

Distinguished grad holds fond memories of WCHS

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DES MOINES — Even before Wahlert officially opened in 1959, I used to take every opportunity to just drive by and gaze at the bright modern edifice. This new structure seemed to embody everything one could dream about in post-World War II America. The building seemed to say there were no limits about what you could accomplish.



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I still recall the excitement when we first walked through the doors for a preview of what was now our school. Everything was so new. As a basketball player, my first fascination was the gym. It was stunning, and with a new coach, Ed Colbert, it would be the scene of a string of wins, taking us to an almost unheard of 14-4 season (ranked third in the state), and then a heartbreaking 57-55 overtime loss to Senior in the first round of the sectional tournament.

But, the science labs were also spectacular. They were so far beyond anything we had at Loras Academy that as a senior I ended up taking both chemistry and biology.

We started new traditions: CAYFEST replaced homecoming (since we had no alumni); a new school fight song ("Golden Eagles Flying on High"); new school colors ("blue, white, and gold, mighty and bold"); a new student newspaper (The Harvest) with the "Hi Gang" gossip column; new letter jackets; and much more.

We did have some old things. The Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC)

program was brought over from Loras Academy, and boys still had to wear their Army uniforms three days a week.

And the school had a firing range and a rifle team. I still recall the thrill of the Military Ball in the cafeteria, the Grand March in the gym and the announcement of who would be named Cadet Colonel of our Battle Group.

Wahlert changed me. It made me realize I could aspire to a diplomatic career that would take me around the world. It implanted in me a moral code that would compel me to risk my life to try to save a wounded Vietnamese soldier during the war. It taught me lessons that have stayed with me throughout my life.

A few months ago, I gave a speech in Des Moines about integrity, saying that one of the most memorable acts of integrity I could recall was Wahlert physics teacher Bob O'Connell, the official scorer at the scorer's table, calling (correctly) John "Fingers" Delaney's incredible mid-court last-second shot (which would have sent that game against Senior into double overtime) "no good" because "Fingers" had released it a split second too late. It broke everyone's heart, but it was the right thing to do. Even 50 years later, "Prof O'Connell's" example remains with me.

I loved my time at Wahlert and used to feel badly that I had only one year there. But in retrospect, I am glad it was that way. Those of us in the Class of 1960, perhaps more than anyone else, can best appreciate just what Wahlert meant, what it gave its students and how it would change Catholic education in Dubuque forever.

Editor's note: Ambassador Quinn was named to the school's Hall of Honor as a distinguished alumni in 1998.