

# Greenwich High School Wreadin Writin n Wreminiscin

Weekly Wreader

10 December 2004



## Recollections

Sadly, there comes a time, usually around the Holiday's when sad news has to be the letter of the day and the topic called "Recollections" was created by Ron Brander, early in the initial phases of the WW-N-W Newsletters. It also becomes the topic of conversation, when some of us get together for a quiet conversation. To date we have knowledge of 30 individuals from the class of 1962, that has passed on to a different spectrum. So we add one more to the Legacy of the Class of 1962. Lillian Mertz was in my homeroom, but that is about all that I can remember of her. I do remember her face, and you can tell by the compass photo, she signed my yearbook.



### Lillian Ann Mertz Becker

1945 - 2004

Lillian Ann Mertz Becker, 59, of Mansfield, Mass., died Monday, Dec. 6, at Sturdy Memorial Hospital in Attleboro, Mass. She died of dystonia, according to her family. Born Jan. 15, 1945, in Greenwich, she was a daughter of Donald and Lillian Kirk Mertz of Greenwich. Mrs. Becker was educated by the Greenwich Public Schools and earned a bachelor's degree from Curry College in Milton, Mass.

She lived in Mansfield for the past 28 years, working in the accounting department of Datel Co. until she retired in 2001. Mrs. Becker enjoyed traveling, reading, swimming, cooking, walking and spending time with her family. In addition to her parents, she is survived by her husband, Robert Becker of Mansfield; a daughter, Kimberly Ann Becker Balboni of Lakeville, Mass.; a brother, Kirk Mertz of Greenwich; a granddaughter; and an aunt, uncle, niece and nephew.

Calling hours will be held from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. today at the Dahlborg-MacNevin Funeral Home, 280 Bedford Street Lakeville. A graveside service will be held at 10 a.m. tomorrow at the Nemasket Hill Cemetery, Plymouth Street, Middleboro, Mass. In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to the Dystonia Medical Research Foundation, 1 E. Wacker Drive, Suite 2430, Chicago, IL 60601-1905.

## Community Ponders Hamilton Avenue's Legacy

By Vesna Jaksic Staff Writer  
The Greenwich Time  
04 December 2004

Memories filled every corner of the aging Hamilton Avenue Magnet School yesterday as hundreds of current and former students, parents, teachers and principals bade farewell to a place they have held close to their hearts for years.

Past and present members of the school community gathered at the Chickahominy landmark for the bittersweet occasion, the last opportunity for many to say goodbye to a part of their childhood. After 93 years, the town's oldest school is expected to house its last group of students in February before it is rebuilt.



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**G** **REENWICH**  
**PUBLIC SCHOOLS**  
**HAMILTON AVENUE SCHOOL**



Memories sprang from the walls last night, where black-and-white photographs of graduating classes from the 1940s and 1950s were displayed. A hallway was converted into "Memory Lane," where a display of tickets from 25-cent spaghetti dinners held decades ago was set up -- a staple of a school so closely tied with its Italian community.

Tables throughout the building were laid with memorabilia such as typewritten notes from a Sept. 16, 1957; PTA meeting that proposed setting \$1 annual membership fees.

"This is a bittersweet celebration," Hector Ruiz, the PTA's co-president said while addressing a crowd of several hundred in the gym during the event, dubbed "A Night of Memories."

"Bitter because it is a goodbye to the building because it has served this community for almost 100 years. Sweet because we know the future brings us a bright new school," Ruiz added.

Some of the future was on display in the form of laminated paper quilts done by the school's nearly 300 current students. The art project was created so the children could remember the building as they got ready to move to modular classrooms at Western Middle School. In one of the drawings, a third-grader

included the message "Hamilton Avenue Rocks." Another part of the quilt had a fourth-grader's recollection of his favorite memory at the school, which occurred during a gym class.

"I was jogging around the track talking to myself saying 'Don't give up' and 'Keep going,' " Brian Deggeller had written.

