

AHS '71 In touch Spring 2026

A once-in-a-blue-moon check-in. Any news to share?

Cats, keepsakes, flame and ash. One day in Altadena

By Tony Bieda

Imagine the confluence of forces, natural and otherwise, that day in January, 2025.

Deb Pidek Vane, AHS '71, stayed home from work, worried about the hot Santa Ana winds blowing through the hills above Altadena, Calif.



Power went out in the middle of the afternoon as she visited her husband in the hospital. ("He was tired of hospital food, so I was bringing him some dinner.") That's when she learned of a fire in Eaton Canyon, about a quarter mile from their home. She jumped in the car and headed back toward the blazing San Gabriel Mountains. At home and at risk: loving cats and family memories.

The neighborhood had gone from serene to mayhem. Toppled trees blocked streets. Flaming embers flew everywhere. Wind-carried debris (gusts estimated at 100 mph) crashed into her car. (See "Deb Vane" Page 6)

Keeping a friend's name alive: in search of Dave Marr

By Barb Seese

One of the great joys of planning a class reunion is searching finding classmates you haven't seen or heard from in decades. You were friends in high school, then went your separate ways. It was a transient friendship, but no less valid than the one you still share with the buddy you've seen since kindergarten.



On the other side of that joy of reunion is the sorrow of discovering a classmate's obituary. Whether they were close friends or just a name or face you recognize, there is still a feeling of loss at this reminder of our mortality.

Which brings us to the mystery of Dave Marr.

Dave was only at the school for our senior year, and although his Senior Brag Page entry merely reads "Creative Writing 3," it belies involvement in a variety of activities. In addition to that Creative Writing class, Dave also reported for The Paragon and was editor-in-chief of Kaleidoscope, the literary magazine. he was in the musical "110° in the Shade."

After graduation, with Vietnam raging and Americans deeply divided over the country's faraway and nebulous mission, Dave joined the 3rd U. S. Infantry Regiment, the oldest active-duty regiment in the United States Army, commonly known as The Old Guard.

As the 50th reunion for the Class of '71 approached back in 2021, committee members searched for "lost Pirates" to include as many classmates as possible in the milestone event. I searched for Dave — someone I classified as one of those transient but treasured friends. (See "Dave Marr," Page 5)

To the wall: Burkland recognized as Colorado 'Mr. Raquetball'

By John Young

Anyone who knew Bruce Burkland in school will recall boundless energy and athletic acumen. He was an all-around gymnastics star at AHS. Before that he excelled in football and track at Carmody Junior High, where he was known to be accompanied by a pole vault poll on the school bus.

It was just the beginning. After competing in gymnastics and graduating from the University of Northern Colorado, and after a short stint as a physical education teacher, he launched a career in recreation – in particular teaching racquet sports while also competing. He became one of Colorado's foremost racquetball instructors and players.

It culminated with a lifetime achievement award from the Colorado Raquetball Association and the title, "Mr. Raquetball Colorado." Whether playing the sport or teaching it -- most of his time at the South Suburban Sports Complex in Centennial -- he left a trail of trophies. A host of his pupils were in the top echelons of players in the country. Two won national championships.

How did you get into racquetball, Bruce?



It began at Arizona State University, where he roomed with AHS classmate John Einarsen for a year: "About 200 feet from our dorm room were outdoor racquetball courts," he said. He and John partook often in sweaty fury.

Though gymnastics was his sporting focus at the time, he realized, "It wasn't a lifetime sport." Raquetball is. He worked, taught, coached and competed at South Suburban for 27 years.

Looking back at his career and achievements, Bruce recalls running into a man he taught to play racquetball once upon a time. The man offered quite the tribute: "You're a perfect fit for your job – the personality, the knowledge and skills. You've just got it all for a job made for you."

The proof was in the accomplishments. However, challenges presented themselves in his late 30s. His eyesight began to fail. He was diagnosed with macular retinitis pigmentosa, a progressive condition in which the field of eyesight narrows dramatically.

That ended his playing days. It did not end his recreation days. Today, living in Goodyear, Ariz., though legally blind, he always is in search of physical kicks. "My passion now is wind surfing – balls out – screaming across the water." He's wind-surfed at South Padre Island and San Diego, among others. He regularly bike-rides and swims in a lap pool.

Sounds like the high-energy Bruce we knew at AHS.



Obituaries: Celebrating classmates we've lost

Joe E. Theil

Joe Everette Thiel passed away July 25, 2025.

He was born Oct. 24, 1952, in Denver.

A pipe fitter by trade, Joe found his way to Hotchkiss, Colo., after purchasing his late father's residence in 2017. "Being so close to his father all his life, he finally felt at home," read his obituary in *High Country Spotlight*.

Joe had a "lifelong relationship with Jesus," teaching Bible studies and "sharing the word of God to anyone who would listen."

Joe was an accomplished huntsman and fisherman. "Every free chance he had he would load up the horses and dogs and a few supplies and 'head to the hills.'"

