San Dieguito Stories

One sentimental principal's scribbling on eighty years of San Dieguito



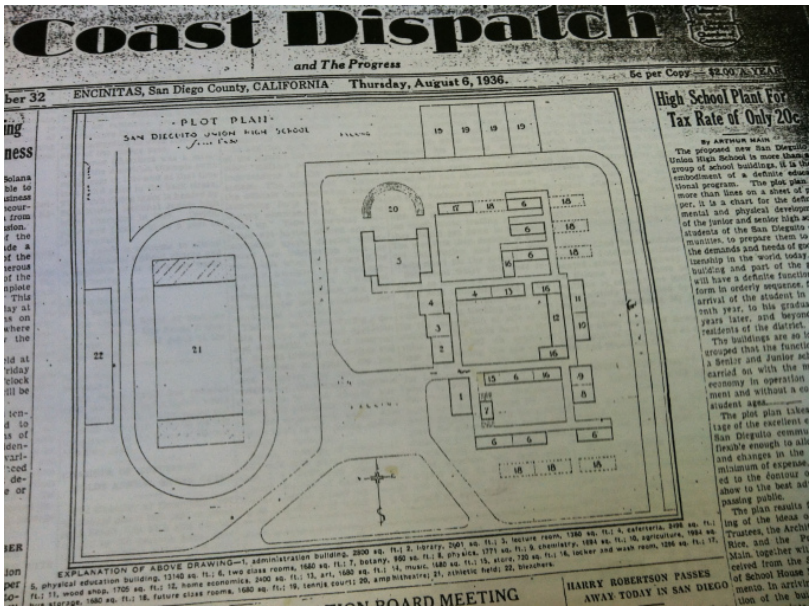
Students created this mural celebrating the 80th anniversary of San Dieguito in the fall of 2016.

Bjorn Paige

"It is always good to look back to see where we were then and how far from there we are now. We do that, not with sadness or bitterness over the changes that have taken place, but to better help us understand why we are where we are today."

-San Dieguito History Teacher Robert Williamson

1. Eighty Years Ago


Coast Dispatch
and The Progress
ENCINITAS, San Diego County, CALIFORNIA Thursday, August 6, 1936.
5c per Copy
High School Plant For Tax Rate of Only 20c
- PLOT PLAN -
SAN DIEGUITO UNION HIGH SCHOOL
EXPLANATION OF ABOVE DRAWING—1, administration building, 2800 sq. ft.; 2, library, 2961 sq. ft.; 3, lecture room, 1260 sq. ft.; 4, cafeteria, 2496 sq. ft.; 5, physical education building, 13140 sq. ft.; 6, two class rooms, 1680 sq. ft.; 7, botany, 960 sq. ft.; 8, physics, 1771 sq. ft.; 9, chemistry, 1884 sq. ft.; 10, agriculture, 1984 sq. ft.; 11, wood shop, 1705 sq. ft.; 12, home economics, 2400 sq. ft.; 13, art, 1680 sq. ft.; 14, music, 1680 sq. ft.; 15, store, 720 sq. ft.; 16, locker and wash room, 1296 sq. ft.; 17, storage, 1680 sq. ft.; 18, future class rooms, 1680 sq. ft.; 19, tennis courts; 20, amphitheatre; 21, athletic field; 22, bleachers.
HARRY ROBERTSON PASSES AWAY TODAY IN SAN DIEGO

In an article from *The Coast Dispatch* dated August 6, 1936, Arthur Main, San Dieguito's first principal, wrote: "The proposed new San Dieguito Union High School is more than a group of school buildings, it is the embodiment of a definite educational program." Accompanying the article, a map of campus shows the first dream of a school that looks familiar to the legions of those whose lives have passed through our breezeways.

This campus has been the home to students for nearly eight decades, and as I look around my office, the same office principals have been sitting in since the Roosevelt administration, it's with a feeling not unlike what I imagine sea captains experience as they step into the cabin of an august sailing ship, appreciating the rich history around them, even as they plot a course toward the future.

Over the next few months I'll spend some time celebrating this deep history of our school. If the walls that architect Lilian Rice designed could talk, the stories they would tell.



It's my hope to tell a few.

Working roughly chronologically, I'll draw stories from the opening of San Dieguito in 1936 through the decades to today. I'll interview graduates from every decade, share highlights from yearbooks, and delve into some of the hidden corners of our school's story.

That said, I'm no historian; I'm a principal, accused of being more

poetic than any good chronicler should be, and the more I looked at the history of San Dieguito, the more I realized that every year had enough stories for a book and every student's life could fill a library. My small contributions to the celebration of our school are mere snapshots in the greater album of San Dieguito.



For those looking for a more formal history of our school, I'd point to our Foundation, whose alumni website has great links to historical articles and even a digital archive of student newspapers. I talked at length to Bonnie Wren in the Foundation office and through her have met some of the most amazing alumni in the universe.

I'm shooting for a post about our school's rich history going up at the end of every week or so, but then again I've got a school to run, so if that pace isn't kept please know it's because this beautiful place (in its present incarnation) has my attention.

Arthur Main started writing about San Dieguito in 1936; I'm just keeping up that tradition.

2. The Dog

There's a photograph from 1936 that hangs in our library and shows the collected students and faculty of San Dieguito standing together near their interim campus and a collection of tents that served as classrooms as the school was being built.



I love the juxtaposition of the stern, bespectacled, and dark suited principal and the fact that just to his left are the hindquarters of a large, black dog.

It's this jarring reality, something that wouldn't happen organically in a school photo today, that strikes me as emblematic of the long running spirit of our school. At San Dieguito the unexpected is never far away.

Mr. Main, that first principal, was shown the door after just four years at San Dieguito, pressure put on him to leave by a staff who felt too "circumscribed in their activities" by their frowning leader. This spirit of freedom is another part of the San Dieguito DNA. We're a school that values academics, of course, but also has fostered the independent spirit of students and faculty for almost eighty years.



The result of this expectation of the unexpected and culture of creativity has led to a list of alumni that reads like a who's who of diversity. Professional musicians, actors, and athletes have learned their craft at San Dieguito. Surfers, scientists, and school teachers began their careers while Mustangs.

As we enter our 80th year as a school, it's amazing to hear the range of stories of the alumni who visit campus. Some are funny (sitting along 101 to watch 1950's celebrities caught in the

traffic jam between Hollywood and the Del Mar Racetrack). Some are moving (1945 Mustangs petitioning to allow an interred Japanese student to return to walk in graduation). Some are patently fantastic (the time the seniors, with a little help from the art department, built a life sized zoo of animals and surprised everyone by putting them up around campus).

I'm looking forward to our Founder's Day reception in October and all the events this year that will give our alumni a chance to come back to San Dieguito and to share their stories. When they do, I hope they'll find me so I can listen. I'll be the fellow wearing a tie, and wishing that just beside me was a big, black dog.



3. Mary



She was from an 8th grade class of three girls and one boy. She married the boy.

Mary came to San Dieguito in 1936 along with the three other members of her junior high class. They biked to a makeshift campus made up of tents, an elementary school, and a church across the way.

She was one of the true founding members of San Dieguito, arriving to school at a time when teachers drove school buses and more people rode bikes to school than drove.

I met Mary for lunch at a cafe in Solana Beach, and we talked while over the patio speakers Frank Sinatra crooned “Cheek to Cheek” and Martha Tilton sang “Please be Kind.” I don’t know if she chose the place for the ambiance, but it fit perfectly her reminiscences about life at San Dieguito between the wars.

As we talked, Mary described the bonfires before the big games, “which meant Vista,” she explained to me with an easy smile. She told me about working in the student store, a thriving enterprise, loving to read, and playing grass hockey on one of the fields around campus.



Mary was a freshman when students chose the school colors and mascot, and was friends with one of the students who helped to write the school song. She saw campus built amid fields of tomatoes, potatoes, and flowers, and was one of the first to walk the breezeways students still walk today.

Her eyes sparkled as she described what it was like to step onto a brand new campus, built as one of FDR’s public works projects. The buildings were new and filled with the latest 1930s technology. Once the construction was done, students at San Dieguito loved their sparkling new campus.



We laughed as we talked about the things that have stayed the same over the past eight decades: the timeless joy of going to the beach just blocks away ("though there weren't the surfers there are today," she explained, "and the paddle boarding we had was something I wanted no part of") and spending time with friends, as well as the many things that have changed.

We talked too about the changes Mary saw between the time she graduated in 1940 and the time, eight years later, when she came back to San Dieguito to teach English. The school grew in those eight post-war years and she returned to a campus alive with learning and more than double the number of students.

Students and faculty alike were shocked that fall of 1948 when a science teacher arrived at her customary 6:00 am and saw flames rising from the school bus yard at the top of the hill. By the time firefighters arrived, the buses were destroyed, and students worried about how they would get to campus. In an example of the kindness of others and the supportive nature of education, school districts from as far away as Los Angeles offered buses until San Dieguito could replace theirs, and school could continue sooner than anyone expected.

On campus, Mary described the feeling of "closeness" that defined her time at San Dieguito, both as a student and as a teacher. She told me about Mr. Main, her principal, who she knew cared so much about students, even if he had some dust ups with teachers, and her smile brightened as she described some of her favorite teachers, including Mr. Harris, who also drove a school bus.



Before I let her go, I asked Mary what advice she would give a young person starting her first year at San Dieguito today. She thought about it, nodded, and said: "Take things in stride. Be a good listener. Befriend those off by themselves." She paused, thinking about my theoretical young girl and perhaps imagining herself in 1936. "Take a look around," she said finally, "*and make up your own mind*. That's me."

Mary is a San Dieguito treasure, and just one of thousands of stories from our first eighty years. As that first principal described, San Dieguito is "more than a group of school buildings." San Dieguito is more than a campus or curriculum; it is the people who share in, and are, its history.



5. A History Lesson



I was given a three ring binder in my first week as principal of San Dieguito filled with a photocopied document titled *The History of San Dieguito Union High School District 1936-1981* by Robert Williamson.

Williamson, a retired San Dieguito history teacher, wrote the chronicle in the mid 1990s, choosing to tell the story of the district from its beginnings in the 1930s through the year of his own retirement.

It is awesome.

Typewritten and single spaced, its 133 pages are filled with a historian's view of the political intrigue and social upheaval of almost a half century of Southern Californian life. He traces the challenges of starting a school and district, and records the names and actions of those who have formed our school and our school district.

It was through Williamson that I learned about the challenges faced by the early administrators at San Dieguito: a record 74% growth in the student body in the late 40s, the war protests of the 1960s and 70s, and an ongoing concern about how best to raise kids to be respectable adults, which had a different meaning in 1950 than it did in 1970 or does today.



Through Williamson's eyes I watched as a polio scare delayed the start of school in 1948, a group of boys from San Dieguio shanghaied a boat at Disneyland in 1959, and the community dealt with overwhelming fears of Communism in the 1960s.

Williamson's words sent me scrambling to old yearbooks to see images to accompany the descriptions of students who led some concerned parents to look for a law and order principal to deal with "too many unacceptable acts" to describe ...in the early 1950s… acts eventually punished with the paddle.

It was also in Williamson's history that I learned about a "very San Dieguito" twist to that sanctioned paddling:

"Mr. Korwin, the principal, kept a list of names of every student

who was paddled and then had a drawing at the end of the year and "the student whose name had been drawn was given a chance to give Mr. Korwin a swat with the paddle in front of all the students at the last student assembly of the year."

Only at San Dieguito.

But this chronicle isn't just a series of facts and anecdotes; Williamson intersperses long passages from board reports, newspaper articles, and letters. He clearly did his research, and did it with the passion of someone who really cares about his subject.



...and then, on page 97, he became part of that subject.

I had to read the passage twice before it clicked for me: Williamson was more than a historian, he was a *part* of this sweep of San Dieguito history.

Describing the controversy around a piece of student artwork that incorporated an American flag, a daring move in 1969, our historian becomes history, writing:

"One day in the Advanced Placement US History class that I taught, a student asked me if he could put up a display he felt expressed his feelings about what was happening in the US."

The "I" startled me, as *The History of San Dieguito Union High School District 1936-1981* took on the feel of the new journalism of Tom Wolfe or Gay Talese. The immediacy was amazing; I felt transported to Williamson's classroom, and then beyond to the controversy that followed.

This inclusion helped me understand Williamson's point of view, and allowed me to see the work as a whole as the wonderfully personal history it was.

As Williamson went on to write about the ways in which the 1970s unfolded on campus, I could picture the students protesting, smoking, and throwing marshmallows at the school board.

I could feel the stress of the principals that sat in this office before me, and also felt the strange camaraderie that came from reading this story in the same office in which much of the story took place. On the wall behind my desk is a button once used to summon the principal's secretary to take shorthand. Along with the wooden paneling and antiquated back door, every day I'm remind that my office was the office of the first principal, Arthur Main, back in 1937.



When Williamson gets to a particularly rough patch in our nation's history and the impact it had on the school community, he writes:

"It would be nice for the peace of mind and the lack of tension to have schools be quiet places where teachers passed on the wisdom of the past in a civil and respectful manner. However, being a public institution, public schools cannot escape the turmoil going on in the rest of society."

How true those words were of the time he wrote them, of the decades before he wrote them, and of the decades that have followed. And what an opportunity this truth offers.

I thoroughly enjoyed this opinionated, passionate, and heartfelt history of our school, and found myself wishing to know more about the story of San Dieguito. It left me hungry to talk with alumni, celebrate the students who were so very young so many years ago, and understand our school and its rich history.

I'll leave the last words of today's post to Robert Williamson, who summed up his efforts by telling readers:

"It is always good to look back to see where we were then and how far from there we are now. We do that, not with sadness or bitterness over the changes that have taken place, but to better help us understand why we are where we are today."

6. Tak



He grew up in Encintias and graduated from high school in 1945, but his path from elementary school to San Dieguito's commencement ceremony took him to an internment camp in Poston, Arizona, to Chicago, and back. More than simply a San Dieguito story, his is a story of strength and humanity, an inspiration and affirmation of the human spirit, much like the man himself.