A similar message echoed through the elementary school yesterday as many people said they were sad to give up the building, but optimistic that its sense of community would be transferred to the new building, which is scheduled to open in September 2007.

"Bricks and mortar don't make a school," Superintendent Larry Leverett said. "The soul of the school is within the community of that school. . . . The Chickahominy community for decades has provided a soul of Hamilton Avenue School."

Located in what's considered one of the town's last working-class neighborhoods, the school has served generations of American and immigrant families since it was built in 1911. The town threatened to close it several decades ago because of environmental problems, which have only grown worse in recent years, burdening the structure with mold and leaks. As he found a picture of himself in the Class of 1948's graduation picture, John DiBella said he was surprised by how little things changed. "To come back to a school like this is almost like a museum," said the Stratford retiree. "It's like a time capsule."

Marsha **WASHINTON**, 60, who graduated in 1958, said she only had bright memories of the place. "I hate to see it go," said the Mount Vernon, N.Y., resident, who works as an office manager at The Mews senior residence. "We were all just like a big family."



Francis Franz, 81, who taught eighth grade at the school from 1951 to 1963, said he spent "12 marvelous years" in the building but understood the need for a more modern facility. "I'm sad, but I'm sure it needed to be done," said Franz, a Norwalk retiree. Moments before the audience members lifted their champagne glasses in honor of the school, PTA co-president Laura DiBella reminded everyone of what makes Hamilton Avenue strong.

"We take with us all the best of the past," she said. "And we'll share in our new building the same kind of community and commitment."

## Wrememberin GHS



William **VANNEMAN** . South Yarmouth . MA  
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Pat Helmrich's (Class of 61) Dad ran Neilsen's during much of the time we were there. She married Bob Sherry, (who I think went to St, Mary's) and I think she is still in the area. Pat, through her Dad, probably has many stories of GHS adventures, and misadventures in Neilsen's. I remember that the staff there really tried to get along with us kids, but we weren't necessarily so good with them.

I remember the controversy between Music and Sports during the various seasons. I have no idea what must have occurred behind closed doors when Mr. Mack and the coaches football, basketball and other sports scheduling conflicts, but I suspect it was fairly intense.



John **GETER** . Norwalk . CT  
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I remember borrowing twenty dollars from my senior English teacher Mr. Johnson and never paying him back.

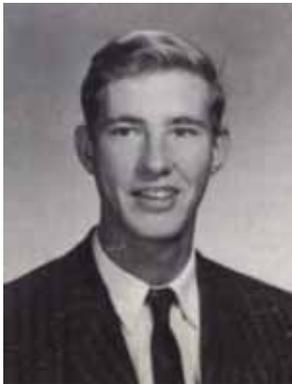
I remember being "jacked up" by are football coach during gym class.

I remember getting my gym shorts pulled down from behind by an unknown classmate while walking from the field to the locker room in front of the girls.

I remember Mr Lewin telling my mother that I should quit school and join the Navy.

I remember my parents finding out I was riding on the back of a motorcycle to school each morning.

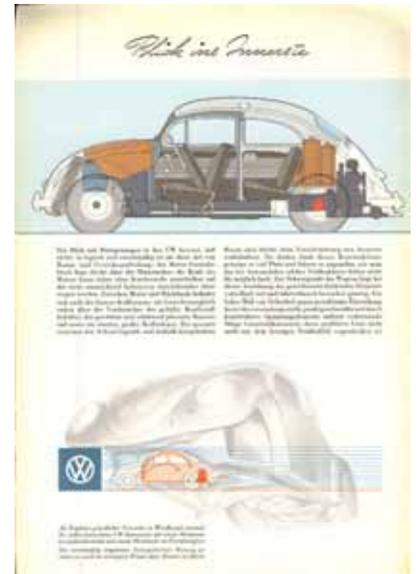
I remember that one of the custodians at GHS, wanted to fight me one day in the hallway.



