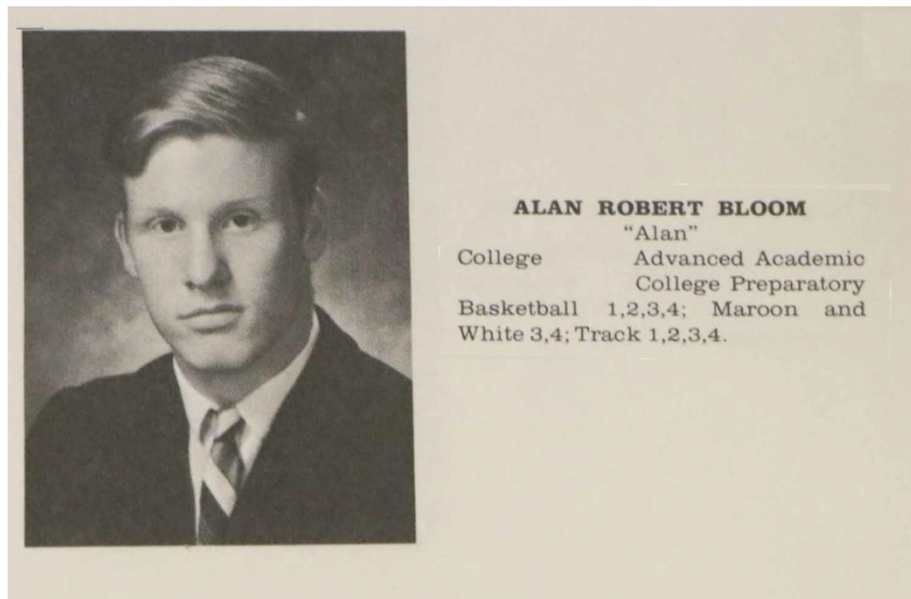




Bloom rides bike 3,000 miles to GHS reunion

By Michael Cooper-White For the Gettysburg Times - Aug 20, 2018 Updated Aug 20, 2018



This is Alan Bloom's photo in the 1968 yearbook.

Submitted Photo

Nearly 100 members of the Gettysburg High School Class of 1968 gathered over the weekend to reminisce and share life stories. As is true of classes everywhere, some have remained in the local area while the majority pursued careers that took them all over the country and around the world.

The reunion-bound trips that converged at General Picket's Buffet Friday evening ranged from a few blocks to thousands of miles. But only one class member spent three months and three days on a 3,000-mile bicycle ride from Santa Rosa, California, to his hometown of Gettysburg for the reunion.

Growing up in Gettysburg during the 1960s, when his father chaired Gettysburg College's history department and his mother was a reporter for the *Gettysburg Times*, Alan Bloom says he "was not a social butterfly." Rather, Bloom quipped of his teenage years in the local high school, "I was a geek before it was popular."



At 6 foot, 7 inches, the lanky Bloom played on the championship Gettysburg High basketball team. As a teenager he also became interested in radio broadcasting and was inspired by local photographer Walt Lane, who also headed fledgling broadcast efforts in the community.

Now retired from an electrical engineering career, Bloom continues to pursue his radio interests as a volunteer with northern California's KBBF, which was the nation's first bilingual station broadcasting in both Spanish and English.

Bloom's bicycling companion for a good portion of the journey, semi-retired architect Val Fulsebakke of Steven City, Utah, met him a year ago on another of his many cycle touring rides.

"We just had a ton of fun," said Fulsebakke, prompting her desire to accompany him this year on many legs of the eastward pilgrimage on highways and bicycle trails.

While always a bicyclist, Bloom began what he describes as "touring" (a trip of 30 days or longer) in 1996 when he made his first ride from California to Pennsylvania. While his daily goal two decades ago was 75 miles, his most recent touring pace was an average of 50 miles per day. On one occasion, however, he rode 84 miles on a day that began at 6 a.m. and ended 13 hours later.

