

Memories of Kirksville Junior High and High School

By
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Junior High Memories

I moved to Kirksville in seventh grade. I had a growing spurt that summer and clumsily walked into Sally Bailey's Home Room number 205 and sat down, feeling as conspicuous as I was gangly. Everyone knew each other. I knew no one. Finally, LeRoy Rose spoke to me. "Where are you from?" "I'm from Iowa," I replied. Then he turned to the rest of the guys listening in. "They sure grow them big up in Iowa. You must be corn-fed." For the rest of the year, that became my nickname — Corn-Fed Moore. It wasn't one of my favorites.

In seventh grade I discovered girls. Before then, I thought they were just soft boys. The Riley's Master Market free show on Saturday morning became the high point of the week. My first movie date was with Diane Crawford. The first time we sat together I summoned up the courage to put my left arm around her. The trouble was I didn't know how to gracefully remove it so it stayed there on top of the seat throughout the previews, the cartoon, and the main feature. By the time the lights came on, my left arm was totally numb. Everyone got up and so did I, but my arm stayed there glued to the top of Diane's chair. Or so it felt. I had to pick my left arm up with my right and carry it out of the theater. The feeling returned about Sunday noon.

After class or basketball practice, we used to walk up to the Korner Kupboard and buy a Pepsi. We threw a fit when the price went from six to seven cents. George, the proprietor, was — in a word — tight. We used to accuse him of charging for wear and tear on the cash register.

On snowy winter days, we would hook cars to get a ride home. As the unsuspecting motorist came to a stop, two or three of us would squat down, grab the rear bumper, and slide along behind the car. Occasionally, we'd hit a bare spot of pavement. Other than being totally dangerous and dumb, it was great fun.

One of the genuine highlights of Junior High was going to the Tiger Den on the one night of the week we were allowed to transgress the high school domain. I recall falling in love with Dixie Lyle to the strains of Wheel of Fortune by Kaye Starr. Typical of relationships in those days, it lasted all week. In retrospect, my most chagrining moment at the Tiger Den turned out to be the best. One evening the guys were all learning to smoke in the restroom. Succumbing to peer pressure, along with

all the others, I lit up. Someone, whose name I don't remember, looked at me and said with disgust, "Moore, you don't know how to smoke. You're _ _ _ _-lipping it." Well, I put that cigarette in the toilet, ran out, and vowed not to embarrass myself again. I never did. That insult undoubtedly kept me from becoming a smoker and, to this day, I am thankful to whoever it was.

During the summer, we used to sneak into Ophelia Parish to shoot baskets in the gym. When we got bored doing that, we would roam the halls looking for any contraband that might be on hand. On one memorable occasion we (I think it was Pete Smith, Carl Rose, Terry Lantz and me) were wandering the darkened and deserted halls of the school. I always looked for empty pop bottles because I could redeem them for two cents a piece at any grocery store. I had found about half a dozen and stuffed them into the waistband of my sweat-pants. As we wandered down the halls, Pete tried the door to the administrative office and, to our surprise, found it open. Of course we went in to snoop around. In a few minutes there we were. Pete was sitting with his feet up on the desk, Terry was rummaging through a file cabinet, and Carl and I were just hanging out, when the inner door to the principal's office burst open and Mrs. Barnes appeared. "What are you boys doing here?" she demanded. At that point my fickle buddies deserted the premises at warp speed and I would have been right behind them but the pop bottles that had been in my waistband slid down inside my sweat pants. It's hard to move, much less run, with six pop bottles clanging together in your shorts. I received the full measure of admonishment from Mrs. Barnes and to add further to my embarrassment, she made me reach down and, one by one, retrieve all the pop bottles from my pants.

Most of us never realized that the budget for sports in both Junior High and High School was pretty much zero. That was the reason our parents had to volunteer to drive the teams to the away games. Occasionally, we went by bus and one such occasion was in ninth grade when we went to play Trenton in basketball. The school bus had nothing resembling shocks, so every bump and rut in the road jarred us until our teeth chattered. It was cold outside so the heater was cranked up to "high." Bouncing and sweating up hill and down hill on Route 6 westward out of Kirksville made everyone a little

queasy. About five miles past Milan, Carl Rose had had enough. “Stop the bus, I’m going to be sick,” he declared. He rose from his seat and proceeded up the aisle as the bus rolled to a stop--unfortunately, not soon enough. Carl’s lunch of weenies and beans were strewn from one seat to the next all the way to the front of the bus. After that, he was fine and he came back and set down. Regrettably, the rest of the team was not. I was just glad I didn’t have to clean up the bus.