Robert **HOWARD** . Guilford . CT  
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I remember the Senior Skip Day of our senior year. Because of my after-school job at the Library, I couldn't go. The morning after, when Mr Bella called all skips to the auditorium, I skipped Mr Cunningham's 1st period English and attended the meeting in my capacity as reporter for the Green Witch newspaper. All in the room were told to sign a roster and received

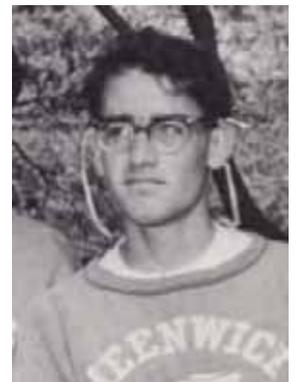
detention. I didn't go to detention since I had not gone to Jones Beach, so ended up being suspended for failure to attend detention. About 1976 Mr Bella, apprised of the details by his daughter, Andrew, came to my farm and apologized for his assignment of detention. I believe John Cunningham had died by then; he and Andy Bella were good friends.



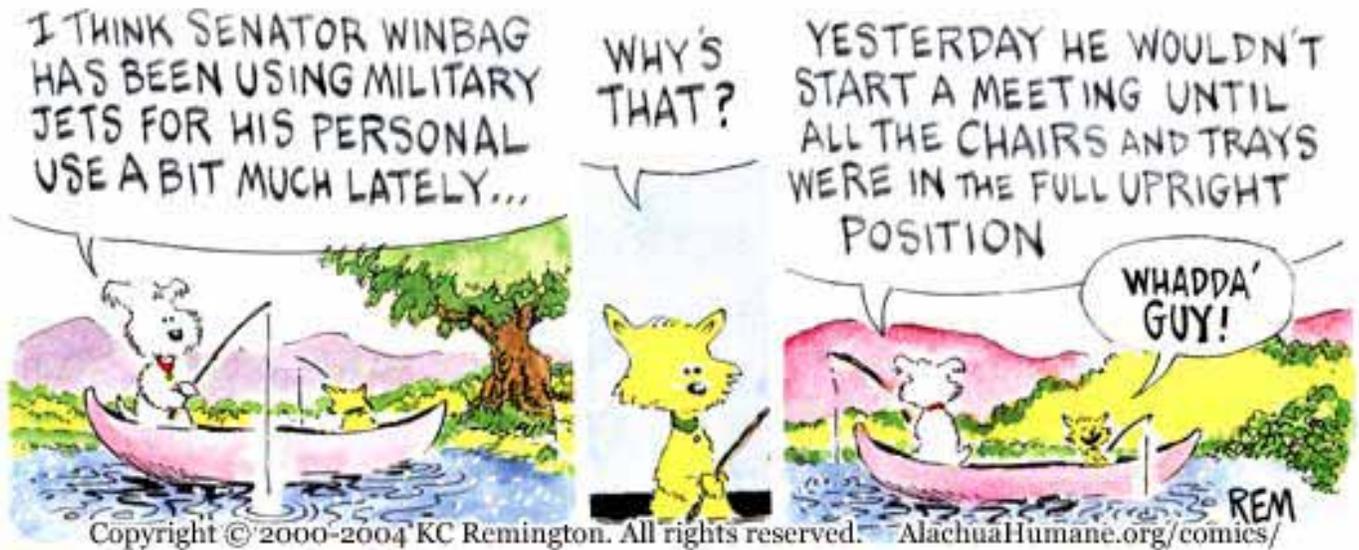
The VW in the Girl's Gym was put there by a crew organized by Peter Crosby. They bought the car for \$15 or so, disassembled it, pried open the courtyard door of the school building and carried the VW to the gym where they reassembled it. The professionals hired to remove it charged \$400 or so, a price considered excessive by Betty & Joe Crosby, his parents, particularly as the lads had removed the engine. Their house was on a deep lot in Riverside. Water to the house was metered, but Betty discovered that the water pipe to the old shed was not on the meter. Betty kept a lovely flower garden, even in dry years.

