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Growing Up in Ferndale : A New Book by Tom Coleman

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By Maggie Boleyn

Whoever said, "If you remember the '60s, you weren't really there" clearly never met Tom Coleman, who has just published a book called "Growing Up in Ferndale: A Baby Boomer's Memories of Life in Mid-Century Suburban Detroit." Not only was Coleman really there, his memories are a treasure trove for readers of all ages. "I feel that my experiences in Ferndale – whether good, bad, or somewhere in-between – contributed to who I am today," he says.

For those who weren't there, Coleman explains: "The 1960s ushered in an era of social, political, and religious upheaval. Just as these changes had a major impact on the larger society around me, they also profoundly affected the way I thought and felt about myself and others."



St. James Pastor Fr. Paul Chateau, Tom Coleman, and Mayor Dave Coulter at book release reception

Baby boomers and history buffs of all ages will enjoy the description of the shopping available in the Nine Mile and Woodward area in the '60s. Some familiar names that Coleman mentions are Federal's Department Store, Kresge's, F&M Drugstore, Sander's Candy Store, Winkelman's Clothing, Hagelstein's Bakery, Betty Murray Hair Shop, and an A&P Supermarket. A few of these can be seen on the cover picture of the book.

Coleman says he wants readers "to get a sense of what life was like for young people growing up in Ferndale, and America in general, during this transitional and often turbulent era, of the 1960s." He notes that, "Life for young people today is so much different." He notes that his life was shaped by "a variety of sources: church, school, family, friends, and television personalities."

Coleman noted, "I realize that the experiences of my classmates may be much different than mine. But some of our shared experiences and memories will be

similar. For memories of mine that are different, perhaps they will help a few dozen Baby Boomers who grew up in Ferndale see those two decades from a different perspective."

Coleman attended St. James, and remembers his graduation class of 1966 with "deep and lasting affection." One of his classmates, Sandy Fontiane, remembers Coleman as "an advocate for the underdog."

Indeed, the idea for this book was born when Coleman decided to attend the 50-year reunion of his graduation from St. James. "Memories started to emerge, and I decided I should do something productive with them. I started writing, and soon realized that a book was emerging," he said.

Coleman says that it took only two weeks to write the book, writing 60 to 70 hours a week. "It was effortless," he said. "It was almost as though I was channeling information from another dimension."

Coleman says when he's not writing, "I challenge authority." From looking at "Growing Up in Ferndale," this is nothing new for Coleman. Whether he was standing up to the "nuns with yardsticks," or organizing 35 Detroit Newsboys, Coleman was, and remains, an active supporter of various causes. He has spent the last nine years focused on persons with disabilities in general and on adult guardianship issues in particular.

"For the past three years, I have devoted thousands of hours of professional time, pro bono, to reform the adult guardianship systems operated by the states, particularly in California, but more recently expanding nationally," he said. "These systems are supposed to protect vulnerable adults but too often unnecessarily take away the rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities." He plans to write a treatise of standards aimed at legal and mental health professionals. He notes that this scholarly legal text will take much longer to write than two weeks.

"Growing Up in Ferndale." is Coleman's third book, and he dedicated his work to his classmates, both living and deceased, from the Class of 1966. "We may be scattered throughout the United States, and have lived very different lives with a wide range of occupational and professional interests, but we share a common bond nonetheless. We spent many of our most formative years together – at St. James and in Ferndale – and, at least for me, those memories endure." ♦♦♦

Ferndale Friends is a bi-monthly newspaper distributed to about 17,000 households in Ferndale and neighboring communities, and available at some retail stores and businesses in those areas. It is also published online at: www.ferndalefriends.net

The book is available online at
www.tomcoleman.us/ferndale