



MIAMI KILLIAN SENIOR HIGH

50TH REUNION, CLASS OF 1975

NEWSLETTER #12 - MAY 20, 2025 - FINAL ISSUE

ONLY TEN DAYS LEFT TO GET REUNION TICKETS!

Will You Be Left Behind?



In only 23 days, at least 203 people are coming to our 50-Year Reunion, with last-minute decisions expected to lure more than 225 of us. ***There never will be another gathering of our class as big and grand as this one: it's truly "once-in-a-lifetime."*** Climb aboard our time machine and be transported back to the heady days of high school! **LIGHT OLD FLAMES.** Meet old friends and make new ones. **Tickets must be purchased by May 30th. Tickets will NOT be available at the door.**

***** LAST CHANCE! *****

Our 50-Year Reunion "sets sail" on **June 12-14, 2025** at **Miami Marriott Dadeland Hotel**. The list of attendees is [here](#). For hotel and ticket info, click [here](#). Our Q & A is [here](#). For our reunion program, see page 6. To place an ad or message in our digital Memory Book, click [here](#).

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ATTEND OUR FINAL REUNION BOARD MEETING!

Classmates are welcome at Reunion Board meetings! ***Our last meeting is scheduled two days from now: Thursday, May 22nd at 7:30 p.m.*** Feel free to drop in and share your ideas, suggestions, criticism or complaints—or simply just listen in. Email us ahead of time at: KillianClassof75@gmail.com for a Zoom ID and password, along with our agenda, so you can dial in with the rest of us.



zoom

Cougater 50th Reunion QuickStats:

Total Cougars in Class of 1975 database:	1,377
Total Cougars with '74 or '75 yearbook photo:	1,192
Total Cougars with mailing address:	749
Total Cougars with phone number:	603
Total Cougars with email address:	599
Total Cougars no longer with us:	176
Total Cougars adding Memory Book biography:	242
Total attending Reunion (so far):	203
Total room nights booked at Marriott Dadeland:	246
Total ordering Beef Saturday night:	75
Total ordering Sea Bass Saturday night:	61
Total ordering chicken Saturday night:	48
Total ordering vegetarian Saturday night:	8
Total without food choice Saturday night:	11
Total Funds Collected for Reunion (so far):	\$53,366

Join our private Facebook group (now 268 classmates strong) at:
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/killianclassof75>

MESSAGE FROM OUR HONORARY CHAIR

Where Did April Go?



Carol Carver Harris

How quickly May has come, and now our reunion is almost here. It's crazy to think we're about to celebrate a big milestone – 50 years since we graduated from high-school! How did we get to 2025 already? It brings to mind the age-old saying, "time flies" and "time waits for no one." It feels as though every day when I wake up (for which I am grateful), another month has passed.

By now, if our reunion dates don't conflict with another big event in your life, you have likely contacted a close friend from high school, or checked the [attendance list](#) on the ReunionDB website. If you have not bought your ticket yet, you may still be considering it. There will never be a reunion like this one, and we're not getting any younger, that's for sure. Yet some of us may still have doubts.

You may ask, *'What's the point? It's easier to stay home and keep up with my friends on Facebook. Why spend more time and money?'* To which I must ask, is social media an acceptable alternative to attending a key life event? If you only went to one reunion in your life, wouldn't you attend the one that is traditionally the biggest and best of all?

Some of us may have considered high school as a place we were forced to attend, dictated to us by parental authority. I can understand the conflict, but the person who emerged from high school without any friends is rare. It's amazing how much we forget, and how memories are triggered and reawakened when we return to the scene of the crime and visit the people we were imprisoned with!

Others may question the value of revisiting the past. One of the benefits of being face-to-face with folks who knew us 50 years ago is that it exposes how much we have grown, changed and stayed the same since high school. There are few events in life which can give us such insight for personal growth, and yet prove to be so pleasurable at the same time.

You will be among classmates who resemble you – middle-aged, tall, short, thin and that other word we won't discuss. Some of us will be fighting cancer or other ailments. It humbles me to acknowledge the 176 names and faces on our [Memoriam list](#), serving as a reminder that life is fragile. We all share similarities; no one is popular anymore, no one is cool - we are just Cougars. Age is the great equalizer. We will all be busy just squinting at name tags. Where did 50 years go?

Therefore, dear classmates, there is no more time to delay—sign up and secure your tickets before it's too late. This reunion promises to be a noteworthy event, one for the history books.

Carol



MESSAGE FROM YOUR REUNION CHAIR

Now It's Up To You



Doug Traub

When I signed up for this gig, I never expected it would consume my life for 18 months. In all fairness, Carol Harris warned me. She told me how hard it would be, how many hours it would take, and how exhausted I would be IF I made it to the end. I retired 2017. I was ready... until Hurricane Helene flooded our home and turned our world inside out. We are still putting our lives back together, but thanks to the hard work and dedication of our Reunion Board—and a wife who tolerated “reunion widowhood” better than I would if our roles were reversed—we’ve almost made it to the finish line.

And what a Reunion it is going to be! I worked with convention and meeting planners for more than 20 years as a President/CEO of tourism agencies in five states. I promise you, this will be one of the TOP TEN best 50-Year High School Reunions in the country. Every detail has been debated and addressed by our team with precision and heart. I have been bowled over by all their love. If you add it up (like I have), we have surpassed more than 7,000 man hours over 18 months. We could have paid \$150,000 for meeting planning services and still fallen short of what we’ve accomplished.

