



# 1955 AUSTIN HIGH REUNION

NEWSLETTER VOLUME 2 ISSUE 3 SUMMER 2007  
www.austin1955.org — [reunion@austin1955.org](mailto:reunion@austin1955.org)

JULY 4, 2007

**HAPPY BIRTHDAY, U.S.A.! HAPPY 70<sup>th</sup> BIRTHDAY TO ALL YOU 1937 BABIES!!**

## **THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU!!**

Many thanks to the following donors: Chuck Cimaglia, Victoria Dobryzynski Peterson, Patricia Giuffre Peterson, James Lupo, Patricia Pecoraro, Lolita Quiny Fraser, John Spinello, Robert Skow, Ann Vatta Smith, Janet Westergren Johnson. If your name is not here, we'd love to put it in the next newsletter. A donation of \$5 per year will be appreciated. Please send your donation to Ken Rosko at the address on page 4. LADIES: Please include your maiden name when making a donation. Thanks in advance for your help.

## **TEACHER NEWS:**

Ken Iversen has learned how to put photos on his computer, and has kindly shared one with us. You can see it on our website [www.austin1955.org](http://www.austin1955.org). Click on "The Iversens".

Kaye (Beecroft) Aurigemma bumped into Rudy Macciocchi recently at a Chicago Symphony concert. He still looks great and sends his best regards.

## **SOCIAL SEEN:**

Phil Grossman and Shel Marcus attended a GVS (Great Vest Side) dinner meeting on May 7, where they had the pleasure of meeting the actor and comedian Shelly Berman. There were 400-500 people in attendance. The Great Vest Side Club is an organization started a few years ago for guys only (how come?) from the old predominately Jewish Chicago West Side neighborhood bounded by Kedzie, Pulaski, 18<sup>th</sup> Street and 12<sup>th</sup> Street. The Yiddish language often spoken there turned "West" into "Vest", thus the name. They hold two dinners a year. The proceeds from the May 7 dinner will help fund the organization's fourth donation of a \$65,000 ambulance, named in honor of Shelley Berman, to the American Friends of Magen David Adom, which is Israel's "Red Cross."

## **IN SHELDON WE TRUST:**

Shel Marcus has been elected as Trustee of the Village of Morton Grove. He was sworn in on Monday, May 14th.

## **HEALTH UPDATES:**

We're delighted to report that Barbara Swanson Foreman is recovering nicely from her May 2<sup>nd</sup> bilateral knee surgery, and is almost ready to go dancing again.

Joan McConville Leander lost a gallbladder in March, but gained a grandson-in-law in May. Congratulations, Joan and family!

## **IN MEMORIAM:**

We are sorry to report the passing of Gail Jensen Amen on April 18, 2007. You may read her obituary at <http://www.legacy.com/chicagotribune/Obituaries.asp?Page=LifeStory&PersonID=87344553>

We were also saddened to hear that Mary Ann (Page) McCarthy, wife of James and sister-in-law of Bruno Popiela, passed away in May. Jim and Bruno were January 1955 grads and attended Cameron Grade School. See Mary Ann's obituary at <http://www.legacy.com/ChicagoTribune/Obituaries.asp?Page=LifeStory&PersonID=88042809>

We extend our sincere condolences to both families.

## **THE LAST DANCE:**

We are sad to include these excerpts from the May 31, 2007 Chicago Tribune article by Michelle S. Keller. For the entire text, see <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/chi-lastdance31may31,1,5574123.story?coll=chi-news-hed>.

Only 214 seniors rush between classes at Austin Community Academy High School, and stop to sign each other's T-shirts. The shirts are inscribed with the words: "The Final Chapter". The final chapter is dominated by senior activities: spirit week, class pictures, a luncheon and Friday's prom -- Austin High School's last dance. After more than a decade of poor test performance, Austin is closing this year. Three smaller schools will occupy the golden-brick building at 231 N. Pine St. Austin's remaining days are few, but on its walls and yearbooks are memories aplenty of a once vibrant school that has been an education center in the area for more than 100 years.

