

ASSUMPTION HIGH SCHOOL

SENIOR PROFILE 1968-1969

This profile, fifth in a series of senior interviews conducted by myself, has proven to be a tradition of value. Closer acquaintance with seniors is effected, deeper insight into their problems of the past, present and future arrived at, personal and mutual appreciations developed. For some students it was "old hat" to be present in the principal's office, reasons for such meetings being various, for others it was a "first" or a "red letter day" in that it was a first and to all intents a last appearance. If any one realization was arrived at by myself, it was that it is extremely difficult over our four years of acquaintance to steer a steady course in administration between the rock of authoritarian prevention and the rock of unbridled license; further, that today's principals of high schools must direct prudence, with understanding, with open-mindedness, with willing ear to the voices of their students. Once this stance is effected, trust on the part of students should be forthcoming and success assured.

The twenty to twenty-five minute interviews covered impressions gleaned from information on questionnaires already completed, questions, expressions of hopes, likes and dislikes on a wide variety of school topics. Home conditions, parental employment, size, education of the family formed one segment of the interview. Subjects preferred and disliked, teachers who struck sympathetic chords as well as those who struck dissonant chords, hours of home study, utilization of mass media, radio and TV, preference of type of such programs, career ambition and choice of colleges completed the second segment of our conversation. Reaction to dress code changes, participation in sports and non-athletic activities, concerns for personal spiritual welfare, summer and after school jobs, outstanding high school experience, outsiders' impressions of the school, both blameworthy and praiseworthy, rounded out the interview.

The Assumption Man

This year's record enrollment of almost 900 students of whom 204 are seniors constitutes a community of students called Assumption Men, a term held in honor by most. Just who is this Assumption Man? After four years of involvement in academic and non-academic living here, impressions left follow this pattern: he is questing and questioning such areas as war, authority, both in the Church and in civil society, more concerned with politics than his forebears, anxious to right some of the wrongs found in American society and especially on the local scene. He is forthright, extremely honest and open, possessed of a keen sense of justice, enterprising and energetic, intensely loyal, almost to the point of braggadocio, restless, seldom arrogant, easily bored, distracted. He is less concerned with mass media than his older brother, being more selective of programs, uses the media of radio and TV for entertainment with heavy emphasis on adventure and variety programs; sometimes quiz shows and the evening movies fill long stretches of his evening.

Proof that he is race conscious is the organization of a human relations club and appearance of school newspaper articles on the subject of race relations. Despite some differences, willingness to use the ordinary means of communication, to have problems of disagreement heard out is evident when tempers flare and disparity of opinion come to the surface. Here particularly is an area of teacher-student-administration-parent concern which will preoccupy us as the challenge of change mounts. All concerned must be understanding, willing to listen and hopefully be listened to as they move to solutions of problems encountered.

Needless to say, today's Assumption Men are mobile, anxious to arrive at that day in their lives when they become certified operators of their own or their family automobile; to help them arrive at this proficiency the well-received Driver Education course now is staffed

~~by two instructors using two vehicles.~~

Religious Activities

Students, with few exceptions, found senior Religion classes repetitious and boring, of slight pertinency to life, labeling courses a "twelve year rehash", pointing up the necessity for the department to do some in-depth study of its present curriculum, its content, its procedures and techniques of instruction. Experimentation and innovation are hoped for, continuous in-service training of teachers, more expertise in the teaching field. Most seniors continue to go to Sunday Mass, one-third admitting to non-attendance, few and far between are those who frequent pre-school chapel Masses. Family faithfulness to before meal prayers is noted, small concern for any formalized morning and evening personal prayers is evident. Doubters of the personal benefit of Sunday Mass obligation opt for charity to their fellow-man, to their classmates, to the poor of the inner-city, to those of a different color or creed, bearing out the trend toward personalism in matters of conscience, the drift away from acceptance of structured religion and formalized religious practices, a tendency to experiment, to innovate, to modernize, to motivate the young to get with religion and new practices. Only in a few instances are classroom Masses, on special occasions, said during Religion classes, an innovation which a year ago was in much greater evidence than today. The Sodality is dead, at least in its former pattern, and no new pattern of religious involvement, except helping the poor families at Thanksgiving and at Christmas with food and clothing has surfaced. CYO activities admittedly stress social life, many times prayers in school are bypassed, Religion textbooks are shelved in favor of up-to-date Catholic weeklies and magazine articles.