I met Tak at his home in Encinitas and we talked for almost two hours, a beautifully meandering conversation in which tales of adventures from sun drenched Leucadia to the coldest winter of his life serving in the Army in Korea followed his charming and lyrical introduction, always delivered with a smile: "Now that's another story…"

The story that first led me to Tak has been recorded before. A local boy, he was born in 1927, attended elementary school in Encinitas, and was set to attend San Dieguito Union High School when it housed grades seven through twelve. Then, in 1942, he and his family were taken from their home and "relocated" to the Poston War Relocation Center along with other Japanese American families from California.

While his Caucasian friends began high school, got jobs, and drove cars, Tak found himself at an improvised school in an internment camp in the the middle of the Arizona desert. Here students carried their own chairs to a hundred foot long abandoned hangar where they had to learn science without materials for labs and had to share five students to one copy of *Silas Marner*.

When he was fifteen, Tak followed his older sister north to Chicago where he attended high school and made plans to go to college to study medicine. The freezing Chicago winter was nothing like San Diego County, but Tak felt welcomed by the people of the windy city and a sense of possibility.

Then, when he was beginning his senior year, his brother was "drafted out of camp" into the Army, his father contracted tuberculosis, and was sent away from Poston, and Tak had to return to the desert and his mother.

By 1944 the families of the camp had built a school using adobe bricks as taught to them by Native Americans. Students had classrooms and an auditorium, and Tak resumed classes and moved toward earning a diploma.



San Dieguito Spanish teacher Josephine Yoch visited Poston periodically, and Tak would ask her about his friends still in Encinitas. He heard about life at the high school, football games, dances, and students living life near the ocean and among the flower fields.

Then, near Thanksgiving, they talked about the possibility of his return to San Dieguito to finish his senior year and graduate with his class. She returned to Encinitas and, according to the stories told to Tak, conducted a vote amongst the student body, who voted almost unanimously to welcome him back for the new semester. “I heard that one fellow voted no,” he told me, “but that he went into the service before I got back to San Dieguito.”



Back on campus, Tak played became an infielder for the Mustang baseball team, earned a letter, and wore his blue letterman's sweater with more pride than most can imagine. He attended classes in the beautiful buildings he’d seen built when he was a young boy, driving in each morning with a teacher, Mr. Dobbins, who agreed to let him live with him at his house in Oceanside. “My happiness came when I was on campus,” Tak remembered, “when I could be with my friends.”

With those friends, Tak was able to be just another proud senior in the class of ‘45. He carved his name on the Senior Bench alongside his classmates, he attended school functions, and recalled that “everybody knew everybody, and all the students really felt like siblings.”

When his name was called at the graduation ceremony, Tak remembers not only the students standing to applaud, but the crowd of parents and friends standing as well. “It wasn’t just the teachers,” he told me, “or the students, but it was the *community*.” It’s a moment he has never forgotten.

Tak's love for the San Dieguito and Encinitas community is profound. "Better than good," he described it. "Home."



His dramatic story of returning to graduate with his class, however, is only part of Tak's San Dieguito story.

With opportunities still limited in North County and a draft notice looming, Tak moved to Los Angeles after graduation. He soon served the country that had interred him, becoming a soldier in the US Army. Life led him to Japan and later Korea, and finally back to California, where he settled into family life, raising children of his own.

Then, in 1974, Tak and his wife moved back to Encinitas, where his two daughters registered for classes at San Dieguito.

"You'll enjoy it here," he told them, his senior dubious, her younger sister open to the idea. They did. "There weren't the cliques at San Dieguito," he explained, "and that stems from the general public." He smiled at the memory. "From the warmth of the city."

Tak's grandkids graduated from San Dieguito, just as their mothers did, and this year his great-granddaughter begins classes, some in the same buildings Tak sat in to learn English and history and math.

"Some things are different now," he said, "but at the core of it San Dieguito is the same."

Tak's spirit is powerful and his positive attitude palpable. Talking with him, hearing his story, and seeing San Dieguito through his eyes can inspire us all to do our own part to make every student's San Dieguito experience "better than good."

7. Home Movies



The 1930s and 40s were lived in full color.

Unlike the black and white photos that fill yearbooks and scrapbooks, the world that students at San Dieguito inhabited in the 1930s and 40s was vibrant, colorful, and always in motion. Talking with early graduates, it's easy to be transported by their technicolor memories and understand that life then was not so unlike life now: teenagers moved at full throttle, adults worried about whether the kids would turn out to be solid citizens, and the world of school meant high spirits and good friends.

What a treat then, when San Dieguito's intrepid alumni coordinator, Bonnie Wren, shared some amazing video from the 1941-1942 school year.

Bonnie explained that "the original reel of this 16 mm film landed in the Foundation Office one day, with no note or explanation of its origin. The old library had just been torn down, so we thought perhaps it had been found in the rafters there, or something! I took the film to a digital preservation company but they told me it was too degraded to save. I was lamenting this fact to Bettie Grice Wolfe ('41) who told me she thought she might have a copy, and she did! It was on a VHS tape, copied over a game show, I think, but I was able to transfer it to my hard drive."



The result is a thing of beauty.

Students watching the movies today would see much that is familiar in the flickering images of their peers from 1941. In one shot a student sits on a bench in the front of the school, the breezeway near the principal's office stretching out behind her. In another, a group of students clown around in the quad outside the B building, and the expression on the girl's face as one fellow



in a sailor suit sneaks in for a kiss is the same as I've seen on kids faces today.

Football was big in 1941, as the grainy film shows, with students lining the field to cheer on their Mustangs beneath the California sun on a field without lights. To see the rows of now vintage cars, which were then simply ...cars, is a delight. Watching the players run and score, smiles beneath their leather helmets, reminds us that while sports change, the exhilaration of competition and the joy of rooting for the hometown Mustangs is timeless.

Images from a ceremony in the old gym show different fashion styles (we see far too few letterman's sweaters today), but the pride in a job well done beams from teenagers and the smiles of adults alike no matter what the decade.

Similar too is the concentration on the faces of the student musicians, the laughter of the students hanging out on campus, and the pride of marching in the Encinitas parade. Of course teachers and administrators dress a bit less formally today.

Perhaps the most striking difference between San Dieguito of 1941 and 2016, at least as it's seen in the movies, is not on campus at all. In many shots, of the games, of teachers arriving at the start of the school day, and of busses of students returning from a trip to the beach, the ocean views across acres of open fields stands in stark juxtaposition to the building boom of the past seventy years.



But a school is defined by its spirit and traditions more than its geography, and this seventy year old video shows that

both school spirit and strong traditions were as alive then as they are today. “San Dieguito High: Those Early Years” brings to life a time in our school’s story that should be remembered. The images leap off the screen and provide our contemporary audience with a window into history, *our* history, the history of San Dieguito.



9. “Mr. Main?”

The small group of students walked into the hangar that had been converted into a schoolhouse in the middle of the Arizona desert. They were hundreds of miles from their home in Encinitas, forcibly “relocated” with their families simply because their heritage was Japanese. Behind them they’d left the new buildings of San Dieguito Union High School, not even a decade old, teachers who cared for them, and an school cooled by breezes fresh off the Pacific. Poston, Arizona enjoyed no such breezes.



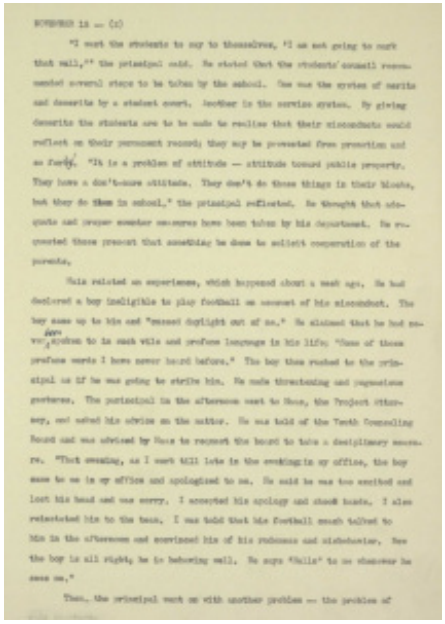
They arrived for the first day of classes uncertain of so many things, and to their surprise one of the first faces they encountered knew them by name. They knew him too, Mr. Main.

San Dieguito’s isn’t a simple story of black and white, but a rich kaleidoscope of vibrant colors, the colors of reality. It’s messy, like life, and infinitely more interesting than it appears on first blush. San Dieguito’s story also extends beyond the stuccoed breezeways, sometimes into the Arizona desert.

In an earlier post I mentioned that Arthur Main, San Dieguito’s first principal, spent four years in his post before leaving after some controversy around his manner with the staff. He was seen as stern, at least with the adults on campus, and that manner led some to push back against him as the school’s leader. He exited, not completely of his own choosing, with the simple distinction of being San Dieguito’s first principal. It would have been easy to call that the end of his San Dieguito story, but it wouldn’t quite be true.

Mr. Main left San Dieguito in the spring of 1940 and by 1943 had taken a principalship at the Poston Internment Camp in Arizona. It was not an easy task to lead a school without adequate resources or facilities, in a fenced community of displaced families. Students came to him and his school with more stress than many of us can imagine, the reality of being prisoners of war in their own country added to the usual challenges of simply being teenagers.

Those young faces that arrived at Poston’s school had few comforts beyond the immediate strength of their families, but I like to think that the teenagers who were forced from San Dieguito in 1943 found some little relief in seeing their principal was *their* principal. In that moment of recognition,



that instant of familiarity, I want to believe that for a few of the students a small measure familiarity split the pressure of their lives.

Looking back at the records of the camp, it's easy to see how some of the students' frustration boiled over in behavior that forced Mr. Main to respond.

In his first year at Poston, Main described an incident when a student he'd suspended from athletics "cussed daylight out of me" and "rushed the principal as if he was going to strike him." Later "that evening," Main wrote, "as I work till late in the evenings in my office, the boy came to me in my office and apologized to me. He said he was too excited and lost his head and was sorry. I accepted his apology and shook hands. I also reinstated him to the team." I don't know if that student ever attended San Dieguito, but I see in Arthur Main's response to him a touch of the Mustang spirit I know. "Now the boy is all right; he is behaving well," Main reported later. "He says 'Hello' to me whenever he sees me."

Mr. Main struggled at times in Poston, as did so many who found themselves in this parched corner of American history. Reading of his experiences, so familiar to a principal like me (graffiti in the bathroom, students in conflict with other students, stressed parents worried about their kids) fills me with empathy and reminds me of the profound lessons in kindness I am learning in my time at San Dieguito.



There's a line in that old song "Can't Help But Wonder Where I'm Bound" about the people we meet in our lives: "Some are bad, and some are good, and some have done the best they could."

I never met Arthur Main, a man who was younger than I am when he was in the principal's office at San Dieguito, the same office I sit in today. By all accounts, I see in him the third part of that line; faced with challenges he did the best he could. What more could be asked of any of us?

And whether we call it fate or providence, or even just coincidence, I believe that in his position as principal in the middle of an internment camp in the middle of that Arizona desert, at least for a moment he brought ease to the troubled minds of San Dieguito students so far from home.

10. Norm



He stood in the doorway, his date smiling at his elbow, her father eyeing this boy in the cardigan sweater and blue suede shoes. “Dad,” she said, “this is…” She stopped, leaned to his ear and whispered: “What’s your *real* name?”

Later he made a point of reminding his dates that his given name was “Norm.” Getting introduced to parents as “Gimpy” simply did not cut the mustard.

Gimpy left San Dieguito early, dropping out his junior year to work at his father’s filling station. He reconsidered after a year and a half of watching his former classmates honking as they drove by with their arms around girlfriends, and during the summer of 1954 he walked into the office of Mr. Davidson, the superintendent, who was planning for the next school year with Principal Korwin. He explained that he wanted to come back.

They told him that over the years many students had left, but none had ever returned. He would be their first.

Gimpy had many friends at San Dieguito, and when he came back for his senior year he and his brotherhood of friends embraced all aspects of student life. Gimpy ran for student Activities Coordinator, elected after a campaign that included tri-colored cards printed on a friend’s mini printing press inviting students to “String along with Gimpy,” a piece of string stapled to each card.



He helped plan activities, served as the master of ceremonies at assemblies, and honed the leadership skills that he would take with him to college and later into a forty year career at General Dynamics. “The key,” he explained to me one

afternoon in my office, “is to *get involved*. Volunteer. When there’s something to be done, say: ‘I can do that!’”

He did.

“I left school in Levis and engineer boots with horseshoe metal on the heels, so I’d click on the wooden floors,” he remembered with a grin, “and came back wearing slacks, sweaters, and white bucks.”

Well, truth be told, it looks to me like a checkered shirt and pegged pants show up in a few of his yearbook photos, beneath rebellious sunglasses and a mischievous smile.



TRAFFIC COURT—Row I, L-R: V. Vint, J. Hawkins, N. Keith, L. Booth, E. Prather, J. Barton, J. Kennedy.

In addition to student council, Gimpy and some friends started a nationally recognized student court to help address community concerns about students driving recklessly at lunch. They monitored student drivers, offered warnings, and in some cases held a court of peers to mete out consequences. Working closely with Mr. Davidson and Mr. Korwin, Gimpy and his chums “helped run the school.” That investment in San Dieguito has stayed with him and his classmates, many of whom still meet every year. They see San Dieguito as their own.

“San Dieguito *is* my school,” he told me emphatically, sure to keep the tense present. “When people visit me, I still drive them to campus and tell them ‘I went there.’”

Being on student court, however, didn’t mean that Gimpy and his friends followed *every* rule. They still sometimes rushed down to Mel’s on 101 to get cheeseburgers and root beer at lunch, a hurry even in their cars. Some smoked cigarettes, and once, reminding us that misbehavior isn’t a trait only of “kids today,” Gimpy, his friend, and “three gals” played hooky from school and drove to San Diego during the day. They didn’t count on the small town detective work of Mr. Davidson.



When Gimpy and his friend got back to town they drove to the restaurant owned by his friend’s parents. They settled in for sodas and were asked where they’d gone that day. “To school,” they answered. “Then why did Mr. Davidson and Mr. Korwin come by the restaurant asking where you were?” The knew they were in trouble.

The year before two student council members had been suspended for cutting school, and neither Gimpy nor his friend wanted to lose their positions. They hopped in the car and drove to their superintendent’s house. Mr. Davidson greeted them in his driveway, a beer in his hand and a serious look on his face.

