

Class of 1969 – Class Reflection

From a distance of forty-five years, it's clear we were at Franklin & Marshall during a time of enormous change. Change throughout the world--in Prague, Paris, Rome, Mexico, the Far East--and change in America, at F&M and in ourselves. But despite the accompanying noise and upheaval, for most of us I think it felt like change came so slowly when we were living it.

But look: Civil Rights, the War in Vietnam, assassinations, the challenge to authority and the status quo that defined our governmental and cultural topography. 1965-1969 were years that, to borrow a phrase from a book about the year 1968, "rocked the world." Our generation was at the center of so much transformation. Despite great resistance, it didn't take forever, after all.

Last time I was back on campus, in 2006, the place looked so different from the one I knew. But I could see that the F&M of our day was present there too, the past quite clearly alive within the present. It's bracing to think back. The college we arrived at was just three years beyond the requirement of daily chapel attendance and--according to the Student Handbook we received-- we were expected as incoming freshman to carry on the tradition of wearing beanies and identification badges during our first weeks on campus. Constrained by requirements during our first semesters, we had little flexibility to find or follow our

academic passions. And we were, of course, the last incoming all-male class before the college became coeducational.

No one of us can speak for everyone's F&M experience because we all took our own paths through. Mine included playing freshman baseball on a team where--as I look at the team photo--half of us wore eyeglasses, we had three different styles of hand-me-down uniforms, and I was only one of five guys under 5'6." My F&M years involved playing a giant rooster in the Green Room production of *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy*, and four years of work as a reader for Dr. Robert Russell. They also involved discovering my life's work under the influence of Russell and other gifted English professors, and alongside classmates whose example of self-discovery sustained me.

I came to F&M unformed, unfocused. I remember walking to the south end of campus one misty evening during my first months there, wading through the heavy odor of tobacco from Lancaster's cigar factories, and finding myself beside the glowering statue of our nation's only bachelor president, our own James Buchanan. I felt a clear sense that I knew so little about myself and about the life I wanted that I didn't even know how little I knew. But I'd come to the right place change that. I imagine the same thing is true for most of us from the class of 1969.

--Floyd Skloot