Communications Media

Radio stations popular a year ago still retain that position among seniors of 1969, with such stations as KXOK, KATZ, KSHE outranking others. The impact of TV'S magnetism seems to be waning though full length movies, adventure, variety shows still intrigue those seniors who are regular listeners. Interests other than these two communications media preoccupy seniors; jobs, home-study and assignments, attendance at and participation

in school functions of all kinds, athletic and non-athletic; the CYO, and dating round out the usual litany of teen-age concerns. None noted or reacted to the heavy dosage of violence in mass media as having adverse impact on their life-stance. Surely they are not of the McLuhan TV generation, which will, when they arrive, according to this media expert's prediction, "likely burn down every school". Still and all training students to appreciate and evaluate TV, this "instant historian", possibly as part of the content of the English curriculum, remains one of the school's most challenging concern.

Teachers and Courses

Eric Hoffer, modern philosopher, maintains that the "passion to teach is far more powerful and primitive than the passion to learn". ~~Dedicated to plant the seed of education, to carefully cultivate it, to~~ be tempted at times to abandon the profession because of discouragement, most of the times returning to the intriguing and baffling work, sometimes pruning, sometimes grafting, always encouraging the men of tomorrow to achieve their destiny, this is the work of today's teachers. Assumption is blessed with a diverse yet unified corps of religious teachers, diocesan priests and laymen motivated and dedicated to meet the challenge of education today. All teachers must strive to be men of experience, ability, vision and critical perspective; some arrive at these milestones early and achieve quick success, while others take longer to arrive at the same objectives. Needless to say, Assumption is no exception to varied teacher talent and capability.

Robert M. Hutchins, onetime youthful president of Chicago University, now at the California Institute said, "education is the deliberate organized attempt to help people become intelligent, without question a challenge. Teachers and their subject-matter constitute the challenge to students to the full use of their powers along the lines of excellence, so well stated by late President John F. Kennedy.

Variant are the personalities of teachers and students at Assumption. Communication is added or atrophied as a result of student clash or confrontation both with the wide span of subject matter and teacher; of necessity circumstances affect the attitude or psychological acceptance on a given day or hour. At best then impressions can only be general as students give their evaluation of both teachers and courses.

Some find Social Studies courses intensely engrossing, particularly in this an election year; others are intrigued by literature both English and American, and again some are baffled and bored with the grammar phase of the course, especially the new course in Linguistics, while others feel that they have gained new appreciation of words and their meanings, through the word game of Scrabble, which has sometime found place in the English curriculum. Latin, taken in years previous, is labeled difficult, Spanish is listed as an intriguing course by a few. The Sciences and Mathematics courses some find complex, confusing and vague, shot though with minutiae, while others claim these courses fulfill them because of the mental challenge and preparation for advanced work in college.

Psychology or Human Development students are, as in years past, highly pleased with the knowledge of self and their improved appreciation of others, for the guidance received in broader in-depth knowledge of college or career choice. Religion, as previously noted, is a bone of contention with many, because of its repetitious and boring pattern. It is forever within the framework of experimentation, proof of an unrest with the present, a groping for a better solution to content, approach and method of confrontation. Art and Music courses were praised because of good organization and personal concern for students.

The litany of qualities appreciated most and those deserving consideration for improvement in teachers is legion. Most frequently mentioned positive characteristics include these: down to earthness, friendliness, willingness to listen, dynamism, patience, venturesome in exploring problems. Likewise listed as commendable in Assumption teachers are sense of humor, informality of approach, good organization, knowledge of subject matter. A few noted the hero-image, a fine specimen of rugged manhood, grass roots democracy, the youthful image.

On the underside of the coin of evaluation students are critical of teacher authoritarianism and arbitrariness, of bias, of surface teaching or poor preparation. They are intolerant of the excitable professor, of the smug one, of the superficial one, of the one obsessed with trivia or the master of minutiae. Especially do they object and that strenuously to the unfair teacher, to the one who plays favorites, to the inconsiderate, to the one given to tantrums. Impatience is sometimes mentioned, though justifiable in many instances, excessive permissiveness which now and then is coupled with favoritism; poor voice projection, a form of poor communication, gadfly-like persistence merit a few mentions. In the overall, the great majority of seniors, while admitting to the above-mentioned barnacles on teachers of the good ship Assumption, are outspoken in praise of staff and administration of their school, and maintain that the excellent academic image which has become one of the hallmarks of the school is due to their mentors.