When it was founded in the late 1800s, Austin High was a small school with only a handful of students. After the western suburb of Austin was annexed into the city of Chicago in 1899, the school's enrollment, then 300, saw lightning-fast growth. By 1931, more than 5,000 students were enrolled. Glamor and elegance surrounded Austin's formal dances in the early 20th Century. Student performers dazzled the audience at the junior-senior revel with "charm and grace," followed by informal dancing and a banquet of "chicken en casserole, sandwiches, olives on ice, ice cream and cake ... with cream sauce," according to a 1920 article in *The Austinite*, a local paper. The Charleston, a fast ballroom jazz dance, was all the rage. During that era, Austin High's prominence in Chicago was well recognized. In 1924, Austin High became the first public school to have its football team play in Soldier Field.

Fashions changed with the politics of the times. By the World War II era, women wore looser skirts and were encouraged to be more active in sports and civic duties. Patriotism was manifested in awards for the "Typical American Girl" at Austin, according to yearbooks from the 1940s.

As in many parts of America, racial tensions peaked in the 1960s. Riots erupted at Austin as the school dealt with demographic changes. "The large migration of African-American families to the West Side was an unwelcome change for many established white families", says Amanda Seligman, history professor at University of Wisconsin. "The big racial change in Austin came in the early 1960s, after similar changes had occurred in North Lawndale and West Garfield Park," Seligman said.

One of the ways residents reacted to racial change was by trying to manipulate the Austin High School boundaries to push out the black families. The school board wouldn't assent to that. The board did, however, allow white parents to transfer their children to other high schools. Although by 1970 the neighborhood was more White than African-American, over 75 percent of Austin's students were African-American. By the late 1970s, the school was nearly 100 percent African-American. The academic emphasis had changed from college prep to training students for industry, office work and homemaking.

The decade saw a depressed economic situation for the Austin neighborhood. The school received an increasingly negative academic reputation. When current Principal Anthony Scott joined the school as a math teacher in 1976, the neighborhood's best students had gone elsewhere. "Kids who could read would leave and go to schools like Taft High School," Scott recalled. But for the students who stayed during that period, the stigma was only from the outside. They still had a great deal of pride in Austin.

"The school had so many clubs back then," recalled 1974 graduate Jacqueline Brooks-Paige. "The school was bursting with activity." Like the dances held in the early 1900s, Austin's prom that year was a formal affair -- with the dancing reflecting the times. "It was the disco era," Brooks-Paige said. Her prom dress gleamed with white satin and navy-blue piping and was covered with a satin swing coat, she said. With the break-dancing craze of the 1980s, fancy footwork dominated the dance floor at Austin's proms. Fashions were loud and bright. Yet Austin's future was anything but.

The administration changed frequently in the late 1990s and early 2000s, primarily as a result of poor school performance. By May 2004, during Scott's first year as principal, the faculty was informed by Chicago Public Schools officials that Austin High would be phased out. "I was told that I would not have any freshmen," Scott said. "I thought I had an opportunity to change the school, but that changed. The community was in an uproar."

Austin, along with Calumet Career Prep Academy and Westinghouse Career Academy, is being phased out this year. Austin will transform into three smaller schools, including the Austin Business and Entrepreneurship Academy, which is already open, and Austin Polytechnical Academy, which will begin classes in the fall. The small schools concept, part of Mayor Daley's Renaissance 2010 project to replace older schools with new innovative ones, hopes to relieve overcrowding and provide different educational options for the district's children.

While the school's closing is a sad note for many, Diondai Brown, president of the Austin High School Alumni Association, sees it as the next step for the community's children. "I think it's an opportunity," Brown said. "When one door closes, another one opens. We need to try to give support to the students who are there."

Scott partially blames the lack of stability the students had in school for the disappointing test scores. But the tough neighborhood surrounding the school didn't help, he added. "They have a lot of competition from the streets," he said, referring to gang violence. But neighborhood troubles will fade into the past as the seniors gather for the last prom on Friday. The prom committee selected as the theme "Make It Last Forever." Although the seniors are excited about their last high-school rituals, they are saddened too. "This is it, the final chapter," senior Adriane Reed said glumly as a friend signed her shirt recently. "No more Austin."

### **MOVES AND TRAVELS:**

Welcome Home, Bernie and Renee Oppenheim! After 30 years in Indiana, they are happy to be back in Illinois, and proud to announce the marriage of their son Daniel to Rebecca Pascal on July 14. Congratulations to the happy family!

