

# Introduction

When I received an invitation by email in March to attend the 50<sup>th</sup> Reunion of the Class of 1966 of St. James High, excuses started to pop into my head. It would cost too much to travel from California to Michigan. I would not recognize most of the people there. I really don't have much in common now with my classmates from five decades ago.

After mulling things over for a bit, I decided that I would decline the invitation. But then, memories from my childhood and teenage years started to surface. Over the course of 11 years – from second grade when I started school at St. James to twelfth grade when I graduated – I had spent more than 13,000 hours with my classmates. And that was just during school hours. Hundreds of additional hours were shared with my St. James friends in recreational activities from the time I started school in Ferndale until the time I entered college.

The weekend of activities the organizers had planned for those who would attend the reunion offered a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. There would never be another 50<sup>th</sup> Reunion! And none of us are getting any younger. I was reminded of our mortality by the passing this year of my close high school friend Fran Paul. She left us in March. A few years ago, Fran shared with me that her eventual knowledge that I was gay helped her to better understand her own son when, as an adult, he disclosed to her that he is gay.

Going to the reunion would not bring back friends like Eddie McQuade who died as a young man suffering with PTSD after his return from the Viet Nam War. But it would provide me an opportunity to hug Mary Crotty, or reminisce with Sandy Avery, or talk about changes in church doctrine with Mel Westover. Perhaps I would get to know some of my other classmates better – find out who they really are and what they really think about life, knowing what they know now.

So I decided to accept the invitation. Once I made that decision, the emotional and mental juices started to flow. Memories flooded back to me. I started to think about my life – from the beginning in Highland Park, the move to Royal Oak, the years in Ferndale, and the move to California. “Don't let all these memories go to waste,” I thought. “Preserve them and share them.” I followed my instincts and listened to my heart. The result is this book about *Growing Up in Ferndale*.

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. Looking back at the St. James years, through the eyes of someone who was a “great imposter” walking a social tightrope during much of that era, will hopefully be an enriching experience for classmates, family members, and others who decide to read these memoirs.