



November 2021 AHS '63 Newsletter

The Post-Apocalyptic Burnt Orange Edition

Northern Outpost, 52 degrees, blustery wind and rain all over the place, orange and red leaves flying ... what's not to like? Whoa. One second it's Halloween, and next thing you know it's beginning to look a lot like ... more halloween. What's up with that? We should be going full tilt toward Thanksgiving. From the Great Pumpkin to pumpkin pie. It's the natural order of things. But here we are smack dab in the middle of a burnt orange funk. Things have gone so sideways on Saturdays we are not talkin about it ... even when we are. It was supposed to be such a stellar year with the Sark. And we're still not talkin about it. It would be funny if it weren't 2 o'clock in the morning and we want something to write about to raise everybody's spirits, including our own. Actually, the rest of this newsletter is already done, and there are many things in this edition that are inspiring, and funny, and there's even something to be incredibly grateful for—because it turns out that the counseling room that we raised money for and completely redid is a center in the school that holds and does not fly apart. In a lingering pandemic, it is the calm place in a pandemic storm for our maroons who are trying hard to just be normal high school students. We did something really good that counts, every day. And then there's Jimmy Raup and Dick Williamson who wrote in about *two more* dance bands (!) to follow up on the last issue, *and* they sent pictures, which for an editor/musician is really a huge kick. And then Frank Mendez is such an inspiration, a veteran's veteran. He wrote in about the beautiful journey he's

on with his art—his paintings are telling veteran's stories that are meaningful and healing. Amazing stuff. Well. Whaddayaknow. It feels wonderful just telling you all of that ... in fact y'all are the only reason this newsletter exists, and the reason it's worth staying up late to put it together. So. Looks like Thanksgiving is coming after all ... thanks to y'all. Well done out there. Love, Queenie.

An Amazing Veteran and His Art: Letters from Franklin

[Franklin Mendez has started a series of projects for, and about, veterans—and his work is stunning. He uses his art to bring recognition to the stories of veterans. And, when we last heard from him, he had started with the stories and portraits of veterans in the barrio. Here's his update.]

October 16.

Terry, I wanted to bring you up to date on my activities. I've pretty busy all summer and continue to come across meaningful projects. One project I stumbled onto, thanks to my long-time pilot friend Bryan, was the attached portrait of the last surviving U.S. Marine WW II Fighter Pilot Ace.

Col. Dean Caswell flew Corsairs off the Carrier USS Bunker Hill. He became an Ace on April 20, 1945, when he and his squadron shot down 17 out of 25 enemy Zero's. He shot 7 that day and became an Ace.

I just presented the portrait to him on Tuesday. I saw some meaningful additions while visiting him. The two additions were very minor—the Distinguished Flying Cross on the right, and the number of his Corsair was added to personalize the plane in the painting.

Both he and his wife were very pleased with my work. I told him that I would do all I could to get the painting into the National Museum of the Marine Corps in Quantico, VA, and into the Museum of the Pacific War in Fredericksburg.



My barrio veterans project is a long story and perhaps you'll remember the first showing in Austin from my last letter. More recently, the "Help Heal A Veteran" organization in Temple was very gracious to host my Barrio Show at their facility last March during Vietnam Veterans Holiday. The Temple, Texas group has been in existence for 50 years. They provide meaningful projects to veterans who are in recovery in hospitals, and also provide a facility for veterans to heal through doing art and creative work with other veterans. They teach leather work, wood working, writing, and some art.



In addition to the Barrio Show, I also painted three rather large works depicting all the services that were in Vietnam for the Temple project. Left to right, they are Brown Water Navy ("A Brown Water Morning"), Ground Troops ("Last Patrol"), and the Air Force

("Delivering Christmas Dinner"). The director was very happy to have her wall decorated with meaningful art for the veterans to talk about and enjoy. She mentioned that some have even started painting their memories, and others want to write about them. So it did a little good, I think.

Thank you for all you do for the class, I do appreciate all your hard work.

Frank

[Frank, your humility and kindness is part of your story, so I am leaving these closing lines—however, writing a newsletter is small potatoes in this arena. I am happily in awe of what you're doing.T]

October 20.

Terry, I have come to realize that returning from Vietnam in one piece was not a coincidence—I was spared while being ambushed five times in one morning, and was missed by a bad sniper on another occasion. And I was one person away from a group who perished in a plane crash in Hong Kong. Nor was it luck that I was transferred to temporary duty in Danang while my crew was ambushed in Supply Column 21 during Operation Starlite. Many of my platoon perished that day. Luckily, my crew survived to live another day.

I think that what I am doing now was the reason for my safe return. These projects are not something that I plan or think about doing. They just happen, and they have never remotely taken space in my mind before the project comes into focus.

