

CITYWIDE

**Lowell Class of '65 considers legacy  
Baby Boomers look back on their halcyon  
days 40 years after graduation**

Duffy Jennings, Special to The Chronicle  
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The leading-edge Baby Boomers of Lowell High School's graduating class of 1965, fresh from celebrating our 40th reunion last weekend in San Francisco, today are reflecting on four decades of turbulence, turning points, triumph and tragedy.

Once the vanguard of our innocent Beach Boys-to-Beatles generation and now at the forefront of the maturing Boomer population, again we find ourselves facing a new age, in more ways than one. The Sixties, in other words, have taken on a whole new meaning.

We were the pioneer class of sophomores when Lowell's shiny and spacious new \$5 million Lake Merced campus opened in 1962, and we numbered 600-strong on graduation day three years later.

More than 150 of us gathered in San Francisco last weekend to reconnect and ruminate about growing up, growing wiser and growing older. A certain denial remains, however, about the latter's impact on skin, hair, weight and eyesight.

"Who are all these old people, and what am I doing here?" was a common remark heard throughout the celebration. "I still feel like I'm in my 30s."

The events included a cocktail party at Tommy's Joynt on Friday night, dinner and dancing at the Concordia Club on Saturday night, and a picnic at Lowell's Eucalyptus Drive campus on Sunday afternoon. The bash was planned and carried off by class member Roberta Bleiweiss, a longtime Bay Area event producer and a co-founder of Beach Blanket Babylon with her sister, Nancy, and Steve Silver, a 1962 Lowell grad.

"The turnout was a real testament to the closeness many of us still feel, even after all this time," said Bleiweiss. "For many in our class the memories of their days at Lowell are much fonder and more meaningful than their college days."

The camaraderie of the high school experience lives on at reunions, but over time the topics of conversation have changed from college, career, weddings and children to kids in college, retirement, multiple marriages and grandchildren. Not to mention aging parents, financial security, health care and even our own mortality. Illness and accidents have taken their toll. At least 16 of us are already gone.

Some in the Class of '65, befitting our generation's trademark iconoclasm, changed the world. And the world certainly changed many of us. Like any other cohesive group with 40 years of history, we've had our share of success and failure, hope and despair, love and heartbreak. Among those in our fold are:

-- Lani Silver, a political and social activist, longtime San Francisco State women's studies teacher and a 1993 KQED Woman of the Year who launched the first Holocaust Oral History Project, which led to her collaboration with movie director Steven Spielberg on gathering 53,000 Holocaust survivor histories for his Shoah Foundation for Visual History.

-- Chuck Lindner, a Santa Monica attorney who helped Johnnie Cochran write the closing arguments for the defense in the murder trial of O.J. Simpson -- 30 years after Lindner tackled "The Juice" in a football game between Lowell and Galileo high. But Lindner's football career came to an abrupt end - a cancerous knee led to amputation of his left leg in college.

-- Randy "Gus" Koernig, a 57-year-old father of a class-record nine kids and a grandfather of 12 who, as a TV newsman in Montana, anchored the only nationally televised town hall meeting with President Bill Clinton, rode with the Blue Angels and reported from Russia on the collapse of the Soviet Union. And one day in 1991, while covering a fatal hiking accident in the Bear Tooth Mountains, he was stunned to learn that the victim was one of our classmates, Chuck Root.

-- Marilyn Sherman Ellis, a Southern California high school Spanish teacher who became a national advocate against drunken driving after a drunken driver killed her 22-year daughter in a crash eight years ago. More recently, Ellis has battled breast cancer.

-- Terry Zachery, the charismatic student body president who shot and killed a Los Angeles County deputy sheriff with the officer's gun after a routine traffic stop on the I-5 Grapevine in Gorman in 1978. Zachery was apparently under the influence of PCP when Deputy Arthur Pelino took him to the substation. When Pelino, who lived behind the substation, failed to come home for dinner, two of his children went to the substation, where they found their father dead on the floor and Zachery seated quietly in a chair. The children ran back to get Mrs. Pelino, who escorted Zachery into a cell and called for help. According to newspaper reports, Zachery pleaded guilty to involuntary manslaughter due to his mental state and served five years for the shooting.

-- Dennis Marcellino, a rock musician with Sly & The Family Stone, The Tokens and 3 Dog Night who turned from a near-suicidal period of abusing drugs, gambling and alcohol to Christianity when [sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/...](http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/...)

who turned from a near-suicidal period of abusing drugs, gambling and alcohol to Christianity when he "realized the Bible was true" and found inner peace.

-- Paul Batmale and Nancy Motzer, Lowell sweethearts who married at 21, had three children, divorced shortly before our 25th reunion in 1991, then remarried before the 30th. Today they have six grandchildren.

-- Tom Huff and Caren Bird, another pair of Lowellites who married young, had three children and were leading an idyllic life in Canada when Tom was diagnosed with cancer at 37. With surgeries, chemotherapy and radiation he lived 13 years before he died in 1998. "It's important to understand that Tom didn't 'lose his battle' with cancer," Bird says. "He won it."

