



WABASH COLLEGE

Class Agents Letter

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Class of 1986

Class Agents

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Greetings Fellow members of '86!

2013. Most of us will turn 49 this year. Wow. I was driving into work this morning and there is a song currently popular called “Madness” by a band called Muse. As I was listening to it on this college radio station, I thought, “Now, why do kids like this?” I listened a bit more. I started to see ... and hear. The song has this very rhythmic back pulse and the singer almost sings in this fake falsetto voice. It reminded me of the artist I had heard before as a younger man, an artist formally known as Prince. I began to understand, really, more to remember.

I remembered dancing on a living room floor in the back of a fraternity house, or later in my life, a bar. This was the type of song that would be played about the ‘peak’ of the party – I am, everyone sweating, couples are starting to pair up, no more group dancing, the alcohol perhaps at its crescendo in our bodies, and that back pulsating beat. This was a song to get close to your dance partner. It was time to figure out where the evening was going, or at least, get some better clues. Probably it was a time, more specifically, to figure out where she was going – back to Butler/Purdue/DePauw, Ball State or

Ah, yes, I remember. I wondered if the other drivers noticed that ‘cat-ate-the-mouse’ grin that was now on my face. It was 30 years or so ago, but I remember those nights, those nights at Wabash.

Thank you. Thank you to those young gentlemen: David Lewis, Hollis Evans, Jay Carr, and Geoff Davis, who entered Wabash before me from Tech high school. No other option seemed appropriate to me for college after those examples.

Thank you to the admission director at that time. He took the time to have my parents, working class and grade school educated, come to Wabash, sit down with them, step by step go through the financial aid application, and show them how I could afford to go there. Without him, I would not have figured out, and my parents would have never let me go there. I think he was at Wabash one year, and then they fired him. But for that one year, maybe I miss Wabash.

Thank you to the Tech men: Hollis Evans, Jay Carr, and Geoff Davis, for getting me into the FIJI house with you. What an eclectic bunch the FIJI house was in the mid 80s. Goodness! The cross section looked a little like this: Early admittance John Hopkins guys, captains of an undefeated football team, guys who made Wilt Chamberlain look like a prude, guys who personified their phrase “Work Hard, Play Hard”. Guys who were actually poorer than me, and guys that felt obligated to correct me that a Triumph TR8 was NOT a Triumph TR7. Sometimes I think I imagined some of those scenes, but yet, I was there. I know those events happened, even if I can’t ever tell my kids about it.

Thanks to the FIJI house class of ’83 – the seniors when I was a freshman. Thanks for banding together (at the request of Hollis) and voting me in over the objections of a few sophomores and juniors. By the way, the sophomores and juniors were right – I was probably a risk for beating the shit out of some of them at some point. Fortunately, their inappropriate hazing ended with my pledgeship, and we never had to cross paths that way again.

Thanks again for Bill Placher. Everyone who ever met him or spent any time with the man understands why. Indescribable. Irreplaceable.

Thank you to the College for my Presidential Scholarship and my job at the library. Without either, I was destined for somewhere else. I can’t imagine where that would have taken me. (More on that in a moment).

Which brings me to this – please give to the College. It does go to our students, in part. It does allow for young men who deserve a shot there to be allowed to take their shot. In short, it does make a difference.

Now to the difference.

In 1982, another young man from Tech went to Wabash. He did not get into the FIJI house. I'm not sure, therefore, that he had the support to tough it out like I did from fellow Tech students. He left after a year.

I saw him not long after I graduated. We ran into each other at the State Office Building. He had enlisted in the military, had a wife and some kids.

He didn't show up, though, for our 10 year class reunion. This was in the day when the internet was very new and I had some friends at a big law firm do a search. I had heard some stories from the street, and I wanted to see if they were true. Unfortunately, they were.

In 1995 or 96, I went to visit him in Maryland, in the penitentiary. He was then, and is now, serving two life sentences for a double homicide. He was the same, and he was different. We talked as if we had just crossed paths at Starbucks. I left, and I haven't spoken to him since. I think it was too hard for him. I can tell you, it wasn't easy for me.

I think of him from time to time. His picture (along with our 4th grade class from IPS #99) sits on my bookshelf in my office. He was smart. He was a good athlete. He was a better person. He had more than once protected me from altercations with those who sought to do me harm because of the color of my skin. We played together. We shared a love for Muhammad Ali together. We laughed at Richard Pryor together. We were in the same advanced classes at Tech our entire high school career together. Despite his regression, I still believe he was and is a good man.

Today, I thought of him again. My staffer came in and told me that a 29 year old man who I had read about in our local newspaper was a friend of hers. He had carjacked someone, hurt them, and then wrecked the car and been killed in the accident. She had known him in grade school as a fun loving, nice young man. I

thought back to my friend. I thought back to Wabash, again for the second time today.

What if he had stayed? Not that Wabash men are above the laws of nature, but I believe his life would have been different, more fulfilling. I don't recall exactly why he left. It wasn't grades. I think it was a lot of things, but money probably was a factor.

With four kids and a government job, I can no longer write \$1,000 checks annually to the college. But I will write a much smaller one, or maybe another later in the year, for what I can. I will think of my friend when I do. I hope my small check will make a difference in some young man's life in some small, unknown or unforeseen way. I know there is no hope that I will make a difference if I do nothing.

Gentlemen.

-Tim Oakes

Class of '86