



**W**e all felt it, either at the time or a few years later, that our tenure at Bergen Catholic was in a special time. We knew we were in a special place. Our Class of 1969 closed out a decade that is rarely mentioned without a moniker. One did not live in “the Sixties” as much as one “experienced” the Sixties.

The continuum of traditions and life at Bergen Catholic carried on much the same as they had in the “Leave it To Beaver Years,” but our final four years morphed into “the Wonder Years” and closed out the “Swinging Sixties,” the “Revolutionary Sixties,” and the “Space Race Sixties.”

Our world was Mustangs, Corvettes, 15-cent hamburgers, and James Bond. We splurged on hamburgers at the Fireplace after the game, making sure you hurried down Oradell Avenue as soon as the game ended before the line edged out the door. The Garden State Plaza was still open-air, and a huge Santa Claus climbed out of a chimney every Christmas season. We had “Kitchen Sinks” at Jahn’s Ice Cream Parlor and ate a “Pig’s Dinner” banana split at Huffs in Montvale.

We survived the Sixties by listening to our rock and roll soundtrack. That first week freshman year, as we drove to school down Forest Avenue from the Pascack Valley, Barry McGuire gave us the update: “The Eastern world, it is explodin’...you may leave here for four days in space, but when you return, it’s the same old place.”

There were scary times like in November of Freshman year when the entire northeast was blacked out after a transmission line failed at Niagara Falls. The summer of 1967 was called the “Summer of Love.” Are you going to San Francisco? The spring and summer of 1968 was frightening. Martin Luther King, just 39-years-old, was assassinated in April and 42-year-old Bobby Kennedy was gunned down on the presidential campaign trail in June.

But there were also exhilarating and magnificent times like Christmas Eve, 1968, when we huddled around television sets fired with vacuum tubes (flat screens did not exist) and listened to the astronauts complete their passage around the moon, humans viewing the Earth from the farthest point imaginable. Reading from Genesis, showing the world a lunar sunrise, with the entire blue-and-frosty-white Earth, set like a diamond against the blackness of space, astronauts Bill Anders intoned “In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth,” and Frank Borman ended “And from the crew of Apollo 8, we close with good night, good luck, a Merry Christmas – and God bless all of you, all of you on the good Earth.” Those were heady times.

We sat in the Tuesday and Thursday study periods listening to the marching band drill all over the parking lot. When they started to play a tune, we all rolled into balls of laughter at the unsynced mishmash of instruments, sounding worse than nails on a blackboard, and imagining them all piled up into a wall like toy soldiers. But by St. Patrick’s Day, they were the opening band in the New York City parade. People forget that we didn’t always have the two sports of soccer and ice hockey. Our class started them. When you played that first game ever of a sport, there was a feeling that you had to represent the tradition of all the Bergen Catholic athletes that went before you. No pressure there.

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While other schools were testing the hair and dress codes, and holding their proms “at a place,” we were still killing ourselves for a week in May to transform our gym for one night into a castle, a tropical island, or any theme that gave us an excuse to have a stream, or a moat with water in the lobby. We didn’t own a ’69 Chevy with a 396, fuelie heads and a Hurst on the floor, but we cleaned and polished our beaters as best we could and picked up our prom date. We were throwbacks but proud to be traditionalists.

On that first Wednesday after Labor Day, 255 wide-eyed freshmen gathered in the cafeteria before being allocated in groups of 35 to the New Wing. Dustin Hoffman in *The Graduate* and Ali MacGraw in *Goodbye Columbus* teased us that there was life after Bergen. *2001: A Space Odyssey* showed us there was a wide-open future where anything was possible. In what seemed all too soon, Archbishop Thomas Boland conferred diplomas on 224 graduates in the school’s gymnasium. That blistering hot May day turned into a torrential downpour immediately after the ceremony, but we didn’t mind getting soaked in our rented white summer tuxedos. While we packed for college that summer, some for the Ivies, some for the Academies and others for schools down the street, we saw our decade close with Woodstock and, finally, Americans walking on the Moon.

As children of the Sixties, we eventually made our mark as: a NFL defensive lineman, attorneys, a Superior Court Justice, DEA and FBI agents, CEO of a Fortune 500 company, doctors, surgeons, a Brigadier General, a Naval Commander, educators, School District Superintendents, accountants, a Partner of a Big Eight accounting firm and published writers. That’s only to name a few of the fields our class of 224 entered.

Two or three times a year, local members of our class meet informally to swap stories, lend advice, but mainly to keep connected. That bond forged at Bergen Catholic is strong and when it seems as if too much time has passed since we last connected, a date is set for the next “BC, Burgers and Beers” night. It seems almost each time we meet, we get a surprise visit from a first-time attendee, who wishes he had been attending like the rest of us have over the past years. We recently celebrated our 50th Reunion during the weekend of September 20-21, 2019, with great participation by class members and their spouses or significant others. Although we weren’t able to share a victory with the football team suffering a loss in the final seconds to St. Peter’s Prep on Saturday of that weekend, we were able to share an emotional moment at the post-game Reunion Mass in the school’s chapel when each attendee received an honorary “Golden Diploma.”

For many years, our class led in the Annual Fund appeal. There were years when we didn’t just lead, we dominated, and it wasn’t because one or two guys made huge contributions, but because a large number of classmates participated. We hope we led by example and encourage future classes to meet and exceed our contributions. Members of the Class of ’69 have been recognized over the years for the commitment they have to Bergen Catholic. Those receiving previous recognition are 2005 Founders Medal recipient Bob Rapport in addition to three Hall of Fame inductees (Inaugural HOF Class of 1990 inductee, Carl Barisich; HOF Class of 2004 inductee, Bill Belluzzi; and HOF Class of 2010 inductee, Terry Bottinelli).

It is hard to imagine that when we started that September day in 1965 as 13- and 14-year-olds, Bergen Catholic was only 10 years old. The tradition we experienced even then felt as though that special place had been around a hundred years. We think that our leadership has trickled down to the young men that have come after us for even today upon entering Bergen Catholic, you can still feel the echoes of our special time there.

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