 50% longer than what I thought an average student would spend studying for a test so that I could have a chance of getting a "B" or maybe even a rare "A". I kept that strategy throughout high school, college and throughout my working career.

Like I said I don't remember a whole lot, especially about the subjects that I took. However, these are the things I do remember. We only needed two years of math to graduate, but my father insisted I take four years of math. I argued the best I could to only take two years, but to no avail. That advice (requirement) proved to be one of the most beneficial things as I never would have gotten by calculus or quantitative methods in college or had become a CPA. So thanks to Brother Gensler, Tim Robertson, Frank Macuga and Greg Valko who taught me the principles of mathematics.

I also remember I had no brain capacity for sciences. By some miracle you could avoid Chemistry and Physics but you needed to take a science course. So, I took Physical Science and to this day I can tell the difference between cumulus and cirrus clouds and can even tell you what makes Nimbus Cumulus clouds (they contain rain droplets). Now that I enjoy boating and fishing I can read the weather forming on the lake and retreat to port when necessary. I can honestly tell you that one of the most beneficial courses I have ever taken in both high school and college was "Typing" or "Business Keyboard." I believe Mr. Srp was the teacher. In any case, I learned how to type without looking at the keyboard and to use all my fingers to strike the appropriate keys. I was really stressed out when you had to type 20 correctly spelled words a minute to pass the course. Typing was easy but spelling was the challenge! Well, I think I actually got around 30 WPM. However, I learned a life-time skill that really came in handy with the computer age and the use of keyboards. I was not a one finger pecker! I remember you also needed to take a foreign language, so I choose Spanish because I thought French was a sissy language. To this day, I can say "Me llamo is Gregorio, commo se llamo?" Which means "My name is Greg, what is your name?" Or better yet "Yo hablas Ingles" which means "Do you speak English". That proved handy when I later retired to Florida and most everyone speaks Spanish.

I remember the discipline of the school. I got my share of demerits for being late to class, or in the halls without a hall pass or any of another dozen reasons. I remember the life values I was taught in a religious setting and what it meant to have school spirit and pride. I remember developing the courage to ask a girl to dance at one of our many mixers with the girls of Notre Dame, Regina, Villa-Angela and other surrounding schools.

While what I learned in the classroom from the very dedicated teachers was invaluable to my development, what I learned on the football field, basketball court or running track from my coaches, teammates and competitors was equally if not of greater importance to my development. Although I was the QB on a very good Holy Cross team, my first lesson on the football field was to switch positions once I saw Bob Bobrowski, Mike Campolieti and Ken Polke as Frosh QB's. I quickly became a receiver and linebacker. My coaches did their best to prepare us to compete and to win with dignity. That taught me total dedication to the task, keeping in shape, trusting teammates, being able to take harsh, constructive criticism (coaching), listening to directions, and wanting to improve. In other words, giving it your all. To this day, I tell people that one of my fondest memories is being a member of a football team that went undefeated through its four years in high school compiling a record of 33-0-1 (we did tie Channel 6-6 our freshman year). I regret Ohio did not have the State playoff system back then; it would have been interesting to see if we could win a State title, like our Cross Country teams had done. Some of my closest friends to this day are high school classmates (hopefully, they know who they are).

I remember the pep rallies we used to have in the gym to spur on our sport teams before a big game. Coaches and a few players would talk, the band would play our fight song, and the students would fill the seats and cheer. The best one was the bond fire before the Euclid game (normally our first game of the season). Our senior year, we beat a very tough Euclid team 14-12. We ended up undefeated that year and #1 in the Greater Cleveland and that was the only game Euclid lost. I need to tell a story about Coach Gutbrod, whom I admired as an authority figure and person second only to my father while I was in high school. I believed he genuinely wanted to get the best out of me, both on and off the field. Well, it must have been some 25 years after I graduated from St. Joe's when I was returning from a business trip via Newark Airport. As I was walking the terminal, I saw Coach Gutbrod walking in the opposite direction and I yelled out his name. He turned and immediately said "Greg, how are you doing?" I don't know how coaches do it. They coach thousands of kids over their long careers and somehow, they remember a name of someone they haven't seen in a very long time. Well I can tell you it certainly surprised me and frankly made me feel very privileged to have been coached by such a great man.

I am so thankful for all of those who volunteer time to ensure we have our class reunions. I remember, the 10th, the 20th, the 25th (I don't remember the 30th) and I fondly recall the 40th. It was the 40th when I was part of the reunion committee which enabled us to meet with school administrators and better understand the challenges the school was facing. I (and I believe many of us on the committee) learned that the school enrollment had dropped below 300 students and for several years the school had to rely on Diocesan loans to meet its operating budget. The school was in danger of closing, just like the fate of so many of the other Catholic schools. As part of our 40th reunion, we set a glass gift goal of \$100,000 to be raised, which we knew would be a class record and we hoped would be an inspiration for other classes

to try to beat. In addition, we organized the initial “Classic Mixer” as an annual fundraiser for the school. We were successful in meeting our class gift goal and with establishing the annual “Classic Mixer” fundraiser. VASJ has continued with the “Classic Mixer” fundraiser and this event has raised well over \$1 million since its inception. This in addition to the schools excellent educational efforts to increase enrollment (now about 470 students has enabled St. Joe’s to become self-sufficient in meeting its operating budget and no longer reliant on Diocesan funding. It was this 40th reunion that really reengaged me with the school and some of my high school classmates. For the large part, this core group of dedicated classmates has remained involved over the last ten years leading up to the planning for our 50th reunion (delayed until September of 2021) due to COVID. In that planning, Captain Kevin Flynt set an astonishing goal of raising \$250,000 for our class gift. Thanks to the leadership of Kevin Flynt, Don Dailey, Neil McCormick, Peter Apicella and others, and thanks to the many classmates that committed to make a donation, Don announced that we surpassed our goal and raised over \$270,000. Certainly the Class of 1970 deserves to be tagged “The Greatest Class Ever”.

Despite all of this good work and progress, VASJ is still very dependent on alumni to secure the future of the school. So I am so thankful for all of our classmates that have made it a priority to help financially support the school. But, I want to share my reaction to those classmates and other alumni that say “St. Joe’s is not the same school” as when I went there and then use that as a reason to not to support it. Well, I believe it is the same school as when we were there because its Mission Statement is still intact. VASJ mission is to prepare its students for college by teaching Ursuline and Marianist traditions and by being dedicated and committed to the spiritual, academic and personal growth of each student. While the school’s demographics have certainly changed (tell me what hasn’t changed over 50 years), it’s still achieving an excellent record of graduating its students and sending them onto the next level of education.

This is compared to the Cleveland School System which has a long history of failing to meet academic standards set by the state and graduates less than half of its students. VASJ provides a real alternative to its students, many of which are drawn from the Cleveland area, and provides them with the tools they need to pursue further education and life skills to enable them to become contributing members of society. This is why I continue to support the school, because they are fulfilling its mission, which I believe in, and giving these kids a chance. If you have been a supporter in the past, I thank you. If you have not, I hope you take another look at VASJ and hopefully, it will become one of your priorities to support. Go Vikings!

Best Regards,

Greg Lieb, proudly a member of the Class of ‘70