

1950's Kew-Forest Memories

THE PLAY'S THE THING

By: Jeffrey M. "Cap" McGann

For over 50 years now, I've been lugging around two yearbooks. Titled, "1958 Blotter" and "1959 Blotter", they are Volume Thirty-Seven and Volume Thirty-eight respectively, published by the Kew-Forest School, Forest Hills, New York, and my high school alma mater. I was in the Class of 1959 – the tail end of the Fabulous Fifties

They are pretty beat up now, having survived an earthquake in Nevada, hurricane Gloria on Long Island in the 70's, and, more recently, 'canes Frances, Jeanne, Charley and Wilma here in Florida.

Though I rarely look in them, I've never been able to toss them out. Much other "stuff" of mine has gone by the boards in 47 years of marriage, three beautiful daughters, several great "careers" and umpteen moves, but I've held on to them.

I'm glad I did because I've been looking in them lately. At the end of this month I fly to New York for my class reunion at Kew-Forest. Fifty years! This doesn't seem possible.

Kew- Forest is a modern, state of the art, fully equipped facility. That wasn't always the case.

My route to the Kew-Forest School in September of 1956 was different than most. The large percentage of students there came up through the elementary school in their neighborhoods and transferred to Kew-Forest after 8th grade graduation. The smaller balance were what I called "lifers" – those who had attended Kew-Forest from kindergarten all the way on up.

I attended PS 101, Forest Hills, Queens. Ordinarily, I would have attended through 8th, graduated, and gone on to high school. I never "graduated" from 8th at "101" because the City had decided to build Junior High Schools. I went to the new Russell Sage JHS on the border of Rego Park and Forest Hills instead.

This was an eye- popping school. Everything was new, modern, and state-of-the art. Classrooms airy and well lighted. Green blackboards were a big surprise. The gym was gorgeous; the cafeteria had a real food line featuring all kinds of food selections.

Because we were to be the first graduating class of the new school, we got to dream up and vote on such important matters as school colors. The yearbook name ("Sagebrush"), and the Senior Class of 1956 motto, "Going Places" are two things that I remember.

After two years at ultra- modern Russell Sage, I lived up to our pedestrian motto "Going Places".

In the fall of 1956, I entered the Kew-Forest School as a sophomore.

I didn't have to go very far. A "private preparatory day school", Kew-Forest sits at the intersection of Austin Street and Union Turnpike in the northeastern corner of Forest Hills about a mile up Austin Street from Russell Sage. Smack on the border with Kew Gardens and Forest Hills it is logically and grammatically well-named. So, one must never forget the *hyphen* when spelling it out.

"KF" as everyone called it was not only a polar opposite from Sage geographically, but academically, operationally, physically, and about every other way as well. Where everything about Sage was new, everything at KF was old and well-worn and understated.

The entire school was comprised of two medium sized one-story buildings placed at right angles to one another. They were connected by a smallish lobby/entrance hall with theater-style crash bar equipped, double doors onto Union Turnpike. There was another set of doors opposite them out to the dirt field which served as the playground and parking field. These door opening mechanisms enabled hurrying students with armloads of books (no back packs in those days!) to open the doors with a butt/hip crash into the bar to exit. Years of butt-crashing gave the solid brass bars a rich golden hue which bespoke the building's 1918 vintage.

Entering from the street, the right hand building was known as the Lower School and comprised, administrative offices, dreary basement restrooms, and classrooms for "K through Prep" for those lifers clambering up the cryptically numbered grade system: "Primary One, Primary Two, Primary Three, Intermediate One, Two, Three, " etc., and then Whew... "Prep" (i.e. 8th grade).

The left-hand building comprised the Upper School or high school. In it were Spartan classrooms equipped with college style movable left and right handed oak desks for traditionally-designated Freshmen, Sophomores, Juniors and Seniors. There was a relatively large "Study Hall" at the far end equipped with an ancient organ adjacent to an old oak teacher's desk which served as podium. There was a public address system that might have been used for the building's dedication in 1918.

