

For the Clearfield High School Class of 1968

From classmate, Bob Gross, in gratitude for many friendships and memories; to those living and those who've passed on

We've had a tremendous nostalgic opportunity the past couple of days to become re-acquainted with old friends, and relive many school year memories – the good, bad, and the not so good. We've also had a tremendous chance to catch up on each other and on our families.

We're once again reminded that **each** of us has very distinct and individual memories of growing up in the 50's and the 60's and of the school years we shared together. But we're also reminded of how many we have to share.

We're all now referred to as "Aging Boomers". Wow, just what we've always want to be – "aging"! Maybe we should be thought of as being in "middle middle age". But some labels are not self-chosen, and most of us are happy just to be called something!

One thing we know for certain, however, is that we are the children of the “Greatest Generation”, those men and women who were born or grew up during the Great Depression, who, along with their families and loved ones, met its greatest economic hardships, and later met liberty’s call to face the greatest calamity of modern times, World War II. To us, they left us their lessons of hard work, frugality, loyalty, perseverance, and patriotism. Many are gone now, and more are leaving us daily. Yet, they leave us a rich legacy that we must never forget, and we owe it to them to pass on their lessons to our children, grandchildren, and generations to come.

Some of us were born in the last year of the ‘40s. The events of the ‘40s would shape, shade, and color the last half of the twentieth century and, most certainly, all of our lives. **Most of us**, however, were born in the first year of the decade known as the “Fabulous ‘50s”, a decade initiated by the outbreak of yet another hot war – this one in far away Korea. The ‘50s were dominated by a growing civil rights movement, the escalation of a Cold War and global arms

race, and with it, a threat and fear of nuclear annihilation which would hover over our generation until we were nearly in our 40s.

Yet, the 1950's also represented, as historians are fond of telling us, a rest stop in the cataclysmic events of the before and the after of the 20th Century. During that decade, we experienced hope and prosperity, tranquility and affordability, a raised national living standard for most, and the rise of the modern age of technology.

There seemed to be unlimited possibilities, heights to be climbed, and through our childhood lenses, an innocence resonating with the sights and sounds of family, loved ones and friends. Memories of events that affected or touched our lives during the years that we spent in various grade schools remind us that the '50's are said to be that last era of real complacency before the eruption of changes that were to be at last ushered in by the tumultuous cacophony of events of the 1960's.

Many of us remember the smiling grandfatherly president of the 1950's, a larger than life hero from that most terrible of all wars, who presided over the

America and provided us an image of the way all presidents should look and smile. Many of us may vaguely recall hearing the news announcing to a shocked America and world, in 1957, that the Soviets had won the initial battle of the space race by launching a basketball size orbiting spacecraft called Sputnik.

The economic ascendancy of American prosperity was in the air as we came to dominate the world's economic stage. Air transportation came of age. Communications and telecommunications advanced with the speed of lightening, a precursor of things to come. Our childhood generation was the first generation of children to grow up with an electronic babysitter, as television came of age.

Speaking of telecommunications, some of us remember a certain Sunday in the mid-50s, when, together with our families, we watched as Ed Sullivan introduced a young, slick-haired Mississippi-born singer who swayed and wiggled as teenage girls shrieked, swooned and fainted. He became known as the King - and changed the face of music for our generation and all time,

preparing for the rocketing popularity of the music of our generation – rock and roll. Others would follow, including a group of four mopped-hair British singers who also appeared on the Sullivan show some years later.

Remember our first toys - coon skin caps, Barbie dolls, brightly colored hula hoops, games of all kinds, our first bikes or sleds, or our first toy soldier or 6-shooters?

There were our childhood television favorite programs - "Fury", "Sky King," "My Friend Flicka," "Superman," "Howdy Doody," "The Mickey Mouse Club," "I Love Lucy," and "Leave It To Beaver," and our parents – usually after we were sent to bed - watched the "Milton Berle Show," "Your Show of Shows," "The Alcoa Hour." And families gathered around the sets for programs like "Gunsmoke," "Ozzie and Harriet," "Father Knows Best," and, later, "Bonanza," "Perry Mason," and popular sit-coms.

