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ROBERT E. DREHER (1915-2011)  
ALBERT L. HARVEY (1927-2010)

May 10, 2016

John Carr  
2317 E. 11<sup>th</sup> Street  
Des Moines, Iowa 50316

Dear John:

In our recent class reunion you asked that we share our thoughts with you as background for your work as our class Editor for our newsletter.

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Reunions provide us opportunity to reflect, not only on our common roots, where we originated as the people that we are today, but upon the multiple paths that we have each taken in life from the point of our origin at East High. Fourteen states were represented at our class banquet. Each person has a totally different story.

I became keenly aware of the meaning of East High and its relevance to the people of Des Moines, and especially those of us who grew up in Lee Township, when I became President of the East High Alumni Association. I soon realized that this was an Association of organized, dedicated people reflecting that East High has real meaning in each of their lives. To have over 15,000 card carrying, dues paying members of the association says a lot about what our roots actually means. We claim that we are the largest high school alumni association in the world because so far we have never seen a claim of any other high school having participation of more people willing to annually paying dues to belong.

Just the amount of volunteer effort on the part of our alumni in order to put on the Association's annual banquet is more than significant. I have often equated the attitude of people on the East side much like that of the Marine Corps. However, I also know that the Marie Corps is constantly thinking about what the Army thinks of them, and the Army does not know they exist. Yet, they have a vital role to play in our national defense. Having served in the military for over 30 years, my first 13 as an Army Signal Officer but my last 17 as a Naval Officer, I have seen this first hand.

A few years later as President of the East High Alumni Foundation, I have also seen the effect our scholarship program has had on the lives of East High graduates; this year



117 students received a total of approximately \$150,000 toward their continuing education. I realize that the amount of the scholarship in itself is not sufficient to pay for their continuing education; but that is not the real important message our scholarship gives to them. What it says to the graduating senior is that others believe in them as a person, and truly care about them. It provides them a sense of their own value and imbues them with a sense of responsibility to go forward in order that they too may make a difference in this world because they have been here. That is a powerful statement at an impressionable age, where we do, in fact, make a real difference in their lives. That is why our class giving a scholarship has been so important for me.

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As I think about my friends from East High, I can appreciate that each of us have made our own statement, each in our own way, but the important thing for each of us to consider is: have we as individuals made a difference in the lives of others? Each of us has contributed in our own way. You, John, are making a difference in assuming the responsibility of editing our "connecting link" so that each of us can remember our common root that lets us reflect on where we have each traveled on our own path in life. That helps each of us value our own lives and we can each better appreciate the path that we have taken.

I think of Jack Hartung often. He died this past year. For the past few years he was essentially unable to seriously appreciate life at the time of his death because his advanced Parkinson's disease had captured his body--but I was never sure that at the same time it had captured his mind. The last time I saw Jack I felt he was not even aware that I was there. I have been troubled that after I left his family told me that he spoke my name. That sent shutters through me, because I then realized that he was aware but was unable to do anything about it. A brilliant mind was trapped in his body.

Jack was a straight A student at East High. He was also All-City's end on East High's football team. In addition, he sat on the bench many times as a member of the East High basketball team. And he also played tennis for East High. He was well-rounded and significantly gifted. Jack went to Iowa State and graduated with a degree in physics with a grade point average of 3.86 on a 4.0 scale. He went to work for NASA, during which he got a Master's degree in Physics and his Doctorate degree in Lunar Geology. He was the world's foremost expert on micro-craters and moon rocks. Not a very marketable profession today, but his research contributed in such a significant way to our knowledge of the universe that Carl Sagan even mentions him in Cosmos. Dr. Sagan told me what Jack Hartung's research actually meant to him.

Jack was responsible for the trajectory of the spaceship from the Earth to the Moon and what the astronauts did after they got there. Jack literally reached for the stars. He told me he would personally go to the Moon even if he knew it would be a one way trip. He was trying to become an astronaut when he got his doctorate degree, but NASA ended its scientist astronaut program and he was not able to accomplish that dream.



Jack took a rather unusual path, but he did make a real difference in our world today with the knowledge of our universe that he discovered.

On the other hand, Harold Olsen never left home. He remained at East High and served as a teacher, and then a counselor for most of his career. Working with him while I was on the Alumni Association board I saw the true effect of his work. Harold personally organized all of the East High students considering continuing their own education beyond East High. He provided their opportunity to be interviewed by the Alumni Committee; and then participated in their becoming eligible and receiving their individual scholarships. He attended over 21 annual Alumni meetings to assure that they were recognized. He did that for most of his career. This was in addition to his regular duties. He performed all of the functions that all East High counselors provide.

Harold got involved in all of the personal problems those he counseled might have. The personal attention he provided his students helped them with personal and family crises, in addition to their career choices. He took extra effort to add meaning to the lives of each individual student in ways that other teachers cannot accomplish, as they must attend to their entire class, and seldom are able to communicate effectively on an individual basis unrelated to their subject matter.

Each of us has a favorite teacher that we have experienced in our life who made a real difference for us—and we still remember them. The fact that you can remember that person today means that even with the limited time that teacher had available to share with you, it has influenced your life forever. Harold went the extra mile and gave each student as much of his personal attention as that student needed. He was looked upon by many students as “their only adult friend”.

What makes Harold Olsen’s life even more important is that he had the opportunity to have more in-depth influence on the lives of thousands of students during his career. His influence on their life has been multiplied by what the students he influenced have then been able to contribute to the lives of others. Our lives are not measured by how far we have traveled. It is measured by what we have done to make in this world a better place because we have been here. Comparing the life of Harold Olsen with that of Jack Hartung makes an important point for me. Harold’s life was far more significant through his effect on the lives of other people living on earth today who will influence those that follow us in future generations because he contributed to helping them become better people. Thus, for me, Harold has earned a much greater share of immortality than most the rest of us will ever have the opportunity to achieve because he has positively influenced the lives of many more people. His efforts were truly “in the service of humanity”, and that is what East High is all about. The “spirit of East High” lives on and it is why we still share our reunions together.

The ability for us to each have an opportunity to help others that follow in our footsteps is why I think our East High Alumni Foundation Scholarship Program is so important. But then, I am a Humanist. I look at life through a different lens than most. I personally believe that our own immortality is the significance of our lives that leaves this Earth a

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better place because we have been here. In addition to our own happiness, to me that is the only thing that really matters in this life.

Thank you for allowing me to share my thoughts with you.

Sincerely,



Lyle L. Simpson  
LLS/md