Students there today might be interested to learn that, basically, our entire stock of educational tools consisted pretty much of: books and teachers.

Kew-Forest had aging facilities and practically no amenities one would imagine appropriate to educating such as laboratories, gymnasiums, libraries, auditorium, microscopes, instruments, or any other technical device.

No classroom TV's. No laptop computers. No digital media. No Wi Fi. No Power Point presentations, no jump drives. No CD ROMs. No tablet PC's. No Kindles, Googles, or Wikipedias. No texting, IM's, cell phones, iPods....No digital anything.

Our entire contact with the outside world was two heavy black dial telephones on desks in the "office" that only the secretaries were permitted to use. No area code or zip code to find us either. To tell time, we wore something called a wrist watch which required winding up every now and then.

Golly, it's a wonder we could even function.

We thought we were pretty hot if we had a ball point pen, though!

Oh yes, there was a “projector”, and occasionally films were shown. This 16mm primitive movie projector was thought by the faculty to be so technologically advanced and hard to operate that they contrived a club to train operators. “The Projection Club”. This is the same for me now, with digital media, as I often look around for a youngster to help me with computer problems.

In the basement of that building directly under the Study Hall were the “kitchen” and dining areas. “Cafeteria” would be way too generous. Gray cinderblock walls with dark green linoleum squares on the floors gave that area the overall appearance of a penal institution. The kitchen equipment, tables and chairs were, unmistakably, original to opening day in the fall of 1918.

Also in the Upper School basement, the entire science “lab” was a faux granite countertop no larger than today’s typical kitchen’s center island. A wrinkled Chemical Elements chart and a 36” rubber-tipped pointer rounded out the visual aids arsenal there.

Despite these deficiencies, KF somehow churned out a few dozen, or so, well prepared, happy, and driven college-bound graduates every year and had been doing so since the 1920’s. Almost 100% of our graduates went into a college or university upon graduation. Most stayed too.

No simplistic school motto like “Going Places”. Kew-Forest’s was grand and inspiring: “Ad Summum”. LATIN yet!

“Ad Summum” and a Greek-looking logo. A hand holding up the torch of knowledge.

When I got there, “Ad Summum” was translated for me by classmate (and still friend), humorist and noted Latin scholar, Dave Dammann as;

“To the summit..... er, ahh.....to the highest.....or, ahh.... to the top.....*summum* like that anyway”.

Kew- Forest didn’t have “Principal” running it. It had a “Headmaster”. So *Dickensian* -sounding, yet he was a kind and gentle man. His name was James L. Dixon.

Dr. James L. Dixon to be exact and he was unforgettable.

I never heard anyone ever refer to him other than **Dr.** Dixon or (somewhat daringly) “Doc”. Such was the esteem and fondness we all had for him. A tall man, with sloping shoulders, he had the habit of standing with his large feet splayed outward at right angles not unlike the building itself.

Unfailingly clad in a navy blue suit, (sometimes with a nice shine to the seat and elbows) he lumbered the corridor from the Office to the Study Hall and back many times a day. He had a very pale complexion (what used to be called a “pool parlor pallor”) and somewhat of a dandruff problem.

He walked to and from home with his unique ambling/shambling penguin-like gait, emerging wraithlike early every morning up the steps of the Austin Street underpass from Kew Gardens where he lived.

I never saw him anywhere in public other than going or coming from home or at a graduation ceremony.

It was said that he was a “kingmaker” at the Queens County Democratic Party Headquarters – wherever that was. It is easy to imagine him in his best double-breasted blue suit and black shoes down at the Party HQ hall schmoozing with the pols in a smoke-filled room with flag in the corner and a moose head on the wall.

