



Class Agents Letter

Class of 1952

Class Agent
William J. Reinke

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March 10, 2020

Dear Class of 1952,

Greetings from the Wabash College campus! Your Class Agent, Bill Reinke, ran across a letter that he wrote to you ten years ago this month, and he wanted to send it to you.

So, following is that letter accurately dated March 2010. This is NOT a current letter. The date listed is correct.

Have a good spring, follow Wabash news when you can, and enjoy the letter.

Wabash Always Fights!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Steve".

Steve Hoffman '85
Director of Alumni and Parent Relations





WABASH COLLEGE

Class Agents Letter

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Class of 1952

Class Agent

William J. Reinke

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March, 2010

Dear '52ers,

NEWS FROM CAMPUS

On 2/18/10, our Alumni Office sent out e-mails captioned "Breaking News from Wabash," sub-titled "Wabash on a roll." The very next day (2/19), the postman delivered to each of us the same publication, but with different pictures and slightly different print format. Neat! Because whether one is computer-literate or not (the e-mail edition added a film clip to an article on "Innovative Approach to Physics Instruction Nets National Media Attention"), in a five minute read all Wabash alumni were updated on campus news.

Included were news of a record number of recent admissions applications to Wabash, the Monon Bell comeback victory last fall, and "The Princeton Review once again named Wabash a Best Buy selection in its annual college guide" among the 650 schools that qualified for the ranking.

Then at month end came a further update by the Wabash Board of Trustees.

So what's left for a Class Agent to report as to current events on campus? Zilch. *Nada*. Nothing. The College has done it all *per* its usual excellent job of keeping us up to date. This allows Class Agents to concentrate on reminiscences and news, both old and new, from and about classmates.

So let's get to it.

BURNING OF THE BLACK 'W'

Classmate **Kurt Thoss** reports that he was recently reading “the latest Fall 2009 issue of Wabash Magazine, ‘The Journal of Wabash College,’ and thoroughly enjoying it, as usual... It includes some collected ‘Stories of Wabash Men,’ with tales of a number of adventures” from their college days. This prompted Kurt to author an article about something which occurred more than half a century ago.

His story is captioned as “the famous **Burning of the W** on the Depauw football field in the fall of 1948,” and it reads as follows.

It was on a wonderfully pleasant Fall evening in 1948 when four Delta Tau Delta pledges, **Joe McFarland, Doyle Pickett, Bill Reinke, and Kurt Thoss**, sat in someone’s study room and decided to take a ride in Doyle Pickett’s Ford coupe down the road to Greencastle. Doyle wanted to see his girlfriend [Donna Bailey] before the Monon Bell game which was coming up in just a few days. The rest of us volunteered to keep him company. (Perhaps we’d meet some nubile and available DePauw coeds.)

As we drove along, however, a different kind of idea evolved. A plot was hatched – a plot that will live in fame and memory as long as the scarlet flag shall proudly flash. It seems that in the trunk of Doyle’s car there was an empty five (or was it 10?) gallon gasoline can. We stopped at a filling station along the way, filled the can, and drove to the DePauw football field. There was no one in sight as we drove along the streets, and we soon found a parking place. The football field was in complete darkness, but lights from neighboring buildings provided sufficient illumination for the four of us. We placed ourselves in appropriate positions directly in front of the grandstand, centering on the 50-yard line. One of us, using the others as points of reference, poured the gasoline in the form of a very large “W” onto the turf. The grass and the ground welcomed the gasoline, and soon the can was empty. Someone produced a match, and in moments the football field was aflame with the symbol of Wabash might and freshmen ingenuity.

It was a wonderful sight, as any loyal Wabash man may well imagine. But we knew better than to stay and admire our work. We piled into the car as fast as we could and drove over to another part of the campus, unobtrusively parking so that we could see the street that led toward the football field. As we swore ourselves to secrecy, knowing not what fate would befall us if Dean Trippet discovered who had done the deed, a couple of fire trucks and police cars, lights flashing and sirens blasting, zoomed past us. Hmmm – now where could they have been going? Well, we hung around there for a few more minutes but didn’t see any more campus cops or Greencastle police cars. Doyle made no attempt to contact his girlfriend, as we did not want

anyone to know that we were in Greencastle. Doyle knew the territory well, as he was a native of Putnam County, so we took a very circuitous route back to Crawfordsville, and sneaked back into the Delt house as quietly as possible.

At the next Chapel, Dean Trippet called on the arsonists to confess, implying swift punishment for our crime. DePauw's Dean, or President, had been on the phone with him early in the morning, and it apparently had not been a very pleasant conversation. "Trip" made it clear that if we were found out, it would not be a very pleasant conversation for us, either. I think expulsion was inferred if not mentioned directly.

I regret that I was not at the Monon Bell game in Greencastle the following Saturday. I'm not sure if any of the four of us were. As far as I know, none of us ever discussed the event while we remained at Wabash. Reinke and Pickett graduated and went on to distinguished careers in Law and Publishing, respectively. What would have happened to those miscreants had they been discovered and expelled from Wabash?