We also remember when it was tradition for us to bring small transistor radios to our classrooms and listen to the Fall Baseball Classic, which was then

still largely played during the daytime and still played in what still seemed to be late summer!

As the 1960's began, we were in the 5th grade, and during the fall, we were witness to television's first presidential debates and the subsequent election of a youthful, urbane president, who, along with his charming wife and family, ushered in the age of Camelot. With youthful exuberance, the new president talked of the grand hopes for the new decade, filled with promise and seemingly unlimited possibilities. He wanted to get the country moving again in a new era of action, change, and service. He spoke of defending America and her allies, and our "willingness to pay any price or bear any burden" in defense of freedom. He pledged to put an American on the surface of the moon by the end of that decade, a pledge ultimately fulfilled. In the early '60s we sat in our classrooms enthralled as astronauts Alan Shephard and John Glenn were among the first American heroes to explore the vast reaches of outer space. Later, at the end of the decade, we thrilled along with mankind everywhere when Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin setting foot on the surface of the moon with "a small

step for man and a large leap for mankind.” The 60's were both the beginning and the peak of America's fascination with space exploration.

Yet, with all of the excitement ushered in by America's space race with the Soviets, another, more sobering and terrifying even occurred in the fall of 1962. The world came as close as it ever was to come to the horror of nuclear annihilation in October of that year during the Cuban missile crisis when America and the Soviet Union stood eyeball to eyeball on the brink of nuclear war, and then stood down.

The America of the '60's came to be dominated by two overarching historical themes: the civil rights movement and the war in Vietnam.

The explosive and often tragic march of the civil rights movement found new life in the '50s when several pivotal events ushered in the movement of the '60s. A young woman named Rosa Parks refused to go to the back of a bus in Montgomery, Alabama and was arrested. The U.S. Supreme Court reversed the separate but equal doctrine which had been the law of the land for over

fifty years when it ruled in *Brown v. the Board of Education* that separate could not, did not and would not mean equal.

And, across the globe, as the French were defeated and retreated in the late '50s from their former Indo-Chinese empire, America stepped into what it perceived to be a breach in the bridgehead to stop the spread of Communism. First, with a build-up of American military advisors sent to advise the fledgling South Vietnamese government's military, and later with the Gulf of Tonkin incident in 1964 serving as a pretext, America would engage in a massive escalation of U.S. troops in Vietnam, as we became the principle antagonist in an undeclared war to stop communism that we would ultimately stop by stepping away from after we lost nearly 55,000 American lives.

Those events would permeate, above all else, America's national landscape and state of mind during our teenage years and beyond.

In 1962, we started junior high school, all of us together in one school for the first time. Each of us can recall the trauma of adolescence, accompanied by

its changes in our bodies, minds, voices, and those eruptions of skin warfare that would plague us for years to come.

In the middle of our eighth grade year, America's sense of innocence and our own individual sense of security would be drastically altered by one immensely horrific and historical tragedy. No one among us will ever forget what he was doing, where she was, what he or she thought, or the awful sense of personal and national loss that we each felt when we heard the tragic news from Dallas on November 22, 1963. For many of us, that day marks the day in our lives from which we mark a personal sense of loss, when all world, national, local and personal events seemed suspended surrealistically in time. Its tragic legacy would sear the remaining years of the 60's and beyond.

Yet, within months, as salve its mourning, the youth of America would welcome, with an outpouring of national hysteria, the onslaught of Beatle mania as a way of supplicating itself with a balm to heal our national heartache.

In the fall of 1964, we separated into two junior high schools as we completed the 9th grade and a year later we reunited, once again, as we started our high school years as sophomores.

At the same time, around the country, questions were being posed about America's values, the "system", and commitments we had made across the seas. That was not new. America questioned herself after each of the previous tragic wars of this century. What was new was the manner in which we challenged ourselves. A counter-culture began to develop. Yet, as high schoolers we were – for the most part – sheltered from such events.

Most of us enjoyed the things we were supposed to enjoy about high school sports, school events, dating, not dating, homework, no homework, a first car, or not having a car. Many of us faced our own sense of mortality for the first time just after our sophomore year, when one of our favorite classmates and good friends lost her life in a tragic motorcycle accident.