He was the kind of a guy, however, of whom it would be impossible to imagine seeing even near a pool hall, or, in a bathing suit at Jones’ Beach, or Rockaway, for example. He looked like he never was in the sun. Maybe I should say he had “pol parlor pallor”.

As we trickled into the Study Hall for Assembly, he would be in his usual position at the front desk leaning backwards just watching the goings on until the exact time to start. Then, he would languidly lean to his left and pull the big stand-mounted chrome microphone over to his mouth and begin.

“Doc” prided himself on his organ skills. He routinely performed longhair organ music at weekly assemblies..... a form of music appreciation (some said, “torture”) for us.

In his way of being jocular and “one of the gang” with the students, he would clap one on the back or squeeze the arm above the elbow and emote with exaggerated officious and puffed-up huffiness:

“Well there.... Ruth Judith (the comely Judy Tuchman’s first and middle name) I see that you are emulating the pulchritudinous Veronica Lake with your hair swept down over your right eye this fine day!”

“Good morning, Dr. Dixon”, she would chirp respectfully.

Or (to me), “Halloo there Jeffrey Martin... you appear to be at the height of salubriousness this afternoon!”

A roundhouse, but gentle, back-slap and he would shamble off down the creaky hall, a fine trail of dandruff trickling off his navy blue shoulder.

Doctor Dixon always used one’s first and middle name when being one of the gang. Also, apparently he once must have had a “thing” for Veronica Lake. She was an old-time movie star known for her come-hither hairdo and two other spectacular assets. I heard him refer to her often.

Quite the reserved prude, the closest he could come to saying “girls”, “female sex” (heaven forefend--- “SEX”!), or using other possibly prurient adjectives, was: “the distaff side.” At assemblies he never failed to welcome the boys and the “distaff side”.

First time I heard that, I said to Dave Dammann out of the side of my mouth, “What is ‘distaff’??”.

“Da goils”, he side-mouthed back to me Runyonesquely.

“Doc” taught one class per term. Physics. Much as we loved him, and, even though he had a doctorate in education, we all agreed he was a really boring teacher. I once saw him put three students to sleep half-way through the 50 minute class, and I was fading fast in spite of my salubriousness.

He also had one habit which cracked us up all the time. He would always emphasize three important principles or points using his uplifted right hand .

He always started with the thumb (“one,”), moved to the forefinger (“two”) and then for the major emphatic point, wave his uplifted middle finger (“**thuree!**”) around for what seemed like an eternity while recapping the advantages and disadvantages of friction and leverage. He would finish off with a maestro-like flourish blithely (but innocently) giving the entire class a final huge Italian middle-finger “salute.”

Then..... “Class dismissed.....someone back there wake up Mr. Decker”.

I had little trouble assimilating at KF, barging in as a Sophomore as it were. I already knew all the Forest Hills students from PS 101, the Community House, church, and the West Side Tennis Club. Also, I already knew the legendary Miss Pitts who was once a Sunday School teacher of mine and also was a (seldom-playing) member of the West Side.

She was a “legend” in part because she was a taskmaster (taskmistress?) history teacher and because she was the paradigm of a spinster schoolteacher. The biggest game in town was guessing her age and if she ever had been on a date. She appeared to be somewhere between 30 and 60. As thin as a popsicle stick, she had a squeaky voice that peaked at the same screech level as the F Train sliding into Union Turnpike.

She had a cute Lauren Hutton/Terry Thomas thing going with her teeth which I found very distracting. She constantly had us feverishly taking notes in her required alpha numeric - descending order format (which everyone now credits helping them to succeed when they got to college). Genie Wild reminded me her hair sometimes looked as though she had been using **square** pin-curls.

I already knew the note-taking requirement from Sunday school, so I did pretty well in her classes despite the fact that she had absolutely no passion for the subject. It was all one-dimensional rote with her. She made us bring in tracing paper and we had to trace maps of the Middle East, Europe, etc. I can still remember the general layout of the Tigris and Euphrates river valleys. But, as of yet I’ve been unable to impress anyone by working that bit of knowledge into a conversation .