Victoria Dobrzynski Peterson moved into her new home in Third Lake, Illinois, and spent a whole year decorating and landscaping. 'Bet it's beautiful. She also attended a reunion with friends from the class of 1956 on Tybee Island near Savannah, Georgia. They've been doing this every year since 1991, and even did Disney World without kids (that's the best way)!

Lolita Quiny Fraser will be in the Chicago area this summer. She's looking forward to a trip to Munich, Salzburg and Vienna in August, followed by a "Tango Dance Tour" week in November to Buenos Aires. 'Sounds like fun! Pat Pecoraro enjoyed a 7-day river boat cruise to Germany, Austria, Slovakia and Hungary in May 2006. She says a river boat is the way to go. It moves slowly, service is attentive and people are less likely to get seasick. Listening to Mozart and Strauss at the Vienna Opera House was delightful. See her photos on our website [www.austin1955.org](http://www.austin1955.org) and click on "Pat Pecoraro Photos (Europe)".

### **MISSING PERSONS:**

Please tell us if you know the whereabouts of any of these classmates:

FRANCES (HARRIS) FISCHER    JOSEPH PALMER    MARY ANN JULIANO\*    GIL CATANZARO\*  
CAROL LEE    JOANNE ELLMAN\*    SEYMOUR GOLDWATER    PHYLLIS ZAIKEN

\*Pat Pecoraro wants to find these folks.

### **CRUISE AND OTHER 2008 TRIP SUGGESTIONS:**

Jim Lupo suggests a Hawaiian Island cruise out of San Diego, or one including the Mediterranean and Greek Isles, or British Isles & Northern Europe. Pat Pecoraro suggests a Scandinavian or Rhine river cruise in May or October. Janet Westergren Johnson suggests a gathering in Las Vegas. It's closer to home and less expensive (unless you bet and lose). We're open to more suggestions. Please tell us yours via email or on the form on page 4.

NOTE: Photos from the January 2007 Panama Canal cruise can be found at <http://austin1955.org/pictures4.html>

**NEXT ALUMNI GATHERING:**

Your reunion committee has booked a Lake Michigan sunset dinner cruise on the Spirit of Chicago for Sunday, September 30. We board at the West end of Navy Pier at 5 PM, cruise from 6 to 9 PM. Cost for the 3-hour cruise, entertainment and a Grande Buffet dinner is \$95 per person, including tax and gratuity. There will be a Cash Bar. R.S.V.P. to Ken Rosko by July 27 with your name, number of people and \$50 per person deposit payable to Austin 1955 Reunion, Ltd.. Full payment is due on or before August 27, 2007.

**STAY CURRENT, LOG ON:**

Log in often to [www.austin1955.org](http://www.austin1955.org) to keep abreast of what’s going on. The site includes a graduate list, reunion photos, school photos, class relevant articles and the latest newsletter. NEW PHOTOS HAVE BEEN POSTED.

**Your Austin 1955 Reunion Committee**

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**NEWS, MEMORIES AND CHANGES**

**GOT NEWS?**

We want to hear from **YOU!** This is YOUR newsletter. Photos and items of general class or historical interest for the website should be directed to [AustinWebmaster@comcast.net](mailto:AustinWebmaster@comcast.net). If you have any news (special trips, births, deaths, anniversaries, moves, etc.) or memories of your days at Austin to share, please email Kaye Aurigemma ([kaurige@comcast.net](mailto:kaurige@comcast.net)) or Nancy Pasquerelli ([npasq@comcast.net](mailto:npasq@comcast.net)). If you don’t have email, send this form.

If your contact information has changed, please send an email to [reunion@austin1955.org](mailto:reunion@austin1955.org) or mail this form to Ken Rosko, Austin Class of 1955, 3233 West Grand Avenue – Suite 103, Waukegan, IL 60085-2234.

NAME (1st, maiden, last): \_\_\_\_\_

NEW STREET ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

NEW CITY, STATE, ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

NEW EMAIL ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE (required): \_\_\_\_\_

PLEASE TAKE A MOMENT TO SHARE NEWS WITH YOUR AUSTIN CLASSMATES. WHAT’S THE OCCASION? WHERE DID YOU GO? WHAT DID YOU DO? WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

**WHEN/WHERE WOULD YOU LIKE TO GO ON THE NEXT CRUISE?**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

EVENT: \_\_\_\_\_

REMARKS: \_\_\_\_\_