A couple of years later, I was visiting with a friend at Purdue, and while chatting with him and a couple of his friends, I learned that one of them had attended the Monon Bell game in 1948. He told me about the huge black "W" that was burned into the football field. He said that every formation of the DePauw band before the game and at half time centered upon that "W." It must have been a wonderful sight, and many of your newsletter readers, Bill, and/or **Wabash Magazine** readers, may remember it.

Doyle Pickett died several years ago, and Joe McFarland cannot be found. But Class Agent Bill Reinke and I are still around, and we occasionally reminisce about the night we branded DePauw's football field.

Ooh-Wa Wa!

Kurt Thoss

A NEW IDEA

From the Hills of Maine – Penobscott, to be more precise – comes the following self-described trial balloon by **Jim Thomas**:

“When we (the class of '52) were mere babes, the motor car was becoming a major part of American culture and of boyhood dreams. I remember riding in my uncle's Model T. During early childhood I heard the following statement more than once: 'He's goin' like 60.' Today if one drives 60 on major roads, one is

likely to get run off of the road. For perspective, one of the early winners of the Indy 500 had an average speed of 74.60 mph.

“We (the class of ’52) are only up to a little over 75, but in less than three years the BigBash will mark our 60th reunion. Peg and I, if we are upright and taking sustenance at the time, plan to be there. Who of you might like to join us? I once sang some solos in the Glee Club, but will not sing a solo for our class on the steps of the chapel and the BigBash. At the very least, we should be able to round up a quartet. It would not take a whole lot more than that for us to garner the percentage attendance award [for our class of ’52].

“Bill, do with this what you will. It is just something off the top of my hoary head. – **Jim Thomas**”

To test the waters, I wrote to Tom Runge of the Alumni Office to ask if there might be any precedent for Jim’s idea. If so, with what results? Yes, of course we are all aware that the Over 50th grads all meet as a group every year, I wrote, and some of us have of course been back for those. Fine. But what of this new idea? Here is Tom Runge’s enthusiastic reply on 2/12/10:

“Let’s do it! Get a good group back and we’ll set up a separate ’52 dinner.”

So what say you to this idea?

Please drop me a line at one of the addresses shown at the bottom of this letter, and please also advise of any changes of address, phone, or e-mail. A new Roster is still in process, which would be essential to plan a 60th reunion in 2012.

MISCELLANY

Dick Gooding e-mailed me on 9/13/09 from Albuquerque, NM: “Sorry, but the class letter file had been damaged and I was unable to download it. Let’s try again!” I forwarded Dick’s plea to Michele Tatar at the Alumni office: “Please try a separate e-mail of our newsletter for Labor Day 2009 to Dr. Gooding and if that doesn’t work, please put him on US snail-mail along with several others of us who

receive the newsletter the old-fashioned way.” Not sure how it was done, but Dick did get the Letter. So let me know if you encounter a similar problem.

From **Bill Rippy** down Tifton Georgia way, came compliments about our last Letter with this additional comment which I think is directed to the article on TRADITIONS (pg 3): “One thing that I thought you might have mentioned was Princeton University’s recent rating of the top ten greatest football fans’ support of their respective schools. I don’t recall exactly who all the schools were since it was about five weeks ago ..Google..but I proudly report that WABASH was #10 on the list with such schools as Notre Dame, Michigan, Southern Cal, and six others of national prominence. Indiana, Purdue, Indiana State, Ball State, as yes, DePauw, too, were all in consideration, but Old Wabash’s loyal fans brought home the prize. Thought you might be interested.” – Bill Rippy

And from the Village, this 2/5/10 report from our favorite New York reporter, **Ted Steeg**:

Pat White was in town last night for a fund-raising dinner I was invited to... The dinner was fun. I got to sit with Russ Harbaugh, the QB who set all the records a few years ago that last year’s QB shattered. I happily reminded him that I was the halfback on the squad of ’51, Wabash’s first undefeated team. He’s here at Columbia Film School. Also Prof Warren Rosenberg, who brings a group of students out to his old home town each year and runs ‘em through all the local highlights – Staten Island, the Brooklyn Bridge, the Immigrants’ Museum, Harlem, the Met, etc. On my other wide was Pat White’s charming wife, Chris. In front of me – a big fat martoooni (before the steak was served).

Best,

T

PHILLIP ‘PHIL’ GEMMER

(d. January 19, 2010)

Phil’s fraternity brother **Chuck Gainer** has kindly authored the following remembrance in accord with my invitation for him to do so.

Phil and I met shortly after our arrival at the Wabash campus. Both of us pledged to the same fraternity. Neither of us knew anyone in the area, nor did we have any friends attending Wabash. Since our last names started with “G” we had several of the required freshman level classes together. We became acquainted and found we had some common interests. Phil had a girl friend back in his home state of Maine and I had one at Northwestern Univ. We both made

it through the pledge duties (not without consequences) 'til the Thanksgiving break. He went home with me to Danville, Illinois, as he was not able to get to Maine and back during the short break. That time together seemed to set the tone for the balance of our first year.

