

OCEANSIDE HIGH SCHOOL'S CLASS OF 1960
55-YEAR REUNION, SEPTEMBER 26, 2015
LONG BEACH HOTEL, LONG BEACH, NEW YORK
WELCOMING ADDRESS BY HOWIE LEVY



Welcome, Sailors and guests, to our 55-year class reunion here in Long Beach — “by the beautiful sea” — and the most magnificently reconstructed boardwalk.

Before I begin, I want to thank my beautiful and loving wife, Susan, for all her help with this reunion and all the others we worked on together before. At the beginning of this month, Susan and I had our 52nd wedding anniversary. Notice that I didn't say “we celebrated” — but we did share a fantastic steak at the Palm restaurant!

This is my sixth consecutive time — beginning over 35 years ago — addressing a gathering of our classmates for a joyous reunion. Each of the first four times, I “waxed nostalgic” (when did you last hear that expression?) about the days that have come to be known as the “fabulous fifties” or the “happy days” — the days of our adolescence. I spoke of coming of age, of high school, of our little town and the growth of suburbia, of how little things cost then; I spoke of cool cars, rock 'n' roll music — and of how we danced and danced and danced through the decade. I spoke of our youthful optimism and the idealism, exuberance and style that were typical of those times. And I pondered out loud repeatedly, “*Oh, how different it was!*”

In 1990, I spoke of how the years right after high school changed everything, not only in our own lives, personally, as young adults, but more broadly, in so many areas such as civil rights, anti-war protests and other campus unrest, feminism, moral values, environmentalism, space exploration, assassinations, hippies, recreational drugs and psychedelic music, Motown, Bob Dylan and the Beatles.

Although briefly mentioned in my earlier speeches, last time, I changed direction a little for our 50-year, “Grand Gala” reunion five years ago and focused almost entirely on the value of old friendships — a subject so very dear to my heart, as many of you know.

Well, I'm **not** going to mention any of these things tonight.

So I thought to myself, “*How might I change direction again, and do something different this time?*” I struggled with this question for a while and went on the internet looking for ideas. There, I found several reunion speeches, including some of my own. But I was disappointed; none of the others, I thought, were as good as mine. Then finally, a friend gave me an idea. So here goes.

[DJ plays the opening of the Big Bopper's “Chantilly Lace” through the first “Hello, Baby!”]

Several times, I have had the extreme pleasure of attending a musical tribute show in which someone portraying the Big Bopper introduces that song by holding up a prop and saying, “For you young people in the audience, **this** is a telephone.”

Yes, in the 70+ years that we have been on this planet together, we have witnessed the most rapid and remarkable technological change of any generation in human history.

How many of us remember what it was like to prepare a meal in our mother's kitchen? How about driving a car of the past? Do you remember your family's first television, the first 45 rpm records (and the last), taking instant photos with those "ginormous" Polaroid cameras?

The rate of technological advances we saw was indeed incredible when we were young (when, in only 20 years, we went from watching Uncle Miltie and "I Love Lucy" on a tiny screen, black and white TV to watching — live and "in living color" — as men walked on the moon). But it pales in comparison to what we have seen since — and what we are seeing now.

Look how our lives have changed and how dependent we have all become on modern technology. How many of you have wondered to yourself, "How did I ever get along without a cell phone, a computer or a tablet, without instant access to endless information on the internet?"

Today, we have all kinds of amazing technology that makes our lives easier, more productive and more fulfilling. For example, we have smart phones that take "selfies" and can do almost anything we want them to do — except shave. And as they say, "*We ain't seen nothin' yet!*" We are looking at cars that will park themselves — or will even drive themselves, robots that fill merchandise orders and little flying drones that will deliver the packages — really fast — to our doors.

I remember when my grandmother, then only in her 60s, would add to any reference to a future event, the words, "... *if I live.*" That leads me to the rate of advances we are now seeing in the fields of genetic engineering and medical technology, some of which may, in fact, extend our own lives — even though we are already in our 70s. I am talking not only of curing or preventing diseases, but of replacing damaged or worn out organs or lost limbs with something called 3D printing, growing new tissues from stem cells, and even cloning human beings.

So even though, as we celebrate our 55 years out of high school, we are spending the evening laughing, dancing and reminiscing — "*reunionating*" — with dear old friends about the "happy days" — and rightfully so — we need not **only** look back. There is much to appreciate about what we have now — and much to look forward to as well.

Before dinner is served, please take a look at the special memorial *Spindrift* that's been distributed while we observe a moment of silence for those of us who have passed on and, therefore, are no longer able to attend our reunions. Note that two names are now missing from the memorial *Spindrift*, whose passings we only first learned of after the print deadline — the popular Bob Schwartz and Bette-Jane Tobolson.

[*Moment of silence*]

Rock on, Sailors!