We searched to find contact information for what eventually amounted to more than 1,100 classmates. God bless our devoted Cougateers! We held an election with 200 classmates to decide where and when to hold our event. We used Facebook to identify ideas and conduct polls to develop popular themes and field trips. We researched our most talented musicians and they came together to create an official reunion song/video and fill every evening of our reunion with wonderful tunes. And how about this newsletter? Twelve issues in 15 months! Each issue kept getting better and better.

When you think about what our Reunion Board put into building a classmate database, finding the best hotel, the best menu items, the best ways to honor lost classmates, the best way to warm up our old memory banks with ice breakers, the best way to get the word out to everyone, the best digital Memory Book to share our reunion with even those classmates who won’t be able to attend, all the phone calls... you won’t find a better Reunion out there. Reunions like ours usually have a major sponsor or classmate with deep pockets to make it happen. We did it all with sweat equity and love.

Your Reunion Board has done everything possible to make this event classy, delicious and fun, and at a price much less than a good seat at most two-hour concerts these days. Groundwork has been laid for the biggest and best reunion in the history of Miami Killian Senior High. But even with this foundation, we can’t do it all. It still remains up to you to make this event more than just a dinner with a few old friends. The Reunion can recharge your social life as we enter our retirement years. It can fill your soul with enough love to power the lights in Miami for years. *Now it's up to you.*

Doug

MIAMI. SEE IT LIKE A NATIVE

by Michael Bell



Michael Bell
Miami Ambassador
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If Killian's 50th Reunion beckons you back to Miami—even for a brief spell—consider adding a day or two for a trip down memory lane or to marvel at all the new glitter. As a native who proudly calls the Magic City home, I am delighted to serve on the Reunion Board as Ambassador for my hometown. I am at your disposal to help plan your visit, including recommendations for restaurants and tourist attractions, navigating Miami International Airport and public transportation, and anything to make your visit a pleasant one. Consider me your personal concierge! Here are my go-to resources for whenever I entertain out-of-town visitors:

- *Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau's* website: <https://www.miamiandbeaches.com>
- Recommended Reading:
 - [*Bubble in the Sun*](#), by Christopher Knowlton “examines the grand artistic and entrepreneurial visions behind Coral Gables, Boca Raton, Miami Beach, and other storied sites, as well as the darker side of the frenzy.”
 - [*Miami Babylon*](#), by Gerald Posner “is a gritty, behind the scenes exposé of one of America's most unusual cities.”

Outdoors:

- [Everglades Alligator Farm](#) (Florida City)
- [Everglades National Park](#) (Two Locations)
- [Fairchild Tropical Gardens](#) (Old Cutler)
- Kayaking
 - [Deering Estate](#) (Old Cutler)
 - [Oleta River](#) (North Miami Beach)

Uniquely Miami:

- [Baseball Game/Marlin's Park](#) (Little Havana)
- [Bayside Marketplace](#) (Downtown)
- [Calle Ocho](#) (Little Havana)
- [Design District](#) (Wynwood Adjacent)
- [MIMO Architecture](#) (Upper East Side)
- [South Beach Art Deco District](#) (SoBe)
- [Venetian Pool](#) (Coral Gables)

Art/Culture/Museums:

- [Art Deco Tours](#) (SoBe)
- [Clyde Butcher Gallery](#) (Tamiami Trail)
- [Deering Estate](#) (Old Cutler)
- [Dr. Paul George History Tour](#) (Various)
- [Frost Museum of Science](#) (Downtown)
- [History Miami Museum](#) (Downtown)
- [Holocaust Memorial](#) (Miami Beach)
- [Perez Art Museum Miami](#) (Downtown)
- [Superblue Miami](#) (Allapattah)
- [Paradox Museum](#) (Wynwood)

Art/Culture/Museums, continued:

- [The Rubell Museum](#) (Allapattah)
- [Vizcaya](#) (Coconut Grove)
- [Wolfsonian Museum](#) (SoBe)
- [Wynwood Walls](#) (Wynwood)

Eats:

- [Bayshore Club](#) (Coconut Grove)
- [Boater's Grill Restaurant](#) (Cape Florida)
- [Casa Juancho](#) (Little Havana)
- [El Palacio de los Jugos](#) (Multiple Locations)
- [Joe's Stone Crab](#) (South Beach)
- [Miami's Michelin Restaurants](#)
- [Old's Havana Restaurant](#) (Little Havana)
- [Puerto Sagua Cuban Restaurant](#) (SoBe)
- [Robert is Here Fruit Stand](#) (Florida City)
- [Shorty's Barbecue](#) (Kendall)
- [Versailles Cuban Restaurant](#) (Little Havana)
- [Zak the Baker](#) (Wynwood)

Miami Neighborhoods:

- [Coconut Grove](#)
- [Coral Gables](#)
- [Design District](#)
- [Key Biscayne](#)
- [Little Havana](#) (8th St. btwn. 12 & 17 Aves)
- [South Beach/Art Deco/Lincoln Road](#)
- [Wynwood Arts District](#)

