

THOUGHTS of a PACIFIC PIRATE

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There are stars visible in the skies above us today whose radiance is visible on Earth though they have long been extinct at their source in the far-flung corners of the universe. There are people whose brilliance continues to light our world even though they are no longer here. These lights are particularly bright when the night is dark. They light the way for all of us.

Looking back to my days as a Pirate as I flip the pages of my *Pacificana Yearbook* it seems interesting that some of the folks I never hung with in High School have impacted my life more than I realized, while I scarcely recollect some of those who were part of my world back then. I see many unfamiliar faces in the book (which was very poorly labeled, with photos disconnected from their captions in a difficult way to connect the actual names to the faces).

Although I must have lived three entire lifetimes since those days, I bump into former classmates on occasion that neither subsequent college days nor professional associations have alienated from a warm place in my heart.

Our senior year was devastated by the creation of a new high school in Rialto (called West Side High, later renamed Eisenhower) that stripped many of our fine teaching staff to fill their faculty, including Mrs. Gottleib, our speech teacher that formed many of us into a first-class state championship team, including Al Jury's speeches: *Lincoln, the Man of the People*, and the *Ballad of the Harp-Weaver* by Edna St. Vincent Millay that could bring tears to a sturdy machoman, and others who won debating ribbons and some of us in extemporaneous and humor that were awarded first place in the CBL and state levels.

Other teachers who made lasting impression included Bud Chambers whose untimely death left a hole in our society, and Charles Brame whose later years continue to bring him well-deserved fame in the role he created in the personification of Abraham Lincoln.

I never respected the brilliance of Mr. Brame until years later.

I loathed my English teacher, Mrs. Fuller, who was so demanding of our assignments - forcing me to learn the language arts in a way that has formed my career as author and conference speaker more than any other single person. She walked on a crutch and came to class with a “tude,” demanding that her students learn what she entrusted to us ... like it or not. Her vast comprehension of linguistic arts and knowledge of the English language

A classmate nicknamed “Frog” inspired me to write proper English, for we knew our “composition” grade was averaged with our “content attitude.” We both knew if we did not have absolutely correct A-grade syntax in our weekly papers we would fail, for the content of our out-of-the-box personal views were always an “F” in her eyes, and a single comma-fault would knock the paper down a grade. Our only hope to pass the paper was to go for the “A” in composition, anticipating the “F” in content to average a “C” on the paper. Frog’s influenced me to beat Mrs. Fuller at her own game, I passed the course, fully equipped to a career.

Verna Brown had a class devoted to radio speech, and although I was not a part of that class, my awkward high-pitched speaking voice was enlisted for the role of Tiny Tim for several years on the school broadcast of *A Christmas Carol* on stations like KITO and KRNO and KFXM and KCSB and others, radio station that have been renamed and reformatted in subsequent years.

The creative techniques employed to learn Spanish (and French?) with the engaging Mr. Windsor was an interesting experience, one I would wish on today’s students. He was a disciplinarian, but he knew how to inspire us with creative techniques to do our homework. One of our classmates, Dr. Henry Sieber, is an academician in Spain today.

We needed more time to accomplish all that Pacific offered. That was before computers, the Internet and video. I had to drop track competition to participate in speech and drama and Spanish road trips, but we never lacked for interesting activities.

Creating parade floats to parade down “E” Street to Football games at the National Orange Show Stadium, including the Colton Yellowjackets homecoming game, and “running the hill” for an irate Mr. Pecchia when we crossed him, were not listed in the curricula but definitely a part of it! Mr. Pecchia had shrapnel wounds from the war, and he could be a bear in damp weather, but he was a great coach - and he sang well ... had the girls swooning when he sang “Tammy” at school assemblies.

Coach Page was always hanging around the track for his own practice at pole vault, as well as coaching others, as he was a contender for the Olympic Games.

Our track and field workouts were partly coursed on a path on Perris Hill behind our school with the huge concrete “P” that our rival school sneaked over at midnight to paint their red and black colors on it. (We got even by sowing Kentucky Bluegrass seeds in their lawn in the shape of a “P” so when the summer grasses in their lawns went dormant in the fall the green “P” shone with such strength they had to dig it out!).