At my class’ 30th Reunion she surprised us by knocking back several gin martinis and saying to me, as we were leaving the cocktail party, “Jeffrey, you’re old enough to call me Eleanor now”. I said, “Naw, you’ll always be Miss Pitts to me”. Outside, Danny Paulson who had been standing with me almost fell over with laughter.

Kew-Forest published a comprehensive obituary for Eleanor, and I was astonished to read two things about her. One, she was born the same year as my own mother. I did the math, so she was about 42 in

1957. Two, every summer for umpteen years she took the Q.E. II to England and back. Wow! Was there a secret life going on here? All those romantic evenings on the north Atlantic. Dining at the Captain's Table, perhaps? Was she always alone? Never a fling? Ever??

I'm hoping she hooked up with some seagoing lothario every now and then. History wasn't really a passion for her but; hopefully, she experienced some passion in her life. She was a kind soul, devoted daughter and, in a role better suited for her, as an administrator later in her career, helped a lot of students with college entrance . She deserved some fun and excitement.

The athletic program at KF was really lame when I think about it now. My oldest daughter has been a high school principal in the Rochester area for almost 10 years. During the school year she is on the job 60 or more hours a week attending this function and that. She never misses hockey, football , or basketball games, or any other after -school function, if she can possibly help it. Everyone turns out to root out the home teams there.

I played varsity basketball, tennis, and soccer at KF and *no one ever saw me do it* except the players, coaches and sometimes the bus driver..... *if* he had nothing to read.

As there was no gymnasium at KF we scrounged court time from various creaky and moldy facilities in the area to which we were "bussed". Usually, an empty and musty armory or a no-frills Lutheran church in Queens Village or Maspeth was our "home court".

The "Athletic Director" was Charles "Del" Delahunt, a grouchy tight- fisted Scot who had been promoting himself as a sports impresario around Queens for many years. His brother, Bill Delahunt, operated Bills Tennis Courts on Austin Street near Luby Chevrolet. Del used to hang out there near the cash box. My sportswriter father used to play there and they would argue about court fees.

A bespectacled misanthrope, with John L. Lewis eyebrows, "Del" as everyone called him, with very little respect, was an old "burnout" by my era. He claimed to be a coach, but never coached. There was no "direction" in the athletic department either on the teams, or, in general. He played favorites, had "pets" and his word was often vague, contradictory, and nonsensical.

"Del's" idea of coaching was to get the entire team on the bus to whatever venue he had chiseled out of court time, let the team run itself during the game, and then count heads for the return trip. We didn't lose too many guys so I guess he could count adequately for the task. He sure had Dr. Dixon buffaloed.

Every year there was an athletic banquet at the Fresh Meadows Inn. He usually hired some old major-leaguer working the central Queens rubber chicken circuit for the "inspirational" speech.

The teams had no names and Varsity players were given an 8" felt letter "K" as their award even though 1920's collegiate letter sweaters to sew them on were out of style. Junior Varsity got 6" letters. A standing joke was..... if you didn't "behave" you would get the Kew-Forest *hyphen* on awards night from "Del".

“Willie” Webb Wade '56 enjoys telling of being called on the carpet by “Del” for some unknown infraction, along with teammate and good pal Teddy Hoffman.

“Well..... look what I have here”, Delahunt sneered from beneath his eyebrows, “A liar and a sneak!!!”

After a puzzling but spectacular dressing down, on the way back to class, Hoffman turned to Wade and said, “Willie.....are you the liar or the sneak?”

At a Forest Hills Club Convivium in Florida a few years ago, Ken Miron '56 spoke kindly of “Del”, however. A KF lifer, I think Kenny must have suffered from “ Stockholm Syndrome”. No one can win a sports- related argument with the, irrepressible, walking -sports encyclopedia, Kenny - so I didn't pursue the subject.