50-YEAR REUNION AT-A-GLANCE

Miami Killian Senior High School - Class of 1975, June 12-14, 2025

Date	Daytime	Evening
Thursday 6/12/25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3:00 p.m. - Midnight <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ See classmate memorials (<i>Sunset Room</i>) • 3:00 - 7:00 p.m. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Arrival/Check-In at Miami Marriott Dadeland Hotel. <i>Valet parking only.</i> ○ Check-In at Registration Table <p style="text-align: center;">LUNCH ON YOUR OWN</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">DRESS: CASUAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6:00 - 6:45 p.m. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Killian Icebreaker & Trivia. Have fun; win a \$25 gift card! (<i>Le Mirage Room</i>) • 7:00 - 11 p.m. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Meet in Hotel Bar • 8:30 - 11 p.m. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Live concert by <i>Killian Seventy-Fivers</i>, w/ Rick Leinecker, Robin Ruddy, Kim Sestok Kushner, Keith Spurlock, Julius Szalay & Ritchie Williams (<i>Le Mirage Room</i>) <p style="text-align: center;">DINNER ON YOUR OWN — CASH BAR</p>
Friday 6/13/25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8:00 a.m. - Midnight <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ See classmate memorials (<i>Sunset Room</i>) • 9:00 - 11:15 a.m. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Killian High Reception & Tour (\$5 extra) Depart on school bus. (<i>Hotel Lobby</i>) • Noon - 1:30 p.m. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Shorty's Bar-B-Que (pay what you eat) • 3:00 - 7:00 p.m. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Arrival/Check-In at Miami Marriott Dadeland Hotel. <i>Valet parking only.</i> ○ Check-In at Registration Table • 4:00 - 5:00 p.m. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reception-Marriott Dadeland Hotel guests ONLY. (<i>Le Mirage Room</i>) <p style="text-align: center;">BREAKFAST & LUNCH ON YOUR OWN</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">DRESS CASUAL: WEAR GREEN & GOLD!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5:30 - 6:15 p.m. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Killian Icebreaker & Trivia. Have fun; win a \$25 gift card! (<i>Le Mirage Room</i>) • 6:30 - 7:00 p.m. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Meet & Greet (<i>Grand Ballroom Lobby</i>) • 7:00 - 11 p.m. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Grand Ballroom</i> opens; food served. ○ Music by DJ classmate Al Corbett • 9:00 - 9:30 p.m. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 50-Year Class Reunion group photo, to be published in digital Memory Book (<i>Grand Ballroom, Salon D</i>) <p style="text-align: center;">COMPLIMENTARY HORS D'OEUVRES AS LONG AS THEY LAST! - CASH BAR</p>
Saturday 6/14/25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8:00 a.m. - Midnight <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ See classmate memorials (<i>Sunset Room</i>) • 9:15 a.m. - 1:30 p.m. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Vizcaya Museum & Gardens Walk/ Tour. Depart <i>Hotel Lobby</i> (\$35 extra) • 9:30 a.m. - ?? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Dadeland Mall. Depart <i>Hotel Lobby</i> • Noon - 1:30 p.m. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Shorty's Bar-B-Que (pay what you eat) • 4:00 - 5:00 p.m. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Marching Cougars Meet & Greet (<i>Le Mirage Room</i>) • 4:00 - 6:00 p.m. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Portrait/family photos by Keith Spurlock. <i>Buy prints online after Reunion.</i> (<i>Grand Ballroom Lobby</i>) <p style="text-align: center;">BREAKFAST & LUNCH ON YOUR OWN</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">DRESS: HIGH SCHOOL CASUAL</p> <p style="text-align: center;">\$100 GIFT CARD FOR BEST 70'S OUTFIT!!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6:00 - 7:00 p.m. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Late Check-Ins at Registration Desk ○ Cocktail hour (<i>Grand Ballroom Lobby</i>) • 6:30 p.m. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Grand Ballroom</i> opens; grab a seat! ○ Plated dinner service starts at 7 p.m. • 7:45 - 8:15 p.m. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Awards Ceremony (<i>Grand Ballroom</i>) • 8:30 - 10:30 p.m. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ PHOTO BOOTH — TWO HOURS ONLY! • 8:30 - 11:30 p.m. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Dance party begins. Live music with classmate Julius Szalay's R&B Motown band, <i>The Wildfire Brothers!</i> <p style="text-align: center;">PLATED DINNER SERVED - CASH BAR</p>



Ritchie (far left) and Keith (far right) performed in the Quad at Killian during Spirit Week.

KILLIAN SEVENTY-FIVERS UNVEIL OFFICIAL REUNION VIDEO!

Thanks to Keith Spurlock, we now have an [official music video](#) to accompany our official Reunion song, “Fifty Years.” Switching back-and-forth between the past and present lives of band members who created the song, it includes photos from “Concerts in the Courtyard” during Spirit



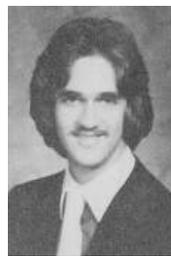
Rick Leinecker



Robin Ruddy



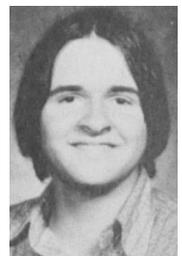
**Kim Sestok
Kushner**



Keith Spurlock



Julius Szalay



Ritchie Williams

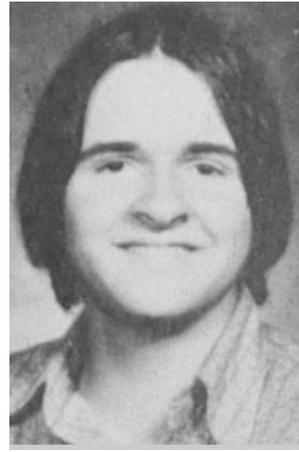
Week at Killian. The video will be played at the beginning of each music set by the *Killian Seventy-Fivers* on Thursday night at the Reunion. You can take a sneak peak by clicking [here](#).

