

Twenty-Seven IFs in Life on My Path to Becoming a Teacher

Freshman Year – A Slow Start and IFs Is Waiting

Before School Started

Before the start of school, I met with Mrs. Henry, the woman who was to be my Guidance Counselor for the next four years. I told Mrs. Henry that I planned to go to Stanford. She then wrote a four-year plan for the courses I would need to take to reach my goal.

High school was very different back then. There were no advanced placement classes, and the scene in the movie Grease where the boys are working on their car in a body shop could have been filmed at most high schools at that time. Menlo-Atherton had an auto shop, a woodworking shop, and various home-making classes. The yearbook from my Freshman year even had a picture of a clothes-making class. Students taking the auto shop classes at M-A were referred to as Greasers. It was not a derogatory term. It was no different than calling athletes Jocks.

High school courses underwent major changes after the Russians launched Sputnik in October 1957. My high school class graduated in June 1957, so all the educational changes that came about after Sputnik's launch had no effect on me as a student.

Each Freshman was assigned his or her own four-foot-high locker in the rows and rows of lockers lining the school's halls. The lockers assigned to Freshmen had been the lockers of the recently graduated senior class. Students did not carry backpacks in those days. Our lockers were for storing books, jackets, lunch bags, and anything else too burdensome to carry around all day. We traveled to our lockers between classes to drop off the book needed for one class and pick up the book for the next class. The locker, once assigned, would be that student's locker for all four years in high school. Lockers each came with a student partner. Two students to every locker, with the assignment of partners done alphabetically. Robert Lorton had Lawson Lowe as his four-year partner. Lawson and I would end up going to Stanford together, as well.

New School Shyness

Menlo-Atherton High School was a new school. My brother Paul, who was now a Junior, was in the first class to have entered M-A as Freshmen. That meant the current Senior class members had begun their high school careers elsewhere. Apparently, that "elsewhere" came with a weird and, to me, downright offensive initiation tradition for incoming Freshmen. As I entered the school building on the first day of classes, I was greeted at the door by Seniors who, once they confirmed I was a Freshman, proceeded to cover my face with designs drawn on with red lipstick. I was not at all happy with this, but at least I could see I

was not the only one being subjected to this absurdity since every other Freshman within my field of vision was undergoing a similar fate. Also, when I finally made it to my first class, every Freshman's face in the room was also covered with lipstick drawings.

The incoming Freshmen all came from two different schools. Both were K-8 elementary schools like I had attended for my seventh and eighth-grade years. So, nearly everybody besides me had friends in the Freshman class who they had known since kindergarten. Sign-ups for Frosh-Soph football took place on the first day of school at our P.E. class. Zero friends and lipstick-covered me was too shy at that point to sign up for anything. My desire to play End on a football team would have to wait a year.

My school involvement that first year consisted of my attending classes and nothing else. The index for the school yearbook for my Freshman year has only one page number by my name.



For the yearbook, the Freshman Class was photographed in alphabetical clusters. A few of my fellow "L's" are in the pictures above. Lawson Lowe and I are in the back row. Lawson is on the far left, with me standing next to him.

A Future Swimming Pool with Its IFs Just Waiting

As I said, Menlo-Atherton High School was a new school. So new, in fact, that it was still under construction. In September of my Freshman year, construction of the school's swimming pool commenced. Its construction was not completed until halfway through my Sophomore year.