

## **Crusaders Luncheon Recap**

By: John O'Melveny Woods

The Crusaders reunited for lunch in February, 2015. It was the first time we had been together for almost 23 years.

Allan Weiss, Stanly Anding, Kenny Reid, Paul Westlund and John met at the Z restaurant in Fallbrook, an eclectic dining spot serving plate-lunches in an airy, comfortable and sheik atmosphere. Not In-N-Out. Not Crusader-like... at all.

But very cool.

Anxious and excited, John arrived first and secured a table near the rear window. Allan appeared next, followed by Kenny and Paul. Stanley was last, strutting to the table with a gray fedora accented with a multi-colored feather. A crooked smile graced his weathered and tan face. The same one we remembered as kids and always translated as the beginning of an idea that usually got us into trouble. Not this time.

Within minutes we were back forty-five years; telling stories, remembering names long forgotten and, between the five of us, piecing together and filling in faint memories and missing gaps in our young adventures growing up together.

Allan was his usual enthusiastic self; bringing a kinetic energy to the group that seemed to transfer like electricity through each of us. Stanley supplied wry comments in a reserved manner. Kenny brought great insight and perspective to the stories, while Paul emitted his unbridled sense of humor and never-ending good-natured calmness. Enthusiastic laughter emanated from the table in waves as story after story was discussed, dissected and tossed about.

Not so coincidentally, Allan had visited La Puente the day before, stopping at John's old house and speaking with the current resident. He had moved there eighteen years earlier and met some of the neighbors we Crusaders had known growing up, such as the Adamo's who had lived across the street (and since moved away). Allan captured a picture of John and Kenny's house and shared it.

Between bites of chicken, patty melts and BLT's, we continued reminiscing about schoolmates, neighbors, friends, girlfriends, scary and fun stories, and a myriad of other subjects. All of them flowing effortlessly and always pertinent to the conversation as it evolved, however convoluted they must have seemed to others listening. Subjects both large and small.

People we all knew would suddenly be resurrected with reference or remembrance from one of us, and the rest would fill in the blanks; about those still living, those we've lost contact with and sadly, those that had passed.

Some of the adventures that John had forgotten were:

- Kenny and Kim Harp hitchhiking to the beach for thirty-two days in a row.
- Going to the wash near our house before the 605 freeway was built.
- Going to Whittier and hanging out on cruise night at Bob's Big Boy on Whittier Boulevard.
- Pretending to stretch a rope across a street while a car approached and standing there as if we are holding it.
- Walking through the back seats of cars stopped at traffic lights.
- Learning to skim board on plywood before surfing (ouch).
- All the different girls each of us dated (who knew?)

Time sped by with a rapidity that is only rivaled by being in love. And perhaps we were in love - with our friendships, our memories, and each other as human beings. We talked for hours. When the time finally came to leave, there was a hesitation from each of us, knowing that the last time we said goodbye twenty-three had passed before that moment came again.

However, it's a new age. Times change.

Now there are computers, email, and cell phones, all of which, although not specifically to keep us in touch, were designed to make sure something like that 'gap' did not inadvertently happen again. And... there was a commitment from each of us, in this second half of our lives, to get together more often and celebrate our lifelong friendships. Friendships that were - and still are - unconditional and timeless.

After all, we are The Crusaders.