

SECTION
E

The Bakersfield Californian



Picture from the 1964 Merrimac yearbook.


JOIN US FOR OUR 50TH ANNIVERSARY

South High is celebrating its 50th anniversary Saturday. The celebration is scheduled for 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and includes the homecoming game, a lunch, tents for each decade and performance by the choir and some of the alumni musicians. Tickets are \$35. They will be available at the door or any Vallitix location. For information, call 831-3680. The Web site is southhigh50th.org.

INSIDE

HOME FRAGRANCE:
Celebrities can always smell a trend, **E2**

OPEN ‘HOUSE’: Our eccentric doctor returns — without his underlings, **E2**





REBEL YELL

South High turns 50! Join us as we look back

Graduates remember the good, the bad — and that bizarre Confederate flag. More alumni on E2.



CALIFORNIAN COLUMNIST
Herb Benham
South High
Class of 1972
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I couldn't get away from South fast enough. Aren't most kids like that though? High school students have, if nothing else, a healthy streak of martyrdom. "They didn't know me, they didn't appreciate me and they didn't like me."
These are as much the lyrics to the alma mater as "hail to the old gray and blue."
However, high school looks better when it's bur-nished by time. The things that you drove you nuts about the place now seem like a badge of honor.
For instance, on rainy days the P.E. teachers would hustle everybody into the gym, divide the

class into two sides, roll out a couple dozen volleyballs, close the doors and let the carnage begin. The point was to hurtle the ball as hard as you could at the heads of the opposing team.
Back then, I dreaded it. Who wants Voit tat-tooned across their forehead? Now, looking back, it seems cool in sort of a "cave man, you wouldn't believe how tough my high school was" way.
The racial unrest in 1968 during my fresh-man year was terrifying. Now, it seems as if we were on the cutting edge of the civil rights move-ment.
Even getting beaten up the first day of gym class

feels like a rite of passage.
This is to say that high school should not be judged on the speed of your departure, but what you packed for the journey. Who you became and how much you owe to the people along the way.
South High was many things. It was a surprisingly good school, had a surpris-ingly good staff and sported an always inter-esting student body. What is often said about



Please turn to **BENHAM** / E2

FUN FACTS

- Fourth school in the nation and only one in the district to teach Russian.
- Leader in the district in instructional technology. Recognized by Tom Brokaw on "NBC Nightly News" segment as national leader in this area.
- First Criminal Justice Academy in California. Now used as national model.
- When South High was built, nearby Union Av-enue was Highway 99, the major thoroughfare from L.A. to Fresno.
- It was the height of the Cold War and the walls of the school were built of heavy cement, not stucco.
- It was Grant Jensen's idea to create the bowl stadium from the dirt excavated during the build-ing of the school. It remains the only school bowl in the KHSD.
- South was the last school built with two gyms.
- The average age of the first faculty was 27.
- Poodle skirts were the rage, but spaghetti straps were a no-no.
- Government classes were called Senior Problems.
- Unlike other schools at the time, the school song was an original written by Ken Fahsben-der, the first band director. It wasn't just a parody of known college songs.
- The first time that South beat BHS in football came at a game at the Drillers' stadium. It was their home-coming, and Frank Gifford was being honored.

— Source: Elaine Jamison, former South High principal

JOEL HEINRICHS, CLASS OF 1974
KERN HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT TRUSTEE



Growing up in the South Gate neighborhood just south of the fairgrounds, I guess I always knew we were poor. Hand-me-down clothes, day-old bread and a used bike that occasionally skipped a gear or two tipped me off. But, I had a bike. I had clothes. I wasn't hungry. So I had plenty of carefree, fun days just like any other kid.
As a typical teen, I wanted to fit in. I was worried that I would not — given the lack of cool clothes, etc. But I learned really quickly that, at South High, students and staff did not care much if you had money (most of us didn't). Even the farmers' kids who had money worked long and hot summers to earn it. We were all encouraged to excel — in the classroom and on the field — without any artificial barriers. No one seemed to care where you lived, just how you performed and behaved.
Heck — Harlan Hunter and I didn't know any better — so we were elected senior class and ASB president, respectively — even though we were two of the poorest kids in the school.
Along the way we learned sufficient academic lessons to compete successfully in college and life. But, equally importantly, we learned to value and respect people of character — regardless of color, income or heritage. South High epitomized the American ideal of a free, merit-based public education for me and my family.



INGA BARKS, CLASS OF 1985
LOCAL TALK RADIO HOST



We were allowed to write a senior statement and put it in the yearbook. I took mine from "M*A*S*H." It was Sidney Freedman's advice to Hawkeye, who was cracking up, in the final show:
"Ladies and gentleman, take my advice, pull down your pants and slide on the ice."
It was my way of saying, it's time to stop being serious, cut loose and have a good time. Hal Eggleston, who I think was activities director at the time, told me it encouraged indecent exposure and he wouldn't let me use it.
I went with a Bible verse instead.



MARCUS HICKS, CLASS OF 1986
STAND-UP COMEDIAN



Being an African-American student at a high school whose mascots are representations of the Southern Confederacy was peculiar, to say the least. Slavery ring a bell? Anyone? After that psychologically and socially damaging period of my life, I went on to study black studies at San Francisco State University.
After college, still reeling from the aftershocks of attending South High, I tried everything to make myself better. Therapy, soul-searching, Scientology, Kabbalah, even yoga were all tried to no avail. Until finally a light went on. Literally. I was sitting in the dark. I turned on the lights and it came to me. Comedy.
I am now a stand-up comedian in New York. I've decided to laugh instead of cry. But seriously, are they still using the Confederate-looking flags?



MICHAEL LATHROP, CLASS OF '82
MARINE CORPS LIEUTENANT COLONEL



My association with South High School pre-dates even my attendance there.
For me, South High was more than a school. South High was a large part of my family's life. The foot-ball stadium, the gym and the baseball diamonds were all just an extension of my back-yard. South High became my home away from home as I spent many a school night riding the team bus and becoming forever entrenched with my loyalty to the school and to the people who have left such an indelible influence on me.
There were the Harpers, the Wards, the Seays, the Strauses, the VerHuels, the Sheldons and the Egglestons. There were the Cotes, the Husers, the Clifts, the Rileys, the Rekoshes and then of course there were the Lathrops. There were the summers spent at Avila Beach as families. We were the sons and daughters of these coaches and we grew up in diapers together and eventually formed lasting friendships. We took an interest in each other's lives, attended each other's weddings and, sadly, funerals. Most importantly we strengthened friendships that were founded on the teaching and coaching profession of our fathers. We became the South High fami-ly.
If I had one lasting memory about South High School it is that I met my wife, Michelle, there. She was my high school sweet-heart and after 26 years continues to be the love of my life.

