

# Coming to Pacific High School In the Santa Cruz Mountains

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Who knows whether the circumstances and network of cause and effect that brought me to the Santa Cruz Mountains and Pacific High School were a matter of chance or destiny? Coming to this area involved both leaving something that I had had enough of and a search for something new and better. I had a deep longing and conviction that there had to be a better way of life, a more spiritual path to fulfillment and Pacific High School was the choice that I made to look for those things.

## **Reflections on the Times**

My thoughts about the Pacific High School experience come within a social, political, and spiritual perspective of transformation. Not only did I make a change in how I taught science and how I understood knowledge and teaching, but I did it within the context of a radical process of transformation of death and rebirth which involved withdrawing from an economic and social structure that supported nuclear insanity and the constant threat of nuclear annihilation, the draft, the Vietnam War, and strange new drug and health laws that promoted reefer madness mentality, use of cigarettes, alcohol, pesticides, waste of our natural resources, and on-going environmental degradation.

## **Deciding to Come to Pacific High School**

I came to teach at Pacific High School from a very well-paying (for a teacher) position teaching science with the Bakersfield School District. At the time it was one of the most affluent school districts in California because of property taxes and oil revenues in the area. I taught Biology and other science classes at Burrows High School, out at the Naval Ordnance Test Center at China Lake in the Mojave Desert. It was the far-flung part of the Bakersfield School District. I was recruited for this position while working on my Master's Degree at the University of Chicago.

When I graduated in 1964, there was competition to hire young, newly trained science teachers with a background in biochemistry, molecular biology and training in the newest Biological Science Curriculum Studies (BSCS) science program. I was brought to Burrows High to launch the new BSCS Biology program and implement the new reforms in science education ushered in by the launch of Sputnik in the late 1950's. In addition to the Navy's regular personnel, there were a lot of technical science people on the base who wanted the best possible science education for their children. Not everyone recruited to teach at China Lake was interested in teaching there once they found out it was a dry lake out in the middle of the Mojave Desert at a Naval Ordnance Test Center, so, as a bonus for coming on board, teachers were given very cheap housing on the

China Lake Naval Base along with other perks like base shopping, Officer's Club privileges, and other discounts.

Eleanor, my wife at the time, had a good job working for the Behavioral Science Division on the base. We had two well-maintained vehicles, good benefits and a great dog, Quimick. Living on the base and in the desert was adventurous and also very beautiful in its own way. It could be very hot there in the summer, but the desert has an alluring beauty, smell, and feel that is very majestic. Despite all of these advantages, we lived on base at the Navy's Ordinance Test Center which was dedicated to researching and testing ways to make better bombs, napalm and weapons for use in the Vietnam "war" and elsewhere. Seeing magazine photos and TV news clips of Vietnam villagers running from their homes on fire used to bring me profound sadness and regret for my involvement in even teaching science at this military installation.

When offered the opportunity to do Ethology (Animal Behavior) research on newly captured bottle-nosed porpoises as they were brought into conditions of captivity for the Navy's porpoise project facility at Point Magu, California, I became very excited. But as I got further into my research, I became aware that the program was harmful to the porpoises and that the research that I was involved with had the potential of using porpoises to sink ships.

Even though I dearly enjoyed the beauty of the desert as well as teaching Biology, these concerns of conscience grew on me. It seemed increasingly necessary to find new ways of learning, being and earning a living. The art teacher at Burrows High School, Mrs. Haig, told me about an experimental high school in the San Francisco Bay Area called Pacific High School. It was dedicated to an experience-based form of education. We investigated, and eventually decided to take part in the experiment. The search for a new spirituality and right livelihood seemed like the right path, and I am glad that we made the choice to be involved.

On the other hand, there were many sacrifices and mistakes that were made in this transformational process on a personal and collective level. Unexpected and unintended things happen, for better or worse, when you open yourself up for new experiences and growth. Most of the staff made major financial sacrifices to teach at Pacific High and "make it work." I remember that I felt so strongly about not supporting the war and "the system" that I took all of my money out of our savings and my State Teachers Retirement System (STRS) account to live on and headed for Pacific. As we headed for our new life at Pacific High we had two well-maintained vehicles, a nice old single lens camera, our household possessions and a dog. I was quite happy to take a big cut in pay to come to teach at Pacific at first, but as my salary shrank, and eventually got turned into two salaries for two full-time people without travel allowances or vehicle maintenance funds, I eventually ended up selling our vehicles because I couldn't afford to keep them up, etc. Luckily, we did not have any health or dental needs while at Pacific, but the lack of health benefits (or any retirement benefits) and the devastating effect of a continual downward level of income contributed to involuntary simplicity and lifestyle changes that may not have been for the best. It was also a time of letting go of old relationships and for making

new ones, and this is always a hard thing to do.

