

Name:

John Gurda

Year graduated from MUHS:

1965

Primary interests in school and extracurricular activities:

honors track, debate, forensics, Sodality, cheerleading

Current occupation:

Milwaukee writer and historian

Where did you live while attending MUHS?

Hales Corners

What were your impressions of the neighborhood during the time you attended MUHS? How did your classmates respond to the neighborhood?

The relationship was largely one of ignorance, generally benign. There was a sense that the neighborhood was low-income and a little dingy, but it certainly didn't feel like the stereotypical inner city. One of my classmates, Dennis Murray, lived in Merrill Park, and I don't recall him acting or being treated differently in any way.

What businesses, entertainment venues, parks, or recreational opportunities were in the neighborhood when you attended school? Were there particular “hangouts” for students near school?

A lot of guys hitchhiked home in the 1960s, including me with some regularity. The South Siders lined up on 35th St. and the East and West Siders on Wisconsin Ave., so we were a definite presence in the neighborhood. Humphrey Chevrolet, just west of MUHS, provided convenient shelter in bad weather.

The courts on the Merrill Park playfield were the home of the tennis team, the old MU stadium (now Quad Park) was Marquette's home football field as well as its track venue, and a lot of guys hung out in a little coffee shop (later a Vietnamese restaurant) on the west side of 35th just north of Wisconsin.

Did you feel connected with the community surrounding the school? Did MUHS encourage you to be involved in any way with the community, either formally (Key Club, the Shared Life program), or informally?

The connections were tenuous, again because of that attitude of benign ignorance. In my last couple of years, there was just the beginning of what would be called service learning today. A scholastic named Morfin, if I recall correctly, led the effort. A group of us tutored young kids in what was probably the 53206 ZIP Code (I got my picture in the *Herald Citizen*), but we also prepared Thanksgiving or Christmas basket for families in the immediate area.

Did students have a sense of the attitudes of neighborhood residents toward the school?

I don't think any of us had a clue as to what nearby residents thought of MUHS. We must have seemed like an island of affluence—all those cars in the parking lot, driven by teenagers!

How did MUHS's location on the west side affect your high school experience? Did it matter that you went to school at 35th and Wisconsin instead of, say, in a suburb?

Marquette was a self-contained bubble when I attended. Practically all its energy was directed inward, and the educational experience would have been much the same anywhere in metro Milwaukee. Looking back, however, I genuinely enjoyed going to school at the city's heart, despite the long commute. I developed a pretty thorough knowledge of the transit system, at least south of the Valley. I liked riding through my old neighborhood on the South Side every morning, and when I had sufficient time after school, particularly in fall, I'd take the Route 30 bus through downtown to feel the buzz and see the old buildings there, then take the 14 through Walker's Point, then the 24 down Mitchell Street and Forest Home, and finally the 64 to Hales Corners. Riding the bus (and later driving) to and from MUHS was certainly my first independent experience of neighborhoods I would later spend a significant portion of my career studying.