Arriving at General Pickett's on the custom-made German 14-speed Rohloff bicycle, Bloom was careful to secure it with a reliable chain and lock.

"This bike costs \$6,500," he said, pointing to its over-sized frame that accommodates his stature. It also includes such advanced features such as a wheel-driven generator that powers a GPS navigation system.

Bloom travels light on the road, carrying a tent and sleeping bag that constitute his overnight lodging on many occasions. But, he and Fulsebakke both commented, at the end of many of their arduous days on the road they were extended hospitality by total strangers.

At a Kansas post office late one afternoon, they were directed to the local firehouse where the chief said without fanfare, "How about if you stay at our house?"

"They gave us dinner, fed us breakfast and accompanied us to the local bike shop to get some repairs," explained the two bikers.

Along the trip, they also availed themselves of the growing number of free bicycle hostels being developed in many communities. A website Warmshowers.org directs cyclists to overnight hospitality typically offered by individuals who are themselves dedicated to touring.

Upon greeting their classmate at Friday's reunion, some of Bloom's fellow graduates commented on his lack of suntan after three months on the road. He said "sun sleeves" and "sun legs" filter out damaging sun rays but allow breezes and airflow to keep the rider relatively cool.

Concluding their reflections on lessons learned during the cross-country bicycle journey during a time when many wonder about the state of our nation, Bloom and Fulsebakke mused, "When you connect with small town America you meet good people."

But the cautioned, "Be careful not to talk about politics or religion!"

While not as dramatic as the story of a 3,000-mile reunion-bound bike ride, the life journeys of others encountered at the '68ers reunion were no less inspiring. Among the 230 or so who graduated from GHS in 1968 were local entrepreneurs, service personnel, doctors, attorneys, educators and many retired from a host of other professions.

One who remained in the local community is Marcia Hawk who headed the committee of over a dozen classmates in organizing the 50th reunion. Hawk spent the later years of her nursing career as manager of the cardiovascular unit at the Gettysburg Hospital.

Despite Hawk's and her fellow organizers' exhaustive efforts to learn every class member's whereabouts, 18 graduates could not be contacted. And as the class gathered to remember their high school days together, they paused to pay tribute to 35 of their members known to have died.

“Some were lost in Viet Nam, and others to disease or accidents,” they lamented.

Helen Longanecker, now retired in Boulder, Colorado, found her high school days particularly challenging inasmuch as her dad was an English teacher at GHS.

“I had to be on my better behavior,” she recalled, knowing any mischief on her part would quickly come to the attention of her faculty member father.

Greg Geesey, brother of Gettysburg and Adams YWCA Executive Director Deb Geesey, spent his career flying F4 fighter jets in the U.S. Air Force. When asked about his favorite high school memories, he gazed fondly across the table at Jackie White, owner of Gettysburg’s Dobbin House restaurant, and said, “I remember our first date.”

Bill Shoemaker concluded a long career in education, including local leadership as principal in Littlestown and superintendent at Bermudian.

“People who knew me in high school would not have expected me to become a school administrator,” said Shoemaker, noting his teenage shyness and reticence to lead others.

One of the more unusual careers was that of David Geyer, who described himself as a “mimic” or professional pantomime artist, who performed all over the world. Suggesting such a career would be difficult to pursue these days, Geyer said, “Now the world has gotten very serious and the arts have changed.”

Asked about their treasured memories from their senior year in 1968, most class members pointed to Gettysburg High’s outstanding athletic teams in virtually all sports.

Summing up the planning committee’s vision for their class reunion, Hawk declared, “It’s a wonderful opportunity to reconnect. We’ve already heard so many great stories about the fascinating things people have done — and all this from a little town like Gettysburg.”

Asked if he would be returning on two wheels to California, Bloom smiled and replied that he's headed home on an airliner.

"I may be crazy, but I'm not stupid," he quipped.

While not sure they'll be up to future trips on such a grand scale, Bloom and Fulsebakke already are contemplating a ride through parts of France.