The Farmers and Agriculture students of the Future Farmers of America had similar concrete letters on their side of the Pacific Hill. Although I wasn't into the FFA, those students excelled, and PHS FFA was respected throughout the state.

Some of our best friends may have been a year or two behind or ahead of the “Class of Distinction” fifty years ago, so I will miss their presence at some reunions. Whatever became of Jon Battle and Rich Moore and “what's-is-name”?

Since we had lost Mrs. Gottlieb, our fantastic drama teacher to the new Rialto high school, named “WestSide” for its location until permanently named for General and President Eisenhower, I stayed on campus following graduation for another year or so producing plays as an aide. M Speech teachers Miss Watson (that was before the “Ms” moniker was invented) and Mr. directed the play action and I served the faculty filling the role of Producer, wearing the hats of Sets, Lighting, Publicity, TD, etc. that later became my career.

We did not have an actual theatre auditorium in those days, simply made do with a simple boxy stage embedded into the north wall of the school “Cafetorium” with folding chairs. Our do-it-yourself lighting and set construction did credit to the spirit of Rube Goldberg.

My own classmates who never knew their impact on my life: Fred Kirkendoll, Jerry Bowers, Art Bertolina, Louie Siedband, Bill Hedleston and others, including Tom Gang, who passed away before I ever thanked him for his influence in my life and Malcolm Smith (the first diploma was awarded by Dr. Bailey to him when he was in hospital with a broken back - or something - he was always breaking some body part before the days of Evil Kineivel, but he never stayed off his bike for long!).

His tinkering led him to create the internationally acclaimed *Malcolm Smith Motorcycles* industry and co-starring with Steve McQueen in the thrilling biker motion picture, *On Any Sunday*.

Malcolm always had advice and a missing part for restoring and creative tinkering with our “bikes,” and John Moreland whose empty swimming pool served as a velodrome in the off-season when drained.

There was the peppy Twila Tharp popping around the campus (whose beautiful hilltop home was destroyed later in a fire) - her dad owned a drive-in theatre in Rialto with a used car lot and restaurant beside it.

Twila went on to Claremont Colleges and has been choreographing today’s top dancers and pop stars on Broadway and stadium events from the Beach Boys to Baryshnikov to Billy Joel.

Drive-in Theaters were a fun experience. The Baseline Drive-In Theater had a huge neon “B” on the sign that was important as a landmark viewable when we traveled (and pulled off to park at the turnouts) along the Rim of the World Highway far above the landmark Arrowhead that has since become a logos on bottled water. Looking down from the mountains above the San Bernardino valley we could see the vast panorama of the Inland Empire and the immediate the Perris Hill where the campus of Pacific High School was nestled, across the valley to Norton Air Force Base, with a runway so lengthy a Concorde landed there decades later.

The big “B” is long gone, but the Arrowhead, planted by Mother Nature on the hill centuries ago, exists as an icon of the Inland Empire.

The outdoor Drive-In movie theater across from Valley College on Mount Vernon Avenue had a swimming pool with a park, playground equipment and picnic area we could enjoy before the late afternoons turned dark enough for the movies to appear on the huge outdoor screen, projected from windows in a booth on top of the snack bar in the center of the parking lot where all the cars were parked on embankment slopes facing the screen, each one adjacent to a post provided with little speakers to hang on the car windows to hear the movie soundtrack.

Other drive-in theaters were situated by the Tri-City Airport on the road to Redlands, and one out at the foot of Mount Rubidoux, and a dozen

others. That airport, alongside the Santa Ana River, has been replaced with a huge Hospitality Lane and San Bernardino Hall of records

Hours of fun were enjoyed at Harry's Roller Rink down by the Orange Show Stadium where a live organist played music as signs dictated us to skate with such directions as "all skate" or "couples only" or "boys only" or "girls only." Sometimes we'd line up arm-in-arm in a line of skaters, spinning a circle, to "crack the whip," do the *bunny hop* or the *hokey pokey* or reverse skating the opposite direction in the rink (so we could get blisters on our other foot!).

Our summer weekends were spent at the beach, surfing with heavy surfboards (built before lightweight boards were ever constructed of foam). We'd pull over at the side of the road alongside the Pacific Coast Highway and trek them across the sand and rest to gain strength to go tackle the undertoe.