They apologized. They explained. They told Mr. Davidson how much they loved San Dieguito and their roles as student leaders. He listened, gave them a week of lunch detention, and let them keep their jobs. “He could tell how much it meant to us,” Gimpy explained. “He really cared about his students, and knew we cared about our school.”

That caring underpinned life at San Dieguito in the mid-1950s of Gimpy’s memory. “Everyone was happy to be here,” he remembered. “So happy to be together.” Students looked out for each other,

and teachers cared. “I remember walking through campus and having teachers say ‘Hi, Gimpy!’ when I got back in my senior year. They knew my real name, but it was kinda neat that they were willing to call me by the name the kids did.”

Just how neat this was, and how special a place San Dieguito was, Gimpy understood better than many of his peers. He had the perspective of having taken time away. When his classmates, flush with spring fever, started counting down the days until graduation, it was Gimpy who told them: “Not so fast. I’ve been out there. The parties stop. The dances stop. The classes stop.” Gimpy never took his senior year for granted, and never forgot how precious those moments were.

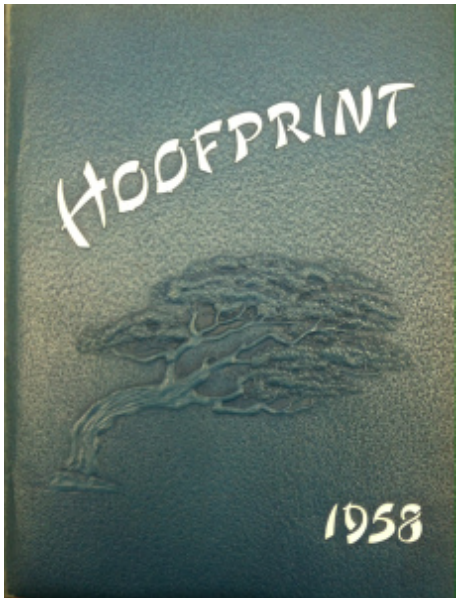
More than sixty years later he still hasn’t. With joy in his voice he described the parties he and his classmates had in undeveloped areas of Rancho Santa Fe, where ground had been cleared for new housing, large flat swaths tailor made for a ring of cars, their headlights illuminating the impromptu dusty dance floor, music provided by every car radio tuned to the same station. “Don Howard had a radio program that ran from six to ten o’clock,” Gimpy recalled. “He’d play the latest and greatest music that teenagers were listening to, and we’d call in requests. I remember being out at the party, dancing, necking, and horsing around, and hearing him on the radio saying ‘Hi to the gang from San Dieguito!’”



The students in our classrooms now, some of the same classrooms that Gimpy learned in back in 1954, are the grand-kids of Gimpy’s generation. When I asked what advice he’d give them, what he'd tell an incoming freshman, he looked me squarely in the eye and said: “Treat people right, all people, and they’ll treat you right right back.”

True San Dieguito spirit.

11. 1958



After years of Mustangs galloping across the cover of San Dieguito's *Hoofprint*, the student editorial staff of 1958 made the bold and incongruous decision to put a bonsai tree on the cover of their yearbook.

Breaking from expectation is a part of San Dieguito, where independence of spirit is embedded in the school's DNA, and in 1958 that looked decidedly Asian.

Sputnik had reached orbit by 1958, and the duck-tail hair cuts and horn-rimmed glasses that look out from the pages of the *Hoofprint* speak to a time when the cold war was raging and Elvis was on every hi-fi, well, before he shipped out to Germany.

1958 was a busy year at San Dieguito, with a homecoming bonfire, a host of school dances, and a western themed Sadie Hawkins Day.

Athletics were big at San Dieguito in the 1950s, and from track to field hockey, smiling students show that representing the school brings pride and camaraderie. These athletes from half a century ago look so similar to the students of 2016; their determination, commitment to their sports, and sense of fun are familiar to those of us who cheer on Mustang athletes today.



Clubs abounded at San Dieguito in the middle part of the century, as they do now, though the clubs themselves were different in 1958, more focused on professional life after high school, and included Future Farmers, Future Nurses, and a Rifle Club. Seeing students in military uniforms toting firearms in front of the school feels out of time today, but this was an age where fears about communism had Mr. Davidson, the superintendent, reminding the world that "The class of 1958 goes out into the world with one of the greatest privileges of freedom-the right to make choices."





Formal photos fill the *Hoofprint*, as was usual for the first few decades of the school's history, but 1958's yearbook includes a few more candid pictures that show the smiles and laughter that filled the campus. Students show up in fanciful hats, clowning in the quad, and a convertible filled with balloons.

Even the faculty, so often pictured in rigid poses and starched collars, is allowed some levity in the 1958 yearbook, and it's a treat to see these adults in more relaxed poses smiling, clowning, and even laughing aloud. Life at San Dieguito has always included teachers who care, and these are folks who helped to shape the students' San Dieguito memories.



But, as always, school is about the kids, and the kids in this mid-century San Dieguito with their poodle skirts and plaid shirts, their letter sweaters and lopsided grins, occupy the pages of the *Hoofprint* with an attitude of school pride that is bold and courageous and looks ready to try something new, maybe even planting a bonsai tree.

12. The Kids From ‘64


Leonard

I met them at Tony’s Jacal, a local eatery that has been home to San Dieguito students since the 1940s, and over a burrito and iced tea I listened to stories of an Encinitas before I-5 bisected town, a world of roller rinks, railroad tracks, and a party line on the campus payphone.

These kids from the graduating class of 1964 are a close bunch, crowding reunions and maintaining connections throughout the intervening years. I’d heard they were tight, part of my reason for wanting to talk with a group, not just an individual for my San Dieguito in the 1960s interview, and I was curious to hear how their stories intertwined.

I wasn’t sure what I was walking into when I pulled up to Tony’s, but the lunch that began with polite smiles quickly shifted into smiling conversation and ended with laughter. Len, Thelma, Peter, and Darryl treated me with love, and stories poured out about San Dieguito and of the area as it was when Kennedy was president.

They were amazing.

Students at San Dieguito High School in the 1960s share some landmarks with our current students, including the bell tower, Moonlight Beach and the La Paloma Theater, but other staples of the class of ‘64, like Al’s Coffee Shop and the Poinsettia Bowl are memories, real now only in photographs and twinkling eyed conversations.


Thelma

There was a twinkle in Thelma’s eye as she described life at San Dieguito when she was in high school. With Peter, her husband and Mustang sweetheart, at her side, she described his athletic prowess, and her own participation in GAA, the Girl’s Athletic Association, a group of about twenty female students who played softball, field hockey, and basketball against local schools. These girls worked without the benefit of an athletic director or CIF schedule to arrange their games, instead setting up matches with sister schools, each with a phone call and challenge.

One of the biggest events of the year, athletic or otherwise, was homecoming, which in the middle part of the last century was


Pete

celebrated with a twenty-five foot tall bonfire, fueled with a month's worth of wood and a splash of gasoline. Students would call up local businesses to borrow flatbed trucks they could use as floats, and the result was a parade through town that saw students shouting "Go Mustangs!" to the sky.

The kids from '64 talked about Mr. Cunningham's wood shop, Coach Wiley's steely gaze, and the Future Farmers of America located on the southeast corner of campus. "You could smell it just driving by," Len said, smiling. "They had goats, pigs, and sheep."

In addition to campus livestock, town was a lot more rural in the 1960s, and Thelma remembered local tomato farmers leaving crates of tomatoes out on Halloween night, "so the kids wouldn't need to steal them to use in tomato fights on MacKinnon."

"The involvement between the school and the local businesses was amazing," Len remembered. And it went both ways, with meaningful charity work by San Dieguito's Tri-Hi Club and other student groups.

But life wasn't just tomato fights and parades. The kids from 1964 talked about cleaning erasers, walking the railroad tracks down to Solana Beach, and Darryl told the story of rolling a VW Beetle on a joyride on the yet unopened I-5.

And when they left San Diegutio as students, the class of 1964 didn't leave each other. Regular lunches, like the one they were kind enough to let me crash, helped to keep the ties that bind. Reunions renewed friendships, and at one, even more; at their 30th reunion Daryl and Francie, two Mustang classmates reconnected, fell in love, and got married. Very San Dieguito.


Darryl

Much has changed since 1964, but the spirit of these amazing Mustangs has remained constant, as has their love for their school. And while San Dieguito may not see another bonfire or joyride on an empty highway, it's reassuring to know that friendly and familiar Mustang faces will always gather around a table at Tony's Jacal.

13. 1969



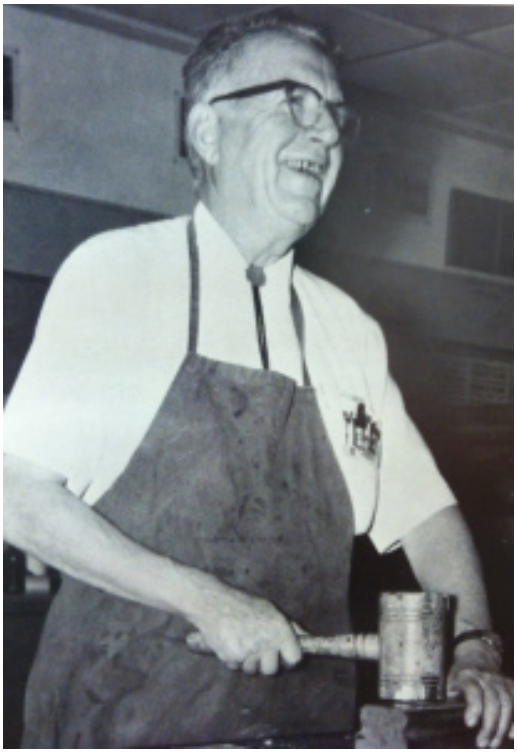
I've played "Donkey Basketball" so I can tell you how nutty things must have been at San Dieguito in the late 1960s.

No one had yet walked on the moon when students arrived on campus in the fall of 1968, though space was a topic on many folks' minds. Conflict was alive worldwide and at home, as was love, and as hair got longer and attitudes got freer, the times they were a'changin'.

These changing times show up in the San Dieguito *Hoofprint*, where quick tour of the 1969 yearbook shows a glimpse into a world of high fashion, rock and roll, and campus hijinks, including wagon races, climbing the bell tower, and laughing with the four legged mascot.

By the 1960s some color photographs made their way into the yearbook, and in 1969 those included curiously posed tableaus of athletics, Mustang royalty on the beach, and a delightfully unexpected picture of four foreign exchange students riding horses. Giddy up.





For those interested in San Dieguito history, the dedication to the *Hoofprint* is a treasure trove of Mustang lore. Smiling out from the pages, a mallet in his hand, is Mr. David Davidson, former San Dieguito superintendent and current (in 1969) San Dieguito printmaking teacher. Many who leave the classroom for administration stay out, especially after rising to the rank of top official in a district, but as the prose beside this photograph explains, after serving as superintendent for nine years, Mr. Davidson went back to the classroom in 1961 where he supervised the literary magazine and the yearbook. He looks happy as a teacher.

Happy too are the students caught just before a wagon race at the Powder Puff Football game. Anticipation, youthful exuberance, and an unfettered joy seen more in teens than adults shines out from this snapshot. This is youth in 1969, free, hopeful, and prone to fun.

On the other side of the coin of youth is studying, and one great photograph from an English class shows Mr. Jordan teaching literature, his pose and deportment begging for a caption. What were they talking about that day? Had they read *Hamlet* or Hardy? Is the paper he is holding up an essay worth quoting or a quiz that didn't meet his standards. In the frozen black and white of time, this is simply a scene captured for posterity from half a century ago.

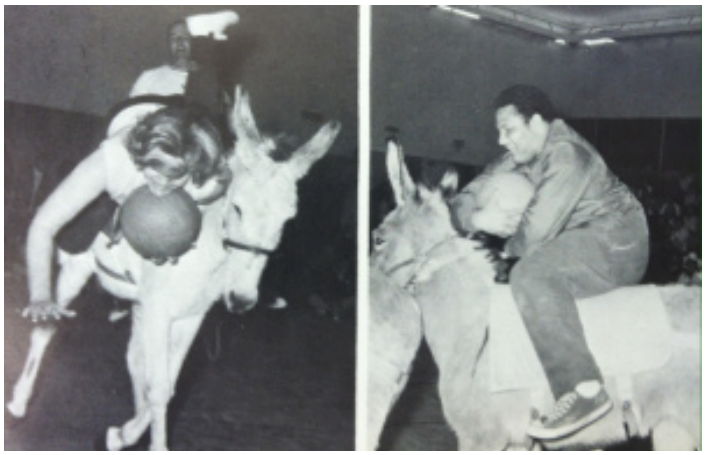
And then there are the donkeys.

The *Hoofprint* records that seniors beat the faculty 30-26 in a hard fought contest that saw students and teachers clutching a basketball while trained donkeys in rubber horseshoes trotted up and down the court. A few action shots capture the abject fear of the players, and even a tumble or two, and a group photo at the end of the game shows exhaustion and relief on the faces of the victorious seniors.



Those same seniors, and students from all four grades, appear in more than 200 pages of photographs, some celebrating the robust music program, others showing clubs from the Future

Farmers to the Motorcycle Club. The *Hoofprint* shows Mr. Liggett preparing students for a production of Molière's *The Miser* and Coach Wiley preparing the wrestling team, affectionately called "The Mustang Matmen."



The world that these thespians, musicians, athletes, and agriculturalists stepped into after graduation was one of flux and friction, but looking at the faces of the Mustangs in the 1969 yearbook, one can imagine that their years at San Dieguito prepared them to face their future with purpose, passion, and a smile.

14. "The Mustang" 1974-1975



As chronicles of student life, yearbooks get all the respect. Students long since graduated can go to trunks and attics and recover bound volumes, one for each year, that remind them in one or two page increments what Homecoming was like, who was in the Key Club, and what the band uniforms looked like when they were in high school. For a reminder of classmates' hairstyles lined up in rows, yearbooks can't be beat, and for durability they're about the best record of years gone by.

For a month to month window in what life is like on a school's campus, however, for a glimpse into students' priorities and attitudes, the most reliable record is quite simply the school newspaper.

The trick, of course, is the transitory nature of a newspaper. Its strength is its immediacy; its Achilles heel is that same quality. Few save newspapers, particularly high school students, and before the digital age when websites archived student journalists, the articles and opinion pieces, letters to the editor and rebuttals, the grainy black and white photos and editorial cartoons were often lost to that great devourer, time.