The song was the brainchild of **Rick Leinecker**, who composed the first draft, wrote the music, sang lead vocals, and mixed the final recording. **Robin Ruddy** and **Kim Sestok Kushner** recorded background vocals, and Robin played the slide solo on the Pedal Steel. Keith contributed riffs on an electric guitar. Ritchie composed and performed the bass line. The song was rewritten and recorded several times before it was finally approved, including contributions by “Band Manager” Doug Traub.

Work on the project began in May of 2024. A broad net was cast to find the best musicians in our class who could collaborate on the project. Monthly meetings were held on Zoom to discuss lyrics and composition. The song is a tribute to classmates and teachers who contributed to our development in high school and helped to make us the people we are today.



Ritchie Williams



*Ritchie's 1974
Yearbook Photo*

RITCHIE WILLIAMS: LAUNCHING US INTO SPACE ON THURSDAY NIGHT!

By Barbara Rutledge McGreal

“Wow” is all I can say about Ritchie Williams, a truly interesting fellow alum I had the pleasure to meet on Zoom a few weeks ago. Ritchie will sing lead vocals and play his bass guitar when the *Killian Seventy-Fivers* open on Thursday night at the Reunion. For the rest of the evening, he will play bass and provide background vocals, until resuming his lead vocalist role for an uplifting finale that ends Set Two at 11 p.m.

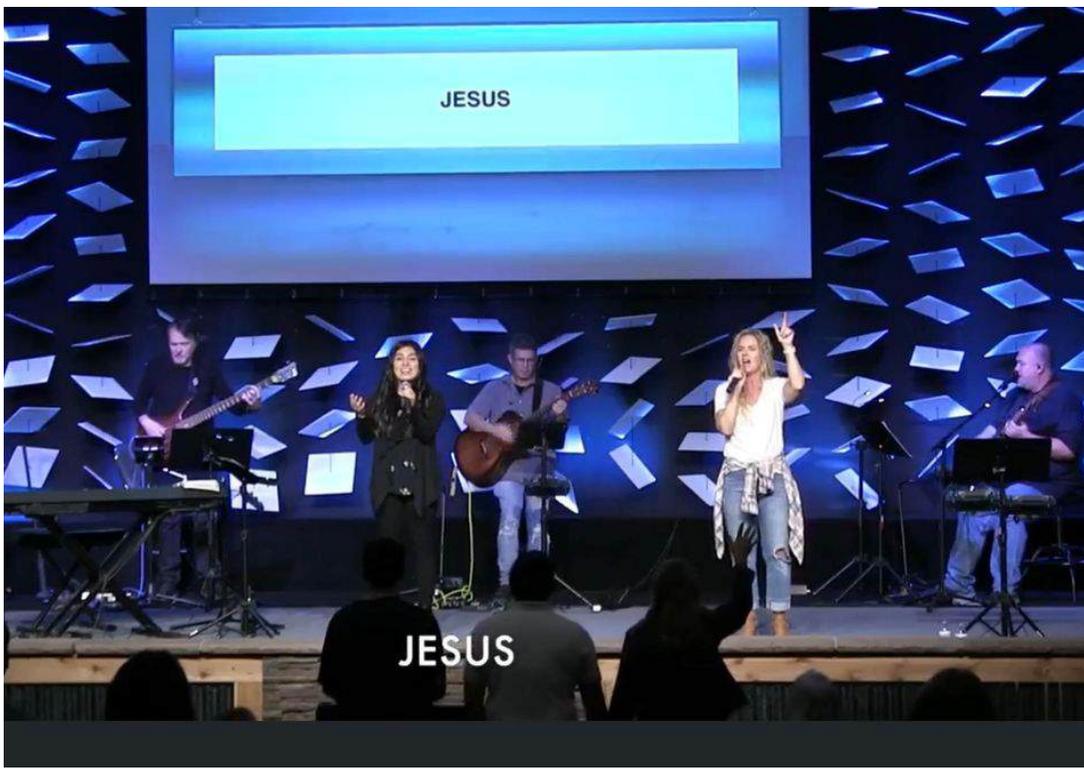
The *Killian Seventy-Fivers*, a group of our fellow classmate musicians, also includes Grammy-Winner Robin Ruddy on Pedal Steel; Billboard Top 10 co-writer Julius Szalay on Congas and Harmonica; official 50-Year Reunion song author of [Fifty Years](#), Rick Leinecker, on acoustic guitar; up-and-coming recording artist, Kim (Sestok) Kushner, on acoustic guitar; and “father” of Killian’s “Concerts in the Courtyard,” Keith Spurlock, on electric guitar. (Julius, Kim and Robin will serve as a lead or background vocalist, too.)

Although Ritchie describes himself as “a laid-back guy who enjoys life, music, family, and friends,” the story that lies underneath is a fascinating journey from a music-loving high school student to a respected aerospace engineer whose work contributed to the perfect landing of the Firefly Blue Ghost Lander on the moon on March 2, 2025.