This last one, *The Colonel*, came about by talking to a longtime friend whom I seldom see. On that one occasion, standing in the checkout line in the grocery store, this project materialized. Who would have ever thought I would meet such a hero? Or be the one to document his story!

But more importantly, this Colonel Project, I believe, would not have happened had I not taken care of my Barrio Veterans first. I, along with them, have a story, and it was through that project that many of these veterans were able to tell their story to others. And they

were *thanked* by so many for the sacrifice they made for a country that saw us as second-class citizens. Painting the colonel has been a challenge, and I feel like it has tested me for more to come. What that might be I have no clue. I will be ready and willing when it hits my lap.

It's all a blessing from above that I have had these opportunities. I do it joyfully and without cost to anyone. I have already been paid in full, and I am now returning what has been paid for in advance.

Thank you for all you do for our class and thank you especially for being there for our veterans.

Loyal Forever
frank

[And thank you, especially, for these personal insights on your experiences. It is a privilege that you're sharing your journey with us, and I look forward to more as it unfolds.T]

Battle of the Dance Bands

Really. This is just plain fun some days. Mere hours after the last newsletter hit the ether—wherein we were regaled with picture and story about the O Henry dance band hot shots, from John Bode—here came emails flying in emails with Pearce's dance band and the Bel Aires. What a treat. Read on.

Jim Raup

Fri, Oct 1, 8:31 AM

My first year at Pearce (8th grade), we did not have enough musicians for a marching band. Our band director was Ken Ragsdale, though, who had his own dance band for many years. No hill for a climber, as they say, so that year, he formed a Dance Band at Pearce with us. We had the

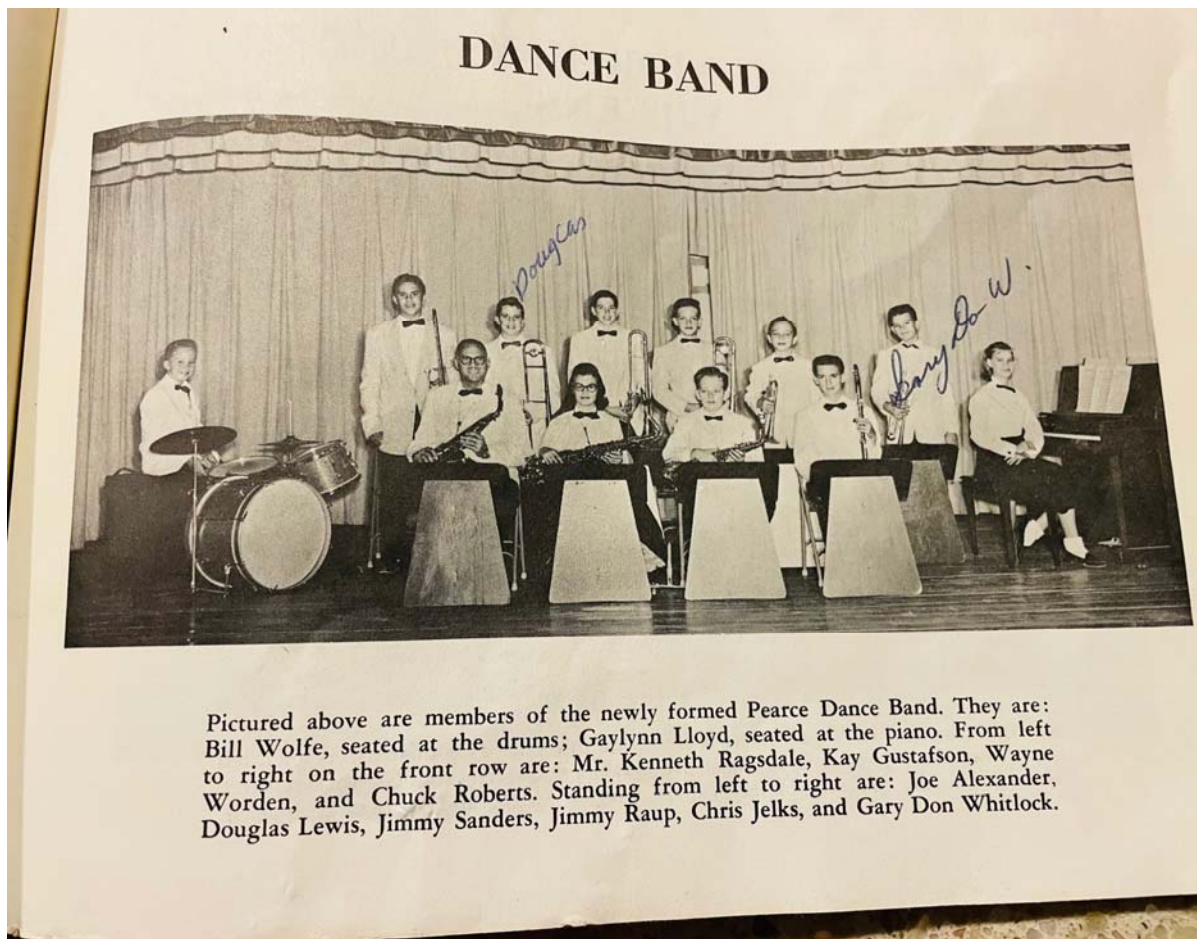
right number of people and the right instruments for a dance band. We played big band stuff like "In the Mood" and "Sentimental Journey." We wore white dinner jackets and all. We were pretty good.