It seems now that in all-too-brief span of three years, we moved from our sophomore year, through our junior year, and on to the conclusion of our senior year of high school.

And as we moved toward the culmination of our high school years, we began to look ahead toward our individual futures, contemplating more of what lay ahead in our worlds and in the world at large. Some of us were already thinking about plans to start families; others were planning on continuing their education after high school; others were planning on serving our country; others were planning on starting careers; and still others had no plans whatsoever beyond where they might hang out when the upper parking lot was no longer available to them.

And, then less than mid-way through our senior year, the calendar page moved forward from 1967, and we rang in a momentous new year.

1968 --oh, **what** a year!

Commentators are fond of saying that 1968 had the vibrations of an earthquake about it. America shuddered with a mind-numbing sequence of

tossing and turning events of that year. History cracked open with the separation of generations and generational values. Suppressed bats of history came flapping out of the deepest caves, carrying with them dark surprises. American culture and politics ventured into dangerous regions - in ascents of new enlightenment for some and rapid descents into quicksands of historical apocalypse for others. The year was monumental and it was messy. It produced vivid theater and reverberates still in the American mind. The year began with promise and hope and yet a sense of darkening shadows. The country was enmeshed in its longest and most unpopular war. The civil rights movement was evolving and changing - and all amidst a growing clamor from many, who excoriated our leaders with demands either to change or make room for those who would effect change.

Americans and our post-war psyche of triumph and power received a thunderous jolt on January 23, when the North Koreans defiantly captured an American Navy vessel, the Pueblo, and all of her crew, and held them brutally captive for most of that year, as we watched, seethed, and fumed helplessly.

Then, just a few days later, violating its own truce and cease fire, the North Vietnamese launched the Lunar New Year Tet Offensive on January 30, attacking, overrunning and capturing towns or places whose names jar yet our memories - Hue, De Nang, Saigon – before being thrown back and defeated by American forces.

Yet, the Tet Offensive, while a defeat for the North Vietnamese, resonated with Americans as a defeat and proved to be a turning point in America's will to fight as it served as a stark and vivid realization to many Americans, that we were, perhaps, involved in a quagmire of resources and manpower that was sapping the strength, youth, and vitality of post-war America. More and more Americans, young and old, began to question the wisdom of America's commitment to Vietnam, especially after Walter Cronkite, America's "trusted uncle" – in a moment of journalistic history - challenged America's role in Asia on one of his nightly news broadcasts.

Thereafter, the events of 1968 spewed forth historical events in a continuous and mind-numbing chaotic eruption:

- On March 12, a Senator named Eugene McCarthy won the New Hampshire presidential primary, defeating an incumbent president
- On March 31, President Johnson, with the famous words, "I will not seek nor will I accept the nomination," announced his decision not to seek re-election, driven to do so by national and international events he could not seem to manage, control, or even understand.
- A few days later, on a Memphis motel balcony, the symbol of the civil rights movement and a moderate voice for peaceful, nonviolent change, Martin Luther King, was gunned down on a Memphis motel balcony. America's cities reacted violently.
- On April 23, protesting students captured the Administration Buildings at Columbia University protesting the war and espousing distrust for anyone over the age of 30.
- On June 6, Robert F. Kennedy was senselessly gunned down, just after winning the California Democratic primary. Less than six weeks before, some of us had heard him tell us, while he was speaking at

Weber State College, "that the youthfulness I speak of is not a time of life, but a state of mind, a temper of the will, a quality of the imagination, a predominance of courage over timidity, of the appetite for adventure over love of ease. It does not accept the failures of today as a reason for the cruelties of tomorrow. It believes that one man can make a difference and that men of good will working together can grasp the future and mold it to our will."

- In early August, Richard Nixon became the Republican presidential nominee. Later in August, we witnessed on television the brutal and tragic trauma of a political party and a whole city being torn asunder during the Chicago riots of the Democratic National Convention.
- In October, we recall American athletes at the Olympic games in Mexico City holding aloft gloved fists, defiantly saluting black power and signaling a change of course for the civil rights movement.
- In early November, Richard Nixon was elected president; and

- Finally, on December 24, Christmas Eve, many of us remember the three Apollo VIII astronauts who circled the moon for the first time, recited the story of the Creation, offered us the Lord's prayer and wished to all peace on earth and good will toward men.