“My contribution was the communication system that controlled all the other systems, including the main engine that slowed it down to land. It's still there and works!” Ritchie said. Ritchie has also provided testing for the Blue Origin lander under construction to provide NASA with recurring access to the Moon for cargo and crews.

Ritchie worked on another big project in the late 90s with Harris Corporation to update the FAA communications system used by pilots to communicate with air traffic control at airports nationwide. He designed it to have a maximum 20-year lifespan, but it’s still in use today!

Our classmate has been in the aerospace and avionics industry since the early 1980s, although he did a brief stint in 1990 building light-dimming theatrical packs for colleges and recording artists. He is now Vice President of [Optasy Engineering, LLC](#) in Medford, Oregon, which formed in July 2023. “I’m always doubting myself,” Ritchie said. “I have conflicts in my brain. Astrologically, I’m an Aquarius Sun with Leo Rising, which explains the duality.”



RITCHIE WILLIAMS: THE INTERVIEW

By Barbara Rutledge McGreal

Barbara: Tell us about your involvement in the upcoming reunion musical performances.

Ritchie: I'll be playing bass on Thursday night, and on Saturday night I'll perform our class song, 'Fifty Years.' I didn't have a lot of input in writing the song itself, but I composed the bass line. I'm happy with my contribution, and I'm looking forward to the live performance.

What's your role in the Thursday night program?

I'll be opening as lead vocalist for The Beatles song, 'I Saw Her Standing There,' and we'll close with The Beatles song, 'Hey Jude.'

What are you looking forward to at the Reunion?

Seeing people that I haven't seen in a long time. I'm fascinated by the different paths that people take in life. Recently, I've been getting into quantum mechanics and learning about quantum computers—really deep thought stuff. I still struggle with the 'what-ifs' in life.

What's your musical background?

I started with formal training on trumpet at Glades Junior High. My music teacher taught me how to read music and the basic fundamentals. I learned bass mostly on my own, although I've had some training along the way. I've learned from many different people, including Gary Lowenthal, who exposed me to different styles and approaches.

At Killian, I wasn't in a band initially, but I joined Pat Matthews' chorus—the Killian Singers. I also jammed with guys at parties just for the fun of it. Earlier at Glades, I was in a band called MTA—Metro Transit Authority. We played all Top 40—Beatles, Rolling Stones—whatever was



on the radio at the time. When I got to Killian, half our band went to Southwest High and half to Killian, which broke us up, but I got together with Keith [Spurlock] and played at school.

Who are your musical influences?

Back then it was The Beatles. Later, I got into Chicago, Grand Funk Railroad, YES, Emerson Lake & Palmer, and Deep Purple. If I had to pick a top influence, it would be YES.

What's your favorite high school memory?

I was kind of a nerdy guy who usually went home and buried myself in popular electronics magazines. But I participated in a couple of musicals like, 'No, No, Nanette,' singing and dancing. We also did a Shakespeare musical where I played bass.

We did some naughty stuff, too. We'd go backstage in the theater, up to the catwalk where they set all the lights. We would sit on the edge and talk. The ceiling was just below us, and somebody once put a foot down, crashing through it. We zoomed off and didn't get caught! I never skipped class or caused havoc at Killian, though. I had just decent days.

What were you known for in high school?

Mostly music. I tried sports but wasn't the athletic type—I wasn't good at running, soccer, or basketball. I didn't join many clubs; I was an introvert. There was one club I did join where we formed a company and built something—I chose to make candles. I was also in Boy Scouts.

Tell us about your family.

My first wife, Karen, was actually from Killian, Class of '74. I am on my third marriage and we live in Oregon. Between us, we have seven kids from previous marriages, plus two from my marriages. We have about 15-16 grandkids now.

What's your favorite part of what you do for a living?

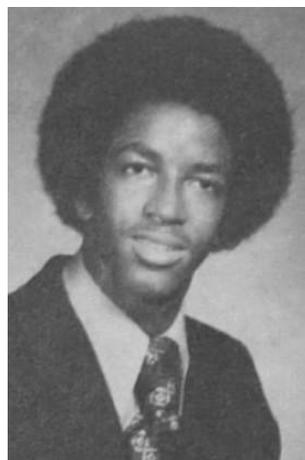
Coming up with an idea, making it into something, and seeing it work—that's very satisfying. Now it's about helping others, too.

Tell us about your hobbies.

My hobbies include designing stuff for my own pleasure, like digital clocks, and playing bass on worship teams in Oregon. I did the bar scene with a progressive band in Florida, but that gets old after a while. I now play in church bands—one church Saturday afternoon, another Sunday morning. Some churches even have 7:30 a.m. rehearsals! We'll play three sets.

Do you have any words of wisdom to share with our class?

Don't take life too seriously. Tomorrow is a new day, and there's no sense in worrying—you can always start fresh. I don't carry problems around with me anymore; I hand it up to God.



Al's Yearbook Photo

Al Corbett

AL CORBETT: DELIVERING AN OLD SCHOOL MIX ON FRIDAY NIGHT

By Barbara Rutledge McGreal

As we prepare to celebrate, I'm thrilled to spotlight another one of our own—Al Corbett—who serves as our DJ for Friday night's festivities. Al's musical talent will provide the perfect soundtrack for our Meet & Greet on June 13th, held on the very same date as our high school graduation five decades ago. Framed between live performances from our own classmate musicians on Thursday and Saturday nights, Al's set promises to bring both nostalgic tunes and irresistible rhythms to the heart of our weekend.

