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Classic Americana: Reenactment of 50-yr Old Prank

By Linda U. Foley



Photo Doug Kohen

Nostalgia and great weather brought several hundred alums and current students together on the Chapel lawn at Saint Mary's on March 25. The guest of honor—a phone booth. The buzz? The 50-year commemoration of the phone booth-stuffing which created national exposure. Free-lancing Bay Area photographer Joe Munroe immortalized the 22 contorted but happy Gaels for LIFE Magazine who later included it in its collection of 100 greatest pictures.

Munroe and his artist wife Virginia—who still live in Orinda—enjoyed the festivities as much as some of the men he had caught on film: director of the Integral Program Ted Tsukahara, the original man in the booth; Ray Motta seen in the middle of the pile; and Ronald and Don Diritos whose faces are clearly visible at the bottom of the booth.

Some others enjoying memory exchanges and fun at hand, were '59, '60 and '61 alums: Denis Kelly, Richard Giambastini, Jim Neylan, Larry Coleman, Lou Meyer, Joe Barry, Francisco Lopes, Cole Buxton and Thomas Uniack. Vice Provost Francis Sweeney and Robert Solari '88 were recalling their experience in the first "co-ed" stuffing-one booth per gender—at the Silver restaging of the famous event in 1984.

Senior Amber Oosman, student body alumni president, had no trouble getting volunteers for this novel stunt particularly since most students probably never had prior hands-on dealings with a phone booth. On the other hand, during mid-terms, this was a great way to let off steam and regroup.

While finding participants was easy, locating a phone booth was another issue; gone the way of manual typewriters, roll-up car windows, vinyl records and black

and white television. However, Lisa Moore '96, Assistant Vice President of Development, came to the rescue by contacting regent Michael Zumbo '82 president of Jaroth Inc., a communications firm, who donated a booth, sent up from L.A.

The booth will have a permanent home with other SMC memorabilia in the Visitors Center when it is completed. Though the booth will not be operable, it will engender memories of other times when breaking Guinness World Book records-like stuffing phone booths and Volkswagens and swallowing goldfish-were innocuous and wholesome pastimes.

Following a barbecue, the event began to accelerate with eager students intent on breaking the 1959 record. The students were divided into teams, Habitat for Humanity-wearing black t-shirts imprinted with the phone booth picture-and the Sculptures, wearing thin, white coveralls.

Following an introduction by president, Brother Ron Gallagher, the challenge began. Though short on technique, the adrenaline was not. Overcome by the excitement of it all, people crowded around the booth with vocal support and a helpful push here and there. Most others could only guess what might be happening in the human vortex and simply enjoyed a whiff of another time-more innocent and perhaps simpler-where phone calls were made in a booth or on a rotary phone. In the end, no records were broken or set but the smiles and linkage through time were enough.



Joe and Virginia Munroe Photo Doug Kohen



Photo Doug Kohen

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