From time to time the water company would arrive, seeking leaks in the pipes. Betty knew when to keep her trap shut.

Guy Cardin was the first in our group to use a backpack. He maintained that baskets on bicycles made the bicycles unstable. Guy was a master at efficient packing. Need a pair of socks? In his backpack. Want a chess set? There also. Boat parts, books -- all in there. Good scholar, good at track, good sailor, a good guy, Guy.



## Webbster n Button



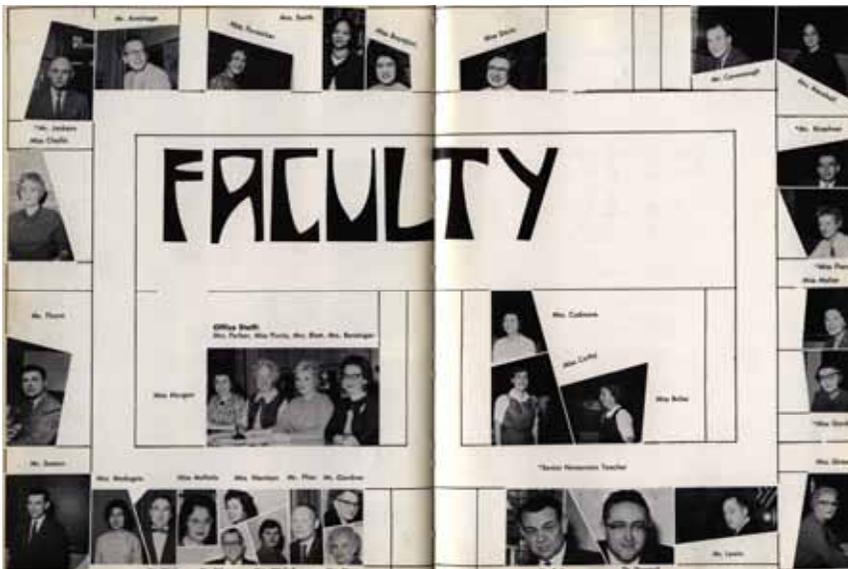
## The Editor Wremembers

Okay, so I built this platform, now I will have to take time to “Orate” from it. Over the past 18 Months, we have had a real rollercoaster ride of events and they have been the fodder for this newsletter. There have been 107 Issues before this one and there may be many more behind it as well. (I hope)

The objective to wremember something about GHS, that was special, is very difficult; in that we had a very advanced school for it's time. The Town of Greenwich, paid their teachers well enough to have the best in the area, and this had a great impact on how the students related to these “select” educators. Looking back in retrospect, I missed something, in that I was one of those “part jock, part wanna-be educated” types, that knew there was something about college that meant more than partying and drinking... (is there?). Well, our teachers, had a significant extra attached to them. Many were Fathers or Mothers of fellow classmates and others



had family working in the schools. My mom was the Head Cook (Today they would be called Chef) at Old Greenwich School and before that at North Street when it first opened. Rudd McGary's Mom was my Mom's Boss. She was the Head Dietician over at the Havemeyer.



Secondly, I remember the large classroom on the third floor corner with the stepped floor and the large double wood framed slate blackboards that also had a map stored in a roll at the head in the “mammoth” room. According to the faculty charts, this room was 313 and was Mr.

Greenberg's. I remember how the teacher would write the test questions on the boards and then pull the map down over it, before the class took their seats.

I remember how you were "forced" to take showers after gym and sports, and how your gym clothes were never cleaned except when you couldn't stand to put those dirty filthy, often damp and horrendously rancid, outfits over you head.

And there was something called the "Athletic Supporter" or "jock"... which was neither a wealthy patron of the sport or an athlete devoted to the game. Do they still have these "rancid things out there?"

We had special laces for our Converse High Tops and they were handed out as though they were made of gold.