I am told that Al was more than just a classmate in high school—he was one of those easy-going, universally liked individuals who floated comfortably through every social circle. With his laid-back charm and warm demeanor, he made lasting impressions then—and continues to do so now. After Killian, Al went on to carve out an impressive 35-year career with UPS, rising from delivering packages to driving tractor-trailers across long hauls, mastering a high-pressure job that required discipline, timing, and professionalism.

So when it came time to select the entertainment lineup for our reunion, the Reunion Board did its homework. Based on Al's history of spinning at other Killian reunions—and the strong bonds he shares with classmates—it was an easy decision. His music will set just the right tone for our Friday night gathering: welcoming, relaxing, and filled with joy.

Still, board members weren't content with just creating a chill atmosphere. Knowing Al's gift for moving a crowd, they made sure to install a dance floor—because let's face it, standing on the sidelines might not be an option when Al drops those timeless tracks.

Before the first song plays, though, we wanted to take a few minutes to catch up with Al—hear about his journey, what fuels his love for music, and the life experiences that continue to shape the man behind the booth. Enjoy this conversation with our friend and Friday night DJ, Al Corbett.



Al celebrated his father's 89th birthday on November 4, 2024

AL CORBETT: THE INTERVIEW

By Barbara Rutledge McGreal

Barbara: How did you come to be the DJ for Killian High School's Class of 1972's 50th reunion, and what made you say "yes" to the opportunity?

Al: When I was asked to be the DJ for the 1972 Killian's 50th reunion, I knew I couldn't turn it down. My sister graduated in '72, and I've had the pleasure of DJing three reunions for this remarkable class over the years. The 50th for our class is extra special, and the opportunity to contribute to such a milestone event and significant gathering was truly irresistible.

What are some of your favorite memories from your time at Killian, especially around sports or student life?

Reflecting on my high school days, the junior-senior football game stands out as one of my favorite memories. I played football for three years, including two years on the varsity team. Unfortunately, during my senior year, I cracked my collarbone in practice and missed the first four games, but my love for the sport has never waned. I was also active in basketball during my sophomore year and junior years, playing as a guard on the junior varsity team, though my heart was always with football.

Can you tell us about your educational journey after high school, and how your path shifted as you started a family?



After graduating, I spent a year and a half at Langston University in Oklahoma, before transferring to Delta State in Cleveland, Mississippi, for a semester. Life took an unexpected turn when I learned from my girlfriend that I was going to be a dad. I decided to start working instead of continuing my studies.

What does your life look like today in terms of family, passions, and the things that bring you joy?

Today, I'm a proud father of a 47-year-old daughter and a 44-year-old son, both living in Miami, along with five grandkids who bring joy to my life. While I'm not currently married, I cherish my relationship with my family. At home, I share my space with Leah, my cat of 14 years. She is my emotional support and often keeps me calm while I play music, which has been my passion since childhood. My dad's love for music inspired me; he brought home 45s that provided the soundtrack to my youth.

Out of all the events you've DJ'd, which one stands out the most—and how would you describe your approach to spinning music for a crowd?

As a DJ, the most memorable event was definitely the Killian '72 reunion held in Coconut Grove, where I stayed for two nights and enjoyed a wonderful meet and greet with everyone. Music is my main hobby—while I may not have time for many others—it's what I do best. I pride myself on being able to read the crowd and play tunes that resonate, blending old-school favorites with a variety of genres (though I shy away from rap).

What was your professional life like, and how did your role in the family evolve after retirement?

During my 35-year career at UPS, I experienced plenty of memorable moments, whether delivering packages or driving a tractor-trailer over the road. Upon retiring, I moved to Georgia to care for my dad after he suffered a stroke, eventually bringing my parents to Texas where my sister lives to keep our family close together.

Even without formal training, you've become a successful DJ. What do you think makes a DJ truly great?

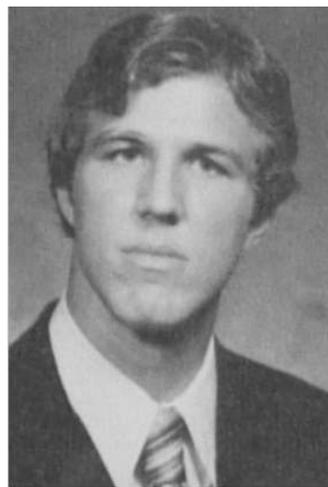
I've never had formal training as a DJ, but I believe a good DJ knows how to play the right music for the right crowd. To me, the essence of a great party lies in creating a relaxing atmosphere that allows everyone to enjoy themselves.

How would you sum up your outlook on life—and how would you describe who you are at heart?

In closing, I want to share a bit of wisdom: Life is about listening to what relaxes you and enjoying the blessings that come your way. So, who is Al Corbett? I'm a music lover, a devoted family man, and a passionate DJ who cherishes connections with others and celebrates the joys of life through rhythm and melody.



Julius & JoDonna Szalay



Julius's Yearbook Photo

JULIUS SZALAY: ROLLING OUT BIG GUNS ON SATURDAY NIGHT!

By Barbara Rutledge McGreal

I spoke with another alum attending our 50-Year Reunion for all three days: Julius Szalay. Julius is not only performing on Thursday night with five other extraordinary classmates, but he is the leader of the *Wildfire Brothers*, our headline act on Saturday night, too. His group includes musicians who've toured with *Rare Earth*, *The Staple Singers*, *Flock of Seagulls*, and *Tower of Power*. What a story he shared about his five decades since we graduated from Killian!