What a treat then that here at San Dieguito some vintage issues of *The Mustang* still survive.

A quick visit to San Dieguito's Alumni website leads to a link to a student newspaper archive. Three years of *The Mustang* live here, 1974-1975, 1994-1995, and 1995-1996. They are a delight.

What's striking about the newspapers, particularly those from the 1970s, is how different the tone seems than the more genteel writers of 2016. These are journalists with opinions, students writing letters to the editor with

May 23, 1975

Students' Rights

by Cheryl Heuton

Education, like most human endeavors, is greatly influenced by the way people relate to each other. In an ideal school situation a student and a teacher get along well. The student works and learns the material the teacher presents, and for his effort the teacher gives him a good grade. A grade is very important to most students because it affects their future by determining which colleges they will be eligible for, and will also be considered by future employers.

Unfortunately, this ideal situation does not always develop. Sometimes a student and teacher have conflicting beliefs, incompatible personalities, or for other obscure reasons they just don't get along. This disrupts the usual work-for-grade procedure, and several regrettable situations can arise. Often the student quits working and the teacher grades accordingly. This is fair, for the student has made a choice and must accept the consequences. But sometimes the student does the work required, learns the material, and is still given a bad grade. After all, teachers are human and therefore influenced by their likes and dislikes.

Is this fair, though? Should a students' grade, and to some extent, his future, be affected by personal likes and dislikes? The state law says that the teacher has the responsibility of evaluating a student and choosing a grade. If the student feels that the grade is unfair, his recourse is to sit down with the teacher and discuss the teacher's reasons for giving a particular grade. Mr. Morris said, "A student has a right to know how his grade was arrived at." If a mistake is found, the grade can be changed. If, however, there is no apparent mistake, the teacher's decision is, almost without exception, final.

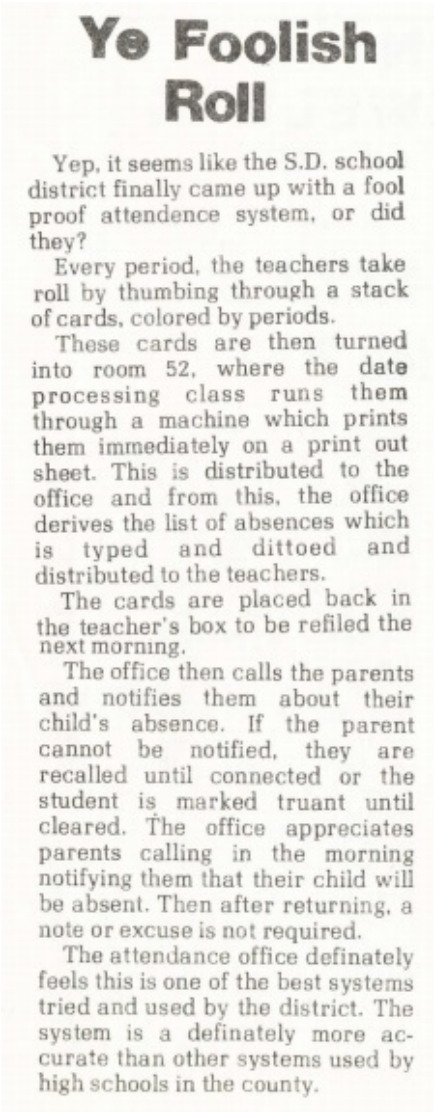
I feel that there should be a more complete form of appeal available to students who feel that they have been unfairly graded. Perhaps there should be a meeting of the teacher, the student, the department head, and the principal to discuss such a situation. A student should have a way to appeal the decision to people who are free from the bias a certain teacher may have. When a student's future is on the line, the final decision should be the responsibility of more than one person. After all, teachers aren't perfect, just human.

things to say. In 1974-1975, *The Mustang* rings with the clear voice of dissent.

A sampling of articles from the Nixon era student newspaper reveals a student body concerned with justice. One student editorialist wrote about "Student Rights" in an educational system where not every student gets along with every teacher. On the same page, another student described "How to Fire the ASB" while a third fielded a letter to the editor demanding to know why an American Government class was being charged for covertly inserting flyers about environmental concerns into every issue of *The Mustang*.


Watch Out McDonalds!!

The 60¢ San Dieguito Special is here to stay.


Ye Foolish Roll

Yep, it seems like the S.D. school district finally came up with a fool proof attendence system, or did they?

Every period, the teachers take roll by thumbing through a stack of cards, colored by periods.

These cards are then turned into room 52, where the date processing class runs them through a machine which prints them immediately on a print out sheet. This is distributed to the office and from this, the office derives the list of absences which is typed and dittoed and distributed to the teachers.

The cards are placed back in the teacher's box to be refiled the next morning.

The office then calls the parents and notifies them about their child's absence. If the parent cannot be notified, they are recalled until connected or the student is marked truant until cleared. The office appreciates parents calling in the morning notifying them that their child will be absent. Then after returning, a note or excuse is not required.

The attendance office definately feels this is one of the best systems tried and used by the district. The system is a definately more accurate than other systems used by high schools in the county.

Noticeable too is pride in San Dieguito and concerns that the school isn't living up to its potential. In a June 1975 column titled "The Critic Speaks," a student wrote: "We have a lot already here at this wonderful school of ours, but perhaps it needs something more. Four years now I have waited for some type of student action other than the usual, other than tossing water balloons at trash collectors and other school employees. I have waited for something better. Something that says out loud, 'We don't give a damn.' As of yet, nothing."

The newspapers also provide a glimpse at the reality that until Torrey Pines High School opened its doors, a delay in construction had young Falcons sharing space with Mustangs on San Dieguito's campus. Praising the advantages of San Dieguito, the student writer noted that "Torrey Pines staff expects to solve many problems when they move onto their own campus."

In an example of the way news can feel dated soon, *The Mustang* celebrated the fact that the "60 ¢ San Dieguito Special is here to stay" and described an innovative and "fool proof" way to take attendance that included color coded cards index cards and a

“machine which immediately prints them on a print out sheet.” Ah, technology in 1975. It was “definitely more accurate than other systems used by high schools in the county.”

From a photo of San Dieguito’s “Math geniuses” to a critique of dividing gym time between girls and boys PE (which included the line: “San Dieguito’s beautiful new gymnasium has gone to the birds, or more specifically, it has gone to the chicks.”), *The Mustang* captured student voices and given them inches of column space to speak out across the decades.

Some of those voices raise concern for issues such as the “Senior Squeeze” that asked 12th grade students to pay the crazy prices of $24 for senior pictures and $8 for a yearbook. Others rise satirically, and in the July issue you can find parody pages of newspapers called *The Red Press and Socialist Review* and *The Patriot*, “brought to you by The San Dieguito Red Neck Society.” If the current satire of *The Mustang’s* “Sentinel” section sometimes confuses folks, I can only imagine how the “Red Press Student Manifesto” would be received with its call to “Overthrow the Administration, Exile the leaders of the ASB Bourgeoisie, and Abolish all school newspapers.”

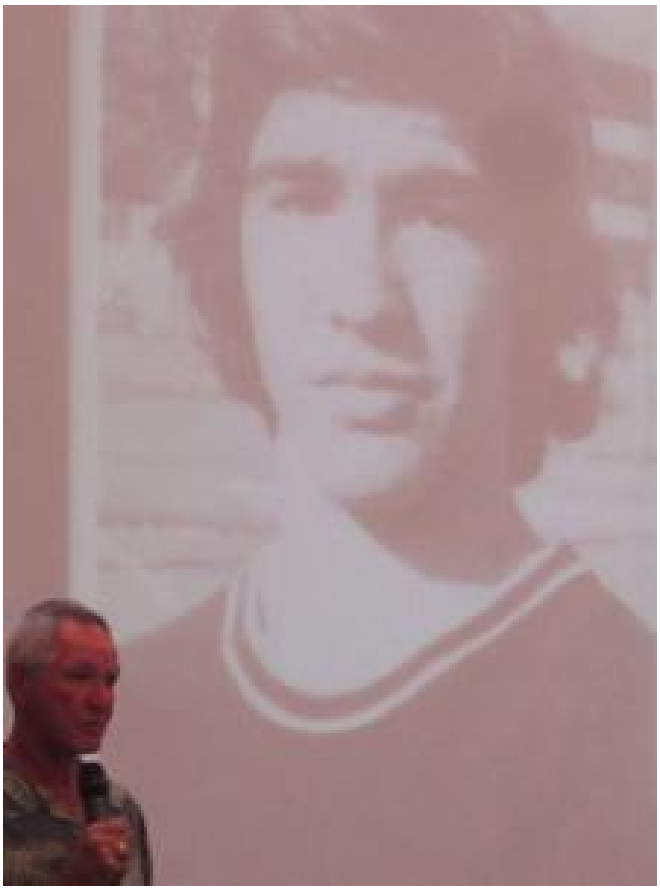
In addition to these opinion pieces are lots of great articles describing athletic events, dances, and student activities. We learn from The 1974-1975 Mustang that donkey basketball was a huge success and that final exams caused “tension to mount” among students on campus.

There is no replacement for a great yearbook, the mug shots from years gone by worth the price of admission, always, but as a compliment to the historical record of San Dieguito, I’d offer past issues of *The Mustang*. Where else will you find a photo of math geniuses?



Math geniuses: S. Gross, B. Dvorak, M. Meyer, L. Carlson.

15. Buns



There are times a little detail, a small image, lodges itself in memory, a burr on the woolen sock of life. Last year San Dieguito alum Mike Koslowski, class of 1974, returned to campus to present the school with a "Golden Football," an honor he earned by playing on the 1982 Miami Dolphins Super Bowl team.

Koz and I met ahead of the ceremony and his stories of San Dieguito in the 1970s were funny, heartfelt, and delivered with a smile. He'd grown up along the coast, played volleyball as well as football while a Mustang, and had a knack for spinning yarns of North County as it was when it still felt very much like a small town.

We filled the library with students on the day he came to officially present the ball, and alumni joined us to welcome Koz home.

As expected, he talked about his athletic pursuits while wearing a Mustang uniform, and the student athletes in the crowd enjoyed hearing about his passion for competition and listening to him describe his winding road to professional success.

Then, about halfway through his talk, Koz paused and asked: "Do they still have those cinnamon buns?" The kids looked at each other, puzzled. Someone offered: "I don't think so…" Koz closed his eyes, bringing back a memory.



"You could smell them baking in the cafeteria from all over campus." He smiled. "All through fourth period you could smell them, and *mmmm*."

The kids laughed.

Koz went on to describe life on campus during the Nixon administration, a world filled with dress up days, school

spirit, and even donkey basketball. Then he paused again and asked: “How about streakers?”

The now very curious crowd shook their collective head.

“I remember guys would run buck nake-”

“Koz,” I interjected from the wings. “Let’s go back to the other buns. I’d rather have cinnamon rolls on campus than streakers.”

Koz beamed.

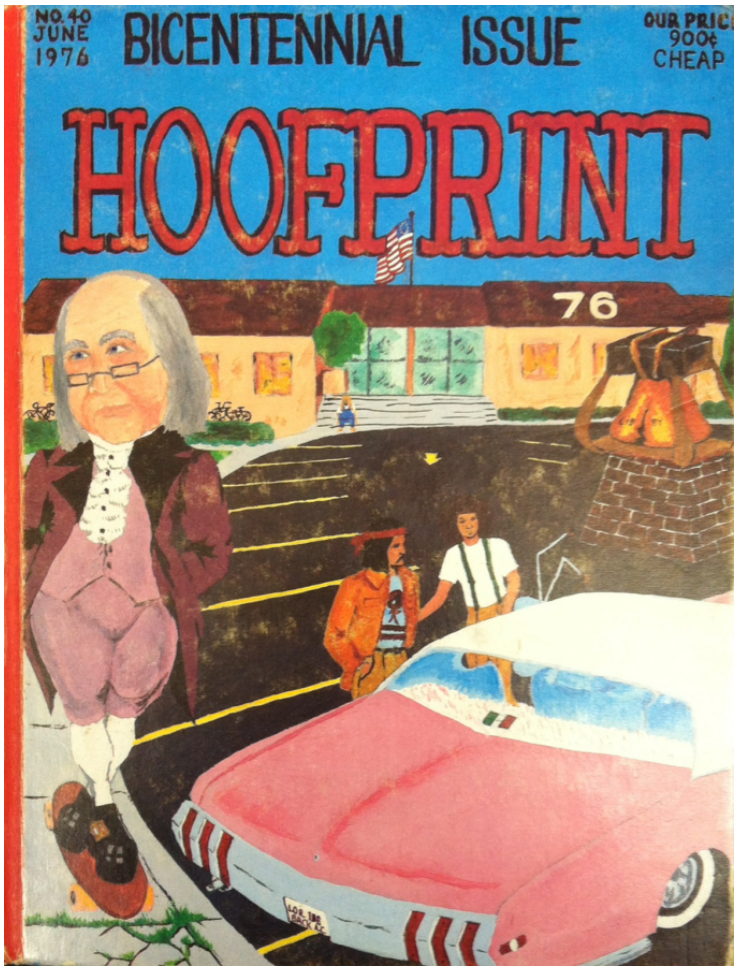
His memories of San Dieguito in the 1970s are comprehensive and deep, and today, a year after his visit, I remember so clearly his laugh, his love for our school, and the little details of his youth that he was so generous to share.



Much has changed at San Dieguito since Koz walked these breezeways, and much hasn’t. Students still play sports, make memories, and “horse around” in ways that would make Koz proud.

We’re a school that values our heritage and our alumni and celebrates the traditions that are part of our collective history. I love the school we are today and the energy and enthusiasm our students and staff bring to all they do, though I’d be fibbing if now, after spending some time with Koz, I didn’t admit that sometimes as I cross campus I wish that I could smell the scent of cinnamon.

16. 1976



Ben Franklin on a skateboard?

"Ye olde check out wall?"

An assembly with a hypnotist who made a student think he was naked?

Welcome to the 1976 San Dieguito yearbook.

Most editions of the *Hoofprint* carry a classy veneer of professionalism, covers decorated by classic Mustangs, dramatic photographs, or clean graphics. In 1976, things looked just a bit different.