Not all of the events of 1968 were so tragic or so solemn or so serious. A new Broadway musical, "Hair", opened that year and ushered in the Age of Aquarius. We were still listening to their last album, "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band", when the Beatles released their double White album late in the year. "Mrs. Robinson," by Simon and Garfunkel, from the movie "The Graduate" was one of the number one hits of the year. Eric Clapton still sang with a group called Cream; Steven Stills and Neal Young were still with Buffalo Springfield; David Crosby was still with the Byrds; the Rolling Stones were still the Rolling Stones and the Beach Boys were still the Beach Boys. Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin and Jim Morrison of the Doors were among our favorites. In the brief future all three would be dead from drug overdoses, unfortunate players in a scourge of the times.

We watched the two top television bits of the season - "Batman and Robin" and "Martin's Laugh-In," and laughed along with the slogans of the day - "Sock It To Me!" and "You Bet Your Sweet Bippy!"

1968 was more than a densely compacted cascade of events and more than an accidental astrological alignment; it was an explosion of change, a struggle between generations. To some extent, it was a war between the past and the future, and, for an entire generation, a violent struggle to grow up. It prepared the way for beginnings. The complex and chaotic events of the '60's would live in the American mind long after the melodrama was over and those who had burned with passions of change went on to become parents and grandparents.

1968 was a blade that severed the past from the future, the then from the now - the "then" of triumphant post-war American power in the world and of the nation's illusions of innocence and virtue, and a more complicated "now" of post Vietnam and post-Cold War globalization.

In 1968, a huge tribe of the young revolted against the nation's elders and authorities, and the nation finished killing its heroes. American innocence and virtue found new forms and found new skins.

The events of 1968 impacted the Class of '68 and shaped our adult lives in different ways and with different meanings.

Yet, for most of us, these events were still, at the time, largely the concerns of older generations and shadows of tomorrow's concerns. We were still largely unaffected by world events as we finished the innocence of our youth.

For each of us, memories of our school years at Clearfield High mean different things, recall individual memories, and would affect each of us in unique and separate ways. For some of us, our high school years were more painful than pleasant; for others, they were, as Bruce Springsteen says, our "Glory Days". We each may have experienced successes or failures, large or small.

To go back in time, each of us would likely do some things differently, change some decisions, take back some of the things we said to others, or reinvent ourselves in the hindsight of maturity and wisdom. For we are human and it is the province of all humans to make mistakes.

We realize now in the halo of wisdom then consigned to our futures that the mistakes, offenses, or slights of our youth were, in fact, some of our best teachers and preparation for our own children. Our insecurities - sometimes masked by shyness, sometimes by bravado - while painful at times, paled and dimmed as we assumed and met challenges of adulthood. From what we learned, we taught our own children that such things should temper rather than scar. We also learned that “less” is often better than “more”; that “selflessness” trumps “selfishness”; and that “humility” is more attractive than “arrogance”.

Many of life’s most important lessons were reserved for the years after high school. That is the way of things. And, now, forty plus years later, with our expanding waistlines, receding or graying hairlines and wrinkles and crinkles, we can look back at the events of the ‘60’s with warmer, softer and fuzzier lenses of

warm nostalgia that is enhanced by the wisdom that comes from experience that allows us to be more comfortable in our own skin. And we know that even now we can continue to learn even as we continue to make mistakes, if only we allow ourselves to continue to grow, for we know that the potential of our growth is neither limited nor measured by the chronology of time. That potential can only be limited only by the cessation of our imaginations.

To the class of '68, however, one thing is certain. For each of us, 1968 marked an end and it marked a beginning. We said goodbye to each other and our childhoods and we said hello to our futures. That is, perhaps, what we collectively and individually remember most importantly about 1968.

So now, forty-one years later, *here's to you - to the Green and White, to the Falcons of 1968, to those who are here and those who are not, and those who live on and those who are gone!*

Thank you for this opportunity and for listening as I've attempted to share some of our collective legacy with you. May God bless you and your families in the years to come!