Great fun! I wonder if I have pics?

Fri, Oct 1, 8:47 AM

Dang it! I have a glossy of the full 9th grade marching band but not one of the Dance Band. Surely my parents got one then. What happened to it? Heck if I know. We never threw history away intentionally.

This is from the very mediocre 8th grade yearbook, but it is better than nothing, I guess. I played the trombone, as you see, but Jimmy Sanders was first chair for almost all of our chair competitions.



[Kaylynn Lloyd probably detested the misspelling of her name, but y'all are going to have to magnify the heck out of this thing to read the whole line up. This is just GREAT. Thanks Jimmy!]

Dick Williamson

Fri, Oct 1, 5:25 PM

While you are doing musical groups, here is a picture of the Bel Aires. Al & me in the back, Bill Wolfe on drums, Kenny Gibson on bass, and our guitar teacher on the left. Kenny and Bill were in the class behind us. This picture was taken at Zilker Hillside Theater, and it was one of our first “shows.” We played various nightclubs around Austin, McCallum and Travis High schools, and many fraternities at UT. The group broke up when I went to A&M for a semester before returning to UT. That was the end of my “Rock ‘n Roll” career, but it was fun to watch Al continue his musical passion.



[Is it hot in here? Looks more like Hollywood, geez loueeze. Thanks for the thrill, Dick!]

UPDATE FROM THE COUNSELOR — ROOM 265

Good morning— I hope you are all doing well! We are slowly creeping toward our new normal. I'm doing pretty well. My self-care is mostly outdoor activities—camping, kayaking, hiking—so I've been able to keep it up during the pandemic. I was actually camping with a friend this past weekend. It really resets my central nervous system.

The good news is that youth are resilient. For the most part, our students are present and learning. Our enrollment is up, and we added 3 new counseling positions, so our Guidance Counseling team is now 7 strong, with students assigned by alphabet. This gives each GC a lower case load and more time to get to know their students.

We also have a new principal, Dr. Melvin Bedford. He was an Assistant Principal here several years ago, so was already familiar with our community. Dr. Bedford has a calming presence, and has worked to create a supportive, positive environment for everyone here.

Students and families are exhibiting more anxiety and depression than ever, but we expected that. One of our biggest challenges is that, even though everyone expected it, there are still wait lists for most mental health services in our community.

Thank you all again for our life saving group room. Our campus is under construction, so we are very short on space for a while, but I've been able to keep the group room up and running (so far), and we are able to support more students than ever through our Safe Alliance groups, Con Mi Madre, and APIE mentors. I already have a long list for our Spring grief group.

I don't really have any asks or needs right now, just your continued prayers for our staff, students, and families who are trying to do so much!

Warmly,

Sherri Patton-Grubb, M.Ed., LPC



[We couldn't have known how important this room was going to be—the pandemic was still 2 years to come. Thank you to each one of you who contributed to our 55th Reunion Legacy project to completely redo this room and refurbish it to support student mental health. I asked Sherri what she needed and I will follow up on that—let's keep our project close and see if there are things we can do in continuing to support our young fellow maroons, especially during this time of a continuing pandemic. -Q]



02 JoAnn Morris Matthews (44)

03 Glynda Hodges Pickens (45)

03 Dottie Plummer Blacklock (44)

05 Kay Bartlett Threadgill (45)

10 Brooks Peterson (45)

11 Terry Marlatt (44)

14 Bob Bodoïn (45)

15 Margaret "Margie" Cowan (45)

19 Linda Kreisle Littlefield (45)

20 Joe Dike (44)

21 Steve Hackerman (45)

23 Tom Moore (44)

23 Marianne Mexia Robinette (44)

24 Doris Rhoades Sadler (45)

And just a word about this birthday list—we don't make it up, but we could, and if you don't remember your birthdate just drop us a line and we'll fill in the blanks! It's a new service for seniors who would rather be part of the fun but aren't sure how to do it. You like that? OTHERWISE, hit reply and send us your birthday/year and you'll make the big time right here. Guaranteed.Q.



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You are on this list because you are brilliant & still drink from the fountain of youth known as Loyal Forever - the AHS Class of 63

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