We keep copies of every San Dieguito yearbook going back to 1936 in the locked vault in the principal's office. Why do we have a walk in vault? That's a question for Lilian Rice and the team from the Roosevelt years, but the volumes it houses are a treasure trove of Mustang history, and the 1976 *Hoofprint* stands out, a delightfully cartoonish relic from the year of the nation's bicentennial.



We talk a lot today about "Keeping SDA Funky." This yearbook *lived* funky.

Inside, the pages of the 1976 *Hoofprint* reveal a school of iconoclasts. Alongside the usual images of programs (the girl posing with her cow as part of Future Farmers of America) are the unexpected (the young woman looking at the camera, a cigarette poised between her fingers). Next to the standard photos of athletic teams are pictures of donkey basketball. Sure the Senior Class Officers show up in the yearbook, but so too does a beautifully artsy skateboarding picture.



The late 1970s saw individualism abound at San Dieguito, the arts flourish, and students find the freedom to be themselves. Pictures from student bands, clubs such as The Fencing Club, Backpacking Club, and even the "Schmeggegis Club" (who "limited membership to those who wanted to join") show that students were having a ball on campus, and that the school embraced the spirit of fun that prompted the *Hoofprint* to eschew traditionalism and opt for something zany.

Today's political correctness (and maybe common sense) is absent from this year of the *Hoofprint*; students posed with liquor bottles for the yearbook staff photo, cartoons depicted the freewheeling 70s, and one page dedicated to seniors shows a line of boys using the urinals. It takes exactly two pages before the first joke about a keg. The golf team posed without shirts. I'm not suggesting 1976 was a *better* time, but it was certainly a *different* time at San Dieguito.



Yet some things are very much the same. Students then, as now, joined clubs like the Thespians and the Speech Team, and the expressions of glee on the faces of the homecoming court aren't that different from students today.

Candid photographs show what it must have been like to walk across the quad in 1976, students lounging on the lawn and laughing beneath palm trees. The students we see in the yearbook look happy and fun loving, the kind of teenagers our teenagers today would like to spend time with.

1976 was a very funky year at San Dieguito. Just ask Ben Franklin ...if you can get him to stop jumping the San Dieguito ten step.



17. Human Stories

A few months ago I set out to capture some of the stories from across San Dieguito's eight decades. Talking with graduates from as far back as 1940, I heard marvelous tales of a school filled with youthful energy, creative spirit, and truly magical history of closeness and caring. I also heard stories that had nothing to do with campus life, remembrances of what happened next to the alumni, stories of life *after* high school.



These stories of life after San Dieguito were moving and just as real as what I heard about the graduates' high school years. They were stories about love and loss, stumbling early adulthood, purposeful middle age, and, in some cases, parenthood and retirement.

Hearing Norm describe falling in love with a beautiful soprano from Nebraska, of taking her out five nights in seven days and then asking her to marry her at the end of the week (to which she replied: "If you hadn't asked me, I was going to ask you!") reminded me of the reality of romance. Listening as he described their fifty-four years of marriage put all his youthful shenanigans in perspective. Here was a man who had fun in high school and lived an adult life just as rich.

Gage talked about his ten year reunion and the connections he keeps with classmates, including the woman he went to college with, who as a girl starred in a play at San Dieguito and was so "intriguingly good" that he began a life of performance, writing, and directing that still helps to define him today.



Tak's description of a prejudiced and Kafkaesque Naval recruiting center showed midcentury racism at its most diabolical and disheartening, and yet his balanced demeanor as he recounted the labyrinthian process of the Navy denying him entry because of his ethnicity, and his unflagging positive attitude toward his life and his community, showed the wisdom he as gained over 89 years of life. Tak is a truly remarkable man, defined not by the injustice he has faced, but by the grace he brought, and brings, to all he encounters.

Whether it was Mary talking about growing up in Encinitas in the 1920s or Thelma and Len describing what it was like in the 1960s, all of these stories, not exactly *San Dieguito* stories,

but *human* stories, form the historical and multifaceted world of which we are all a part.



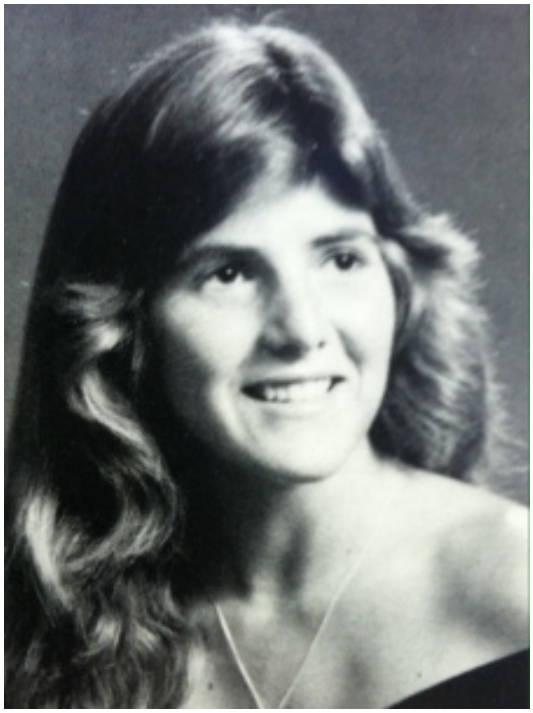
Every day we pass people on the street, wait in lines with people at the grocery store, and encounter people whose stories are just as moving and whose experiences are just as profound as those Mustang alumni I have had the pleasure to meet.

The experience of talking with Mary and Tak, Gimpy and Gage, Len and Thelma, and so many others has taught me to appreciate the heroism and humor, the strength and soul that exist in every person. Their stories, both from high school and from life, illustrate the complexity, joy, sorrow, and humanity of our world.

These amazing individuals, so kind in sharing their memories, have inspired me and might, I hope, inspire a few people reading along to take the time to sit down with a parent or a grandparent, an aunt, an uncle, a son, or a daughter and ask them about their story.

That story doesn't have to be about our school, but like this San Dieguito experiment it may inspire something astounding.

18. Jennifer



"Yes, create!"

Positive artistic energy exuded from Jennifer when she and I sat down in my office to talk about what San Dieguito was like in the late 1970s, and she remembered that urging from her ceramics teacher to engage artistically with the world. It's a call she heeded.

A class of '79 grad, Jennifer not only attended art classes at San Dieguito, she also took biology from legendary science teacher John Hewitson ...who also happened to be her dad. When we talked, her stories of her father's love of teaching at San Dieguito were as rich as her own experiences.

"He kept a fourteen foot long reticulated python named Stretch in his classroom," she remembered. "And finally gave it to SDSU because he got so big and was still growing!" There wasn't room for Stretch in the classroom, what with the two rattlesnakes he also kept there.

But Mr. Hewitson's penchant for reptiles didn't mean he was a one dimensional person; he painted (mostly pictures of trout), was an avid fisherman, and took his job as a teacher very seriously. "I had him for bio," Jennifer told me, "and one day after I'd been absent, home sick, I got to class and he told me that I needed to go to the office and get a note before I could come back to class." Really? I asked her. She smiled. "But even in class I always called him 'Dad.'"

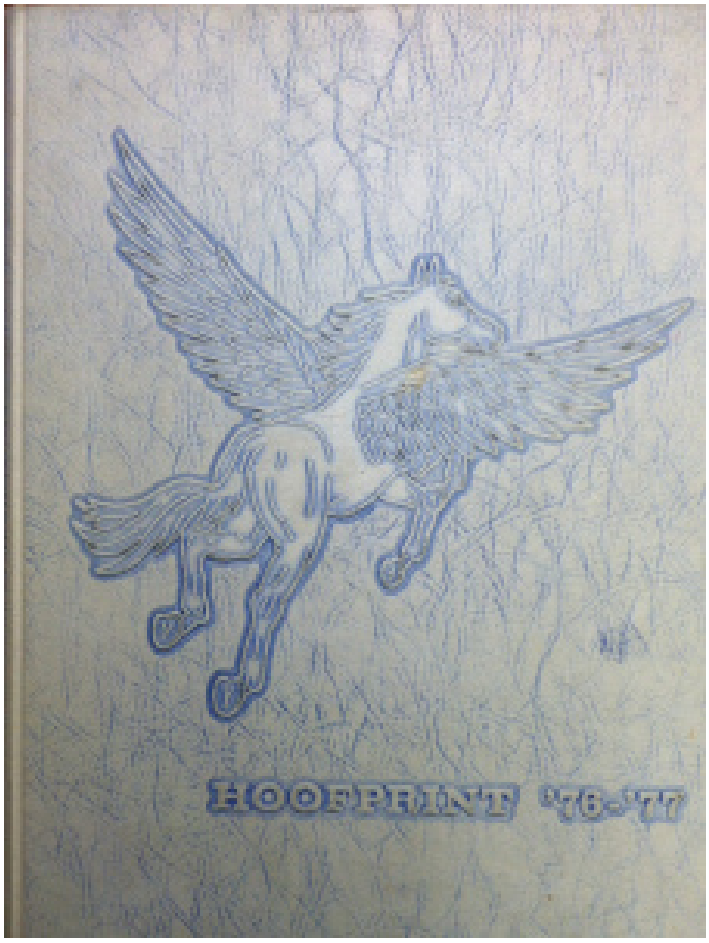


Teachers who saw their students with familial affection were present across campus. Jennifer remembered Ms. Delise, her printmaking teacher, being "so nice" and so supportive of the creative spirits of her young artists. "We used acid wash to engrave metal plates in Ms. Delise's class," she said. "Not as safe as today, but the results were amazing."

Amazing too was the passion and purpose teachers brought to their work with students. Jennifer told the story of her photography teacher, Mr. Bonnafoux, who greeted them on the first day of class with an expensive camera hanging from

around his neck. He made sure that he had all their attention as he began talking about the joys of photography, and then took the camera and flung it across the room where it landed with a crash. Open jawed the class got silent. “And that,” Mr. Bonnafoux told them, “is how worthless a camera becomes when it has been ruined by sand. That one was taken to the beach. DO NOT take your cameras to the beach.” Jennifer never did.

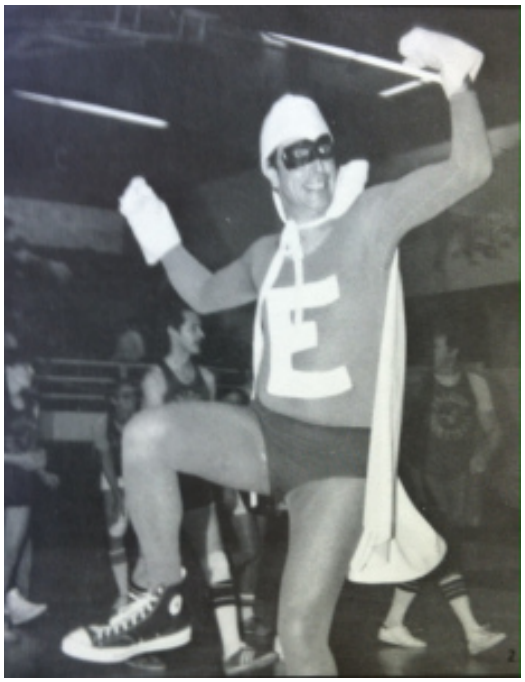
From Red Heuton’s “Epistemics” class, that another teacher described as “a bunch of navel gazing in the quad” to the Ms. Martin’s class on Women’s Studies that resonated with a young Jennifer, teaching and learning at San Dieguito in the late 70s had the scent of freedom and the spirit of adventure.



Jennifer captured that spirit in the drawing of a winged Mustang that flies over the cover of the 1977 *Hoofprint*. To have her artwork selected as the cover of the yearbook meant much to her as a sophomore artist, and looking back now the sense of expectation and excitement in that flying horse is still palpable.

Jennifer’s son is a student at San Dieguito now, and looks forward to taking classes from science teachers who knew his grandfather. I hope that he carries on Jennifer’s independence, joy for life, and creativity, and that our school always whispers in the ears of our students: “Yes, create!”

19. 1982



A playful spirit filled San Dieguito in the early 1980s. From the exuberance of the students looking up from the cover the 1982 *Hoofprint* to the smiling faces inside, it's easy to see that Reagan era Mustangs new how to have a good time.

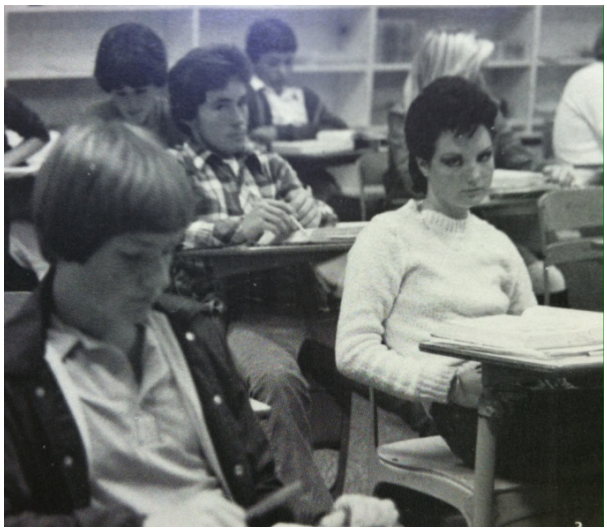
That sense of play shows up in the gritty determination on the faces of the students playing tug of war by the gym, competing against the teachers in a basketball game (complete with costumes), and clowning by the bell tower.

The unconventional 80s show up throughout the yearbook, in the trench coat that appears in the soccer team photo, the striped socks on the four legged mascot, and the fact that when a teacher didn't have his photo taken for the *Hoofprint* the editors substituted a caricature.

Scenes captured from classrooms remind current readers of the way technology has changed in the past thirty-five years, and how much teenage expressions have stayed the same.



Athletics were popular at San Dieguito in the early 80s, and the varsity basketball team not only had "the most successful season the S.D.H.S. Basketball team has had in 17 years," but Coach LaBorde reflected that "They're the nicest bunch of guys I've ever worked with."



The 1982 *Hoofprint* celebrated weekly pep rallies and the cheerleaders who organized them, after game dances (you can almost hear *Soft Cell* playing as you look at the photos), and a host of clubs from FFA to Backpackers.

