

“The Times They Are A-Changin’ “

Four Decades at George

Preface

My apologies to Bob Dylan, but it seemed to fit.

First of all, I am the accidental historian for the Class of 65. I recently received a call from Truly (Hix) Callaway, because I was “missing”. In fact, I wasn’t MIA, I had just maintained a 40 year low profile in terms of the Class of 65. By the time the conversation was over, I found myself with a new “project”. Having spent 20+ years of my life directly associated with GW (3 in the 60’s, and 18 as a teacher), I guess I had spent more time at George than any other member of the class of 65, and got the job by default. For those looking for a day by day, year by year history of our Alma mater since 1965, I apologize in advance. This is the Readers Digest version.

1965-2005

During the first decade beyond our joyous graduation in June of 1965, there would be some major changes in the way Denver Public Schools, and indeed, George Washington High School did business. Under court order, the world of DPS would change from that which we had known. The changes would have some rough spots, and George certainly had a difficult period of adjustment.

By the time the second decade after our graduation began, the Denver Public Schools, and dear old George seemed to accept the change, and this period saw less turmoil, and stress throughout the system. It was toward the end of this period, that I returned to George, this time as a teacher. By this time, I had taught in DPS for over ten years. Although the school was certainly much different than the one we had left, it was good to be back! By the mid 80’s, there were still a handful of teachers at the school who had been there when we graduated, but most had moved on.

The third decade since our graduation, once again saw a major change at GW. It was during this period, that the International Baccalaureate program was started at the school. Vaughan Aandahl, who was a math teacher when we were students, was instrumental in bringing this fabulous program to DPS, and specifically George Washington High School. Sadly, Vaughan passed away before the program really took off. Long time GW faculty member, Suzanne (Suzi) Geimer has been the director of the program from its inception, and under her able guidance, it has flourished. This prestigious academic program seemed to elevate the entire learning atmosphere during this period of time. The IB students certainly have made enormous contributions to the school as a whole. Having spent 13 years teaching in the IB program, my bias may be showing!

During the last decade, once again things have been slowly changing at George, and indeed system wide, as increasing demands run head on into decreasing budgets. Since I retired in 2001, the faculty at GW has decreased about 25%, but there has not been a commensurate decrease in the student population. We have the CSAP test as well. One reality that has had an impact on the entire education system, is wide open, and fierce competition for students. I equate this situation to that which those in business understand all too well. George Washington no longer has the only IB program in the state, let alone, the metro area. Having substituted at George until 2004, I noted things had changed in the brief time since 2001. As I always told my students, “change is the name of the game”. The one thing we can be sure of, is that the next four decades will see even more change at George. Not that we have changed in the last four decades!

During this period, GW has been under the leadership of 9 different principals: Rollie Wright
Bill Shumacher
Jack Beardshear

Bill Parsons
Larry Corsa Ann Casey
Dr. Sylvia Smith
Vivian (VJ) Johnston
Mario Williams (current)

As a teacher, I served under all of the principals from Larry Corsa through Mario Williams. I also served under Bill Schumacher while I was at Place.

George-The building and grounds

I thought I would include some information on the physical changes at school.

I know some of you may have toured the building during previous reunions, and have some idea as to the changes up to that time. As with the "school", the building has been undergoing constant changes for the last 40 years. Some of the changes are simply due to aging, and not graceful, like us. As you know, the mini lecture space etc. behind the library has been transformed several times during this period. At the present time, this area is divided into the school store, audio visual storage, a teacher work area, and a small classroom. The third floor underwent changes, when the Computer Magnet program was at George. The library is now the Elmer A. Albery Library, the North

lobby is the Ann B. Casey Spirit Lobby, and the stage is dedicated to Nancy Priest. The "West Wing"(not that one) has undergone major changes, including the recent addition of new space in the subbasement, for science classrooms. A number of classrooms have been converted into science labs on the first floor and basement. ROTC has added

new classroom space in an old storage area next to the boy's locker room, and a weight lifting room has been added across from the same locker room.

The grounds have undergone some changes in the last few years, as well. The baseball field has changed position, and a new softball field has been added in the name of a now forgotten Rockies pitcher. The parking lots, both upper and lower, have also undergone numerous minor changes.

My final thoughts concerning the building are somewhat editorial in nature. By the mid 90's the building was really showing its age and the signs of years of neglect. The cockroaches had taken over, and it was very sad for me to walk in every morning during that period. As a member of the COM (yes another one of those changes) at that time, I was part of a group of people who were very distressed by the condition of the physical plant. Changes were instituted, and the building has improved since that time. New tile

on the floors, and paint on the walls, along with new ceiling tiles, have been helpful. The custodial staff is a little more attentive, and the population of our "little friends" has decreased. There is still room for improvement. Having visited other older school buildings, I know that age is no excuse for neglect. I was just recently in the building, and it depends on where you are, as to the conditions you might observe.

Finally, one of the toughest changes to witness over the last 4 decades, is the decline in school spirit, or just plain school pride. Having spent the last two decades in the halls of GW, and attending many various functions, the hardest thing for me, as an alum, is the lack of "school spirit". I believe this boils down to a lack of community, and a sense of identifying with school as a focal point during this period of one's life. The whole atmosphere just seems different. Obviously this isn't just a situation at George, and certainly isn't epidemic, but somewhat disconcerting for someone who has had such a long association with the school. One can note that attendance at athletic events is somewhat "sparse", except basketball, which is well attended. All School Stadium isn't even filled for Homecoming! I believe this is due to many factors. We have to consider that the student population is about 1,000 less than it was in 1965. Ultimately, as I previously stated, "change IS the name of the game". Alas, its been a long journey from 1965 to 2005!