### **Early Days at Pacific 1966-7**

When I first started teaching Biology and Science at Pacific we were still building the “Science Room.” We had a few odds and ends of science equipment and a few old text books—not much to teach BSCS Biology and science as Inquiry in the way that I had in public high school. I tried doing various experiments and labs that I could adapt from my past science backgrounds, but soon found that this was not of much interest to most of the students there. This was due not only to the lack of facilities, and my lack of experience, but also to a reaction against that old science classroom/traditional high school lab approach to education in general.

As I got to know the students and staff better, a new kind of curriculum began to develop. Out of the traditional Sex, Drugs, and Rock-and-Roll teenage curriculum, individual students and various sized groups of students formed to learn more not only about the pharmacology and physiology of drugs and diet but the natural history of the surrounding Santa Cruz Mountains. I went with various groups of students into the back country to explore edibles and the environs around the cabins behind the school, and “Devils Canyon” to the North, where the run-away “hippie” children and diggers lived. One time a group of us went cross country through logging sights to Memorial County Park and Pescadero Creek. The students and I ended up attending logging permit hearings and getting involved in the preservation of redwoods, even to the point of following loaded logging trucks to their destination at the docks where the logs were shipped to Japan. There was a lot of interest in useful and healing native plants, herbology, organic gardening, and logging and other conservation issues and the constant interest in the Vietnam War protests, the Draft, and Music and Dancing of the times in San Francisco and at the Barn in Scotts Valley. More than once did we load up the old school bus and go dancing on a Friday night up at the Avalon or Fillmore ballrooms.

### **Early Days Staff 1966-67**

When we first traveled to Pacific to meet the staff and students for interviews, we interacted mostly with people like Alan Stran and Stan Bean and briefly with a few of the students. (See Photos of Early Days at Pacific 1966-67.) When we moved to the Bay Area we found housing for us and our dog in Redwood Estates. It was the closest, affordable place that we could find where we could also keep our dog at the time. When we officially started teaching there in the fall of 1966, we met the rest of the full- and part-time staff. In addition to Eleanor and I who were considered the Anthropology and Biology teachers, the other full-time teachers were Warren Howe, English Teacher; George Hall, Building Construction Coordinator and Teacher; Ken Kinzie and his wife Patty (who later changed her name to Raven), Art Teachers; John Dufford (Sulumon), Music Teacher; and Ray Ditman (and his Wife Bonnie), Math Teacher and Bus Driver. In addition, Gloria Harmon (from Bridge Mountain in Ben Lomond) was a part-time teacher in sensitivity training who attended staff meetings and the early

staff marathons and had a daughter, Holly, who attended Pacific. Erick Trojack was one of the bus drivers and had a sister, Nina, who was a student at Pacific. Alan Stran and many others volunteered help with the on-going construction projects. Stan Bean was our executive director and Bonnie Ditman (Ray's wife) worked with Stan in the office.

We had regular staff meetings, board meetings, and several weekend-long staff retreats facilitated by Samtio Chung. They were rather unique in that they were 48-hour marathons (where participants stay awake for 48 hours) that employed a lot of interesting improvisational "psycho-drama" and "encounter-group" techniques. Even though there were some pros and cons to this type of intensive interaction, it seemed to help us learn about each other in an in-depth way and encourage each other as teachers and individuals.

Later in 1967 and 1998 other part-time teachers and facilitators for special classes and school-wide programs were added to the program. Alan and Heath \_\_\_\_ (From Ananda) taught yoga several times a week. Aaron Manganelo (?sp.) was our Social Studies-community activist teacher. Jack Spicer also taught English. Jade \_\_\_\_ taught about Viet Nam culture. Mike Murphy and others brought interns from Esalen to do body awareness-dance workshops with our students. Samtio Chung did improvisational drama with the students. This activity eventually turned into a full-fledged teenage anti-war guerilla theater group that went onto various high school campuses to do lunch-time performances and workshops for administrators. Lars Spear (?sp.) was hired to teach Photography for awhile. He helped students and staff put together the first published Pacific newsletter. I am sure there are others that I am not remembering to mention. We discussed hiring these people at our staff meetings, but I was too much involved with teaching to be involved with the official contracts, staff budget, and paperwork for them. I was on the Pacific Board of Directors as a teacher representative for awhile. I was grateful to spend most of my time interacting and teaching the students and trying to keep my ever-changing life together rather than getting involved with a lot of administrative tasks.

All in all it was a dynamic, diverse learning environment for all concerned. I have made digital copies of my 35 mm slide photos of staff, students, field trips and life at Pacific High for Holly Harmon to use in her up-coming book about that era at Pacific High and the Holiday Cabins and Bridge Mountain in Ben Lomond.