Halloween gets its own page in the yearbook as does the dance team and the ASB Convention, complete with blue and white bunting. It's in 1982 that some familiar faces peek out from the *Hoofprint*. Fran

Fenical, future SDA principal, was teaching Social Studies in 1982. Current PE teacher John Cannon makes an appearance, and San Dieguito Foundation Executive Director Leslie Saldana sports the smile of a sophomore cheerleader.

By 1982 San Diegutio was approaching a half century of educating students and it showed all the marvelous immaturity of a fifteen year old.



20. Monica



In 1984 Ray Bradbury visited San Dieguito High School. He spoke to the student body in the gym, part of the Science Fiction Fair, and was "funny, but eloquent" as he talked to the students as part of the week long event organized by students. A senior in 1984, Monica was a writer, and her English teacher, Jane Mills, told her that she *had* to meet Bradbury. It was the kind of encouragement that typified the special support staff showed students, and the unexpected opportunities that seem almost expected at San Dieguito.

Cows still roamed campus, or at least a corner of it, in the mid 1980s, yet another opportunity, this for more agriculturally minded students. Monica remembered the student who crafted a "fully functional cannon in shop class" reassuring me that "it was NOT used to dispatch his 'pet' project in Ag class."

For Monica, opportunity came through theater with Mr. Ligget, whose limp and "wicked sense of humor" made him an imposing figure who was "so passionate about acting" that he inspired his students as the tread the boards of the theater in the round.

In addition to the fine arts, Monica and her friends made up the Radio Club, a group of student enthusiasts who titled themselves KSDH and whose photo in the yearbook looks like the poster from a John Hughes movie, complete with boom box.



As iconic is the group photo from the 1984 *Hoofprint* staff, a delightfully '80s group of which Monica was a proud member. "That was a great group," she remembered as we leaned in over a copy of the yearbook. "I learned so many things outside the classroom, things and interests that have continued into my adult life."

Monica is now the parent of current San Dieguito student, and our morning together drifted naturally into how her daughter's experience compares to her own. "What I see at SDA," she told me, "is more student interaction, and more acceptance of each other." She paused thoughtfully. "I envision, and I am hopeful, for a future of more understanding, accepting, and generous human beings. Beyond all the academic accolades that SDA will no doubt continue to receive and humbly foster, it nurtures an environment for these amazing smaller human beings to thrive and move confidently forward."

As a Mustang parent, and grad, Monica is vital part of making that dream a reality.



San Dieguito is blessed to have many parents, and grandparents, and aunts and uncles, who have graduated from our school over the past eighty years. People like Monica, so kind and giving, are the lifeblood of our storied school. Their love of San Dieguito and commitment to keep the best

that it has been and will come ensure that future generations of Mustangs will be able to find themselves, support each other, and create the memories (as diverse as KSDH and Ray Bradbury) that will help to build the foundations of their lives.



Monica left my office, her yearbook under her arm, with a smile, and her impact on me was profound. That such care and dedication to making the world, and our school, the best place it can be exists can't help but inspire. Her memories of San Dieguito in the 1980s, and seeing those goofy photos through her eyes, made me remember my own high school years. It's no accident that that decade spawned so many angsty teen dramas, and -as evidenced in someone like Monica- it's no accident that as we children of the '80s become parents of teenagers we bring an appreciation of lessons learned.

Ray Bradbury once said: ""We are cups, constantly and quietly being filled. The trick is, knowing how to tip ourselves over and let the beautiful stuff out." Monica knows how. She learned part of that at San Dieguito.

21. 1991



1991 is recent enough to feel familiar, and far enough away to seem from another world.

A first look at the *Hoofprint* from 1991 shows a wealth of familiar faces: current physics teacher George Stimson, then high school senior (and now AP History teacher) Kerry Koda, and associate superintendent and former San Dieguito principal Mike Grove back when he was a young teacher. The buildings in the background are the same, the grass on the quad looks as green, and even the mascot looks like a bluer cousin of our current unicycling Mustang.

And then you start noticing things that wouldn't show up in a yearbook today: the kids dressed as a six pack of Corona for Halloween; they share a page with a militia of well armed cowboys and a handful of costumes that would be deemed ...insensitive today.

Students stand in front of lockers in another photograph, a throwback to a time when San Dieguito issued these metal boxes of combination locked anxiety, great to decorate, but prone to becoming home to decomposing food and sophomoric hijinks.

Delightfully asymmetrical clothing and matching offset hair wins the day in many pictures, along with the reminder that cargo shorts were *not* a thing back in the early '90s.



Along with these differences, however, are the smiling student faces that remind us that youth then is more similar to youth now than it is different.

The students holding up the High School Surfing Champions banner would be comfortable down at Moonlight Beach today. Heck, many are still probably surfing there with their own kids.

Photographic evidence shows that students then, as before them and students now, loved a good tug-of-war.

And for any current student who enjoys wearing a full body Pikachu costume on a daily basis, a quick scan of the 1991 *Hoofprint* shows a smiling group of students who were kindred spirits.



The 1991 yearbook buzzes with energy. Pictures from the talent show, Spirit Week, and pages and pages of candid photos show a campus alive with spirit and a sense of fun. These were students standing on the threshold of a world of opportunity and ready to step forward.

What do Mr. Stimson, Ms. Koda, and Dr. Grove see when they look out at our school today? I hope great memories and a place where students carry on that enthusiasm for learning and life. ...and where costumes are still part of our Mustang spirit.



22. Oly



We talked a lot about kids and surfing and being dads. We talked about the west coast skateboarding scene in the early 1990s and the movies of the 1980s, today's technology and yesterday's farming communities. Our conversation, ostensibly about Oly's experiences at San Dieguito High School ranged from his growing up with a surfboard under one arm and a skateboard under the other to what it's like to teach at the school from which you graduated.

It was a discussion that reminded me just how much the story of San Dieguito is the story of Encinitas. Ours is a school at the heart of the community, a touchstone for our coastal town, and a shared memory for so many.

Whether it was hanging out at the Straw Hat or going to hear a local band at a house party, Oly remembered a feeling of community at San Dieguito and in Encinitas. "The bond of San Dieguito was greater than any subgroup," he said, acknowledging that the distinctions skater, surfer, jock, and brain existed, but mattered less than the greater identification ...Mustangs.

"It was different then than it is now," he told me. "If we wanted to do it, we had to *create* it."



In a time when no one had an iPhone or laptop, that do it yourself attitude applied to music, skating, and life.

That music, the post punk experimentation of the mid '90s, saturated San Dieguito. Oly remembered the "network of garages, houses, and alleys" where bands like *NIV*, *Niner*, and *The Barracudas* jammed with a diversity of styles that would keep them underground and a popular part of Enicnitas life.



9th grade Oly (far right) with friends Shawn Haggar, Jon Foreman, and Brian Barker

Oly talked about skateboarding down the breezeways at San Dieguito, being chased off and relocating with the pack of boys skating together at Oak Crest. I could picture the young hoodlums rolling down Balour Drive, laughing and planning their next tricks. "By the time we got shooed out of Oak Crest," Oly told me with a smile "we could go back to San Dieguito and skate."

Those memories "stand still in time" for Oly, even as he walks the same breezeways as a current teacher at San Dieguito. The students he teaches now are building their own memories of school, and there is something full circle in the fact that "Mr. Norris" is a part of those memories as many students' favorite history teacher.

Talking with Oly reminded me that schools change and towns change, but in many ways people stay the same. Students today are curious, adventurous, and filled with hope, just as those were who graduated with Oly in 1995. The adult Oly is owes much to the student Oly was. The school Oly is a part of now is built on the memories and traditions of the school Oly attended.

When we talked about how San Dieguito continues to change from year to year, we talked most about the people who compose our school. Many of Oly's teachers grew up in the 1940s and 1950s and brought those attitudes to their work. Today, a generation of teachers of Oly's vintage bring their own experiences and perspective to their work with kids. Those teachers, and their interactions with the youth of the day, help to shape our school.

It's a story that has been going on for the whole history of San Dieguito; Mary, who graduated from San Dieguito in 1940 returned to teach here, moving the school forward with her modern

perspective; today Oly, and more than a half dozen current San Dieguito teachers are also San Dieguito grads.

San Dieguito is a school that loves its own, and a school loved by its students and alum. That so many teachers are grads and that so many families have multiple generations of Mustangs brings a feeling of small town America to our community. As he left my office I looked at Oly, a man of stories and sincerity, and thought: there goes the spirit of San Dieguito.



23. Time Capsule



It smelled older than 2000.

Major construction unearthed a two foot by two foot metal cube in a spot on campus that had long been rumored to contain a time capsule. No one knew when it had been put into the ground, but the rust and grit encrusting it suggested age.

We pulled it from the ground and a forklift brought it to the library, where we put it on display through the winter with hopes it might generate some discussion and prompt some of our alumni to remember days gone by. Then we found out that nobody remembered burying the thing.

So we asked everyone we could find. Some alumni remembered burying a time capsule in the mid 1970s. Others suggested the 80s. Someone thought early 90s. No one knew for sure.

At our annual faculty and staff reunion former teachers and past graduates looked at the box and made guesses. None could actually remember the metal cube going underground, but they all agreed that it looked old.

The day we finally opened it up the school gathered with expectation and a crowbar. Our metals teacher and some intrepid students loosened the bolts and pried open the top. It took some work, but finally the top opened and inside…



...smelled horrible.

Inside we found newspapers, magazines, letters, and a reminder that if one is to put together a time capsule waterproofing is *really* important.

Looking through the contents that survived sixteen years in the ground, I thought about the differences between 2000 and today.



George Clooney looked younger.

Cassette tapes existed.

The students at San Dieguito at the turn of the millennium were still closer to their brethren of the 1980s than students of today. Terms like "smart phones" and "instagram" weren't part of their lives. Few knew of groups like al-Quaeda, the Department of Homeland Security, or Maroon 5. Charles Shultz was still writing *Peanuts*.

On San Dieguito's campus students still listened to Blink-182, skated down the San Dieguito ten step, and learned physics from George Stimson. In addition to Mr. Stimson, fourteen other teachers here in 2017 were at SDA in the year 2000. Yet from boom boxes to break dancing, the world of 2000 feels farther away than seventeen years. Should it be strange then that the time capsule looked the part?

Next month our current students will put their own time capsule into the earth not far from where the class of 2000 lowered theirs into the ground. What will the world look like years from now when students (perhaps not yet born) paw through the flotsam and jetsam of 2017? I assume George Clooney will still look good.

Time marches, here at San Dieguito with a bit of a skip in its step, and to try to freeze any moment in time is as foolish as it is tempting.



The memories that our students are creating are real, just as were those of students from the year 2000, or the 1970s, or the 1950s, or the 1930s, and I'm sure that if a principal twenty years from now sets about chronicling San Dieguito for its hundredth anniversary the results will be moving and concrete remembrances of a school filled with creativity and caring.

A time capsule captures something different, merely facts and objects. That photograph we pulled from the rusty metal box isn't as clear as the memories from any of the students in the picture.

The world that emerged from that rusted metal box, mildewed as it was, is less vibrant that any story a graduate might tell.

As we reflect on San Dieguito's eighty years as a school, I invite us all to gather not news clippings but people's stories. I encourage anyone interested in the history of our school to find a graduate, a teacher or former teacher, and ask them what it was like when…

San Dieguito is more than a place; it is a collection of people, a collection of memories, and a collection of stories. These carry more weight than wet newsprint.



24. Gage



His sixth day of high school was September 11th. He woke up early, turned on the news as he usually did, and saw the chaos of reports from New York that a plane had hit the World Trade Center. A split screen reported a plane hitting the pentagon. He watched, a rapt 9th grader, as the second plane hit.

Like students across the country, Gage went to school that day. His teachers, who he'd met less than a week before, welcomed him, reassured him and all his peers, and showed a "real, tangible concern" for all their kids.

Gage is now an energetic and affable adult, just past his tenth class reunion and filled with more positive stories about San Dieguito than I could put in a post, and yet, as we sat down to talk about life at San Dieguito in the early 2000s, he led with this story of 9/11. "Everybody cared so much," he explained to me. "Teachers were willing to make honest emotional connections to their students," and help make the horrible morning into a moving "introduction to the culture of San Dieguito."

That San Dieguito spirit, defined in part by the connections between teachers and students, loomed large behind all our conversation. "When I got to college," Gage told me, "I was surrounded by people who didn't like their high school experiences. I *loved* mine."

"We were all in it together," he went on. "There were no nerds at San Dieguito because *everybody* was passionate about something. In middle school it wasn't always popular to love something, or *show* you loved something, but at San Dieguito it was cool to like stuff."

That attitude didn't happen by accident. Gage looked back on his high school years and credited the teachers at the school who "shepherded students" and encouraged them to try new things. In Gage's freshman year that meant Comedy Sportz. He was "terrible." That didn't stop him.

After summer Comedy Sportz camp, Gage returned to San Dieguito and struggled in practice not to be nervous. "By September I was lousy. By October just not good. By November I was okay, and then something clicked. I was in a game. People laughed. It was great." He didn't look back.

"I never felt pushed into anything I wasn't comfortable with at San Dieguito, but I felt safe. I knew from watching my teachers and my peers that it was okay to open up and be vulnerable."

That vulnerability translated into true connections between students as well, and Gage remembered a time when he was performing in a Chekov play in the San Dieguito Theater program. “I was friends with lots of guys from the baseball team, and one night they all came to see the show. Imagine that, the baseball team sitting there watching *The Cherry Orchard*. At the end of the night, when we were doing the curtain call, the whole team stood up and pulled open their shirts; they had painted the letters of my name across their chests.” He laughed at the memory. “A silly fusion of fun.”

And a not atypical San Dieguito story.



Gage talked about the influence that “distinct culture” had on him and how it carries on with his friends today. “I hear about a lot of kids whose high school friendships were defined by proximity, but at San Dieguito it was deeper than that.”

San Dieguito’s distinct culture, strong in times of adversity and always ready for a silly fusion of fun, continues today, and I asked Gage what advice he’d give one of our current students. His smile broadened. “These four years are perfectly suited to throw everything at the wall and see what sticks,” he said. “The best thing you can do is try everything. Everything. And do the things you love as hard as you can. Don’t be afraid to try things because you are bad at them. Be bad at them and one day you’ll be good at them.” He paused. “And don’t be afraid to talk with people about what you love.”

Gage sure did when we sat down together, and he left me inspired.