Those were the days we would simply pull off and park at the side of the highway - and hit the beaches or climb the cliffs. Corona Del Mar had a cave that was fun to crawl through. "Little Corona" was a sandy cove south of it that could only be reached by swimming around the point.

Today those areas are fenced off, planted in asphalt parking lots with toll booths. Much of the natural beauty is marred by vandalism and graffiti. Today the tunnels are blocked with gated fencing.

Here closer to home, we'd hike up Forest Falls - It seems Jack Ruffer was lifeguard at a nearby campground swimming pool for the less adventuresome - or across the valley below Cajon Pass to sneak across private property to climb the Bonita Falls in Lytle Creek Canyon or go rifle shooting back in the wilds up there. In former years the area had been a verdant green location often visited by the rich and famous, but a big flood in the previous generation had washed most away, leaving a barren space. Up by the rifle range it resembled the set of a man-on-the-moon science fiction movie (since nobody imagined we'd ever get there to see the real thing).

Sometimes we'd go bowling at Crestline near Lake Gregory where bowling pins were reset by pinboys on the spot - not the automated alley machines that clear and drop those ten pins into position in today's alleys.

Most of our lakes were created years before by damming up streams, including Arrowhead, Big Bear, Lake Gregory and Green Valley Lake. On a clear day we could go high on the hill above Green Valley and actually see Catalina Island far away, crowned by rays of the setting sun.

We enjoyed going to Catalina on the Great White Steamship or a little plane or a friend's cabin cruiser, and singing a top 40-pop song about that Island with the harbor at Avalon Bay.

Detroit didn't make RVs - we made our own by welding angle iron and pipe frames to stripped-out old Mercs and Chevys and ride them across the wash, out east of the Norton AFB runways. Seatbelt harnesses? What are those? We sometimes used "skidlids" (helmets) as we'd chase jackrabbits throughout the open spaces.

At sunset we'd build campfires there and do weenie roasts and marshmallows stuck on coathanger wires stuck into tree branches. The sometimes flaming marshmallows were speared by the wire and seared by the flames - and made the delicacy of the smore a culinary art.

Or we'd do that out on East Highland Avenue, under the Rialto cliffs where we actually pitched tents and camped out under the stars at night by the stream when life was simple and a heck of a lot of fun. It seemed that was "way out of town."

We enjoyed horseback riding, and especially midnight hayrides at La Carrera racetrack in the East Highlands. Up above all of that on the Redlands plateau were situated acres and acres of citrus groves that today are planted with Yuppie neighborhoods and shopping malls instead of oranges.

In the cold nights of winter, special fires were ignited in portable furnaces called smudge pots placed between the citrus trees that spared the harvest from frost, but belched smoke blackening the valley with a cloud cover that coated our walls and dirtied our clothing and made our eyes squint. I hesitate to think what it did to our lungs.

Our cars were modified back in those days when any consumer could identify the designs of automobiles that rolled out of the factories with fins and fenders that sported colorfully chromed designs. But we re-designed our cars further. We did things to them that made them our own

- like lowering and raking, dago-ing, chopping and channeling. We'd paint names on them like "Tinkerbell" and "AwKwitcherBitchin."

We didn't have the Internet, but we had Popular Mechanics and hotrod magazines and the Hit Parade magazines with the words of the top 40 ... although back in those days we could understand the words without having to read them. The girls read all sorts of fan movie magazines, but not many of us knew why.

A list of stores we enjoyed would include Gail Stockton's Sporting Goods. He lived up at the south end of the golf course. Not far away from his store on Highland Avenue was a really cool (pun intended) ice cream parlor named Heywood's with a fine collection of scale model trains on the walls. Close by was a circus-themed hot dog walk-up stand and Foxy's Restaurant with a 12-foot fox winking at us as we entered.

We ate at restaurants like the *Carnation* just south of our Rival San Bernardino High School or the *Arco* over on Baseline and the fast-order *Rosalies* north of Baseline, katy-corner and up the street a bit from Sages Market on E Street or drive our souped up cars into Queen's burger joint that featured gals called "car hops" in short skirts who bought our food on a tray that attached to our windows when we rolled them down.