### **Drop-in Teachers**

There were still other people who acted as "drop-in" teachers. For example, there were wood cutters like Austin Keith and Dave Sivilla (?sp.) and others who lived in the back country cabins behind the school who would stop by to visit as they drove through. There was Jafu Feng (? Sp.) who would now and then walk to the school from his "Still Point" retreat on upper Bear Creek Road and do tai chi with us and discuss life. He was a great inspiration to me and was also one of the first tai chi teachers at Esalen. It was always interesting to have a celebrity like Wavy Gravy or other pranksters drop in for a visit. Many interesting parents would stop by for visits or to share something of interest with students. One day

on my way up to Pacific from Palo Alto, I witnessed a pack of dogs running down a young deer along upper Page Mill Road. They had just brought it down. I stopped to see the deer and found its spirit departed, so I brought it to the school for our Biology lesson of the day. We learned a lot about mammalian anatomy and much more as we dressed the deer, skinned it and roasted it for an afternoon feast. The students and I skinned and dressed the deer and roasted it over a fire for much of the day. Jafu just happened to stop by and share in the offering of the deer's meat for our feast. It was a moving Biology lesson for all and we considered the deer also to be one of our honored drop-in teachers.

### **Spiritual Adventure and Awakening**

We did all of this largely on faith that we could create a better form of education and way of life in general. In the absence of any one spiritual philosophy, group of elders, guidelines, or culture to support community health and healthy relationships, Pacific High was sort of like a psychedelic amalgamation of many spiritual points of view and practices. There was a lot of input from the original Palo Alto Quaker community who had a lot to do with the founding of Pacific High School as it grew out of Peninsula Elementary School. In addition to Jafu Feng's tai chi, and Samtio Chung's Subud, there were many other religious, mystic, and pagan insights and practices that were shared which influenced us all. We were largely in unexplored territory. It was a great blessing and opportunity for spiritual discovery, growth, and transformation on one hand, but such change can be difficult and it took a heavy toll on some.

My fondest memories of Pacific were the great fieldtrip expeditions and the all-school experiments and adventures in experiential education that we pulled off. We had many great in-depth fieldtrips and study groups that included political protests about the Vietnam War and logging of redwoods in the Santa Cruz Mountains, trips to hear great music in San Francisco in the school bus, musical and dance events at the school, like jam sessions with Max Hartstein and the 25<sup>th</sup> Century Ensemble, Bridge Mountain, and Esalen-led sensitivity training sessions, and nature hikes in the back country as mentioned previously. Science fieldtrips to the Coastal Mountains, Great Valley, Sierra, and deserts to the east to study the Geology of California (as understood before the plate tectonic revolution), fieldtrips to Hopi land and Mexico, newsletters and art projects, as well as the all-school events where we turned Pacific into such things as a Black Panther training center (without guns) and a Zen monastery with Shunryu Suzuki Roshi for awhile were some of the highlights for me.

As I scan slides for a Pacific reunion for 2010 and possible use for Holly Harmon's book, many old memories, images, and emotions come up. I am also impressed that from my current perspective as a retired public and private school Biology teacher (after about 40 years) and lecturer in Natural History at UCSC, husband, father to a beautiful daughter and wonderful son-in-law, grandfather of two fine (Charter 25 home school) grand children that live in Zayante, how wonderful it was for the students and staff of Pacific to have those great experiences.

Despite our ignorance and the mistakes that may have been made, there

was a great energy and sense of adventure and idealism at Pacific. Those kinds of quality, in-depth, experiential, small-group learning opportunities are not that common. Also, in retrospect, I think that despite my personal ignorance about the pitfalls of this type of educational experimentation, Pacific High and those students were fortunate to have someone like myself, who did have a really good academic Biology education background as well as a sense of adventure and willingness to let go of old ways of teaching and explore new areas of learning based upon student interests. Beside that, they were fortunate to get two teachers for the price of one low salary, and we did have that fine International Harvester (IH) Travel-All that ran well and took them on many great distant and local fieldtrip adventures.

### **Field Trip Notes and Photos:**

For example, in the California Geology class (field experience) and the Macrobiotic Diet Desert Seminar, they actually had a chance to travel together in the old IH Travel-All out across the San Joaquin Valley, over the snow-covered Sierra, across the Mojave Desert to Death Valley and back. Another time, a group of students wanted to live on a macrobiotic diet (one of the interests at the time) in an isolated area. We decided to have a Desert Seminar and travel to the Eureka Dunes, which were located in Saline Valley (just this side of Death Valley) and live on a brown rice macrobiotic diet for 10 days or 2 weeks while studying the natural history of the desert. To have those kinds of first-hand experiences along our coast in the ocean class to the Big Spur Coast to the South, or the north during the Marin County adventure was a profound experience for me and hopefully for those students as well. Those teaching experiences changed my concept of education and life. (Digitized photos of those field trips and special events at Pacific are available)

### **The Reunions:**

Perhaps the reunions that we have will in some way help us to experience coming out the other side of those chaotic times and there will be some perspective, resolution, healing, and appreciation of each other and our times together. I know that I really enjoyed meeting old students and staff again at the last reunion that I attended. I witnessed how our time together at Pacific was just one point in our lives and that we have all gone on to other things. It was a great time to give thanks, celebrate our accomplishments, meet the children, honor those who are no longer with us, go through my slides and try to make sense of and honor that time in my life.