25. 2002



The most fabulous first impression from San Dieguito's 2002 *Hoofprint* is the yearbook's maroon velvet cover. A shower of stars spill across the cover along with the silver words "I'd Like To Thank The Academy…"

Just wow.

Inside the pages of the yearbook a picture of life at San Dieguito emerges, a world of interesting haircuts, scooters, and school spirit.

Looking out from the pages of the *Hoofprint* are faces familiar to today's current students. Mr. Davidson was teaching Chemistry in 2002, sometimes in costume. Mr. Hrzina sported a groovy bit of facial hair, Ms. Koda and Mr. Keillor looked exactly like they do now, and Mr. West proved that mohawk haircuts aren't just for kids.







In 2002 students had lots of opportunities to share their creative spirit. The Battle of the Bands, theater events from *Zombie Prom* to *Pygmalion*, and painting murals are all represented in the



yearbook, along with examples of students volunteering, working on cars, and making movies. Pages celebrating Comedy Sportz, Speech and Debate, and the Academic Team sit alongside images of student created fine art and more clubs than pack of neanderthals.

As the *Hoofprint* editors noted: “After a troubled day surrounded by cement walls and tedious assignments, there wasn’t anything more gratifying than coming together with various students who shared the same interest.”

Athletics also mattered to the Mustangs of fifteen years ago, and from Track and Field to “Mustang Fùtbol,” San Dieguito students demonstrated spirit and sportsmanship on the field, in water, and on the court.



Skaters, scholars, artists, and anarchists, San Dieguito students lived life in 2002 with passion and purpose. ...and they had fun.

Over the past few months, as I’ve had an opportunity to peek inside the pages of yearbooks from San Dieguito’s eighty year history I’ve continued to be delighted by the familiarity of the expressions on the faces of students and staff; these are people inspired by hope, enjoying each other’s company, and eager to take on the world.

The class of 2002, in their thirties now, are well into their own adult lives, and it’s fun to see their youthful faces, looking forward toward a future that is now the present.

26. Today at San Dieguito…

Over the course of this school year it has been my pleasure to celebrate our school's 80 year history through stories, interviews, and reflections on what life was like here on a campus that began with rented tents, grew to include pens for pigs and cows, saw the construction of shops and classrooms, and is now poised to open a wing of 21st century science labs that look forward to a future rich with technology. I've tried to capture both these physical changes to campus and the spirit of the students and adults who filled these breezeways. Admittedly, I'm more poet than historian, but the journey has been wonderful and I hope the modest scribblings that have come out of it have been worth a few minutes reading a week.



Having tromped through the 1930s and 40s, years of football teams and flower fields; the 1950s and 1960s, when more cars filled the parking lot and San Dieguito acquired a gleam that has never left its eye; the 1970s and 80s, when it felt at times as if "anything goes" was a school slogan; to the 1990s and 2000s, when San Dieguito began to take on more the look that it has today, I've now reached a strange point in my narrative: the present.



I've given some thought about how to approach this. Ought I turn the keys over to others (students and teachers) and ask them to pen a few words? They're here after all, and know their school. Should I go out and drum up some current stories? Time encroaches on that pursuit; I've got a school to run, after all, and we're already talking about building next year's master schedule. So…

I realized that one of the biggest goals of this little blog is to celebrate life at San Dieguito, the students, the activities, and the spirit of our school. Over the past two years I've amassed more than a few entries on San Dieguito, and for a glimpse at life on campus circa 2017, I offer these.

Each fall Homecoming brings a crackle of electricity to campus. Here at San Dieguito, a school without football (or, as some maintain, a school "undefeated in football since 1996), "The Big Game" looks a little different. If our school had a motto, it would be "Keep SDA Funky" and homecoming week lives up to that as we enjoy a "Whirlwind" of activities.

Whirlwind



Homecoming at San Dieguito High School Academy runs for three weeks.

It shouldn't surprise anyone that we do things differently; marching to the beat of our own bongos is part of what makes our school so "very SDA." As the principal, I have the distinct pleasure of waving my hat above my head as I ride the whirlwind of school spirit, looking something like Pecos Bill in an illustration from the middle of the last century. This wild ride captures much of what it's like to be a part of our school family, involving students, staff, parents, and alumni.

Homecoming assemblies traditionally rally around sports, cheerleaders and athletes trotted out to run through a paper banner painted with some slogan about winning. Here at San Dieguito things are a little different. Students saw new teachers dance to Michael Jackson's *Thriller*; the homecoming court introduce themselves in diverse skits involving lip syncing, hockey jokes, and confetti; and our Homeroom Olympics roll in on a gondola. Student MCs got the crowd on their feet to cheer on a wide variety of peers as they participated with, not against, teachers in a series of games, and the school came together to celebrate what it's like to be a Mustang.

Mustangs from as far back as 1940 joined current students after the assembly for a Founders' Reception in the library. Talking with current students and each other, alumni from the eight decades of San

Dieguito shared stories and showed that the title of this year's Foundation Dinner, Dance, and Auction could not be more true: "Mustangs are Forever."



The next Monday kicked off Spirit Week, with students and staff sporting pyjamas on one day, workout gear another, and "Tacky Tourist" outfits, before a wild Friday of Halloween costumes and homeroom trick or treating. That night was the homecoming dance, and only at SDHSA would one highlight of the evening be a haunted house put on by the Japanese Honor Society.

Throughout it all, campus life hummed with the usual energy of October. Sports teams brought students to the field, pool, courts, and gym, our "Stang Gang" coming out in force to cheer on Water Polo, Tennis, and to punctuate fantastic volleyball play with their polished cheer of "S-D-Ace!"



Similar crowds celebrated music during the ongoing "Battle of the Bands" which stretched through and beyond Homecoming, and looks forward to a final evening performance a week from now. Some drew inspiration from *Switchfoot* frontman, and SDHSA graduate, Jon Foreman, who played a gig with our wind ensemble a week or so ago, and the crowds cheered all the student musicians as they brought music to our outdoor stage.

Homecoming ended officially with our annual Flag Football tournament that saw more than 500 students play in a tournament after school on Friday. As the afternoon turned into evening, student teams moved from the field to the stands, enjoyed tacos and treats from the food trucks on campus, and cheered on their peers as the top four student teams took on a faculty squad.

My most lasting memory of the night, beyond the kindness of the players and laughter on the field, was the throng of students who sat on the sideline cheering on the game. These spirited students held up signs of encouragement and exuded pure joy as they watched the huffing and puffing of the staff team (whose pregame chant was "Don't Get Hurt! Don't Get Hurt!") and the laughing and lightning quick talent of the student athletes.



At halftime the whole student body came onto the field to dance.

I've been in the school business for more than twenty years and I've never witnessed more positive energy than I saw on the sideline that night. Heck, they even cheered when the crafty veterans stole a victory from the students in overtime. Good clean fun.

It's Sunday night now, and I'm both tired and inspired. Not to stray too far from campus, but as my wife and I watched a romantic comedy, *About Time*, this weekend, I was reminded of the importance of savoring every day. The lead character in the picture, a redheaded time traveler, narrates his learned wisdom, saying: "In the end I think I've learned the final lesson from my travels in time; and I've even gone one step further than my father did: The truth is I now don't travel back at all, not even for the day, I just try to live every day as if I've deliberately come back to this one day, to enjoy it, as if it was the full final day of my extraordinary, ordinary life."



We all have the potential to live extraordinary, ordinary lives. I'm thankful every day that mine involves pyjama days, student rock and roll bands, and flag football.

Art matters much at San Dieguito. Construction is our current reality. Those two sentences fit together like cats and vacuum cleaners. Last fall, when two old buildings were razed to make way for our newest science and math building, the sacrifice that had to be made was years of student art. It was a wrenching moment for our school, but one that we've emerged from intact. The most dramatic day, involving chisels, tears, and smiles, looked like this:

Vertebrae

"Art is not cozy and it is not mocked. Art tells the only truth that ultimately matters. It is the light by which human things can be mended. And after art there is, let me assure you all, nothing."

-Iris Murdoch

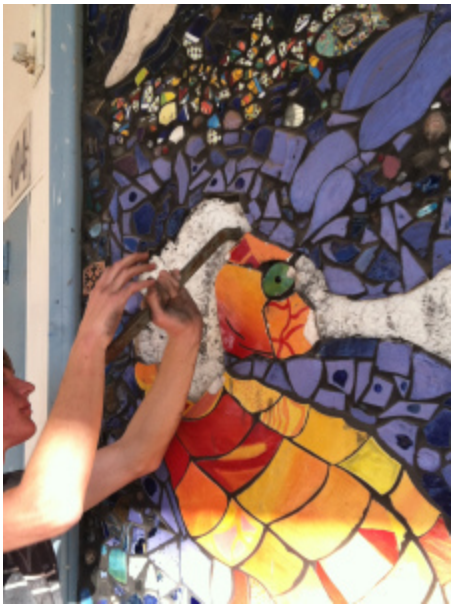


I saw a theatrical performance this fall that almost made me cry. Student actors, passionate in their craft, led the audience up and down the scale of emotion, transmuting laughter into heartbreak with a turn of the head and the subtle motion of a hand. I'll remember the performance for a long time, in the same way I can recall singers and songs from decades ago as clearly as if they'd just walked off the stage. It's the magic of art, an ability to change lives, alter perspectives, and touch us to our core.

That the set has been struck or the musician has long since left the building doesn't diminish the memory of the art that was created. Much as a painting or sculpture, both less transient pieces of art, music, theater, and dance all have the potential to resonate with an observer and remain as real in that person's mind as the Elgin Marbles ...if the observer is willing and able to engage with the art.

I saw such engagement this afternoon, real, honest, and profound.

It was sparked by destruction.



The construction of a new classroom building on campus has meant that as a school we need to say goodbye to two classroom buildings, their walls decorated with student artwork. For a couple of decades, mosaics and murals on these walls have celebrated everything from theater to sea life. Square senior tiles reach to the eaves, clay faces peer out from planters, and the ceramic bones of a life sized dinosaur stretch across the back of one of the buildings.

Removing the artwork wasn't possible; sturdy, mid century adhesive had seen to that. Justifiable sadness spread about losing the work.

I talked with students about the art, attempting the analogy of performance I used to start this post. It almost sounded plausible. Art teachers weighed in about the fact that it was really okay; the world changes, and those changes are part of growing up.

And then, today, as I walked up to a group of students chipping away at a giant seahorse, I was struck by the sheer power and unapologetic magic of art. One student used a hammer and crowbar to pry at a seahorse, doing his best to remove the work without damaging it too much. That it was an impossible task didn't seem to matter; he was uninstalling it, just as years ago a person about his age had put it onto the wall. He was focused and serious about his work. He knew that seahorse more closely than anyone since it had been created.

Two students nearby paused to point at a small detail in the wall, appreciating the craftsmanship of a teenager (who would now be old enough to be their parent). "I never really looked at this before," one said. "See!" She pointed. From across the decades, the detail of a simple starfish brought two teenagers into communion with an artist who they may never meet, but with whom they share the bond of art and our school. They tapped at the starfish with hammer and chisel, more successful in their scrutiny than its removal.

The sentiment echoed and was amplified when I walked across the court to where some seniors were looking at the senior tiles of students old enough to be my age. They ran fingers over the smooth white surfaces, reading the words -*really pausing to read them*- and laughing, commenting to each other, and making connections to their own lives.



I could almost hear Robin Williams from *Dead Poet's Society* behind us whispering "*Carpe Diem*."

I hope that these same students will bring this attention to the mass of student art that continues to fill our campus. The art lost in this courtyard is a small percentage of what we have all over San Dieguito, all of it with the same potential to inspire.

I hope they will create their own.

Our photography classes have taken some high resolution pictures of the murals and mosaics, and we'll use these images to make posters for our new science and math building. We're also looking to reinstall the metal Mustang from the 1980s that once held dominion over the front of the school in the expanded courtyard that will open for students in 2017. These nods to the past are meant to honor those



artists who have contributed a verse to the poem that is San Dieguito High School Academy. They're the actions of adults aware of the limits of holding on to the past.

My heart was stirred today by the youth uninhibited by such limits.

I hope that the photos will capture the spirit of the art that time and hammers are taking away. The more ephemeral magic, however, and something that I will remember forever and wouldn't dream of trying to recreate, was today's interaction between the art and the students.

This, I thought, is what art does when it is at its best.

The individual tiles and pieces of clay that were a part of our campus will be gone by the time I post these words, words themselves that are as temporary as a dream, but the *experience* our students engaged in today will last as long as they are alive. The spark that passed between the active observers and the art they interacted with is truly inspiration.

To see this artwork's last act be to deeply connect with students, students who would have been the distant future to the artists who created the mosaics, struck me as profound.



As I walked away from the court a student called my name. Jogging up to me he smiled and said: "Mr. Paige, I'd like you to have this." In his outstretched hand was a perfectly shaped brown vertebrae. "It's from the dinosaur," he said.

I have no object more precious from San Dieguito in my office.

We can't change the flow of time, but we can change the world and ourselves. We can't prevent the destruction of things, not always, but we can make art, and pause long enough to appreciate it.



One of my favorite authors said that "art is the light by which human things can be mended." I saw that today, as clay crumbled, tiles chipped, and anxiety about losing something seemed to mend, at least a little.

Today art, the backbone of our school, reached across the decades to bring people together. It did so spontaneously, genuinely, and unexpectedly. I was lucky enough to leave with a vertebrae.

Exhibition Day at San Dieguito is, put simply, *magical*. Who we are today is reflected on that day in the multifaceted celebration of humanity that makes up "SDA's Favorite Day."

SDA's Favorite Day.







Before it started, as students were setting up booths and the dance team was organizing itself on the outdoor stage opposite the dunk tank and robotics display, a student came up to me and described it as "SDA's favorite day."

I smiled at him; the claim seemed hyperbolic, especially on the heels of such great events as class javas, opening a time capsule, and a string of amazing homeroom olympics events. "It's my first Exhibition Day," I admitted. "You're going to *love* it," he replied, and then he disappeared into the crowd of students packing in baskets of homemade jewelry and getting ready to set up the drum circle.

Exhibition Day has been a San Dieguito tradition for almost twenty years. It's an opportunity for students to celebrate the pursuits they love: music, art, motorcycles, you name it. Once there was a petting zoo.