One afternoon, in early fall, we were walking down town and went past the used car lot that was on the main street through Crawfordsville. He noticed an old truck at the back of the lot. It was a 1928 Chevy pick-up with the cab top cut off.* His father owned a Chevy dealership so he thought he had to have that truck. After some discussion with the lot owner, we bought the truck for \$40.00. Phil did not have any money, so I gave the lot owner the \$40.00 with the understanding that Phil would pay me his half when he returned from the Christmas break. We cranked (yes, cranked) the truck to get it started. We parked it behind the Phi Delt house. The truck was used to get straw for homecoming and Halloween as well as other activities.

After being initiated into the Phi Delta Theta Fraternity, Phil and I decided to move out for the spring semester. We found a room, which was actually a closed-in front porch on the main north-south road toward downtown. He spent much of his time polishing shoes and talked about three things – skiing, his girl Alice, and occasionally he did mention his home state of Maine. Phil was a warm, sincere individual who would help in any way he could. Phil loved life and all activities associated with Wabash even though his heart was in Maine with Alice and skiing. He spent little time studying, and more time in other activities such as visiting the Greek family's diner (forgot the name), the men's clothing store (he loved Brooks Brother style) and any other activity that kept him from the books. At the end of the spring semester Phil shook my hand, wished me to have a good summer, and promised he would send me the \$20.00. As he walked away, he mentioned that he probably would not be back in the fall of '49. He wasn't. Nor was the \$20.00 (That was alright as I sold it two years later for \$60.00 and did not send him any.)

Phil and I had no further contact until about 4 years ago when we talked on the phone. Yet I will always consider him one of my best friends.

-- **Chuck Gainer**

[Ed. Note: After his freshman year at Wabash, **Phil Gemmer** went on to graduate from Babson College, Wellesley, MA. Succeeding his father as president and owner of Forest City Chevrolet/Saab, during the 45 years Phil ran it, he made it the largest such dealership in New England. He became a director of the Am Int'l Dealers Assoc, and in 1996 received the TIME Magazine Quality Dealer Award. Survivors include three sons, ex-wife Alice, and four grandchildren.]

*-- A photograph of that 1928 truck is planned for Page 8 of this Letter. Classmate **Will Appel** is in the front passenger side and another '52 classmate, **Mike Austin**, is standing beside him. Chuck is not sure who the driver is nor any of the people in the truck bed.

RUSS THRALL ...

e-mailed in mid-January that “**Gordon and Jean [Peters of Peoria, IL]** were just here [Arlington, VA] for a memorial service for **Marilyn** who died on December 22 [2009]. They urged me to notify you since Marilyn, like many Wabash wives, was a true Wabash fan, despite having graduated from the place just to the south of Crawfordsville. She died following a bout with cancer which was diagnosed in mid-July.”

In the course of several follow-up e-mail exchanges with Russ, I sent to him a copy of this mind-boggling video which played recently at SONY’s Executive conference: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cL9Wu2kWwSY> Title: “Did You Know?” (See if you can play it; I guarantee it includes an unusual glimpse of the present and what the future may hold.) Which prompted Russ to send this message:

Bill: Suppose we had graduated in 1852 and it was now 1910, could we have possibly imagined what the world would be like today? I think back to when I was about 7 or 8 and going to see serials at the movies on Saturday mornings. Specifically, Flash Gordon who would walk from one building to another by means of an electronic pathway that he could create by the push of a button. Far out? You bet. Or is it? As the Sony piece points out, we are living in exponential times and who knows what the future holds...except that we can’t imagine it.”

I replied (2/25/10):

Believe it or not, I was reviewing a piece from classmate **Kurt Thoss** on looking BACK 50+ years ago this morning for our next Class ’52 Wabash Letter, and now I receive your comment about looking ahead, which makes for an interesting juxtapositioning of views. Here’s yet another way of looking at it: Difficult as it is for us to consider ourselves as inheritors of the past, far more difficult it is to view ourselves as ancestors of the future. Indeed, as you well conclude, “we can’t imagine it.”

Cordially,

Bill

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[Ed note: Intended for reproduction on this page 8 is **Chuck Gainer's** photograph of a 1928 Chevy pick-up truck at Wabash in the 1948 fall of our Freshman year. Please note the top is cut off. The truck had to be cranked to get it started. Occupants are all Wabash men. Classmates **Wilbur "Will" L. Appel** is in the front passenger side and **Myron "Mike" R. Austin** is standing beside him. Identity of the others is unknown. **Chuck Gainer** supplied this photo from his home in Enterprise, AL, as a supplement to his fine remembrance of classmate **Phil Gemmer**, deceased, at pages 5-6 of this **Wabash Class '52 Letter** for March, 2010. More about the truck according to Gainer:



“I used to drive that thing between Crawfordsville and Danville. A man in Danville who restored vehicles bought it when I went into the Air Force. It got a bit cold from time to time but it ran back and forth. Had to carry water as the engine did not have a pressurized cooling system. There was a cover that pulled up over the cab when it rained.”