

There are places I remember:

# ASL in the 1950s

During their trip to London for Reunion 2008, JAY MARRON '59 and JERRY SANDHAM '59 spoke with former English teacher Tosh Lee about their memories of ASL's early years.

## On what brought them to London

**JS:** I was in London because my father worked for General Motors. He was transferred over here in 1955. He worked in the Frigidaire division. After the war, everybody was buying refrigerators because they were moving away from the tradition that every day the wife would go to the store and buy the provisions for that day and then the next day she'd go to the store again—no supermarkets in those days. My father was here to build refrigerators and sell them to the British people.

**JM:** My mom worked in the Embassy, as did many other students' parents, and there was a large Navy complex; in fact, I got my hair cut in that headquarters. There was a PX [post exchange, similar to a commissary]. The whole Grosvenor Square area was a little America.

## On Stephen Eckard and Mary Bradley

**JM:** Headmaster Eckard was mostly an administrator, so we only had him in class occasionally, but he was at Assembly every morning. He knew everybody's name and he would address you by your first name. He was a very caring person. There was this little marble elevated area, and he would put his heels on that and he would sort of rock on his heels with his hands behind his back. He always wore a tie, he was always immaculately turned-out, and the ultimate diplomat. He would lecture to us on our responsibilities as Americans in England.

**JS:** When I met him I thought of him as a very eloquent man. He dressed well, he

always wore a shirt and tie, and you could tell he was a gentleman with a high degree of education, and with that in mind you sort of felt as though you were in a school that was going to give you a good education.

**JM:** Mary Bradley was an English teacher; a very strict teacher. We were all a little afraid of her! When she came into the room everybody was quiet. She had very high expectations for us, she was the kind of person that would throw you in the deep end of the pool, and Jerry, tell her about what you did...

**JS:** One day in ninth grade we were sitting in class and she points straight at me and she says "Jerry, you're going to learn the Gettysburg Address by heart and you are going to present it before Assembly on Friday. You have two weeks to learn it."

**JM:** Mr. Eckard was superb at hiring. They say it's who a CEO of a corporation hires that makes the difference and Mr. Eckard seemed to have a very perceptive attitude about that. One felt he was very perceptive of you, as a person. I think they knew my mom was a widow from the war and there was a little depression there, and I think they sensed that and they were very caring.

## On Harry Truman

**JM:** In the eighth grade we put on *As You Like It*, and we had field trips to the Old Vic for different Shakespearean plays. In the ninth grade we did *The Rivals* by Richard Sheridan, and I was given the lead... it was a horrendous thing. But, I did very well and I got the improvement button at the awards ceremony when Harry Truman came. It was the graduation of the ninth grade and we were waiting and waiting and waiting for what seemed like hours and then suddenly these tall men came up to the front of the fireplace in the Assembly room, which was



Jerry Sandham '59, Tosh Lee (ASL 1975-98) and Jay Marron '59

a large room in one of those old Georgian mansion homes (sadly, it's been destroyed). So, these big guys came in, and that was security, and then Harry came in and he gave a little lecture. It was a bit about how we're all diplomats and we have to be respectful. Then he gave an award to the valedictorian and then I got the improvement award, so I got to shake his hand.

## On food

**JM:** We went out for lunch and we'd go to the Embassy cafeteria which was also on Grosvenor Square. Somebody put sugar in the salt-shakers and salt in the sugar-shakers. So the Ambassador was putting sugar on his potatoes and salt in his coffee! There was a big to-do about it and we were banned from going out for lunch. My mother was terribly upset because she was a working, single mom—my father died in WWII—and so she had to get up early to make me lunch. She came into school to meet with Mr. Waller [Peter Waller, former administrator and trustee] and he put her at ease immediately. We were no longer to go to the Embassy, but the Navy had a snack bar on the other side of Grosvenor Square, where the Embassy is now, and so we would go there. That was better because they had milkshakes and ice cream and all sorts of things. So we were saved!

