

Rose Glassberg - Remarks for 55th Reunion, May 31, 2015

Good afternoon; I do appreciate being included in your reunion plans. I asked Kim to let me speak last because I had some summing up to do. It's that time in my life, and I am reasonably sure that I'm the oldest person in the room this afternoon.

About five and a half years ago, when your 50th reunion committee was still working on details of that lovely event, I was invited to dinner with Lou Haenel, Barbara Kreps, and Sue Lear, all of whom had been my students both in their sophomore and senior years. They were, of course, wonderful students, but I had not seen them in at least forty years; yet the years melted away, and during the evening I felt the mutual affection and respect we had shared so long ago. They had been a joy to teach, and I think they, too, had found joy in the learning we shared. That evening was somewhat magical, repeated several weeks later at a slightly Bacchanalian, cross-cultural celebration of Purim at Barbara's condo.

I have wondered how, after all these years, we could have enjoyed each other's company so thoroughly; certainly, that was not my experience as a high school student. I had been a good student but never felt so close to any of my teachers that I could have imagined one such evening, let alone a second.

There is no doubt that I enjoyed teaching the particular class that included Lou, Sue, and Barbara, a group that was bright, receptive, and a joy to work with. I felt I could teach anything, and they would be up to it. I still remember the day I walked into the English Department's bookroom and found a new, never used set of books on modern poetry. I grabbed those books and taught their class a unit on poetry that I wished someone had taught me.

But theirs wasn't the only class I taught at Germantown or the only class I enjoyed. I liked them all. I was very aware that some of the students I taught might have been the first in their family to graduate from high school. I tried to teach skills useful for their careers, but I was also concerned that they have a positive experience in high school; that is, that they would have success in learning not only the content of the curriculum but also in learning how to learn.

I thought if that happened, they might go on with their education; for I never assumed that those who didn't plan on attending college immediately after high school were incapable of doing college work at some later point. I felt rewarded when some came to that realization even before they graduated from Germantown.

Nor did I feel unusual; we had a significant number of conscientious professionals on our faculty, a credit to any school and I'm sure you're remembering them now. With good reason, Germantown High School had a solid reputation in the community. Yes, I know we had a few sourballs on the faculty -- a distinct minority. I remember one who, on learning that I had discussed *Beowulf* with a class, stated

that whenever she taught that work, she always drew a comparison between the monster Grendel and Russia, in an example of what today might be called the “Sarah Palin School of Literary Analysis.”

Most teachers would want their students to read literature on its own terms, and would discuss the writers, their personal backgrounds and the period during which they wrote, as well as aspects of literary form. Our goal was to have students read literature independently, believing that if students could *really* read literature, they would enjoy the experience of finding beauty in a well-wrought work.

I also hoped they might be able to recognize the “cri de coeur” in a poem or work of fiction and perhaps feel less alone with some of the inner struggles that attack us all. Yet as they thought about what they read, I also hoped they would think about what *they* wrote, writing not just correctly but also truthfully, using the tools of research to add substance to their writing and feeling confident that writing what they believed was worth the effort.

In short, I liked what I did and felt it had purpose. All of my subsequent work in higher education, as I have often said, was indebted to my years of teaching high school English. It was a given that at some point, I would teach prospective teachers of English what I had been so fortunate to have learned with you – and from you -- at Germantown High School.

In her note to you on the occasion of your 50th Reunion, Claire Hirschfield wrote that teaching you at Germantown High School had been “a privilege.” I thought that was a particularly apt phrase. Those years were rich both for you and for the teachers who mattered to you. I thank you for again reminding me of them and allowing me to share this happy reunion with you.