There was a fast food place across the street above the *Rosalies* without carhops. To order food we had to walk up to order our bag of hamburgers, milk shakes and french-fries, speaking through a hole cut in the glass. This hamburger joint had a sign that counted the millions of hamburgers that had been sold since it opened, and we did our best to help that number grow.

Two brothers built this fast-food stand that was unique in days when America's normal night-out consisted of parking the car and walking in to be seated in a full-service restaurant, or visiting a maltshoppe counter. It was purchased by an entrepreneurial fellow who promoted its title of a single "M" formed by two golden arches that has subsequently given San Bernardino to feed the world.

Two former McDonald employees, Glen Bell and Neal T. Baker went on to found their own eateries.

Bell started one called Bell's Hamburgers, then one he called Taco Tia. He sold it and started one that carried his name, called Taco *Bell* and not

content with merely burgers and tacos, he opened the first Der Weinerschnitzel in San Pedro that went on to become a major fast food place. But the entrepreneurial spirit does not stop there.

A fellow named Ed Hackbarth who worked at Taco Bell in Barstow started his own “Casa del Taco” in Yermo that he shortened to “Del Taco. And if you can believe this: a fellow who worked for Del Taco, named Dick Naugle, started his own chain he named “Naugles.”

Another Del Taco employee, Albert Okura opened a fast food kitchen that featured rotisserie chickens, he named Juan Pollo. His first place was in Ontario, and his second was in San Bernardino. Since his success, he has purchased the original McDonald’s location on E Street in San Bernardino, and opened a McDonald’s museum on the spot.

And Neal T. Baker? He gave fast food a new twist, by opening two windows, one for burgers and one for tacos — twin kitchens at a single location, at Highland and Genevieve. Today his chain is known as Baker’s Burgers.

Our class president Bill Hedleston had his name on two eateries, since his folks owned a fast food place called *Hedleston’s Taco Town*, one down on Waterman at Rialto, and one at Baseline, just east of Windsor (where there was a really cool ice cream place called Foster’s Freeze). Whenever we visited Bill at his place there was always the welcome smell of refried beans and taco meat cooking in the kitchen.

Burgers cost a quarter in those days. So did a gallon of gas and a pack of cigarettes. For a dollar you could buy three gallons of gas and a pack of cigarettes. Originally, McDonald’s burgers had been fifteen cents each.

Probably our favorite hangout was the “A’s” . . . A and W Root Beer, north of town, at the beginning of the highway to the mountains.

It cost a nickel to send a postcard or buy a Baby Ruth candy bar ... and a toy inside a box of Crackerjacks was worth collecting. Baseball cards (the ones we didn’t clothespin to our bicycle spokes to make a rat-a-tat sound) we also quite valuable.

Something called the “coffeehouse” culture was arriving, and we had two local “beat” houses called the *Eye of Centaurus* on E Street and the *Id* in

Rialto that charged hefty prices for tiny cups of strong coffee and featured live guitarists singing in a darkened corner and practiced speaking beatnik language on each other. I admit at the time, most of us thought it silly, but some thought it seemed “Cool, Daddy-O.”

Smoking was cool in those days, glorified on the screen and widely accepted in society. At least tobacco smoking was. There was a security guard named Ted, always on the lookout to catch us smokin’ in the boy’s room. He was nicknamed “Ted of the Head.” A woman who patrolled the girls’ room was bestowed the sobriquet, “the Toad of the Commode.”

Dope was not as openly widespread in those days. We sought to improve our bodies and our minds before the era of the “drop out” society when we did not want to be like the skinny guy in the Charles Atlas ads who had sand kicked into his face, although sucking on an orange was a gratifying screwdriver not beyond some of us who inserted vodka into oranges with a hypo needle.

We carried huge radios with a bunch of batteries to power them to listen to a radio station that pumped “our kind of music,” from the “Mission Valley Inn, the Garden Hotel, San Diego” over a clear channel station to transmitting towers across the border in Mexico.

Nat King Cole reminded us that we were not too young, and Pat Boone kept us off our Blue Suede shoes and Elvis sang his TV songs on a screen that was blacked across the bottom so viewers could not see his pelvic gyrations. Johnny Mathis reminded us that we may never meet again.

