

Name:

Timothy G. (Tim) McMahon

Year graduated from MUHS:

1983

Primary interests in school and extracurricular activities:

Student Conclave (Gov't), which I served in every year, including as class president twice and as secretary of the conclave my senior year; Webster Club (debate team, 3 years); track and field (sprinter, sophomore-senior years); Senior Follies (writer & performer)

Current occupation (or former occupation if retired):

Historian/Professor

Where did you live while attending MUHS?

Elm Grove, WI

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

The neighborhood was a mixed blessing, as we used it for sports and activities, but we also knew it could be rough. We used Merrill Park (especially the area that formerly held Marquette Stadium) for working out for track; the tennis team used the park as well. During the winter months, when the track was under snow, we ran through the neighborhood, including running to County Stadium and using the exterior as a half-mile "track" on which to run. Those runs helped us get to know the area fairly well. The football teams worked out at Washington Park or Wick Field, which took them a little into the west side. I also ate lunch daily with a boy who lived just south of school; his father was county executive at the time, and the family was a remnant of the Irish ethnic heritage of the neighborhood. My parents had lived in an apartment on 32nd and Wisconsin before I was born, and knowing that the bus stop where I waited for the bus home was in front of that building always struck me as a nice connection. My dad also worked downtown (Plankinton and Wisconsin), so I never remembered not coming into the city. Still, as a suburban kid, the poverty that was evident made an impression, as did the ethnic and racial differences from my home neighborhood. That was a good thing, and I think most of my classmates saw it as good also. That doesn't mean we were always comfortable. Some were genuinely scared by being in an urban area, which was both racially more diverse and poorer than we had known before. The business office at school was also robbed one morning at the start of the school day, which reinforced some of those concerns. At the same time, the Jesuits especially made it a point to teach us to reach out to all, and the school's location made that message somehow more real to us.

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

As I said earlier, during athletic seasons, we would often be in Merrill Park, but aside from practice, not really to hang out. I also wasn't really aware of other hangouts. Most of the guys I knew from the west side (Tosa and Elmbrook areas) road the bus home after school, and we were

just as likely to hang out at Gilles's or one of the east Tosa/Bluemound places as near campus. But there also weren't a lot of places nearby for us to get food. As we got older, we might visit friends at Marquette University, but not so much near the High.

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 most important way for me was through the Senior Shared Life Project, in which I worked at a daycare on 38th and Michigan, just off the north entrance to the old Marquette stadium grounds where I practiced track. Those children were all African-American, from families of limited means, and several were the children of immigrants. Most lived in the area around the park and in what was the old Pigsville neighborhood. It was probably the most direct connection I personally had with the people of the neighborhood.

Did students have a sense of the attitudes of neighborhood residents toward the school? Not that we talked about in my circle of friends: looking back, that was short-sighted on our parts.

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?

It mattered a great deal to me because my family had a history of living and working in Milwaukee, and I was grateful to connect up with that tradition as we moved further outside the city. I had been in Tosa until age 12, and then moved to Elm Grove. I knew people at the latter home who had NEVER been downtown, which struck me as odd because the city was such a part of my life. Riding the bus, trekking to the Milwaukee Public Library or the Memorial Library at MU, and meeting friends from all over the metro area was really important. Two of my best friends were South Siders, and I spent a lot of time getting to know the city, especially once I could drive, just to visit people I knew from school. But you'll note that, aside from the school, there was not a lot that drew all of us to that neighborhood. The teachers, and especially the Jesuits, did try to connect us to the people more, but mostly the boys did their work, participated in their activities, and headed home--at least as I recall those days.