Aside from touring all over Florida with concert gigs from coast-to-coast, Julius is the owner of Szalay Investigation Agency (S.I.A), a Florida-based private investigative firm company he founded more than 20 years ago. Prior to establishing his company, Julius supervised the Special Investigative Unit of Titan Inc., where he was the lead Investigator and conducted crisis mitigation assignments. Julius is proficient in covert field surveillance and other investigative techniques.

Julius spent 20 years in the U.S. Navy and attended the United States Military Academy, Georgetown University, The Naval War College and George Washington University. During his career, he's been a field operator, training officer, case officer and analyst. He grew up speaking Spanish, Hungarian and Russian at home, but picked up Arabic, Farsi & Pashto while on the job in various assignments around the world. He regrets he is not fluent in his native Gaelic tongue.

Julius' band now takes up most of his time. Julius ordinarily plays Congas and Harmonica while providing lead and background vocals. His keyboardist is the legendary Kenny James Folcik, an original founding member of the iconic Rock & Roll Hall of Fame band *Rare Earth*. Dave Berger, his lead Guitarist/vocalist known for smoking trademark guitar solos, toured with *The Staple Singers* and has done stints with Albert King, Otis Clay and Yoko Ono.

According to *Jazz Hot* magazine, the group's drummer James "Sugarfoot" West—who previously played with *Flock of Seagulls*—"puts the 'Fire' in Wildfire." Julius' band is rounded out with session bassist Frank Fanelli, and all-around horn guy Tony Waka on saxophone, who previously played with *Tower of Power* and has a long list of national act credits.

Julius describes himself as happy, free-spirited, and hard-charging. Aside from music, his passions are art, literature, cold beer and the open road. He enjoys travel, motorcycles, museums and great restaurants. His *Wildfire Brothers* moniker honors, "The Wildfire that burns in all of us."



JULIUS SZALAY: THE INTERVIEW

By Barbara Rutledge McGreal

Barbara: Please tell us why you are performing at our Reunion.... You gave up two paying concerts on Thursday and Friday, and paid someone to cover the shows for you, too, just as Robin Ruddy [another classmate musician performing on Thursday night] has done. And you won't be paid for this concert, either! And, you're providing sound and lighting both nights. It's so generous!

Julius: *Well, actually, I would rather just attend and chill. But I'm just trying to help out. I have a band that plays R&B, '60s and '70s music, so it will be fun to play for old friends.*

What was your part in creating our official Reunion song, [Fifty Years](#)?

I was honored to contribute where I could, but my band is doing our own version of the song that is closer to the original that Rick [Lienecker] conceived. We are soon shooting a video for our version of the song that we hope will have our Killian Alums in it. I am excited to also be a part of the music video being produced by Keith [Spurlock], and we're inviting all five musicians back on stage Saturday night to play the original version of the song again, too. We started rehearsing with the original version when it first came out, and we just stuck with it ever since.

What got you into music? How did you break into the industry?

My mom was a hairdresser for The Jackie Gleason Show, Carol Burnett Show and countless other TV shows and movies. We traveled a lot from Miami to LA. I got to be a dancer on American Bandstand in the '60s. [He laughs.] I grew up backstage when I was a kid. At 13-years-old, I was 6-feet tall and shaving every day, too. I told everyone I was 18, and no one doubted it. I started playing at the Aquarius Lounge in Miami with a stripper who handled a big, big snake. The rest is history. [He laughs again.]

Tell us about your musical training, instruments, and vocals.

I took music theory classes, but mostly learned on the road as they say. I started as a Bassist, then Keyboards, Guitar, Congas and Harmonica. I'm the lead vocalist with my current band. I believe that the arts bring us closer to the Creator.



Any interesting musical connections you've made?

We were Jim Belushi's road band. I'm a co-writer on a few tunes out of Nashville, with three hits on the Billboard Top 10. I played with Gary Lewis & The Playboys, Looking Glass, Loggins and Messina, Miami Sound Machine, John Secada, Hall & Oates Band, and King Harvest. The Wildfire Brothers opened for over 150 National acts since we began and that has been a gas!

I heard you were involved in a terrible motorcycle accident....

Yes, two years ago. I went from a coma to wheelchair to a walker, and now a cane. But I will be off that soon! I was at a traffic light and hit from behind. I have no memory of it, before or after.

What's your favorite high school memory?

Playing gigs at Rollo's at night, even though I was underage. I also played at Widow McCoy's and the 747 Lounge, The Wreck Bar, and Big Daddy's.

What were you known for in high school - sports, music?

I was a good student, but dragged my ass to school in the morning bleary-eyed. I liked music, sports, and hot rod cars. I had a blue 1969 Mach I Mustang, and a fast Kawasaki 900 motorcycle — all the bad stuff. I was in chorus in school and did stage plays.

Your biggest regret?

Never getting a try out for the rooftop Roller Derby team.

Any memorable pranks from your school days?

Aside from streaking? [pause] There was this big cow on wheels in front of Steak & Ale. We stole it and hauled it to Killian and stuck "For Sale" signs in the Killian front lawn, and a banner reading "Killian is Bull Shit." Someone ratted me out to Mr. Freese. We also took Coach V's VW bug and put it in a corner so he couldn't get it out.

