

Name:

Peter Staudenmaier

Year graduated from MUHS:

1984

Primary interests in school and extracurricular activities:

German, English, philosophy; ran track and cross country, was part of Run All Winter; member of a CLC group (Christian Life Community), where I made some of my strongest friendships; volunteer work in the neighborhood and elsewhere; through the archdiocese I worked with a group called Youth for Peace, along with groups like Bread for the World -- Fr. John Eagan at MUHS had a decisive influence on me.

Current occupation (or former occupation if retired):

history professor

Where did you live while attending MUHS?

Wauwatosa

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

The neighborhood seemed gritty and urban to my suburban eyes. Some of my classmates considered it a dangerous part of the city, though I don't remember feeling personally vulnerable. It brought me into contact with parts of Milwaukee I hadn't seen up close. The bus ride to and from school was also an eye opener. All of my siblings went to Pius, and it felt like the location of MUHS definitely set it apart from the world I was familiar with.

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

I wasn't much of a hanger outer during the school day; I don't remember noticing those aspects. When I spent time with friends from MUHS, it was mostly away from school, in the suburbs where we lived.

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?

I think I felt distinctly disconnected from the community surrounding the school. But MUHS did try to encourage more engagement with the community. One of my favorite volunteer activities was helping out at St. Rose grade school a few blocks from MUHS; I loved that work, but it also brought home to me the social gulf between where I grew up and the communities the St. Rose kids came from.

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

I don't know how much of that had to do with accurate perceptions on our part or with prejudices and projections, but there was a sense among some classmates that local residents were hostile

toward MUHS students. It was the early 1980s, Milwaukee was in the throes of deindustrialization and disinvestment, and the near west side faced a lot of challenges. Though I wouldn't have put it in such terms, at the time it seemed to me that this vague sense of threat was related to conspicuous economic disparities, but it was also racially marked, with white students feeling potentially unsafe around black people -- when we'd hear stories about students being robbed nearby, for example, the ostensible perpetrators were represented as black men. But this may tell us more about MUHS student attitudes toward local residents than the other way around.

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 enormously. I grew up in the Washington Highlands, geographically just a few miles away but basically on another planet, especially back then. All of my classmates throughout Catholic grade school were white. My time at Marquette High was a crucial transition between that sheltered upbringing and the world I encountered when I went away to college and beyond. Because of extra-curricular activities, I spent a lot of time in the MUHS neighborhood after school hours, and that was an education in itself. The surrounding community made a deep impression on me; my memories of the neighborhood are as strong as my memories from the classroom.