On balance, sports were a lot of fun and the camaraderie it engendered was priceless.

I'm not sure the “distaffs” fared much better with their athletic leadership. The girls were also whisked off in buses to rented venues to play basketball, field hockey, or lacrosse, also sans spectators. Their coach was a snarky gym teacher who appeared to be joined at the hip with a woman who worked in the office but seemed to spend all her time “assisting” the coach. The coach was unmarried, but her assistant was, so there was little overt speculation about their “relationship” that I was aware of (then). Hindsight, though, is another thing.

The sweet and lovely Carol Ottaviano Sperandeo '60, told me last year at our Forest Hills Club Convivium in Jamaica (hosted by Brenda LaGrange '57, the US Ambassador there, by the way) she once got an unsolicited career prediction from the coach who snarked at her something to the effect of, “Young lady, you will never amount to anything”.

In the 80's I used to run into the coach and her “assistant” at the Riverhead Country Fair. They were retired and living together in an “artist's colony” out in Greenport. Carol, meanwhile, having been a beloved teacher at PS 101, is mother and grandmother to a superb and successful family and has an important and responsible position with the Vanderbilt Museum on the north shore of Long Island. So there, Snarky!

The high school faculty while I attended was all women except for Mr. Cleary and there is some question of how far he falls into the men teacher's category. I'll clear this up in a minute. First, let me digress a little.

Back in those days, when there was something seriously peculiar, weird, or unusual about someone, people would talk normally and then whisper what it was that caused them to be like that. For example, a person would say, “ Did you hear about Mr. Lamott? He, blah blah blah ya da” The blah , blah, blah, etc was the “lowdown” on the guy or....the “whisper”

There was a character around town who was crazy as a bed bug. He could be seen from Upper School windows, tall and cadaverous, always dressed in a long black overcoat and greasy fedora, pacing up and down Austin Street talking loudly to himself with a staccato stutter.

People would say, "Oh, that's Mr. Knocky, poor soul, "his wife and children were all burned up in a car accident years ago, you know". That was the whisper on him.

There was a "bum" who used to sleep in the alley doorway of the Midway Theater. His name was George. The whisper on him was: "Poor George,..... he used to have a seat on the Stock Exchange but lost everything in the Crash. They pulled him in off a window ledge."

Homer Cleary was a double-duty teacher at KF. He taught both French and Spanish, something I never heard of before or since. He looked like Alfred Hitchcock in profile and I always thought of that TV show as he glided into the classroom carrying his books nestled in the crook of his arm like the girls did. (The guys always carried theirs down at their hipbones.)

He was from Cleveland, Ohio (Shaker Heights, if you please), so to us New Yorkers he had somewhat of a "foreign" accent in English. I don't know if his Midwestern twang carried over into romance languages, but he also sounded somewhat "distaff", if you get my drift. Somewhat ironically, Dr. Dixon gave him total discretion over who would get the annual "Public Speaking Award" even though he no connection with the Debating Club.

He walked with mincing little steps and dressed in suspended brown suits, often with a natty bow tie. He wore heavy rimmed glasses that were forever sliding down his bridgeless nose. In French class where we sat around dozing and taking turns reading paragraphs from the tales of *Inspecteur Maigret*, one warm spring day, I calculated that he pushed those glasses back up his shiny nose with his right forefinger every 40 seconds. He was easily excitable, somewhat impatient, and would throw a hissy fit when agitated.

He had "pets" whom he would "star" in his plays (which were well-known for their superb quality). Ticket sale revenue played an important part in the annual building fund drive which had been going on for years and was finally tapped about 35 years later.

The whisper, then, on Mr. Cleary's eccentricities and effeminate bearing was, "he was an up and coming Broadway director headed for fame and fortune but his debut play opened on Tuesday, October 29, 1929."