Joe owned four horses "and loved them all." He learned riding skills from his father and many cowboy friends. "He was never without a dog or two or three."

Joe is survived by one daughter and 10 grandchildren.

In lieu of flowers the family requested donations to Cedaredge Seventh-Day Adventist Church
290 SW 2nd Avenue Cedaredge, Co. 81419 P.O. Box 656.



Ray Nelson

Ray Arman Nelson died Nov. 20, 2025, at his home in Hager City, Wis. He was born June 15, 1953, in Manhattan, Kan. He studied at Colorado State University and Colorado Mesa University before receiving his degree from Metro State University in Minneapolis.

His wife Susan survives him. They raised three daughters and had six granddaughters.

Ray had a wide-ranging career in management in various companies in Colorado, Wisconsin and Minnesota, including IBM, Conagra, Control Data, Red Wing Shoes and Bic Corp. He retired in 2021.

He was a member of St. Francis Catholic Church in Ellsworth and the Knights of Columbus. He was also a member of the River Falls and Elmwood Sportsman's Club.

"The first love of Ray's life has always been his family, but his motorcycle is close second," read his obituary.

In the AHS '71 50-year memory book, he said one of the things he missed from high school days was "great cars." Fittingly, a highlight late in life was acquiring his dream car: a red Corvette.

Ray was "a faithful Packers fan, except when he was rooting for the Broncos."

A swimming pool party was a cherished reason to bring family together.

"His faith and positive attitude sustained him, and he would like you to remember, 'It's gonna be a great day!'"



Terry Thompson



Terry Thompson passed away Sept. 20, 2025, in Denver.

He was born Oct. 17, 1952, in Topeka, Kansas.

Terry attended Fort Lewis College in Durango before graduating from Colorado State University.

His career included 18 years in varied roles with the City of Littleton. Later he ran his own landscape business.

A lifelong skier, Terry competed in ski racing through college and served on ski patrol at Loveland Ski Area.

Terry taught Bible school at University Park Methodist Church and led the youth group in several service projects.

He also served as Cub master for his son's troop, nurturing leadership and camaraderie.

He is survived by a daughter, son and two grandchildren.

The family invites you to honor Terry's lifelong love of family and children with a contribution to Save the Children.

What are you up to? Share contact information

We need everyone to help keep our class whole through email and other contacts.

Share contact information and info about your life and career, as well as news about classmates. Email ahsreunion7@gmail.com, or text the editorial team: John Young, 254-315-8822; Tony Bieda, 703-399-9172; Barb Seese, 602-505-2119.

In search of Dave Marr (cont.)

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Although we didn't keep in touch after the early '70s, I had great memories of him and wanted to catch up. That first phone call is hard. Have I found the right Dave Marr? Will he remember me? Will he have any interest in a conversation, or will he consider my contact an invasion of his privacy? Luckily, I found the right Dave Marr — “our” Dave Marr — in Dumfries, Va. And he was the same kind, thoughtful guy that I remembered from high school. From conversations and emails, I learned that Dave met the love of his life, Micaela (AKA Mikie) during his military service in Washington, D.C. They married and raised a family, eventually becoming grandparents.

After Dave left the service, he worked for a defense acquisition firm in Virginia until his retirement, which was hastened by a diagnosis of the progressive muscle disease: inclusion body myositis. This would keep him from attending the Class of '71's 50th reunion; it made travel too difficult. When we spoke after the reunion, he talked about finally getting an electric wheelchair. He made plans to buy a conversion van that would accommodate his chair and restore some of his independence and mobility.

Months passed. The next time I emailed Dave, there was no response. I mailed him a card and heard nothing back. I tried calling . . . the phone rang and rang. It had been a while since our last conversation, and with the knowledge that he was battling a progressive, debilitating disease, I feared the worst and cautiously began looking for an obituary.

Herein lies the mystery. I found evidence that a David Richard Marr had died Jan. 30, 2024, was cremated, and then was interred at Arlington National Cemetery (Section S49, Column 28, Court 9, Niche 3). The birthdate of this Dave and the place of death approximated information known about our classmate. However, there was no definitive obituary.

Hours spent online, looking at every available source, only turned up a bare-bones notice: no mention of the woman with whom he spent his life -- no naming of his children and grandchildren, no recounting of the life of this creative, gentle, good-humored human being who had graced the planet for 71 years. So . . . was this our Dave Marr at Arlington? The scant details suggested it. But without corroboration from a family member or an obituary that gave enough information to erase all doubt, we couldn't be absolutely certain. Maybe we're mourning someone who is still breathing.

Did you know Dave Marr? Were you one of his pals in high school who kept in touch with him after graduation? If you are and you have more information about this classmate, please ease our disconcertion and let us know; we would like to give Dave the certain acknowledgement he deserves.

