



WABASH COLLEGE

Class Agents Letter

Alumni and Parent Relations

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Class of 1952

Class Agent

William J. Reinke

April 2013

Dear fellow 52ers —

You may recall that **Ted Steeg** wrote the last previous Newsletter, filling in for our classy class agent, **Bill Reinke**. **Bill** is still dogging it from his minor open-heart surgery back in January, interminably keeping himself off the Class Agent Duty Roster. So this month I am writing the Newsletter for **Bill**, and thus allowing **Ted** to resume wallowing in the aesthetic and sybaritic splendor of NYC.

During **Bill's** extended medical leave of absence from his Class Agent duties, the college has been mailing copies of *The Bachelor* to **Ted** and me. A couple of weeks ago, there was a feature article about alternate-history fiction, that "What if X had happened instead of Z?" plot devise. Such as, *What if Lindberg had been elected president?*

The *Bachelor* piece was quite well done, the subject interests me, and as a result the author of the article, **Ryan Horner '15**, and I exchanged a few emails discussing alternate-history fiction. Afterward, I fell to wondering how old someone our age must seem from his perspective. He is a sophomore, and back when we were sophomores in 1950 a guy of our current age, 82 or 83, would have been born around 1867-68, almost during the Civil War. How very old we must be perceived by college kids these days, and how grateful we remaining '52ers can be to have stuck around on *terra firma* for so long.

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A subsequent issue of *The Bachelor*, the 5 April issue, reported that Wabash student baseball-fans had earned a reprimand from the Director of Athletics and Campus Wellness, **Joe Haklin**, for their heckling of opposing teams. The president of the Sphinx Club, **Jimmy Kervan '13**, agreed that fans were crossing the line of propriety and in his comments referred to "degrading chants like 'Ohio Sucks'" and "*the famous DePauw and their migratory bird problem*" (italics added). Goose droppings, perhaps? We're eager to know more about that.

SPARKY WATTS (1930-2013)

In our last newsletter, **Ted Steeg** reported that **Sparky Watts** had been unable to attend our class reunion last June because of illness. It is now my sad duty to report that **Sparky** died last month, on 17 March in Crawfordsville.

Here is an excerpt from his obituary:

Sparky was born on November 24, 1930, New Richmond, to Carl and Ethel Faye Bunnell Watts and grew up on the family farm. He graduated from New Richmond High School in 1948, and then received a Bachelors Degree in history at Wabash College in 1952.

While at Wabash, he was a member of the ROTC and then enlisted in the United States Air Force. Sparky was very proud to have served in the Air Force for twenty years in many capacities including as a Navigator on a KC135 in Indochina and Vietnam, and retired with the rank of Lt. Col.

After the service, he worked as an estimator for Randolph Builders and then served on the Cemetery board as the Sextant of Oakland Cemetery near Elmdale. He attended St. Bernard's Catholic Church and had memberships in the American Legion, VFW, and Vietnam Veterans organizations. In his spare time, he loved to travel, was an accomplished woodworker and loved spending time with his family, of whom he was very proud.

Sparky was survived by his wife Joan Gates Watts (whom he married in 1956 at Fort Benton, Montana), three sons, and ten grandchildren.

His Delt house brother **Bill Reinke** remembered **Sparky** (whose given name, Robert, has been largely cast aside) in a recent email:

As you may recall, Sparky was my "point man" to encourage us Delts to attend our '52@60' June 1-2, 2012 60th class reunion last year, and he worked at it. Sparky even made reservations to attend himself. But as you and I discussed at the time of our reunion, he had to cancel out....

At one of our past reunions when each of us re-introduced ourselves at a banquet, Sparky said something about feeling he had enjoyed success because God willing and the Creeks don't rise; he particularly enjoyed the benefits of indoor plumbing in the winter time....

He was some Little Giant, though. I vividly recall, Buck, a few years back when in one of my Letters I wrote about our Undefeated Football Team of 1951, and somehow I mistakenly gave Ken Beasley or Norm Buktenica credit for the other's contribution. Sparky straightened me out pronto with an immediate clarifying phone call. The requisite correction with full credit to Sparky, was made in my very next Letter.

Knowing that I was preparing some words about **Sparky** for this newsletter, **Ted Steeg** recalled by email that in the film *Hoosiers*, **Sparky** played the character who sat in a barber chair. **Ted** wrote:

One of my favorite Sparky stories is when I went to see the movie *Hoosiers*, and almost fell on the floor when his Montgomery County puss showed up in closeup early on in the film....

I always kidded him about the fact that he and I were the only Hollywood "stars" out of our class, him in *Hoosiers* and me in *Going All the Way*.

Sparky and **Norm Buktenica** maintained a firm bond of friendship to the end, and **Buck** remembers him this way:

I'd like first to share a 'Sparky anecdote' from early on at Wabash. Sparky and I sat next to each other in a Willis Johnson science class with three deep chalk boards that were quickly rolled up out of sight as they were filled with notes. Sparky was much faster than I was at taking notes. So being unable to keep up with Willis, I copied Sparky's notes as he wrote them. As a result, in so doing, it was not unusual for me to be unaware that I was writing obscenities about myself as I copied from Sparky's notes !!! Sparky, of course, thought this was very funny at my expense. (And, another of course, he was right!!) More importantly, the situation was prototypical of Sparky's character, humor and friendship. What a guy!

