

Who can forget their first teacher? Mine was Miss Blake at Ensley Elementary who was a very caring and nurturing person which was 180° from the principal, Miss Doyle, and there was Miss McKenzie who had the patience of Job. Of course I had to hear what a great student my older sister was and then “What happened to you?” At Brentwood Junior High there was Mr. Tappan and Coach Showalter who made certain I knew that life is not fair. I use their lesson often in “explaining” the real meaning of life to my children and grandchildren. Other teachers at PHS were very instrumental in shaping my life. Miss Melton brought me into the world of Byron, Keats, Shelley, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Tennyson and William Ernest Henley whose poem *Invictus* hangs on my wall today. My all-time favorite was Mr. Woodward “Woody” Skinner who instilled in me the love of history, especially that of Florida, but Woody was much more to me. He was a positive influence on my life and I owe much of my success to his caring and guidance. I was also a source of amusement to him as my antics in those days were somewhat legendary but not necessarily career enhancing. We had some heart to heart talks and when I told him I was thinking of joining the service he said I would surely end up in the brig if I continued with my comedic and bullet proof demeanor. I listened to him because as a WWII Marine veteran, he knew of what he spoke. He challenged me to push my personal envelope and reach for a higher plateau. Thank God he threw down that gauntlet and I was bold enough to pick it up. Seven years later after my first tour in Vietnam I returned to PHS to show him that not only was I not locked up but had been commissioned as an officer and was sporting “Wings of Gold.” Unfortunately, he was not there the day I visited so I never got the opportunity to thank him personally for not giving up on me. I thought I would have another opportunity but it never came. I should have made more of an effort but when we’re young we think there will always be a tomorrow but tomorrows turn into yesterdays and yesterdays are gone forever. Graduation in 1958 seems so long ago but to me it was only yesterday.

In the 11 th grade I failed English so I had to take junior English and senior English in the 12 th grade. I was failing English again and I will never forget Miss Harper called me out in the hall and said I guess you know you are not going to graduate don't you, and I said I guess you know you will never see me again. Later I was told to get a cap and gown and be at the auditorium and if they called my name I graduated and if they did not then I didn't. Well they did call my name and I was one happy guy. I made it with a D-. If it had not been for Miss. Harper I would not have a diploma and the success in life that I have had. I owe it all to her. I don't know if she is still alive but if she is, I would like to give her a hug and a big thank you.

After graduation we were turning in our Honor Society things and Mrs. Raborn said to me...”now go out and set the world on fire.” I was really surprised she spoke to me. I never did get that fire started...

When I walked across the stage at graduation I knew I wanted to be a doctor but I didn't know if I could make it. Pensacola High School gave me the foundation I needed to get through college and medical school. I believe everything I have accomplished is the result of caring teachers at PHS who encouraged me when even I had doubts about myself. They convinced me it was better to try and fail than to not try. I owe all my success to those teachers.

In 10th grade my first class of the day was world history and for the first time I had a male teacher, Coach Gordy. I was intimidated from the very start! That first morning he said he wanted me to sit at the desk by the door and I had no idea why I was relegated to that seat. Did he want me as far from his desk as possible? I learned the reason the next day. Coach called me to his desk, gave me a nickel and told me to go get him a coke. I moved at a legal speed but was tempted to run! Returning I handed him the coke and he drank it down with several aspirins. I eventually learned he had a war injury and suffered from bad headaches. I made many coke runs. Then he started giving me notes for another coach who taught Biology downstairs. I forget his name. Sometimes it was verbal but more often written. They were always about football. It seems I had been chosen to be Coach Gordy's "Gopher" and the first seat was reserved for that student. One morning he had a message for the downstairs coach and off I went. This day I made a fateful decision. I always obeyed the rules...always, boring but safe. However, I determined that it would be quicker to get to the biology class if I went down the upstairs instead of taking the longer way by going down the downstairs. I saw no harm since everyone was in class. So I headed down the upstairs. To my utter dismay, at the bottom of the stairs, stood Mrs. Freeman~!! She asked what I was doing and I told her that I was delivering a message for Coach Gordy. Before I could think of a better answer she said, "You should know you never go down the up-stairs!" I'm sure my face turned two shades of red and I just said yes ma'am. Then she told me to march up the up-stairs and use the down-stairs. I crept by my classroom door, hoping Coach Gordy didn't see me. I hurried down the stairs and found Mrs. Freeman waiting for me. She watched me until I delivered the message and went back up the up-stairs. Only one thought was going through my mind as I climbed those steps...how am I ever going to survive high school?

Ms. Margaret Stephens Barrisford is celebrating her 100th birthday next Tuesday at the Haven on Summit Blvd from 2 to 4. She taught some of us at Blount Jr High and at PJC. She is amazing...As she says "all original parts." I remember so well the first day in her class when she told us up front she had never given any student all A's. She had several students who had made all A's in elementary school but we were told not to expect that would continue. For me it was like she threw down the gauntlet! I was determined back then. At the end of the year she wrote a note on my report card saying "I've never made out a report card like this before." She was one of the best teachers ever! It was challenging but I loved every minute in her classroom. She was one of my favorite teachers. She inspired me in so many ways. She used to show us covers of magazines like the Saturday Evening Post and tell us to go home and write a story about what is happening. I loved those assignments and am sure they planted the seeds for my later writing efforts. I'm amazed she is 100!!

Charlie Stokes former PHS offensive coordinator under Jim Scoggins, passed away. Coach Stokes was probably better known as Superintendent of Escambia County Schools. He also served as head football coach at Pensacola Tech High School and was the first head coach at the new Woodham High School in 1965. Coach Stokes played football at the University of Tennessee and was considered one of the best single-wing coaches in the country. As stated in the Florida's Oldest High School Football Team, Coach Stokes stepped in during the darkest days at PHS and saved the program from neglect. He was He was instrumental in having Leo Carvalis hired and seeing that resources were provided to the Tigers creating a

chance to be competitive. For example, he made sure PHS got a weight room. He was one of my favorites and I enjoyed visiting with him at various get-togethers of old Tigers. He will be sorely missed. Rest in Peace, Coach Stokes

I was in 10th grade at PHS when Miss Millicent Beck and her two sisters moved into a new house two or three blocks from where I lived. They were interesting and educated, from Indiana, and came from a big family where everyone loved poetry, probably because their father wrote poetry but also had a good job with an insurance company. They grew up in Lafayette, Indiana, where Purdue University is located. I had a garden and cultivated chrysanthemums. Chrysanthemum plants reproduce, so I had too many and asked Miss Beck if she would like some of them. The sisters' new house was only three blocks from my house at 9th Avenue and Torres in a subdivision called Granada. I brought the extra plants over in a box of dirt. The box was a good, sturdy liquor box, and that, surprisingly proved a problem for Miss Beck. One of her close friends was Miss Lelia Abercrombie, her former landlady. "Miss Lelia" was an Old Maid and a rabid Temperance fanatic. ["Lips that touch liquor shall never touch mine!"] and Millicent told me she had to get rid of that liquor box right away because "Miss Lelia" would have a stroke if she visited them and saw it in the Becks' garage.