

Henry Amoroso

Class of 1962

What are your fondest memories as a student of AWHs?

I came from a working class neighborhood in Quincy, described by many as modest. None of my friends in junior high school aspired to be scholars. We were the sons of wage earners who got through the day ducking debt. When it came to religion we attended Mass on Sundays and on holy days of obligation. During the 8th grade, I applied to and was accepted at AWHs. I wanted to go there because they had a great football team. I got off to a fast start, making the varsity and captaining the ninth grade team. I was also elected class president, and did well in my classes. One day after practice, the assistant coach told my dad that I was going to be the next star. Socially, I was friendly and unassuming, everyone's pal. Although I was in the top fourth of my class, I could not parse a sentence or translate Latin. My teachers called me "determined." Three memories stand out. I remember debating controversial topics in a history/religion class. I challenged the Jonah story one afternoon, scoring points until my fury reddened my face. At that point, I was asked to sit down. That was a good reminder to use facts and reason, not tavern-style shouting in debate. On another occasion, one of my favorite teachers allowed me to write a term paper on a very controversial topic in the 1960's: Darwinism. With a twinkle in her eye, she approved my thesis, reminding me to analyze both sides of the issue. Unknown to me, this wonderful teacher was modeling humanistic inquiry that has defined my university teaching for the past 35 years. Finally, I owe much to AWHs for the moral compass it gave me. Discussions about the Sermon on the Mount with its call for meekness and social justice led to professional commitments, and have helped me fight leukemia over the past year. I recall I dressed in black and pink, and never wore a hat when it rained. I rolled up my sleeves, wore my belt buckle on the side, had snap jack shoes, and bought Elvis records. I went alone to the Friday night dances at the Armory, hung out downtown on Saturdays, and took the train to Boston to attend Celtics and Bruins games.

Have you stayed close to the friends you made at AWHs? I moved away from friends and family in 1962 to attend St. Michael's College in Vermont (B.A. in English, 1966), Goucher College in Baltimore (M.Ed. 1967), Vista Volunteer work in the Caribbean, and the University of Wisconsin, Madison (Ph.D. in literacy and psycholinguistics, 1978). My first professorship was at Vanderbilt University in Nashville and a second professorship is at the University of Southern Maine. Even at a distance, I managed to stay close to several friends. During my recent bout with cancer, at least 20 alumni/ae have been in regular contact with me. Why? We truly love and respect each other.

Career I've developed and taught more than 50 courses across diverse subjects in literacy, diagnostics, poverty, technology, and the philosophy of education. I have three manuscripts ready for publication and have scores of peer-reviewed articles, op-ed pieces, text reviews, national and international conference presentations, more than 20 funded research grants, and numerous citations. Among my service accomplishments are consultantships to scores of school systems in the USA and Canada; accreditation work for the New England Association of Schools and Colleges; past president, State Board of Directors, Literacy Volunteers of Maine; Presidential search committee; originator of three trips to Cuba for students and policy makers; Faculty Senate chair, Director, Core Council; Chair, steering committee for the review of the core curriculum; AFUM State grievance officer; chairperson of numerous committees in literacy and higher education.

Family I am married to Marilyn Gordon Amoroso, who is the former president of Toastmasters, Portland, Maine. She has held temp positions at the University of Southern Maine for several years and is currently an administrative assistant at University of New England. She is also a Justice of the Peace, who marries many people. We have five wonderful children: Perry, Justin, Tim, Anna Maria and Josh.