Even the most naïve fifth-grader today, would say dismissively, "Oh, he's gay". But to us that was always a whispered question. There is nothing new about, "Don't ask, don't tell."

To this day, I don't know how much truth there was to the Broadway whisper and he kept his personal life private. But, I can assure one thing: he knew how to put on a play!

A special treat for me at Kew-Forest was to get to meet and know a new bunch of kids from outside Forest Hills. Most came from Jamaica Estates, a beautiful enclave a couple of subway stops away, but I

also became good friends with Dave Dammann and Jimmy Evans from Astoria and Dick Russo from Ridgewood among others from out of town.

Among the Jamaica Estates “group” was one girl in the class of ’58 whom I remember with particular fondness. Nancy Parker was charming, sweet, and beautiful in a pixyish way that would make a dead man’s heart skip a beat. She had a beautiful smile and laugh and a great personality. Her best girlfriend was Judy Tuchman equally as charming in every way. They were always together.

I think Nancy really had designs on a show business career and loved the Dramatic Club. (The Dramatic Club was not really a club. It was simply a full blown Broadway -style play put on by Mr. Cleary every year).

The play was a big deal at KF. Tryouts and rehearsals started in the fall, and went on for months until the big night in February. It was a “given” that 1958’s play, “The Divine Flora” was selected as a vehicle for the charismatic Nancy. His pet that year. His pet usually got the “Public Speaking Award” for that year also.

I went ,along with many others, (really to bulk up my extracurricular activity resume for college application purposes) and “tried out” for a part in the play. A few weeks later, as was the custom, the casting list was posted on the bulletin board.

I never thought to even look at the list as my real interest then was sports and way less cultural activities than theater. I heard some grumbling in the hall, and then one of the Senior guys said disgustedly, “ I don’t know why he would give the male ‘lead’ to a Junior!”

“He’s talking about you, McGann” enthused Dick Russo, a truly handsome leading -man type of guy whom I thought would have been a shoo-in for the big part.

“You got the lead!” he said, walloping me on the back. Then, “ Congrats!! You get to make out with Nancy Parker!!!!”

“You’re pulling my leg”, I said.

There it was. Etta Dean.....Nancy Parker Randy Pryor.....Jeffrey McGann.

I swear, I’m not making up the “Randy” bit either.

As soon as the play’s little script book was distributed I raced through it, like a salacious rooster, eagerly looking for details of the love scenes I would be doing with Nancy. The big “make out” parts turned out to be a sensual kiss (one!) at the final curtain.

We rehearsed for months in a little basement playroom for kindergartners under the Lower School every Tuesday and Thursday after classes.

In my opinion, the main reason the play was one of the best things about KF was that it was the only large-scale event in the school year that was truly co-ed and involved several grades. There were many jobs aside from acting and it took a lot of student power to pull it off. What made it especially sweet was that we played to a public audience which included our families, friends, KF grads, and (rumor had it) talent- scout friends of Mr. Cleary. Major players received opening night telegrams which were taped to the dressing room mirrors just as on Broadway. There were flowers for the lead actress. The excitement was palpable.

Homer Cleary was in charge for sure. He produced, directed, supervised, managed, coached, cajoled, screamed, and every once in a while during rehearsal he threw his famous hissy. I caused a major one.

In one of my lines I had to say, "femme fatale" and I kept mispronouncing it "FEM fatale".

"It's FAM, FAM, FAM!!!", he screeched stomping his little feet. I know he must have been thinking, "This jerk has been taking French for 3 years and he still can't pronounce the word for 'woman'".

It was truly a fun activity and I got to know and become friends with many great kids. My hopes for kissing Nancy a lot evaporated as every time we got right to the part where I was to bend down and kiss her passionately, Mr. Cleary would snap, "OK. That's it for today. Save the kiss for the play". I suffered badly from kisses interruptus, I can tell you.

Nancy was a sensation the night of the play. I guess I did pretty well too, as we both got a great curtain call ovation. That felt really great.