Sundays were for churches, many of them with good youth programs, including singing in a youth choir, playing on church league baseball and basketball teams for those of us who didn’t sing in the school choirs or play on school teams. Churches had summer camp programs and “VBS” day programs that were interesting for those who had aged out of Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts.

Some of us did not apply ourselves to study, or realize the importance of scholarship until graduation week, and we suddenly gave new respect to those with the CSF medal attached to their tassel. Those were days we all worked to have good looking bodies and sleek automobiles. It was hard to realize a few years later the scrawny, long-haired hero and ugly Vee-Dub busses would be the epitome of student life.

We would cram steel wool into a beer can and stuff a pipe into it for a muffler on our “bike” and enjoy that ripping sound. But after all, San Bernardino is the birthplace of the Hell’s Angels biker society!

We’d roll up the sleeves on our “muscleman” T-shirt (even some of us skinny guys only *dreamed* we were muscular, heh!), and wear our Levis low (at least that’s what our parents said - they should see what is worn TODAY!). Some girls wore lots of petticoats, and yes, poodle skirts were a reality back then. One thing for sure, their dressline hems always below the knees or they would be sent home until properly dressed.

Life was simpler then when gum-chewing in class was considered a major problem. My folks would never believe what is tolerated today! Race was not an issue among our student body. Our best friends were of Latino, African, Pac Rim or Euro descent.

We were not color *blind*, mind you, we knew the colors and cultures, accepting and appreciating all our friends for what color they were, and whichever cultural clime was their heritage. We enjoyed diversity.

We did not have instant access. A remote phone call was something called a telephone booth - the kind Clark Kent used for a dressing room - that used a dime to call somebody. We didn’t have cellphone cameras - We bought rolls of 8mm movie film inserted in a boxy camera, carefully avoiding sunlight exposure, and when it ran the first 25 feet, we’d turn it over and film the other half and send it in for photo processing - mostly black and white, with color optional - and silent, at that - no sound. A week later it would be returned for us to thread and project the 12 minutes or so on a screen in a darkened room.

TV was mostly live broadcasting, as Hollywood feared to allow actual theatrical movies on television, and most screens were black and white, although “compatible color” was coming onto the market. It was possible to attach a plastic sheet onto the TV screen with blue on the top and green on the bottom that was suitable for not much more than travelogs with lots of blue skies and green meadows.

Animal broadcasts back then were taken of trips in Africa shooting animals, before animal activists changed it to fishing shows. Chris Craft bought channel 13 and featured a bunch of outdoor broadcasting.

Bill Burrid did a lot of those. Our TV antennas, like flagpoles atop our roofs, with a lot of guywires to keep them from toppling over, brought us three network channels and a few local ones from LA that we selected with a circular knob that clicked from number 2 through number 13, but broadcasters were working on upcoming newer High Frequency channels they hoped would be as successful as the new FM radio channels that were beginning to populate the radio dial.

The first school television station in the state was KVCR - broadcast from our own Valley College.

Life was not all fun and games, but we learned to tolerate — we lost our Mr. Finn who coached track and field and taught metal shop in a tragic accident when he walked into the path of a tossed shotput and was struck in his temple. Some of us ditched school to go to his funeral service at St. Anne's - it was the first time I'd ever attended a mass.

I anticipated some good conversations with friends at the Pacific Pirate event, with the realization that those early days of this awkward plebe starting out into life were more formative than I would ever have realized at the time.

When I see the youth of today's generation, I am sorry they will never know the experiences we lived.

And to be true, I prefer having enjoyed youth then to what I would face now as a student in contemporary society.

Perhaps it is a misnomer to characterize those days as "Happy Days" fueling TV sitcom episodes, for we were experiencing a new life personal to each of us, but these days of preparation and experimentation and guidance and experiences opened a unique world to us that we were blessed to experience.

Our dances were nowhere close to today's raves - we decorated the gymnasium with crepe paper and creative decorations and mirror balls for our dances and proms.

And yes, "sock hops" were a reality, necessitated by the fact street shoes were not allowed on the gym flooring.

