

Cubberley Class of 1974; The South Palo Alto We Shared
by
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Ten short years removed from earning their place in the Greatest Generation,
our parents perched on this western edge of manifest destiny,
bought cheap, functional Eichlers in tracts carved from still-harvested apricot
groves
where kids rode bikes in cul-de-sac neighborhoods,
bisected by Charleston and Middlefield,
bounded by El Camino, Oregon Expressway, San Antonio,
and the Bayshore Freeway.

Our fathers worked at Varian, Fairchild, and Philco
or rode the train from a lazy California Avenue depot up to The City,
a far-away place that we visited on weekends.
Our mothers dragged us shopping to Mayfair, Co-op, Sears and Maximart,
where bread was still sliced by the baker,
toys rarely plugged in,
and color TV's were magical and rare.

Most of us met on a warm fall morning in 1968,
blended from seven elementary schools,
nervous, expectant, hopeful, timid,
some girls nearly grown; some boys with hairy chins;
the rest of us treading water until we could leave childhood behind,
all forced to shower with a hundred strangers every day.
We stared down an unmapped tunnel of our next six years,
7,560 class periods, 378,000 minutes sitting at our desks, give or take,

Book covers, band uniforms, Wilbur red and gray.
In 7th grade, we young, emphatic radicals earned the right to stand silently for the Pledge
of Allegiance if we chose.
Boys bent metal, cut wood.
Girls learned to cook and sew,
and were allowed for the first time to wear pants to school; a shocking revolution
from which the world survived.
Learning to slow dance, box step at arm's length, in PE, was somehow deemed a
critical life skill.

In a seeming moment, high school;
at Cubberley we *mostly* went to class,
looking forward to the important stuff:
brunch, lunch, our sports, plays, concerts,

a smoke over by the donut shop,
glances from a boy or girl that made the day glow.

We were mostly white and Anglo
until a few brave families of color breached the Bayshore barrier of suburban
prejudice.
We knew Senor Gamez was gay,
but that was not yet OK for many of our brothers, sisters, and best friends.

We received the Hassling legacy of Ron Jones, Tony Petrie, and Student Power,
found refuge in Tom Stamper and the Alternative School,
where couches replaced desks,
and Frisbee replaced gym.

Some of us studied every weeknight.
Some of us hardly studied at all.
We shared an adolescent biochemistry that juggled us up and down,
passionate and risky,
insightful and stupid,
mean spirited and kind...
sometimes all in a single week or night or day.

We came to school in sandals, boots, Birkenstocks, barefoot;
in halter-tops, blue jeans, long straight hair.
It took three schools to gather a quorum for prom,
but we ALL turned out to support Coach Peters
because kids in Viet Nam had suffered the napalm attacks of a government that had
lost its way.
We were mostly middle class, which loosely justified the pranks we wrought on
dark homecoming nights against "those rich kids" from Paly High.

On weekends we cruised Mayfield Mall,
the Bijou,
the Varsity,
the drive-in,
A Sunday with Santana at El Camino,
Joan Baez at Frost,
the Dead at Winterland.
We bought and sold weedy, seedy \$10 lids,
found misguided adults to buy us cheap six packs of Mickey's Big Mouth.
Parents looked the other way or bought a keg and left for the night.

In the summer, we suffered through typing class and driver's ed,
bought Slurpees for a dime, a quarter, thirty-five cents for a large,
swam ten hours a day at Greenmeadow and Eichler,
worked the night shift at greasy fast food franchises,

and ate hot dogs watching little brothers whiff on Little League fastballs to the smell of a freshly-mown outfield.

In less than two decades, microchips and fearless innovation turned our small stucco homes into million-dollar tear-downs.

Families with young kids moved away,
schools closed,
the post-war decades gave early birth to the 21st century.

We went to college, to jobs, moved out of our parents' homes...
and some moved right back in.

The trees in South Palo Alto grew up and arched across our streets.

We grew up, too,
sharing a window of time and space
perhaps not unique...but certainly it was ours.