This year saw a skateboarding demonstration, a bouncy slide, and a car show. Student entrepreneurs sold t-shirts designed and created in our screen printing shop, homemade organic soap, and Henna tattoos. The Photography Club had a booth with cards and prints, the Thespians read palms and painted faces, and one of my assistant principals assured me that the Bento bowl she got from the Japanese National Honor Society was fantastic.







A little like a carnival, a little like a swap meet, and a little like an alternative music festival, this student imagined and student run event (with a little help from our veteran ASB advisor) is a celebration of the things that our students are passionate about beyond the walls of school. It's a place for open mic poetry, hula dancing, and the student selling her own line of swimwear. Exhibition Day brings sea glass jewelry, succulents, and waffles to campus. It invites the unexpected.









In addition to the Saturday Market side of things, students and adults who call San Dieguito home also had opportunities to engage with each other in creative pursuits. Many hands and many brushes painted the "art car."



Up by our Mosaic Cafe blindfolded pottery throwing inspired the senses while just inside the Mosaic a cavalcade of student musicians entertained audiences in an intimate venue.

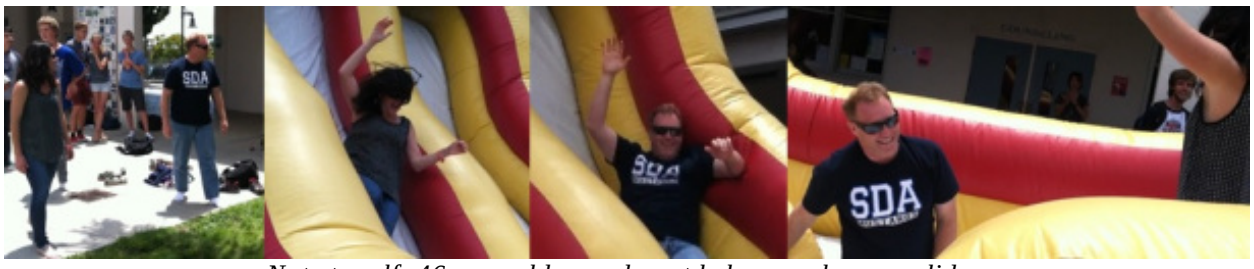
More raucous fans cheered on our Comedy Sportz performers in the theater, and throngs of students yelled along with the growling rock and roll bands who played in the outdoor amphitheater.

What impressed me most was how happy everybody was. Students laughed and joked. I saw I could buy “Bad Advice” for fifty cents and “Awkward Compliments ...and tape” for only a quarter.

Teachers populated the dunk tank and later cradled the student made items they’d purchased as they walked from booth to booth. One of my assistant principals led a dance line during a heavy metal concert on the outdoor stage.

I was enjoying all this when the chair of my English Department challenged me to a race through the bouncy slide. Moved by the spirit of the day, I ignored that she was fit and young, and I pulled off my shoes and accepted the high fives of the students clustered around the starting line.

But, boy was it fun.



Note to self: 46 year old men do not belong on bouncy slides.

Everything about the day was a blast, and celebrated the funky, free spirited reality that is San Dieguito. Around every corner was an unexpected delight: Pokemon Cards, sushi, and a chalk mandala. On every face was a smile, and behind each eye the twinkle of possibility.

Our school board president stopped by, as she often does to visit campus, and her laughter and happy interaction with our students told me that she could feel it too. She knew, as she witnessed students making music and art, and feeling free to be themselves, that this was something magical.



This was, to put it simply, SDA’s favorite day.

And finally, a little speech.

Each year the principals from our district schools are invited to make a presentation to the board of education. We're given a few minutes to celebrate our school, share some highlights, and give the board members a taste of what life is like on campus. This year mine came in September, too early to talk about the year's accomplishments, so I simply described the things about San Dieguito that "I Love…"



I love that San Dieguito is a school where the unexpected is expected, where school spirit is funky, and where people, students and adults, take the time to see past the outer masks we all wear and really listen to the content of each other's character.

I love that at SDA students can find themselves, be themselves, and try and fail and succeed and know that they're safe.

I love that right now you could walk up from this library to an art gallery on campus where you would see paintings and drawings by staff and alumni, and that if you made that same walk in a month you'd see student work that would astound you.

This is a place where students and teachers learn and laugh together.

In just a few weeks our homecoming game will see hundreds of students, male and female, freshmen through seniors, playing flag football, and we'll end the night with students playing a game with our staff. Last year at halftime the student body came out onto the field and danced.

I love that we have a campus that embraces events like Cabaret Night, the Dorkathon, and the Homeroom Olympics, a place where students in AP Art history just celebrated our school's 1936 opening by holding class in tents on the anniversary of the first opening day, when construction wasn't completed and kids had class in canvas classrooms.



We have construction now, but no fear of tents.

I love that yesterday, when I was subbing in a Senior English class and stretching time as the sub plans were being delivered, in a delightfully unscripted moment a student raised his hand and asked: "No offense, but what do you *do* during the day?"
I did my best to explain what a principal does, though I'm not entirely convinced I did.

And I love that later that night at Back to School

Night, when I went over to thank some students for volunteering to help parents find classrooms, that same student was there, and as I thanked him too, he said: “I’m not part of ASB; I’m just here because of the good vibes.”

Me too.



And those good vibes are evident all over San Dieguito, at concerts, games, assemblies, dances, and performances. That spirit of SDA shows up in our Link Crew, students who help new students feel comfortable at our school; our PALS program, student listeners trained to help peers through challenging times, and the hundreds and hundreds of students who find quiet ways to make our school better every day.

These same students remind us to embrace life and be playful, passionate, and positive.

With every student I see in a cape or a costume, a Mustang jersey or a goofy hat, I’m reminded of why we all do what we do.

As educators, at our best, every decision we make is for the students.

“How will this help kids?” That is the question great teachers and principals, and all of us with a hand in education should ask ourselves every day.

I love that at SDA, where you can wear a Pikachu costume ...or you don’t have to, we embrace respect, kindness, and a funky spirit that feels most like love.

That’s us today, proud members of a school community with traditions and memories that reach back to 1936 and dreams that stretch forward into the distant future.

27. The Time Capsule Crowd

We sat around a table in my office, an office that has belonged to San Dieguito principals since 1937, and talked about burying a time capsule that would be opened in 2068. Fresh faced and energetic, the students at the table will be in their sixties when the airtight container is opened next; I'll be dead.



Time is funny and time capsules are funnier still. What will the class of 2068 think of our quaint life in the year 2017? Will the flash drive we tuck into the time capsule puzzle them as a slide rule would today's students? Can we *know* the water will stay out and leave our buried treasures intact?

Our discussion was a delight. Spending time with thoughtful teenagers is a pleasure and a privilege I enjoy as a high school principal. And after we talked about the articles and artifacts they wanted to bury for their grandchildren it struck me that for the final interview for my sketch of San Dieguito's eightieth anniversary I could do no better than to talk with this group of students that my marvelous assistant, Lois, referred to affectionately as "The Time Capsule Crowd."

So we talked.

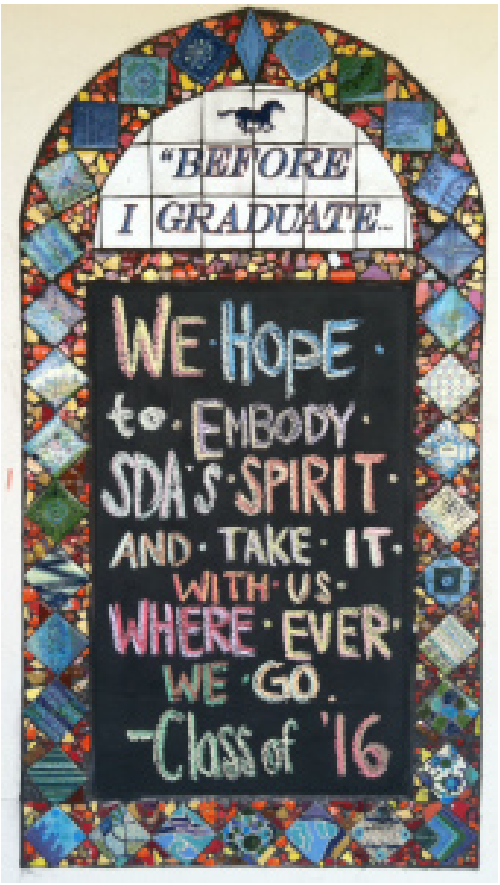
We talked about life at San Dieguito in the year 2017, the experiences that meant the most, the places that were the dearest, and what it really meant to "Keep SDA Funky."



Three freshmen were at the table, Bella, Martina, and Saylor, each from a different middle school and each with their own story of why San Dieguito was *their* school. Jack, a sophomore, spoke to his own transition from the comfort of middle school through the anxiety of coming to high school, and finally how he'd found his own voice at SDA. And at the head of the table, Stephanie, a passionate senior, held court with memories that ranged from her shy freshman year to her outspoken final year at San Dieguito.

Much of our talk circled around what makes San Dieguito the place it is today. “You can be yourself at SDA,” Saylor noticed. “You can really do anything,” Martina added. Stephanie, the elder statesman, explained “I feel good to be here because no one is going to judge me. It’s a place where there are lots of people to look up to. It makes me want to be *my* best.”

I asked the group when they stopped looking up to others and felt like they were the ones others were looking up to.



“When you find your style,” Jack answered. “It just happens. You aren’t consciously aware of it.” The other students nodded, the freshmen smiling.

“Are you optimistic?” I asked. They looked at me like I was from outer space. Of course, those looks answered. “Why?” I followed up.

“Because you can be yourself,” Saylor answered.

“And you can do anything here,” Martina added.

“In middle school,” Bella explained, “we read *The Outsiders* and our teacher had us do a map of campus to indicate where the different groups hang out, you know, the popular kids here, the sporty kids there. That would never work at SDA. There aren’t the same kinds of groups.”

“Everybody is just open,” Stephanie added. The table nodded.

That freedom to be who you are, and that understanding that for students that *who* may change many times over the four years of high school, is a core value of San Dieguito.

“SDA is like a Michael Jackson music video,” Stephanie offered with a smile. “Everybody looks different, but the come together to dance, and then at the end they each walk away in their own direction.”

That ability for each of our students to have a safe community from which to chart their own path is an important part of what makes San Dieguito the school it is. As our ninth graders told me:

“Just be yourself.”

“Don’t overthink it.”

“People are nice here. It will be okay.”



We ended our conversation with a nod toward that familiar refrain: “Keep SDA Funky.” I asked them what they thought “funky” meant at SDA.

Their answers, delivered with the gentle smiles adolescents bestow upon their parents and fellows my age who ask silly questions, ranged from “freedom” to “being ourselves.” Jack added “There’s no pressure to be funky at SDA. You can just be yourself.” He gestured to his t-shirt and jeans; not everyone dresses in a Pikachu costume; they just know they *can* and it wouldn’t be judged as odd. “We don’t *have* to be different,” he said. “We can just be us.”

I look forward to seeing these amazing students continue to grow, graduate, and move into a world beyond our campus. The spirit they bring to San Dieguito, a spirit I have no doubt they will bring to life after graduation, gives me hope that the world is in great hands. Our kids. Our future.

28. The Next 80 Years

San Dieguito's first eighty years began in tents during the Roosevelt administration. The next eighty years will end in 2097.

If that date feels like the setting for a science fiction story, it is …at least from our early 21st century vantage point. For perspective, 2017 is about eighty years *later* than the publication of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*.



It's always fun to look back at the futurists' projections of what lay in store for humanity in the distant or not too distant future. Jetpacks, flying cars, robots. Whither San Dieguito?

I won't be the fellow who predicts automatons will teach the kids or we'll be traveling on pneumatic tube roadways. I'll refrain from imagining levitating classrooms or a dome over the field.

I could play it safe and say that actors will still be staging Shakespeare in San Dieguito's theater, as they did in 2016 …and 1970 …and 1946. I'm confident that we'll have a thriving ASB, dynamic student journalists, and an art department that is the envy of the district. What that theater, or that paper, or those art studios look like, that I'm not so sure of. I do hope that the breezeways designed by Lilian Rice will still be home to students traveling from class to class.

The reality, however, is tough to predict. Eighty years before San Dieguito opened Walt Whitman was publishing *Leaves of Grass*, including "An Old Man's Thoughts of School" that notices:

these young lives,
Building, equipping, like a fleet of ships—immortal ships!
Soon to sail out over the measureless seas,
On the Soul's voyage."



Lots can happen in eight decades, so many ships of youth launched from this campus into the measureless seas of the world.

So, veering away from infrastructure and architecture, I'll stake my predictions for San Dieguito's next eighty years on the observations I've made looking back at our school's first eight decades.

I believe that the Mustang class of 2097 will be kind. I think they will be creative and accepting and innovative. I think they will surprise people who don't know them and rise to the expectations of all those who do know them.

Like our students today, and students I've met who attended from 1936 until today, I believe that eighty years from now it will be the students who attend San Dieguito who define San Dieguito. Theirs' will be the story told by some future historian, stories of adventure and connections that tell of young people striving to be themselves while being part of something bigger than themselves.

Those future generations, like our current students and the alumni who still call San Dieguito home, are the lifeblood of our school. San Dieguito's first eighty years have contained multitudes; the next eighty years promise to be as grand.



Afterward

I started this project back in the summer of 2016, knowing that San Dieguito was a school rich with stories and hoping I might capture a few in a series of posts I would publish, one a week, from the start of school until about spring break. Along the way I got lots of help and encouragement from all kinds of people, and can say without a doubt that I learned more than just San Dieguito history; I learned that there is good reason to believe the best about the human condition.

This little chronicle has been a labor of love. There were always lots of stories to tell, and I did my best to bring as many forward as I could. That said, I only scratched the surface of what life at San Dieguito has been like over the past eighty years. Catch an alum and ask what her life was like when she was a student here and you're likely to hear stories just as rich and just as unexpected. Talk with a former teacher or staff member and the same is true.

So…these pages are a *sliver* of the rich history of San Dieguito (heck, I hardly mentioned the bell tower, the metal mustang, or the student forum), but a sliver of history told with affection, appreciation, and love. I can't say how much I appreciate everyone who has helped inspire the stories in these pages, from the alumni to the current students, teachers past and present, parents, staff, and community members. I'm grateful that there are places in this world like San Dieguito and that I have the pleasure to be a small part of this great school.