We have all lost a marvelous friend. For me personally, a most beloved one — so loyal and devoted, dedicated and caring for and to those he loved as a husband, father, brother, grandpa, great grandpa, friend and buddy, and just being Sparky. Even in my sorrow, I cannot help but smile as I think of him. Sparky's personally woven philosophy of life and people is more than noteworthy. His incredible capacity to identify life's incongruities, obvious in his wit and timing, is reminiscent to me of Herb Shriner and George Gobel. If we were listening, we heard him chronicle the life and times of our era. Then, of course, many of us thought his appearance in *The Hoosiers*, was worthy of an Oscar — the Best Barber Chair Sitter Award!! Such incidents, as well as recollections of four years of comradery, football, baseball, and our continued friendship since college, may help fill the irreparable void of Sparky's death.

Hopefully, his family and the rest of us can find some comfort as we savor the memories of having Sparky in our lives for all those many years — truly and positively a unique person. I already miss my ol' buddy.

NEW PREZ — DR. GREGORY D. HESS

As you may have noticed via college news releases, **Dr. Gregory D. Hess** is the new president of Wabash. An alumnus of UC Davis and Johns Hopkins, he comes to Crawfordsville directly from Claremont McKenna College in Claremont, CA, where he has been serving as VP of Academic Affairs. Comments from the chair of the Wabash Board of Trustees, **Stephen S. Bowen**, foretell that **Dr. Hess** will be assuming his duties concurrently with the trustees conducting an appraisal of the “College’s net tuition revenue,” including possible tuition increases, reductions in student aid, and recruiting more “students with the ability to pay all or a substantial portion of stated tuition.” Stay tuned — I am confident that more info will be coming down the pike that will interest Wabash alumni.

Reflecting on presidents of Wabash, do you think that anyone will ever hold that office who will match our own prez, **Frank Sparks**? Sartorially, certainly not. Like that other president whom people of our age knew so well, **FDR**, our **President Sparks** projected the visual image of an already faded era. **FDR**’s soda-straw-long cigarette holder and his cape, and **President Sparks**’s dove-gray spats; according to Wikipedia, spats went out of style in the decade before we were born, yet **President Sparks** wore them with advantages, signifying gravitas whenever he strode across campus.

RALPH F. WILLIAMS (1930-2013)

More sad news to report here. We just learned of the death this month of our classmate **Ralph Williams**. His obituary in the Crawfordsville Journal Review confirms that he was a summa cum laude graduate of Wabash and was a member of Phi Beta Kappa. **Ralph** also earned a master’s degree from IU in English and Library Science and subsequently taught English at Turkey Run High School, where he also directed numerous student theatrical productions. **Ralph** retired in 1992 and was living in Crawfordsville at the time of his death. Additional details are not yet available.

FOOTBALL — THE UNBEATEN TEAM OF 1951 AND THE WABASH ATHLETIC HALL OF FAME

The placement of this story created a real editorial dilemma for me: Whether to come in like a lion with this piece as an opener or to go the non-Eliot route and end this newsletter with a bang? Eventually, I went with non-Eliot, and here is the Bang: **The Wabash football team of 1951**, the entire team, will be named to the **Wabash Athletic Hall of Fame**. Note the tense in that last previous sentence — future tense. The Hall of Fame selection has not yet been publicly announced, so this story is a scoop for the Class of '52 Newsletter. **Tom Runge**, Alumni Affairs director, advises that the selection of the Team of '51 has been approved by the alumni board, and that public announcement is imminent. It's a done deal.

A fullback and linebacker on that team, **Norm Buktenica**, did not try to conceal his enthusiasm when he commented on the selection of the team in an email to his teammate **Ted Steeg**, halfback. **Norm** wrote:

They finally got it and got it right!!! There is nothing like a team effort than an undefeated season, an accumulation of individual efforts in various situations, supporting and complementing one another...a composite of multiple talents. In the case of our 1951 team, we had an unusual collection of very good athletes who individually and as a group in particular circumstances got the job done.

When I requested **Ted's** comments on the selection, he wrote:

As for the undefeated 1951 team, I'll say this: we were much better at the end of the season than we were in the beginning, as evidenced by our increased scoring the last few games (41-14, I think, over DePauw). Our only blemish was a tie with Butler, early in the season, who we really should have beaten. Had we played them at the end of the year, we'd have taken them for sure. Our strength was a terrific offense.

If opponents massed at the line to stop bruising fullback Stan Huntsman, brother Jerry would start whipping touchdown passes. When opponents laid back, our running game punched big holes in their lines.

Good players at every position. What a pleasure to play on that team.

There were stars - Ken Beasley, Bob Hansen, Moose Hepler, Lou Jones, Joe Dooley, Stan and Jerry, Norm Buktenica — but the truth is, it was a well-oiled team in every sense of the word, with a very clever coach (Garland Frazier) who believed in speed and finesse rather than brute power. It's a shame there wasn't any post-season play in those days, because we would have made a noise.

BILL REINKE

I believe we can reasonably expect **Bill Reinke**, our leader, to be back in charge of the next newsletter. Although I joked about his malingering that forced **Steege** and me to write a couple of his newsletters, we were happy to fill in. I'm really damned proud of **Bill** for his recovery. His aortic valve replacement in January was an immensely invasive piece of surgery, and the strength of his recuperative powers is surprising his docs. Example: a couple of weeks ago, he and his wife, **Liz**, traveled from South Bend to Chicago to view the Picasso exhibition at the Art Institute and later on the same day attended a Yo Yo Ma concert at Symphony Hall. A tough old bird, and I'm proud of him. Even though I shall miss the newsletter writing, I am delighted that he is on the cusp of a full recovery.

Paul Arnold
Bloomington, Indiana