It is no news to any of us that in the Kirksville of the fifties you had to invent your own entertainment. There were no teen centers, recreational fields, or anything such as kids have today. So, playing pranks became one of our methods of self-entertainment. Halloween was particularly notable for such antics. There were many standard pranks that were played but one standby was to place a quantity of cow dung (normally quite plentiful around our town) in a paper bag, place it on a front porch, light it, ring the doorbell, and run like hell. The gambit intended that the person who answered the door would see the bag on fire and stomp on the bag to put the fire out. There would be stomping, splattering, cursing, and great merriment for all but the stomper. On one chilly Halloween night, a gang of us (names are withheld to protect the guilty) embarked on such a mission. The only problem was we had no cow dung. Not to be thwarted by that logistic limitation, one of the group (whose name shall definitely be withheld) volunteered, and soon we had our bag of stuff. Up to the house we went, laughing and giggling at the anticipated result. The bag was lit, the doorbell was rung, off we ran, and the door was answered. Unfortunately, the fire went out. There was no stomping, no splattering, no nothing. However, even more unfortunately, the little old lady who answered the door decided it must be some kind of present so — to see what it might be, she stuck her hand down inside the bag.

Other Junior High memories include — spin the bottle games and scavenger hunts at Judy Simpson’s birthday parties — playing the pinball machine up on your toes at The Huddle across from Ophelia Parish — Lowell Gosser dancing the Dipsey Doodle at the Tiger Den. . Larry Ratcliff singing “Unforgettable”— swaying to “Hernando’s Hideaway” at sock hops where the boys shot baskets with the oatmeal box and the girls danced with each other — beating Quincy twice in our freshman year at basketball —

Senior High Memories

On Senior Skip Day, many of us went to the lake at Thousand Hills State Park to picnic and water ski. I had

water skied before, but had never taken off from a dock. “How difficult could it be,” I thought. The boat was revving its engine, the crowd was cheering, I signaled that I was ready. The rope snapped taut, jerked me off of the dock, and I staggered a bit but remained upright. Confident and smiling, I waved to the admiring crowd on the bank. The only problem was that my swimming suit was dangling from a nail on the dock. Clad only in what was left of my jock strap, I turned loose of the tow rope and sunk ignominiously into the lake.

No doubt sports were among my most cherished high school memories. Football — with an undefeated season when we were sophomores and winning the conference our senior year, stand out in my memory bank. Track — throwing the discus against a guy who went to the 1960 Olympics was also memorable. He only beat me by 45 feet. Not possessing the basketball prowess of a Tindall, Smith, or Rose, my game was characterized by mostly just showing up. As was written sometime later, “Johnny Moore played fullback, end, and tackle in football and roughly the same positions in basketball.”

Bill LaCore was the fastest sprinter in our class. We called him “the sheik” but I never knew why. He would have won more races but he ran with his head down so he might start in lane one and finish in lane six.

Most of us remember our first car. Mine was a 1939 Ford that cost \$100 and came with a floor stick-shift between the seats. Actually it wasn’t mine. A. E. Hamilton (Class of ‘56) and I co-opted in the purchase and operation. His contribution was to drive and mine was to pay for the gas. Nevertheless, it constituted “wheels” and we used it to get to football practice, double date, and enjoy the freedom that came with cruising the square, the Silver Star drive-in, Hartsells, and anyplace else you could get on 75 cents worth of gas (because that was the most we ever had to put in the tank). It found its way throughout most of Adair County and could find New Street in Kirksville with its lights off. I didn’t know much about cars then (still don’t) and I didn’t know what a rod was. I did find out what it meant to throw one, because that is what we did on the way to Brashear one summer evening. As we walked back to town, we could never imagine the nostalgia that event would engender fifty years later. Route six became the final destination of that old ’39 Ford and all the memories it held went with it to the junk yard.

My second and last car was a 1952 Plymouth Cranbrook. Some of you may remember it as the only car you could floorboard and turn any corner in town. Nevertheless, it saw more action in and around Adair

County than an automobile should and by the time I was ready to leave for college, it had been in two wrecks, had four bald tires, and used a quart of oil for every two gallons of gas. After I left, my Dad bought replacement body parts from the junk yard, repainted it, shined up the chrome, put on four new tires with boots in them, and sold it to his friend, Mr. Royce at the Royce Used Car lot. The unwitting purchaser subsequently drove it to Macon but, on the way, used three quarts of oil and blew two tires. Mr. Royce and my dad were never very close after that.

Stella Kallenbach was one of my most unforgettable teachers. I still visualize her walking into the classroom with a stride that looked like she still had manure between her toes. In American History, she invariably would give us a ten minute assignment and then excuse herself from the room. Rumor had it that she retired to the teacher's lounge for a nip from a flask she kept in her purse. It was never confirmed but she usually returned happier than when she left. The best memory of her return was the day that Doug Conyers mixed iron sulfide with hydrochloric acid behind the radiator. The odor of the resulting hydrogen sulfide gas smelled like rotten eggs but not as fragrant. Miss Kallenbach had taken a longer than usual break that day and by the time she returned the class had become acclimated to the gas and we were somewhat composed. As was her custom, she took three giant strides into the room before coming to an abrupt halt. With a look of surprise on her face, she whirled around and asked, "Who besides me smells the sewers?" Well, that brought the class to reality and an uproar of laughter ensued. Feigning ignorance, several of us answered "What smell?" Eventually, I told her that Mr. Fink's chemistry class was making hydrogen sulfide gas in the lab and probably the wind currents swirling around the school carried the odor from the other side of the building around to her room. It was total B.S., however, amid much giggling and crude comments, she finally bought into the fairy tale. My final memory of that day was watching her go back to the teacher's lounge for a refresher.

