

Another “Howard”

By early August I was beginning to accept the thought of school starting again, and even thinking it wasn't such a bad idea. Fall meant some new stylish clothes. This year was especially exciting because I was starting high school. Dating and driving were just around the corner.

Everyone wanted to look their best for the photo ID card and wore a new outfit, one that would show off a summer tan while at the same time looking “sophisticated.” After all, we were freshmen now.

The school cafeteria was transformed into a maze of tables manned by coaches, office staff, the cheerleaders (all six of them), and class officers. Winding through the lines at each table, picking up a schedule at one, school club information at another, and simultaneously, checking out any new faces, trying not to look too obvious...or lost. The usual “hi” to those you hadn't seen all summer as if you really missed them.

Finally, schedules in hand, we huddled together to compare schedules to see which teacher everyone had for English, which class period, then for Math and so on. It seemed that I never got in the same class period as everyone else. Of course that one would become the “cool class.” Oh, to be in that class was the envy of everyone else. My only concession it seemed was that I got my first choice for electives.

Finally, making it to the last checkpoint, I handed off my last form to Mrs. Damron, the school secretary. She took one look at it and muttered, “Oh no, another Howard.” It was quite possible that one or more of my three older siblings had walked those halls and had been less than inspiring to this woman. I was in a freshman stupor, or maybe it was a stupid freshman, but I didn't quite grasp the weight of her despair.

On the first day of school the first bell signaled time to head to the first class listed on the schedule. Unfortunately, clocks in a high school are different than anywhere else. Five minutes is not ample time to get to a locker, throw books in, pull books out, and head to the farthest hall while blocking misguided masses going the opposite direction. Besides that, the clock hand moves minute-by-minute until four minutes have passed, then jerks to the fifth minute, shorting us a full minute I'm sure.

Finally, entering the classroom, taking a quick glance, without anyone noticing the desperation to find some friends, and slide into the nearest seat. However, since mine were all in the cool class, I searched to find another unlucky soul I knew, hopefully at the back of the room and grabbed a seat.

Then came roll call. At least I didn't have a weird name or the kind no one was sure if it was a boy or a girl's name until someone answered “present.” It was certainly an opportunity to find out someone's real name. Then the ribbing, a laugh or two, which continued as the teacher mispronounced a name. Thankfully, I didn't fall into any of those categories. I didn't stand out too much at least I didn't think so.

As each teacher got to my name she would ask, “Are you kin to Ricky Howard?” I smiled thinking, *Oh, the teacher already feels a connection to me.* Then rather abruptly the teacher would order me to take a seat on the front row.

It took more than one roll call on that first day of school for me to finally catch on as to which of my older siblings was responsible for my newly acquired reputation. I was a freshman with four years to go until graduation.

I am positive that I never lived up to their expectations because even if I had tried... there's not much opportunity for mischief on the front row!

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