

KELLY'S CORNER

by Jan Kelly

Provincetown High School Graduation - 1998

[Editor's Note: Ms. Kelly's report on the graduation at Provincetown High School was written in a timely fashion, but we were not able to get to it until now. The event was especially touching this year and we are happy to share these special "down home" moments with you.]

Graduation comes upon us each year, but it always seems like the first time. Rather than a set of emotions, our feelings are for the individuals and the individuals are different each year, each ceremony. There isn't some homogenized graduation feeling when you live in a small town with a graduating class of 30 students—usually fewer—and this being Provincetown, we are different for each ceremony.

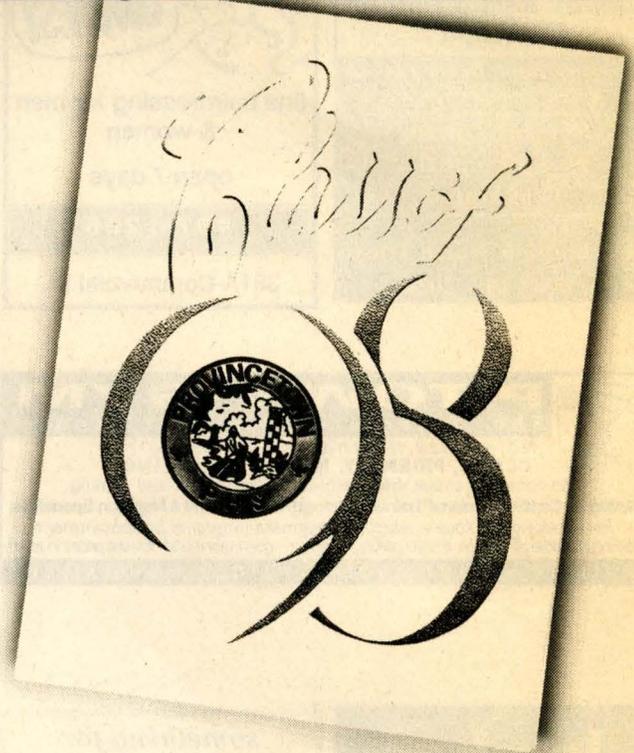
We have known the students individually since babyhood. We know their siblings, their parents, grandparents, cousins and friends. Enemies are short-lived at close quarters. Most of us in the excited and well-wishing audience have had some interaction with a good number of these more excited and eager graduates. Past, present and future become a kaleidoscope of humor, pathos, love and hope.

We're hopeful for them. Their individual lives of choices and actions are before them. It's the time for hope, just prior to action. The youngsters don't know that. They will just be going out to live, to study, to graduate again or to find a good occupation with their minds on fun... most of the time, as it should be.

They were itching on that stage, to get to their parties. "Hope is a good breakfast, but a poor supper," and they will be at the breakfast table until they have reached their first goal as an adult. They may change occupations and activities all through life... some will, some won't. But they're on their way and we are smiling and crying at the same time.

"Pomp & Circumstance" by Elgar pierces the reverie. The Provincetown High School Band moves into the notes more smoothly with each note and the graduates each come down the aisle, no two doing the practiced "step-stop" the same. Each of them hears Elgar in a different way. The inner metronomes are obvious, as each marches to a different drummer. They are relaxed—I have always noted that. To the Provincetown graduates, the march becomes a performance. A small school is like familial love. You know you are accepted. So off-beat, goose step, bit of a skip or dragging, all the different steps are accepted and loved.

We salute the flag. Many of us are already dewy-eyed. Krista Wheeler welcomed us. Her voice, accurate and sure, was welcoming. Lois Borgesi of the School Committee welcomed us, dressed in a soft peach color, no longer all black and white.



Amy Tetreault and Carrie Dundas-Lucca innovated by giving the valedictorian's and salutatorian's speeches in tandem.

A sense of value, a commitment to helping others instead hoarding up for yourself... They spoke of a New Jersey businessman, born poor, who grew to be very wealthy, and became a philanthropist. His name was Feeney and he said, "You can't wear two pair of shoes at the same time."

They spoke of taking their theme from the writings of Kahlil Gibran as they were seeking the spiritual within the material. I thought of Gibran's line, "Leave all things of substance,—as a call to leave the negatives of society. "For it is but the web of the spider: nature will greet you as one of her own." The text comes from "The Cortège," a dialogue between youth and age, trying to create a set of values in order to live a better life. Amy and Carrie were brilliant in their interpretation, moving the idea from a classic Arabic poem/play to 20th century moguls, to their graduation day.