Robinson Field was the place where young men were tested and dreams were born. It was where farm boys learned the game of football and where city boys learned how tough the farm boys could be. Grass was waist high at the first practice in August. By October, the grass was gone, the turf was chewed up, and when the ground was frozen, it was like playing on concrete rubble. Every time you hit the ground, it hit you back.

Robinson Field House was more like a barn than a

house. It had two rooms; one for the seniors and one for the lower classmen, who weren't allowed into the senior area. "How nice it must be in the senior room?" I thought as a freshman because the lower class area was a jock strap, toe-jam-smelling, dump. The first time I was allowed in the senior room I found out how wrong I was. It was an even worse dump than the under class area, mainly because it had the only shower, except that it wasn't used as a shower because there were no toilets. I really can't remember what the under classmen did to satiate the call of nature because there were no toilets nor showers in their area. Our mothers never found out that kind of stuff or we wouldn't have been allowed to play. We were supposed to take our practice jerseys home and wash them. Most guys just stood them up in the corner where, soaked with enough sweat and Missouri clay, they would stand on their own by mid-August. I often wonder why we put up with the conditions of Robinson Field House, but it was rite of passage and, as John Spainhower once told me, before we had Robinson Field House, the team dressed in the middle of the field. I guess we were lucky.

I would say that John Spainhower had more impact on me than anyone else during those years. I suspect that I am not alone among KHS grads in that belief. He taught us that life, like sports, is hard and you need certain qualities to succeed. One such quality was toughness. In his inimitable way, he implored us to hit the line "hell-bent and flashing" on every play. To not do so was "plumb pathetic." From him I learned that mental toughness was even more important than physical toughness and it helped get me through the rigors of life in the military and one war. One was enough, thank you.

Mardi Gras was the single most memorable event of my KHS years. Though we didn't realize it at the time, Mardi Gras served each of us in many ways. It brought the class together in a common effort. It taught us to be resourceful, imaginative, hard working, and larcenous. It combined the spirit of competition with the thrill of victory when it happened and the agony of defeat when it didn't. Mostly, it helped us appreciate the joy of being part of something bigger than ourselves. I doubt it was intentional by the school, but Mardi Gras made us better people.

There were, of course, funny incidents along the way. I cite the random collection of scrap iron as an example. When everything that was available for donation was taken, things such as farm implements and construction materials became fair game. At one time the class of '56 had enough rakes, harrows, and reapers to

hold their own used implement sale. “Come in and buy back your old plow,” was their battle cry. And a true battle it was, particularly during our junior year when the seniors retrieved an old ship boiler from the Chariton River bed. Just as they were dragging it up the bank and loading it on a flat bed truck, we juniors showed up with written permission from the land owner to claim the boiler. I don’t think they’ve ever forgiven us for that coup.

Another highlight of Mardi Gras was the infamous cake sale our senior year. We were behind in the collection race and needed a major infusion of cash. What could bring in several hundred dollars? After all, the Adair County scrap iron was already all stolen. We hit on a cake sale. Three hundred cake mixes were purchased from Carl Rose’s father’s wholesale food company at sixty cents each. The idea was to have class members bake these cakes, add icing, and we would sell them door-to-door. The problem was that the resulting cake tasted only slightly better than the cardboard box it came in. So, our mothers came to the rescue and either added eggs, sugar, flour, and milk to the mix or baked another one from scratch. At the end, we were selling them for \$2 a piece to the chagrin of many mothers who said the ingredients they added cost more than that. Nevertheless, it was an entrepreneurial venture that had great success and almost made us a winner. But regardless of the amount collected, we all became winners for having participated in that February ritual we called

Mardi Gras.

Other Senior High memories are: running wind sprints at Robinson Field — gamma globulin shots after George Lehr got polio our sophomore year — playing the rest of the football games undefeated in his honor and finishing the season, ranked number two in the state . . . putting “Red Hot” in Freddie Potter’s jock strap . . . getting stuck in the graveyard and having to call my girl friend’s father to get pulled out — eating at Macon on the way back from away games — tick-tacking Janet Snyder’s house just outside her bedroom — making two free throws to win the game against Bloomfield (my only two points of the game)— throwing water balloons out of the hotel window in Chicago on a Masque and Gavel field trip (I think I just watched)— crowning Sara as the Homecoming Queen our senior year — crowning Charlene and Laverne as Mardi Gras King and Queen our junior year — not crowning Leona and Bill our senior year — Kenny Smith, who gave his all to teach us values and leadership — Sally Bailey, who taught me much more than English — there are more, many more, mostly personal memories that will remain that way.

Most of all I remember the individuals of the Class of 1957. Kids who welcomed a gawky, corn-fed transplant from Iowa; kids who accepted me as one of their own; and kids who gave me the genuine love and support we all needed to grow from immature adolescents into young adults. To each of you, I say thanks and I treasure your friendship along with the memories.