

# Tragedy teaches compassion early



DECATUR COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL QUARTET, (above) singing at the 1968 Prom, include, from left: Tom Phillips, Donna Kump, Evan Jorn and Cheryl Corcoran. Randy Fisher is playing the drums.

By **MARYLOU OLSON**  
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In his memories of the Class of 1969, Evan Jorn wrote, "Mrs. Ready, our fourth grade teacher, reflecting on the class not too long ago, said she thought that the presence of Jimmy Machart in our class taught us compassion from an early age and helped make us a better group.

"Jimmy walked when we started kindergarten, soon needed crutches and before long used a wheelchair. He had Muscular Dystrophy, and

we came to know that his life would probably be shortened by that condition.

We learned that illness and disability don't have to define a person, and while we carried his books, opened the doors, and pushed his wheelchair, we knew instinctively that he was not different than the rest of us in any essential way.

"Jimmy did die before graduation, but he wasn't the first to go. In a still-unbelievably tragic accident at the Oberlin Speedway, our

classmate, Mark Johnson, met his demise years before Jimmy.

The names of the honorary pallbearers on Mark's funeral program show how young we all were; two of the names are "Tommy" and "Donnie." If we learned nothing else at that young age from this tragedy, we learned that life is most assuredly not fair.

"We had a good group of athletes, musicians, scholars, public speakers, debaters, actors and entertainers. We had a lot of fun together in these

extracurricular activities, as well as in school.

"One of the great things about school in Oberlin for us was that participation in activities was wide open to all.

You could play in the marching band and be on the football team. You could wrestle and play in the pep band. You could be in the musical and on the debate team. If you wanted to participate, you could. For me, our school was exactly the right size, and the more I reflect on it, the more I know that's so.

"One of our main free time activities was driving up and down main street, out to the lake, then back again, honking at friends we'd meet. I even added some truck horns to my 1959 Ford car so I could have a distinctive and extremely loud tone that ensured I would be heard. An unintended consequence of this was that my parents could sit on the front porch of our house on N. York Avenue and know where I was by listening for my horn!

"Most of all, I remember a very diversified class, yet classes ahead of us and behind us would say that we, as a whole, were a kind and, for the most part, (ha) well behaved. We were a responsible and respectful group of students, but normal teenagers."

Another member of the class, Donna (Kump) Tucker, said, "I have had so many extraordinary opportunities throughout my career. My life journey has taken me around the world as a musician/singer; television and film, but not once has the small town person ever left me. Many times in interviews, I am asked how I keep my balance as a performer as well as a mother and wife. 'Growing up in a small Kansas town and being held accountable for my actions,' is my reply.

"I would not change one moment of growing up in Oberlin. I am who I am because of that community. Thank you, OBERLIN!"

Valedictorian of the class was Marilyn Cochran and salutatorian was Tom Phillips. Class officers included: Dennis Waldo, president; Evan Jorn, vice president; Lyle Crawford, secretary; and Ron Hunziker, treasurer.

The class motto, "Some men see things as they are and say, 'Why?'" We dream things that never were and say, 'Why not?'"

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