A final word about obituaries: The number of people who die without a written word about their lives is stunning and distressing. An obituary is not just a matter of historical record or satisfying the curiosity of nosy neighbors or announcing funeral plans to friends. If you don't want to spend the money (pricey, yes), you don't have to pay to have it published in a newspaper. The funeral home that prepares your body for burial or cremation or alkaline hydrolysis or burial at sea or whatever will publish it free online. And then, those dear ones in your world, past and present, will have another element of closure as they celebrate your life and mourn your passing. *An obituary is your last chance to tell your story the way you want it told.* So, as you make out your trust/will and otherwise prepare for the inevitable end, consider also pre-writing your obituary. (At the very least, your high school reunion committee will thank you for it.)

Deb Pidek: Devastation in Altadena (Cont.)

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(From Page 1)

Her street was closed, forcing a choice of an alternative route. Arriving, she found the neighborhood dark. “Fortunately, we have backup power and I could turn on the lights at the house to find things,” she recalled.

“We were warned to get out of there. The fire was a quarter mile away. I wasn’t scared, because at that time the fire was moving slowly toward the house, and I was watching it closely from my front door, and I knew I still had multiple ways to leave,” she said.

“I got the cats, family albums, important papers, treasures and got out. Later that night, the fire moved faster and overtook many Altadena neighborhoods with little warning.”

Leaving the house was a temporary respite from the chaos, with just enough time to consider, “Where to spend tonight with two cats?” And where to spend subsequent evenings not knowing the fate of one’s house, a family home for decades?

“All the hotel rooms were booked. I spent the night with friends,” Deb said. “I watched the news reports and was sure our house was gone.”

Next day, she was able to get past the barricades and detours to survey her neighborhood, her block, her home – still standing.

“I couldn’t believe the devastation,” she said. Neighbors and across the street lost their homes. “So many houses near ours on the East side of Altadena were gone. Beautiful houses. The West side of Altadena was obliterated. It’s hard to describe what the loss of 6,000 homes looks like.”

Though largely intact, her home did not escape the ash and contamination upwind of destroyed houses built before lead was regulated. It took six weeks before water service was restored and longer for the electric service. All of the HVAC ductwork was replaced, and the attic insulation that melted from the intense heat was replaced. The house was thoroughly cleaned of ash and smoke by a commercial cleaning company. Every mattress, pillow and rug was thrown out. Several trees were removed. It was five months before Deb and Gregg moved back in.

Deb said the recovery for the community has been long, but people are rebuilding their homes and their lives, gradually and steadily. FEMA recovery teams were a valuable resource as well: “warm and caring.”

“People have come together,” she said. “It is a peaceful place and a strong community. These are special folks, including lots of artists, musicians, scientists, actors. A very special place, with proximity to the national forest and an abundance of wildlife.”



Deb with CloudSat team

Deb’s adventures at NASA

Surviving the Altadena fire was a recent and personal adventure that supplemented her professional adventures in a career with NASA. Right out of college, she worked on the Viking unmanned mission to Mars.

Then beginning in the late ‘90s, she was project manager for the CloudSat mission orbiting Earth to improve modeling and analysis of

weather systems. That mission occupied most of her professional career spanning 49 years.

(<https://science.nasa.gov/mission/cloudsat/>)

CloudSat's primary objective was to provide the first global, three-dimensional survey of the vertical structure of clouds, including liquid and ice-water content. Pulses of microwave energy sent through the atmosphere, with measurements of the returned signal, created detailed vertical maps showing locations of cloud layers, transforming how scientists observe cloud systems. The project has yielded thousands of articles in scientific journals and publications.

"The many sophisticated weather forecasting models can always be improved," Deb said. "Before CloudSat, meteorology had measured cloud ice and cloud water at the top of cloud formations or at ground level, but never before had those elements been measured methodically in their vertical dimensions, through radar and microwave systems from space."

As project manager, Deb found satisfaction in giving team members the resources and support they needed to be successful. She also served as intermediary between the scientists and the NASA hierarchy, managing changes in budgets, timetables, etc.

"It's rewarding to support and lead a team of people who love to solve problems. As project manager, my job is to ensure they can do what they do best and not become distracted or diverted," she said.

CloudSat encountered substantial drama in 2011, when a major anomaly jeopardized the mission. Deb said the remedy required intense and protracted effort around the clock by the entire project team from April through November.

"I remember thinking, 'Why isn't someone filming this?' It would make a great documentary."

After funding was approved in the late 1990s, Deb and her team worked for six years to build CloudSat, launching in April 2006. It was decommissioned in December 2023. She is working on the final report of the project, to be completed this year followed by a well-deserved retirement. Deb and husband Gregg have two daughters, one son and two grandsons.

Deb is looking forward to another reunion of the Class of '71.

Together again for breakfast



Left to right, AHS'71 alums gather for breakfast in December: Ron Stanislaw, John Quinn, Ken Charles, Jerry Donner, Ralph Swain, Robert Stokvis, Wes Isenhardt, Rick Warner, Bob Hicks, Gary Thron, Monty Schurr, and Steve Bostwick. Photo courtesy of Steve Valdez.