



Billie Johnson Cox - Class of 1965

“The memories of high school may fade over time, but - like it or not - those years are part of our story, part of who we have become.”

Southeast Memories

I was in Beta and on the Newspaper (Tower) and Yearbook (Crusader) staffs. Other activities I enjoyed included Pep Club and Jousters (Pre Title 9, girls' sports were all intramural. We had sports days for each sport where we would compete against other schools. Always relegated to “girls' gym.”)

Our senior year we nominated Richard Land for state president of Beta. We chose “Land Rush” as our theme with various western acts/skits. One was a square dance on stage. Those participating came to my house where my dad taught us how to dance. Anyway, Richard won; we all had a great time at the convention in St. Louis.

A couple of memorable classes and teachers:

- Mary Margaret Johnson, 10 & 12 English: We all loved her!
- Ms. Mossman, typing and shorthand: Knew her stuff, very proper.

Other memories: acting our scenes from MacBeth in Ms. Johnson's class; cheering with the Pep Club at Friday night football games and basketball games in the new athletic center; the freedom to wander the halls as a member of yearbook staff; senior prom; a decrepit apartment on Main St. rented by some of the senior boys as a place to drink (one of them looked old enough to buy beer, I guess), the hideous swim suits and the humid, super-chlorinated swimming pool.

Current Events '63-'65:

- Hearing Martin Luther King, Jr. speak his “Birmingham jail speech” (not first or only time, I believe) in Kansas City
- The Civil Rights movement - hearing about little girls killed by a bomb in a Birmingham church, watching police shoot fire hoses and sic dogs on peaceful protesters, “I have a dream” speech, and finally the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act
- The beginning of Viet Nam and protests against it
- Seeing the Beatles perform at the ball park
- Kennedy’s assassination. That was especially memorable because I first heard the news as I sat in the newspaper classroom. A friend who worked in the office across the hall came over to tell us that he had been shot. We were all numb. The next period in French, Mr. McMillan’s voice came over the p.a. to tell us that Kennedy had been killed. My teacher, Madame Coulter began crying as we all walked to the front of the classroom where we stood at the windows and watched the flag lowered to half mast. Our tears and grieving had just begun.

Outside of School

My family lived at 7226 Flora, and my sister, Marilyn Johnson Keeshan, also attended Southeast and graduated in 1970.

I was active in my church, a small one located at 51st and Prospect, and went to MYF every Sunday evening (probably more for the boys than the religion).

I worked in retail sales for a while during my senior year, spent time with family, had many slumber parties with friends, and spent many hours each night doing homework.

After Graduation

I attended Baker University in Baldwin City, KS, for four halcyon years. (Ask me about BU memories!) Made life-long friends, including my husband! We married a week after graduation, moved to KC and Raytown, had a son, and then decided to move to Phoenix, AZ, in 1973. There I did secretarial work for a few years before returning to college, AZ State University, where I earned my M.A and PhD in English education.

Taught high school English for over 30 years with a year out in administration before returning to the classroom to help start a new high

school in Mesa, AZ. Served there as dept. chair until retirement. Taught classes at the community college, wrote curriculum for on-line creative writing courses. Volunteered on a Foster Care Review board for 8 years until moving to Flagstaff, AZ, where I will be a 3-day-a-week nanny for my daughter's twin boys.

One Last Story

At our 50th reunion, I tried to recall what I had learned at SE that I had taken with me or used. I'm sure there were many (my education there allowed me to skip many of the required courses at Baker, for instance). It's hard to separate what one learns one place from knowledge and skills learned somewhere else. Finally, I did recall one experience that used skills I only gained at SE: I was teaching at Mesa High when the student body organized a free-throw contest pitting faculty against one another. I was a 5'4" English teacher who had joked about being a "jock" in high school, so someone drafted me for the shoot-out. I think I was the only woman competing against mostly coaches. I won. The coaches never got over it! Thanks to Ms. Gaggens and Ms. Walker!