

THE COLLECTED MEMORIES
OF COLLEGE PARK HIGH SCHOOL ALUMNI
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When I was first asked to give a speech on "Memories of College Park High," I refused. And with reason. In the closing football game of my Senior year, I went onto the field with the Ramettes for the Star Spangled Banner. As we went into our "peel-off" to salute the flag, I literally "peeled-off" by breaking the zipper on my uniform. This single memory drove all other memories of high school from my mind and, therefore, I was uniquely unqualified to give this talk.

However, where I can remember only humor and humiliation, many of you have generously shared your other memories of this great school with me. So, let us recapture the memories of College Park High School--the sounds, the tastes, the smells, the sights, and the feelings you experienced during your five years here.

Start by turning your ears back 10, 20, 30 years and listen...

Can you hear the sound of notes being passed between cubicles in the language lab followed by Mrs. Hamilton's Wagnerian cry, "Who's rattling all those papers?"

Can you hear the sound of Mr. Bostardi's laughter filling a classroom, filling the office, filling the hall, filling the whole school?

Can you hear the sound of Sarah Taylor and her themes and variations on the simple command to "be quiet": "Do not open your mouth. Do not say one word. Do not say 'God is Love.' Do not say anything."

Can you hear the sound of a stick cracking the desk inches away from the head of a sleeping student in Mr. Barchi's class?

Can you hear the sound of Southern accents wrapped around Spanish syllables in Mr. Germano's language classes?

Can you hear the sound of music....

...of Mr. Evert's orchestra bravely playing the familiar tunes from Oklahoma, The Sound of Music and Dr. Zhivago?

...of Miss Barron's Choralliers practicing on Monday nights?

...of Mr. Scott's band playing the College Park Fight Song with enormous energy, the crowd stamping their feet and clapping as they sang along?

Can you hear the sound of student actors struggling to learn their lines and find their motivation in Miss Drew's Senior plays and Miss Barron's spring musicals: The Man Who Came to Dinner, Guys and Dolls, L'il Abner. (And did you realize that many of those actor/musicians went on to become famous? To get their own talk shows? To sing with the Metropolitan opera? And you got to hear them for 50 cents....)

Can you hear the sound of toe hitting leather at the opening kickoff on a Friday night in August and the generations of cheerleaders yelling "Push 'em back, push 'em back, way back"--including one fateful night when WE had the ball.

Can you hear the sound of Mrs. Cochran's unmistakable footsteps coming up behind you in the hall punctuated by a series of commands to each student she passed: "Tuck that shirt in." "Where are your socks?" "Drop that girl's hand, boy, this is no lover's lane."

There were not only sounds. There were tastes we associated with College Park High School.

Can you remember the taste of lunchroom mystery meat, with its alternating texture of crunchy and smooth, and its bland taste, accompanied by bland, sticky rice topped with stewed tomatoes?

Or the taste of the infamous cornbread and chili casserole prepared by eager young cooks in Mrs. Yarbrough's Home Ec classes (which made you appreciate the cafeteria food....)?

Or the taste of the McDonald's hamburgers surreptitiously smuggled into the school by SOMEONE who cut third period every day for a year and got away with it?

Now breathe deeply and recapture the smells of College Park High School.

Remember the smell of a newly-mimeographed test--cool, faintly slippery, and everyone held it up to his face before taking one off the top and passing the stack.

Remember the overpowering mixture of sweat and deodorant in the locker room.

Remember the smell of formaldehyde when Mr. Jones passed out the fetal pigs and frogs for dissection in Biology lab.

You may not want to remember the smell of your locker on Monday morning after you left a carton of milk and your gym clothes in it over the weekend.

But can you ever forget the mind-numbing sweetness of hairspray, Chanel #5, and English Leather After Shave at the Junior-Senior?

Now use your eyes and see the sights of College Park High School.

Do you remember the look of disbelief on Mrs. Redwine's face when you went to the office to check out "sick" and "No, your fifth period test had nothing to do with your upset stomach"?

Do you remember the sight of the field at halftime, with the band in formation playing, and suddenly they moved these small safety buckets filled with sand onto the field, and the stadium lights went down, and you knew...tonight, the majorettes will twirl fire batons.

Remember the sight of seemingly intelligent people--future doctors, lawyers, and Indian chiefs--at 2:00 in the morning, stuffing kleenex into chicken wire to finish a Homecoming float.

Remember the sight of cars racing around the back circle. Then they added speed breakers, but we were not deterred. Remember the sight of cars defiantly going "speed--brake--kerplunk, speed--brake--kerplunk" over the mounds of asphalt.

Remember the sight of Blue Lights and the elaborate dating rituals associated with that particular visual phenomenon.

Remember the sight of Mr. Kimes' friendly and smiling face when you walked into your SUB-Freshman homeroom (what is lower or dumber than a SUB-Freshman?) and he made you feel better about having just bought an elevator ticket for a school that had no elevator. Or a pep rally pass. Or whatever the upperclassmen were selling that year.

Remember the sight of girls with their hair in rollers the size of orange juice cans and fluffy, floppy, nylon hair nets arriving for early morning band practice.

Remember the sight of the sun glinting from helmets and swords during the ROTC drills and, inevitably, one cadet would lock his knees and begin to rock back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, before he passed out in the heat.

Remember the stoic expressions of Coach Badgett, Coach Harris, Coach Cunningham, Coach Wheeler, Coach Hutto, Coach Ross, and Coach Camp as they led their teams to victory--and maybe more importantly, inspired them to move beyond their few defeats.

There were sounds, tastes, smells, and sights. But most of all there were feelings.

Do you remember being fourteen and knowing you were ugly (because you were fat and your skin was broken out and you had braces) and suspecting you were of below-average intelligence and would never get a job or go to college and feeling unpopular and unloved and worthless--until Mrs. Howard listened to your litany of complaints and promised you that adolescence was only temporary. And you felt better. And she was right, folks, because, today, we all look much better than those pictures hanging on the school walls.

Remember the feeling of desperation when it was your turn to stand at the board to solve problems and Mr. Stuart (or Miss Kent or Mr. Freeland or Mr. Harris) began to read a long problem about two trains starting in different cities and travelling at different speeds and heading in different directions--and you decided at that moment to become a Frequent Flyer because you were certainly NEVER going to find those two trains.

Or the feeling of stage fright when you stood up to recite the poem you memorized for Mrs. Tingle or Mrs. Stanley--and you always did fine at the beginning and the end, but you could never get the middle right.

Remember the feeling of outrage when you got Miss Boone's reading list for Senior English, and you went to Greenbriar to buy the Cliff Notes only to discover that THERE WERE NO CLIFF NOTES for any of these books--she expected you to read them....your SENIOR year.

Remember the feeling of impending doom when Mrs. Simpson passed out one of her famous 20 question pop tests.

Or the feeling of fellowship and school spirit at Pep Rallies when you truly, sincerely believed that Lakeshore or Headland or Russell High School was the most important enemy you would ever have to face.

Do you remember the feeling of joy mixed with sorrow when you realized you were actually going to graduate...but then older people started telling you "These were the best years of your life", so you felt regret because you wondered if you'd missed something.

Were we ever that young? Did we realize then that these sights and sounds, these thoughts and feelings would have such an impact on the people we eventually grew up to be?

Did we ever stop long enough to say "Thank You" for the money, the hours, and the pure sweat equity that College Park High School invested in us?

If not, we can say it now: "College Park High School, thanks for the memories."

And students of College Park, preserve these memories. There all that's left now.