Ms. Leslie Smith-Tighe, a former graduate, delivered the Commencement Address at the invitation of Mr. Arthur Reis, her 7th grade teacher. Leslie is now a lawyer and an advocate for children's rights. She expressed the belief that children should be seen and heard and that in this way they will learn respect for others. "Don't be rude!" Leslie staccatoed.

"You may get the job if you are rude, but you won't keep it." Leslie told us that she had her epiphany in the third grade. Her quest was to help children and law school came out as her

means. In the growth of the United States, we have thrown off the French, the English, and the slave trade—all of them shackles; this stripping away was fundamental to our growth. Now, we must look at these school shootings and must take all threats and hostility seriously. Ms. Smith-Tighe went on to give the graduates some pointers: Be involved; attend classes; ask questions during and after class; travel abroad; use your linguistic education; go out into the world. If not college, then do something you want to do and do it well. (I heard Ghandi in that phrase.)

Leslie spoke of Mr. Reis, urging his students to challenge themselves, personally. Nothing wrong with going slow, she said and don't worry about what someone else thinks. Keep moving and you won't go wrong. Stillness is motion too. Check yourself, listen to yourself. Reflect and then move on.

A good speech, a good speaker, a swash buckler, fencing her foil into our thoughts with messages of self-worth and action. Sally & Peter, her proud parents, were probably in awe of Leslie once again. A young, a very young, lawyer set on her route. I love looking at this family; they are handsome, dynamic, full of ideas and action. The very molecules around them vibrate from their energy.

The awards continued with two brave moments among them. The parents of Mark Roderick Perry came to the stage to share with us how, six years ago they were at their son's graduation. Mark died in September, 1997. His eyes and his heart are living on in the beings of others now. They provided a \$500 scholarship in his name and Cheryl Meads received it. Al Silva, father of Linda Silva, lost September 12, 1996, gave two \$1000 scholarships. All of us were pulled even tighter together.

Mr. Edward Boxer and Mr. Paul Seeley awarded the long and impressive list of scholarships. Local businesses and individuals, lodges, private clubs and banks gave scholarships for just about any talent or aptitude possible. These students are cared for by a loving and generous community. Their start in life will be eased by this generosity. The Cecilia Francis Award of \$5000 was won by Aline S. Rodrigues; Roland J. Santos received a \$2000 scholarship. Too numerous to list, all these awards, but not too much to spend on one or two of our best investments: education and health.

English teacher, Mr. Paul Seeley retires after 35 years. He received a standing ovation to which he responded by telling Ed Boxer he would get even for that surprise. Addressing the graduates, he added that when they find themselves in English class next year and they are day-dreaming and see a fly on the wall, remember "That's me watching you."

Dr. Susan Fleming, even more elegant in her Harvard crimson robes, presented the closing remarks, thanking parents, families and all present for their support of the graduate scholarships. Dr. Fleming aptly referred to PHS as a "private/public educational system." In her presentation of the class, Dr. Fleming gave a brief synopsis of each student indicating how they will be remembered. Caring, ever caring. Our third poignant moment came when Avis Earnest stood to listen and accept what we will remember about Chelsea. Chelsea would have graduated this day. We were all pulled even closer. We were experiencing grief in public and with dignity.

Provincetown affords us that.

I was the guest of Roland J. Santos who will be remembered "because you put out energy to excel at what you wanted. For knowing your dreams and for your commitment to bring them to reality. We hope you will remember us and how much you mean to us."

Roland wore his gold tassels on hat and 'round his neck to distinguish him as a member of the Honor Society, the only male student in this group. Roland excels as an poet, short story writer and songwriter. He accompanies himself on guitar. He will be taking his hefty scholarships to Johnson & Wales in Providence, RI, where he will study Culinary Arts. Travis Costa and Joseph Goshen will join him. Roland says he feels a little sad, but overall, has a good feeling. His mother, Elizabeth, his father, "Boy Blue" Manuel, his brother, Edmund and his sister Carol were present and proud. Edmund is now the associate director of development in charge of computer systems at the Wang Center. Carol is the most effervescent worker at the Bradford. I wish grandmother Bertha could have been there. Bertha was in charge of tickets for all the Rescue Squad's fundraisers and womanned her post at the old fire house next to Town Hall, day in and day out. Maybe she was there, listening to the applause, especially the applause for her grandson, Roland J. Santos.

[A poem by Roland Santos appears in next weeks issue under micro-works column, look for it!]