Disciplinary Stance

Assumption's discipline purposes to be democratic and as such is rational, with justifications given students for rules; further, they are non-arbitrary, avoiding directive for directive's sake alone; they are bi-lateral, providing for explanations, permitting and inviting discussion. A case in point is the relaxations in this year's dress code, where teachers, parents and student council officers assisted in formulation of the code. This year for the first time a student council officer attends the Academic Council meeting, advisory and policy making faculty body. Teachers have seldom, according to senior opinion, been harsh, used abusive language, or resorted to harsh, impersonal, or vindictive forms of sanction, distinguishing for the most part between the use and the abuse of the DT or detention sanction. The majority of men interviewed agreed that the school must have minimal standards of discipline and direction. Never did seniors subscribe to the theory that the teacher should ever abdicate his decision-making role in the classroom to students.

Praise and Blame

Senior soul-searching of what Assumption is praised and blamed for resulted in some interesting revelations, caused satisfaction in some cases, gave reason for pause in those which pointed up areas needing review and reformation.

Reasons for senior and their parents' satisfaction with their school include a dedicated and efficient teaching staff and administration, along with good student-teacher rapport. School spirit and loyalty was frequently mentioned as praiseworthy, the school's stance on acceptance of all students applying, raising no bars against anyone, regardless of race or creed. The overall academic image, high standards of politeness and courtesy, of friendliness were qualities mentioned as sought for and noted by employees who look for students to fill after school and summer jobs. Satisfaction with the dress code changes of this year, resultant in a relaxed student attitude and cooperation, was mentioned by all but a small minority of seniors.

Blame was placed on those students who indulge in drinking in public and to excess, on the minority of braggarts and rowdies, on those who at games show unsportsmanlike conduct, on those who vandalize school property. Blame is also directed against the book, the money, the watch, the Assumption jacket thief. Foul-mouthed individuals, those who are hypocrites and cultivated liars are other types of antisocial people who, regrettably, are sometimes found in our midst. Selfishness and irresponsibility were faults frequently enough adverted to to cause concern to students and teachers alike. Instances of poor race relations in a school with 5% black students and need for better communication between black and white students in this area were also pointed up. An improved overall parent organization, uniting Fathers and Mothers Clubs, was suggested as a desideratum.

Varia

Interesting and incisive were senior observations on the question of dating, as well as the percentage of regular (weekly) drinkers, as well as ~~the percentage of drinkers who go to excess. The average senior dates from one to two times per week, normally spends about \$5 on the usual kind of date, more on formal dances, school events, movie attendance and home visiting constitute the usual pattern for dates. Sometimes the senior spends a quiet evening at his own or girl friend's home, ordinarily she is a St. Teresa Academy girl, and only by exception a girl older than the senior.~~ The percentage of regular imbibers, of beer, hard liquor and lately of wine ranges, according to statements by seniors, from 20 to 75%. Usually half of the percentage mentioned go to excess, most frequently when in a boy groups, seldom in mixed groups.

Black white student relations, except for one incident caused by lack of poor communication, were classified by seniors as satisfactory, even though there are some of the opinion that the school is racist, which is not of necessity unidirectional, but could be laid at each or both doorsteps. One point worthy of mention and consideration is the fact that 15 or more former students of St. Joseph and St. Regis parish schools are

now members of our freshman class. Black students are most frequently represented in the area of athletics, less frequently in non-athletic activities. Some seniors have joined the Human Relations Club "Break-through" which has for purpose improved student relations.

Highly commendable in the eyes of seniors is the first successful Assumption dramatic presentation, "The Rainmaker", where seniors took the major roles, an activity which augurs well for the cultural future of the school.

Listed as one of the high school experiences most worthwhile was the participation in the Closed Retreat at the Marianist Apostolic Center at Glencoe; for some seniors it was a second opportunity capitalized on, having previously been exposed to the same benefit and advantage last year as juniors.

The Student Council operation was variously appreciated, comments ranging through labels of smugness, to satisfaction, of status-quo people to successful leaders. Cooperation in effecting an improved and to-date successful intramural program was noted; indifference in effecting the use of the once effective Spirit Banners, slow progress in completing the Senior Lounge were other points noted by senior men.

Summation

Such is the image of the Assumption Man. These are our senior men of '69, as viewed through the eyes of their principal, not only through the period of the personal interview, but over the span of four years spent together, a composite of impressions gained through many and diverse contacts. Change and its challenge is a clear bell-like sound that keeps resounding as one attempts to evaluate a group. The tides of change that move men to new solutions run deeper than the swirling events recorded in the morning newspaper, the TV screen, or the school's bulletin read in classes each morning. These are the merest whitecaps of surface currents. Man, the Assumption Man is the seedbed of change, the instigator of innovation, the critic of old ways, the mapper of new paths still uncharted. To be alert to the tides, to the surface messages, to the whitecaps of student concern, to the budding seeds of youth's concerns and problems, to chart with them new courses of action is the task of the staff and administration of Assumption High School. Rest assured of our dedication to this task!

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