

**UHS 1973,**

**Educator Frank Trujillo commented that “Whoever first coined the phrase ‘You’re the wind beneath my wings’ most assuredly was reflecting on the sublime influence of a very special teacher.”**

**Sorry, Frank, you may have a doctorate and you may be an important figure in Education, but you have it bassackwards.**

**Trust me, after forty-three years as a teacher, I know. In fact it was the most important of many lessons I was taught by this eclectic group of amazing people I met my first three years as a teacher. Four decades later it remains a fundamental truth that starting with the UHS Class of 1973, students have and continue to be the wind beneath my wings.**

**Hey, I know, at any reunion gathering people can and often do wax poetic and with bushel baskets of hyperbole. As for those of you who have at various times tried to renew or maintain correspondence with yours truly, I can understand an eye roll, sneer, or cynical chuckle at those opening lines. Nevertheless, they are true. Shoot, forty years ago you helped save my job at UHS during your senior year. (There are probably some members of the administration who still wonder why and how you did that.) And countless times since then a flash of nostalgia from those three years has re-energized me and my teaching, and helped me craft a different way to try and teach another group of students.**

**Seven or eight years ago a commercial appeared on television built around the concept of “herding cats.” I saw it a few times, laughed, and went back to everyday life. Then one day a class was having an especially difficult time dealing with a collaborative learning activity. I thought about**

the commercial for an instant, then cracked up when I immediately recalled my own “herding cats” experience during spring break of my first year at UHS.

I was chaperoning a group of UHS sophomores (all Class of 1973 members), and we had gone to dinner somewhere in Paris as a group. I think partly to celebrate the birthdays of a few people in the group. Long story short, we had a great time and were heading to the Metro for the trip back across the city to the Lycee St. Louis where we were staying. But the leader of the group, then a life-long New Yorker, figured that every major city must keep its subway open 24/7.

Wrong.

Let’s just say I learned a lot about planning ahead, not taking things for granted, and herding cats as we slowly but happily made our way across Paris that night. I told the class that story, and it helped generate a lot more collegiality among the various groups.

Then just a few semesters ago I was struggling to find something to recharge my battery and better convey the importance of observing and including all five senses to my screenwriting students. Suddenly it hit me: why not try *The Orange*. Oh, they looked at me like I was some kind of alien being when I told them to bring an orange to the next class session. And like many of you in one of my classes decades ago, a number of them probably are still wondering what it was all about.

And the last time I taught *Do The Right Thing* in a film and American Culture course, I wound up telling a story from UHS ’73 about a student who gave my 8th period Social Studies 10 class, a free puppet show one day, only to almost

be caught by the hall duty teacher. She went to Jim Murphy and insisted she had the culprit dead to rights. . .an African-American student with a red Afro hairstyle. Of course, I knew it had been Barney Griffin and not Canior Hill.

After I told that fact to the Assistant Principal, I still can see Jim Murphy fight and lose as he tried not to crack up with laughter.

Maybe the tale helped some students here get their minds around how we misread others, especially those who are other than ourselves. . .or maybe it made no difference.

Either way, like the herding cats experience and a number of other UHS '73 memories, it made me smile and laugh as I recalled and retold it.

Those times I just had to smile and laugh at myself, like I do all too often. Even when things really matter to me, I am the world's greatest procrastinator/rationalizer. I create more bogus reasons to convince myself that I will "get to it tomorrow" than Katy Scarlett O'Hara.

This "message" of "hey" and "thanks" is just another example. I have thought about it, planned it, written versions, mentally (it's amazing how great one's ideas can sound in the morning in the shower) and on paper and the word processor. However, I kept stopping myself because I wanted whatever I said to y'all (hey, I've been in the South for over two decades now) to be good, to be worth your time, and somehow to be able to convey just how much you truly have meant to me for four decades.

Hey, have a great time together. Laugh, remember, stretch the truth, and hopefully show one another and yourselves that you have learned what Murray Burns tried to teach his nephew Nick—that it's been worth the time and effort to get

**to know exactly the special thing you are. . .to stay awake  
and know who the phonies are. . .to know how to holler and  
put up an argument. . .to see all the wild possibilities. . .to  
know it's worth the trouble to give the world a little goosing  
whenever you get the chance. . .and most of all to know and  
share the subtle, sneaky, important reason you were born a  
human being and not a chair.**

**Ah, wholly to be a fool while Spring is in the air. . .yeah,  
kisses are a better fate than wisdom. . .since feeling is first.**

**Happy Fortieth. . .and thanks. Y.A.T.W. B.M.W.**

**As Russ Bastin would say, "Love 'ya, baby."**

**Bill Larsen**