## On education

**JM:** The American School was so good because we had such good contact with our teachers; that's what was so superb about it. The classes were small, maybe 10 or 12 students, and the teachers took us on field trips. The math teacher, Mr. Hon, chaperoned the trip to Switzerland. There's something about the philosophy of the American School in London, from

when we experienced it, I sense it here now, too. There is a caring attitude, a high level of respect. It's either an attitude, or perhaps a philosophy of education. I call it an "emotional contagion," something that has come from Ms. Bradley, Mr. Eckard and Mr. Waller, and that contagion is still here. It's a caring, respectful attitude and an encouragement for students to try new things.

## On dancing

**JM:** We actually had square dance lessons on Fridays. One student's mother was a square dance caller, and she brought in recordings and taught us the steps every other Friday. On the other Friday we had ballroom dancing. And, you know, in sixth, seventh, eighth grade, you know, you're sort of afraid of the opposite sex, a little, at least it used to be that way! But we were encouraged to try dancing. And then, of course, the rock-and-roll thing hit. We had blue suede shoes and we started playing those records. There was this guy who came from Hawaii who knew the bop and he taught everybody.

**JS:** One Friday Mr. Eckard pointed at me and said, "Now we're going to learn the Lindy Hop and the gentleman that's going to teach us is right over there." And I had to get up there and show the students how to do the Lindy Hop! How fun! We students couldn't wait until Friday came.

## On travel and field trips

**JS:** My father worked for General Motors and they sent us here by ship. I came across on the *Queen Elizabeth*. It took us five days.

**JM:** I came across in the *SS America* and, in fact, I won a ping-pong competition on-board!

**TL:** And what about travels in Europe?

**JS:** One summer, we did a thing called a military hop. They were always sending planes to various sections of Europe. You put your name on a list and if a seat came up they called you and you flew free to wherever they went. We went to Copenhagen and we spent three or four days up there. Our senior trip was to Rome. Well, that lasted a good week because, again, in those days, to get there

we had to get on the train, go down to the English Channel and cross on a boat to France. The train would take us down through France and Switzerland. I remember going around Lake Como, which was quiet and serene and beautiful, and then down to Rome. It took at least two days just to get to Rome.

**JM:** We had so many field trips; every Wednesday was a field trip. At one point, some of us went to Arosa, Switzerland. My mother was hoping I'd have ski lessons, but we ended up tobogganing. We had a lot of experiential learning through the School, and I think that philosophy is still present today: a commitment to not only book-learning, but to experiencing things; London is the ultimate city for that.

## On the facilities

**JM:** The School building was Georgian, pillared, terraced, very typical of London. It had a marble staircase—two or three people could be going up and down at the same time. The assembly room was this huge room with four very large French windows that opened onto a little balcony. Each class had its own homeroom. The buildings next door were not occupied, and we used to play in the bombed-out buildings. We found old British helmets and first aid kits—gosh! Parts of the basement had been used as air raid shelters.

## On being rebellious

**TL:** What did you do if you were being rebellious?

**JM:** Well, we played in bombed-out buildings is what we did!

**JS:** I was there in 1955-56 and they were just building the new embassy in Grosvenor Square. All the buildings on that side of the square had to be torn down, so one day, I said to Jay, "Let's go over there and help tear some of them down." We crossed over the barriers and we're taking some of the bricks out and we're looking in some of the rooms that are already demolished. No sooner did we do this than the British police, the bobbies, saw us. They came over and motioned for us to come towards them. So sure enough we came over, and we say to ourselves, "Gosh, we're in deep trouble now." We



In the 1950s, students had dance lessons every Friday.

told them we were Americans and we saw them tearing down the buildings, so we thought we'd help a little bit. They said, "Well, all right. Please leave the area and don't come back again," and that was the end of it. But we thought, "Oh man, they're gonna put us in jail!"

## On sports

**JS:** We had a sports program; we didn't have the facilities like students have today at ASL. We got on our PE clothes and we hiked on over to Hyde Park, and we played [American] football and baseball. There were very limited facilities, but we made the best out of what we had.

**TL:** Did you compete with English schools?

**JM:** No, there wasn't any inter-school activity at that point. In fact, baseball and football were American sports and British people walking by would stop and look, because they hadn't seen it before—it was fairly new after the war. They would come up and ask us questions, you know, "Why did you throw the ball that way?" Sort of like us looking at cricket! 

Edited by Laurie Hindley and Rebecca Moore.  
Transcript by Anna Higgins '09.



ASL in the 1950s