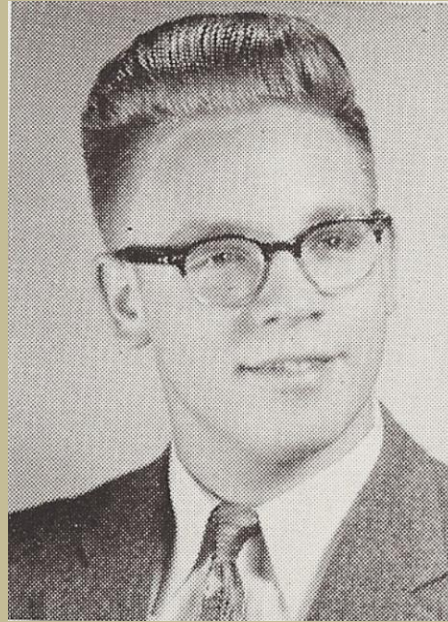


By Jerry Plotkin - 5/25/09



SENIOR NOTABLE, Best Linguists
Marie Renelli and Jerry Plotkin



I enjoyed looking through the 50th web site, the slide show, and the tributes to Tony Portincaso. The photos certainly evoked some nostalgia - among my favorite Leyden teachers were, in no particular order, Mr. Lawicki (biology), Mr. Gill (math) - he and I had the same birthday, and exchanged cards until he passed away in the 1980s, Mr. Gates (English and Egyptology), Mr. Fern (French I) and Mlle Noreen Doran (French II), Mr. Von Ebers (P. E.), Mr. Southworth (physics), Mr. Grosscup (chemistry). I went on to double major in college in

French and biology, and eventually taught both subjects, plus Spanish later.

My major impetus in 1956 to study French was that (1) my high-school buddy Don Powers was taking it and (2) our next-door neighbor in River Grove was French, having married a G.I. during the years following the war. My French work eventually took me through 34 years of high school and college teaching, four summers as an interpreter for the Department of State, and, in the mid-70s, two years in French-speaking West Africa as a Peace Corps volunteer. At college graduation, I had intended to follow up my years of college AFROTC with a commission in the Air Force, but at the last minute was rejected because of my nearsightedness. You can't fly a plane if you can't see the controls without your specs! Peace Corps gave me the chance to serve my country, teaching future English teachers in Cote d'Ivoire. It's funny that the faculty named me "best in foreign language" in the '59 yearbook - very perceptive on their part.

Besides Don, the other people I especially enjoyed hanging around with were Fred Gayda (now deceased) and Joe Kempf (whereabouts unknown). Joe Karlovitz was a great friend until his very unexpected death caused by a diabetic crisis about 1957. Many names from the class of '59 are very familiar, through classes we took together, or just "hanging out". I've made contact over the years with a few people through alumni websites, and, as other generations follow ours, many of my own former students have linked with me through Face book. Remember the days before computers? Such things as commonplace today as DNA were still unfamiliar concepts in 1959, and weren't yet in the biology textbooks.

Our 25th reunion in 1984 was my third date with my wife. A kindergarten teacher, our meeting was sort of a "set-up": my first cousin and her sister were very close friends. My brother, Rich Plotkin, class of 1964, had gotten married in his 20s in 1970, but rolling stones gather no moss, and I was enjoying the traveling life and teaching (high school teachers rarely meet other eligible singles while they're working!). Today, 24 years later, we have two great kids, Natalie (now 21), a pastry chef at the Biltmore Estate here in Asheville, North Carolina, and Zachary (18), who will be a freshman studying biology at Appalachian State University beginning summer

2009. While the kids were growing, we traveled all over the country in our van, pulling our tent camper to KOAs in twenty-some states between San Diego and Key West. In 2000 we spent ten days in Israel visiting many beautiful Holy Land sites, and just last summer, Zee devoted four weeks to being a volunteer near Tel Aviv at an archaeological dig.

After high school, I worked for a couple of summers at Russell's Barbecue on Thatcher. After settling in Geneva in the Fox Valley to teach, I discovered that it was enjoyable to once again be a beginner, making it a point to start a new language every five years or so, going through German, Russian, Spanish, Jula (the African language I used in West Africa) and, for the last five years, Mandarin Chinese. I'm still encouraging my college-bound students to study a "critical language" once they get to college, among them Chinese, Arabic, Farsi and Russian.

After retirement from active teaching in 1998, I answered the call from a couple of French-teacher colleagues who needed a replacement for a year's maternity leave, first at Libertyville High School, then later at Loyola Academy in Wilmette. My wife found in 2001 a little want ad in the Daily Herald that led to four very enjoyable years as a tour guide at the Chicago Botanic Garden in Glencoe. My dad passed away in 1997, and my mom in 1999. When our last grandparent passed on (my wife's mom, who was living with us), we sold our Vernon Hills home in 2006, just as the market was beginning to go belly up, and moved to Asheville, where I've been once again teaching French and working part time at Biltmore's Guest Relations department, one of about 1800 employees here in town.

**I'm sorry we can't be with you at the 50th. We'd love to hear from you and catch up on old times. We're at geraldplotkin@hotmail.com
<http://home.earthlink.net/~riende9>
and on Face book.**

Enjoy the reunion!!

Jerry Plotkin