-- Your correspondent, who was a Chronicle reporter in the 1970s covering the Patty Hearst kidnap case, the Zodiac murders, the assassinations of Mayor George Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk and the Dan White murder trial before moving on to head PR for the San Francisco Giants throughout the 1980s.

In 1977, when we were turning 30, I profiled several of my classmates in a Chronicle article beginning with the premise that we perceived our Lowell diploma as our "express ticket to a rosy future, to success and happiness as we knew it."

Instead, we clashed head-on with the Vietnam War, the draft, campus protests, the psychedelic age, marijuana, rock music, black power, the sexual revolution, the women's movement and Watergate. And most of all, with ourselves -- our values, our attitudes, our goals.

Teens of the mid-1960s, according to a Time magazine cover story at the time, were "on the fringe of a golden era" -- brighter, better educated and more affluent, motivated and independent than ever before.

That came as no surprise to the Lowell community. The oldest public high school in the West -- Lowell turns 150 next year -- it has long ranked among the top academic schools in the nation, and boasts a stellar alumni. Titans of business, government, medicine, law, education, science, public service, sports and the arts populate an alumni roster that includes:

Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer ('55), actress Carol Channing ('38), Yale University President Richard Levin ('64), former California Governor Edmund G. (Pat) Brown ('23), actor Benjamin Bratt ('82), Chronicle columnist Art Hoppe ('42), Pierre Salinger, network TV journalist and John F. Kennedy's presidential press secretary ('41), "Gorillas in the Mist" scientist Dian Fossey ('49), actor Bill Bixby ('52), author Irving Stone ('20), Bob Lee, three-time Minnesota Vikings Super Bowl quarterback ('63) and "Lemony Snicket" creator Daniel Handler ('88).

Many Lowell grads, encouraged toward independent thought by the times and the setting, were

spurred to a philosophy of social change. At 20, when Lani Silver's priority in life was finding a husband and wondering "what color my bridesmaids' dresses would be," her parents took her to South Africa, where the poverty and despair she witnessed in one short afternoon drive through Soweto transformed her.

"This morning I was a conservative," she told her mother and father at dinner that evening. "Tonight I'm a liberal."

In the 1977 article, Silver lamented a world "falling apart" with violence against women, pollution, unemployment, corporate indifference and injustice. Not much has changed, in her view.

"We're in a worse crisis today," Silver said. "The poor are getting poorer, the separation between the classes is growing, we're at war with half the world and we have the worst president ever."

Paul Batmale, a star basketball player at Lowell whose father, Louis Batmale, was the longtime chancellor of City College of San Francisco, and Nancy Motzer, a popular singer, personified the popular group in high school to which many adolescents aspire.

"I had a great time at Lowell, maybe too much fun sometimes," Batmale said. "It's a short period, but the times in high school are important developmental years where kids want to attach themselves to something."

Today the Batmales, the high school sweethearts who divorced and remarried, live in Auburn (Placer County), where he is an insurance broker with former 49ers quarterback Y.A. Tittle, and she is an executive with Kaiser in Sacramento.

For Marilyn Sherman, the post-Lowell path was predictable and happy -- for a time. A UCLA grad with a teaching credential, she met and married Sy Ellis, and they had two daughters, Kim and Amy. Then, on the night of Dec. 9, 1997, their lives changed forever.

Kim, then a 22-year-old Pepperdine University law student on a break from finals, was driving on the Pacific Coast Highway when a drunken driver plowed head-on into her car, killing Kim and another young woman and injuring two other passengers. The driver, who had prior offenses, is now serving 18 years-to-life in prison.

Rather than cave in to debilitating depression, Ellis coped with her loss by forming a chapter of Students Against Destructive Decisions at her school, speaking at national conventions, organizing "Every 15 Minutes" drunken-driving awareness programs at schools, and supporting Mothers Against Drunk Driving events.

"When you lose your parents, you lose your past. But when you lose your children, you lose your future," said Ellis, who teaches Spanish at Sierra Vista High School. Her husband of 36 years is a

mortgage banker

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mortgage banker.

Ellis has since overcome breast cancer and become a victims' advocate for MADD. "Without Kim, nothing is as joyful as it could be," Ellis said. "There will always be a big void, but life goes on. I stay involved to honor her. I try to keep busy and positive. My license plate frame says, 'Live Well. Laugh Often. Love Much.' "

That attitude typifies the outlook of many Baby Boomers today, the notion that life has been a collection of learning experiences, defining moments, rewarding work and precious memories. And that there is much more to come.

Some have retired while others are reinventing themselves and even now beginning new careers. Some are financially secure and others have failed to prepare adequately for their retirement years. Some married young, some often, some only recently. Some have grandchildren, some have infant children, some have no children.

One thing this particular group of Baby Boomers will always have in common, however, is their time together at Lowell, and the anticipation of the 50th reunion in 2015.

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