

Class of '68

President Kennedy had been assassinated in November of 1963. Two months later, the Beatles came to America to appear on the Ed Sullivan Show. And Downers Grove High School—that school on Main Street, just south of Ogden Avenue—was overcrowded.

So District 99 built a new high school, at 63rd and Dunham. This new high school would serve the students of Woodridge and the southern half of Downers Grove. This new school opened in September of 1964.

Our class, the Class of 1968, began our high school careers on that same day in September of 1964. We were the pioneers, the original inhabitants of this school.

In that first year, this high school had only two classes: Freshmen and Sophomores. The Sophomores were the Class of 1967. They were the first graduating class of Downers Grove South, but they spent their first year at what is now Downers Grove North.

We were the Freshmen, the Class of 1968. We were the second graduating class of Downers Grove South and the first class that had spent all four years of high school here at Downers Grove South.

When I was a Freshman at Downers Grove South, my older sister was a Senior at Downers Grove North. Although we lived in the same house, every morning we would attend different high schools.

In that first year, we at Downers Grove South voted on our school colors of blue and navy blue, and on our team name, the Mustangs.

In that first year, all of the classes were held on the first and second floors of the school. The third floor was empty, and all of the doors at the top of the stairwells were locked. In the second year, beginning in September of 1965, the new freshman class, the Class of 1969, entered the school, and all three floors of the school were in use.

When Downers Grove South was built, it had one set of doors by the Auditorium and another set of doors by the Principal's office; and those two sets of doors opened out to an empty field. We were told that those doors would allow for future expansion when a new wing would be built and form a courtyard. That new wing exists today.

When Downers Grove South was built, there was no swimming pool or central air conditioning. Those features were both added later, after the Class of 1968 was gone.

Elvis Presley had been dethroned by the Beatles as the top act in rock 'n' roll. They wore their trademark mop-head haircuts, which they acquired when they had played in Hamburg, Germany. They changed our culture, and while many teenage boys wanted to wear Beatle bangs, the Downers Grove South dress code forbade boys from wearing hair that was more than 3 inches long.

The dress code also forbade girls from wearing pants. And the length of miniskirts was also restricted.

From 1965 to 1968, the American involvement in the War in Viet Nam increased, and in 1968, we had over 500,000 troops there. Some of our soldiers had volunteered, but many had been drafted. Those draftees did not choose to join the army, but they were inducted and sent to fight the war. I remember that, on warm days, our Physical Education classes usually involved playing softball or flag football; but sometimes, our P.E. teacher would take us out into the parking lot to practice marching like soldiers. He said that it would train us for Viet Nam. The good news is that, as I have been told, none of the members of the Class of 1968 died in Viet Nam.

In our day, Downers Grove South had one computer for student use. Only one! It was not a laptop computer or a desktop computer, because those had not yet been invented. Our computer was in a big, green box, and it was the size of the refrigerator in your kitchen.

In our science classes, we did not have any pocket calculators, so we used slide rules for multiplication and division. Does anyone today use a slide rule?

Academically, we were above average. Each year, the National Merit Scholarship program uses the standardized test scores and names the top one-half of one percent of the students as National Merit Semifinalists. The Class of 1968 had 360 students, so an average class of that size would have 1.8 National Merit Semifinalists. But we had six National Merit Semifinalists, which is three times as many as an average class of that size would have had.

Elaine Fuchs graduated in the Class of 1968, and she later got her PhD from Princeton University. In 2009, President Barack Obama awarded her the National Medal of Science. In 2014, she was recognized with one of Downers Grove South's Distinguished Alumni Awards.