We watched Sheriff John and Crusader Rabbit on TV, with musical variety shows hosted by Eddie Fisher and Perry Como, enjoyed the

adventures of Ozzie and Harriet the Lone Ranger, both transferred from radio dramas of the previous generation. We witnessed theatrically choreographed bodyslammings on the mat with Gorgeous George and whatever it was that Liberace tried to accomplish with his music.

Soap Box Derbies raced down a stretch of Electric Avenue. One year our neighbors actually won the national championship in Ohio.

Those were times of opportunity where we were taught life was an open and grand potential for each of us - our school was very young. The previous graduating class was the first to complete a full course since Pacific High School was built in the early fifties.

We watched the relocated Brooklyn Dodgers play in the LA Coliseum around the corner from USC, awaiting its relocation to the crest of Chavez Ravine looking down on Chinatown and Union Station.

For entertainment we could go see a show staged by local Civic Light Opera that featured starring roles performed by professionals who came to our town. These included Marni Nixon who starred for us as Anna in Rogers and Hammerstein's *The King and I*. She was the voice that many movie stars matched their lips to sing words recorded by her (can you say Milli Vanilli?), including Deborah Kerr who mouthed her words to lip-sync the film version of that musical. The reason so many movie stars sounded alike is that they sang to the same voice, Marni, and she was here on stage performing in our musicals.

Marni was a wonderful actor as well as singer. Hearing her voice emanate from the stage was better than listening to the album sound track with a picture of Deborah Kerr on the jacket. Several of us auditioned and sang on stage in the chorus to the imported stars in *Damn Yankees*, *South Pacific*, *Li'l Abner* and other shows.

We had a really cool main street downtown with Lier's music store (with a big RCA Nipper Dog at the entry), and Woolworths, as well as a Thrifty drug store, and a Sav-On (boom- boom!) Drug Store. Our department stores included Harris, Sears, "Monkey" Wards and J.C. Penney.

In addition to the California Theater, there were three movie theatres, the Ritz, Studio and West Coast.

Only the California remains today. Today's other downtown performance theater is all that remains of the former Sturges Junior High School on E Street.

PHS had one of the largest student bodies in the state. Today the scope of its community is shared with San Geronimo and Cajon High Schools that never existed back then. A new one is constructed north of the Airport (former Norton Air Force Base) on Del Rosa.

Downtown featured flower stores that some of us worked part time driving delivery panel trucks. Jewelry stores featured Arthur's and Goodman's with a big free-standing clock outside on the sidewalk. A local ladies apparel shop on Baseline and E Street sponsored Judy Ann Price as a candidate for Maid of California, which she won in our senior year.

A bit farther out of downtown was Skip Fordyce motorcycles on the East and the Mexican food restaurants on Mt. Vernon on the west that served delicious food, near the tall Santa Fe whistle towering above the train "roundhouse" (that no longer exists) to spin on its axis to service train engines.

The California Hotel, where Tennessee Ernie Ford got his start as a radio Dee Jay was on the corner of fifth street, a strip of Route 66 that included San Bernardino in the lyrics of a pop song as the final stop before reaching LA.

Today these locations are empty lots, mute testimonies of another time when E street was a good downtown area to cruise on the weekends.

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The centrally located Municipal Auditorium was torn down to build the library to replace the original Carnegie Library over on D Street across the street from the Sun Telegram newspaper office that had replaced the Fox movie theater the previous generation.

We lived in a parenthetical era between a world war to bring freedom to the world that was supported by our students and an unpopular war with anti-American marches and flag burning.

When a college radio station interviewed my daughter several years ago, one of the questions she was asked was what she would do to change her parents. She answered that she wished they were younger today so she could hang with them as friends and classmates.

I would have to conclude my thoughts about my times as a Pacific Pirate with a similar wish: that I could somehow wrap up today's generation and take them back there and then to be a pal.

They will never know what they are missing today that was a part of a world we were just entering. Society may have been faulty in some ways life was presented to me, but I did my own share of tripping and slipping along the road of life as I went along, for which I can point no accusing finger to others.

Many of us did not realize the value of the life impacting us back in those days.

Some claim the longest word in the English language is floccinaucinihilipilification, a word that is defined as a lack of realizing true value. For me, assigning a lesser value to my days as a Pacific Pirate is the strongest example of that word (I won't spell it again).

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