I see that you got remarried in July 2024. Where and how did you meet?

We met online. My cousin signed me up for Facebook dating. JoDonna and I talked on the phone for six weeks before meeting in person. When we met, it clicked. We were engaged on Valentine's Day and married in St. Augustine on the fourth of July last year. Every day is like Christmas with JoDonna. At this age, why wait? We were both widowed for many years.

What's your favorite part of what you do for a living?

It's different every day and lets me be creative.

Any words of wisdom you'd like to share with the class?

The Prayer of a Midshipman has been a part of the U.S. Navy since 1938. I try to live by it, and parts still ring through my head to this day: "If I'm tempted, make me strong to resist; if I should miss the mark, give me the courage to try again. May I live so I can stand unashamed and unafraid before my shipmates and Thee." I couldn't say it any better than that.

FOOTBALL TEAM REUNITES AFTER 50 YEARS!



(l to r) top row: Mark Bentley, Gene Mills, Al Corbett. second row: Glenn Mollman, Rocky Rumenik, Doug Traub. Third row: Kem Brooks, Glenn Mollman (listened on his phone and watched on his computer)

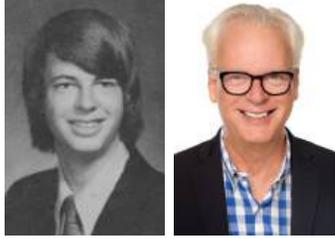
On the evening of April 9, 2025, history was made as six of the members of our football team reunited in a Zoom call. Much of the talk centered on Coach Vagotis; continuing back, hip, knee and shoulder injuries; a nearly perfect record in 12th grade; the death of Coach Ehman; and six-hour practices at night with the field lit only by the headlights of parent's cars waiting to take them home.

"If I could go back to high school and do it all over again, I would," said Gene Mills.

We have at least three football team members who are attending the Reunion: Al Corbett, Gene Mills and Rocky Rumenik, and several other members were still considering it at press time.



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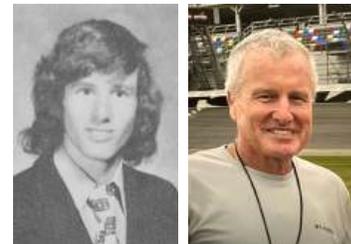
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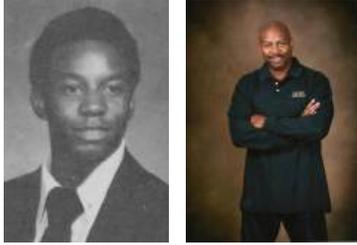


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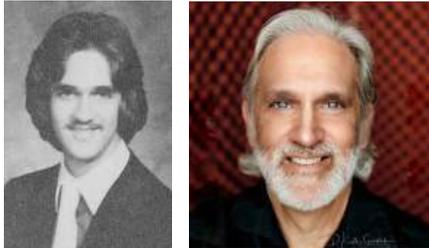
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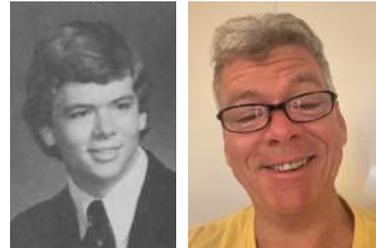
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Join our private Facebook group (now 268 classmates strong) at:
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/killianclassof75>



DIGITAL MEMORY BOOK CLOSES JUNE 15TH
“Ad” Your Name to the History Book!!!

The digital Memory Book has proved so “wildly” popular that we already have 61 pages of classmate biographies contributing to its expanded 250+ page count! As a result, we are closing ad sales one week earlier, on June 15, 2025, in order to be able to distribute it on July 10th. If you wish to run an ad, say “hello” to classmates or memorialize a lost teacher or classmate, act now!!

More than 20 ads have been secured in the digital Memory Book — 12 are full-page size! All our premium ad positions (back cover, inside cover, etc.) have sold except for full page ads (\$150) starting on page 16. A partial list of advertisers you may know follows:

Howard Anapol
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For information on how to place an ad in the digital Memory Book, click [here](#). For information about how to include your FREE biography in the publication, click [here](#) and turn to pages 2-3.

MISSED A NEWSLETTER?

Parting is such sweet sorrow....



This is our final newsletter. Our all-volunteer staff of classmates is checking out. We have been honored to share the good word with you about our upcoming Reunion. Thank-you for reading our stories over the past 15 months. If you missed any, links to all of our past editions follow. Good-bye!

Past Killian Class of 1975 Reunion Newsletters

[February 11, 2024](#)

[March 15, 2024](#)

[April 19, 2024](#)

[June 26, 2024](#)

[July 25, 2024](#)

[August 14, 2024](#)

[September 18, 2024](#)

[October 17, 2024](#)

[November 26, 2024](#)

[January 21, 2025](#)

[March 11, 2025](#)

Here are your classmates who contributed newsletter stories since we began:

Editors: **Barbara Rutledge McGreal, Doug Traub.**

Miami Ambassador: **Michael Bell**

Poet Laureate: **Kandy McKenzie Hill**

Contributors: **Stu Adelman Evans, Beth Gault, Carol Carver Harris, Karen Wilson Lawrence, Dawn Eberst Lucas, Kathy Miller, Paula Finkelstein Rosenberg, Anthony Washington**