So did the kiss!

When she graduated in 1958, I was there. She received the "Public Speaking Award '58". I looked for her outside the Community House to say goodbye only to see her jumping into the back seat of a big luxury vehicle holding hands with a handsome collegiate older- looking guy. Someone whispered she was going to get married. I don't know what happened. I never saw her again.

It turns out that her father was a big- league New York builder who bought all the vacant land behind Russell Sage JHS and constructed several huge luxury apartment complexes there called "Parker Towers". The first one was named, the "Nancy". It's right on Queens Boulevard the main artery of Queens.

Every time I pass by, I think of Nancy, Mr. Cleary, and the night of February 8, 1958. I can still hear the applause.

Whenever the Forest Hills Club has its Convivium in Florida I see Judy Tuchman who loyally comes. She is Dr. Judith Ratzan now, a highly esteemed medical doctor and professor of oncology at the University in Miami and more beautiful than ever. She put me in touch with Nancy several years ago and I spoke to her on the phone at her home in Aspen, Colorado . She sounded great.

Here's what she wrote to me next to her picture in the 1958 Blotter, " Dear Jeff, Here's to the greatest guy at Kew-Forest besides Mr. Cleary, the only one who made my play as wonderful as it was. Good luck, Jeff you're the greatest. Flora (Nancy).

I'm not sure the other guys at KF would agree that Cleary and I were the greatest guys at Kew Forest! But, in a classic backhanded compliment, my pal, the hulking Jeff Shuckman wrote this under his picture in my 1959 Blotter: "Well I guess it's time to right something. I would just like to say you were great in the play. I can't say or think of anything else nice to say to you since there is nothing else nice to say, but Good Luck. Jeff PS Some sense of humor"

Today, the whisper on " Shuck" is: "he's the funniest CPA on Long Island."

My Senior year, I guess I was Mr. Cleary's "pet". The play he selected was called "What a Life!" and it featured a mischievous and troublesome high school lad named Henry Aldrich. I played the role (not a big stretch!) and with Chickie Lipton, Candy Diener, Dick Russo, Genie Wild and many others propping me up, we "knocked 'em dead" February 7, 1959.

Cleary gave me an A in French (I deserved B) , and the "1959 Public Speaking Award" ; a medal about the size of a Green Stamp that had a man's head on one side and only enough room on the other to engrave, "59". I treasured it, but it slipped down a crack somewhere and is gone now.

When you talk to someone who "grew up poor" in the Depression, they invariably say, 'Yes, we were poor, but we didn't know we were poor". At KF in those days we may have been underequipped and lacking in frills, but we didn't know it. Or, if it occurred to us, no one complained. I'm not complaining now, I'm just realizing .

Thinking back 50 years is like looking in the wrong end of a pair of binoculars. You can see, but not the details .

Now I'm asking myself why was I so happy to go there with all those existing deficiencies and limited facilities, and why my schoolmates and the "alums" I know all seemed to have loved the place too. I should mention that I often see many fellow KF alums through our membership in The Forest Hills Club (www.foresthillsclub.org) and I've never heard anything but fond remembrances of Kew-Forest days.

Here's what I remember about the Kew -Forest School in the Fabulous Fifties that made it great for me:

- 1- Great "school spirit"
- 2- Customs
- 3- Traditions
- 4- A "collegiate" academic ambience.

5- The School Play

6- Uniforms. They socially democratize.

7- A dedicated staff of mainly women educators.

8- Highly motivated students.

9- Pot-roast Tuesdays.

10- Dr. Dixon, Eleanor Pitts, Homer Cleary, Margery Mitchell (loved "Word Wealth", especially)

I can't wait to see the old cast in New York.

I know Doc, Homer, Eleanor and the others are gone but their ghosts will be around.

I'm sure they like their new digs.

Vero Beach, Florida

May 14, 2009

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