

## An Experience That Changed My Life

On a quiet tranquil early morning, I'm walking on dew-laden freshly laid sod at Grover Mitchell Field. I hear the thumping rumble and rusty squeals of cold blue steel train wheels and a moan of the horn of a train bound in an out of downtown. I drift off to the sound tracking to a memory of a similar train behind my old high school (Dewey High School in East Oakland).

It was 1969 and I had just turned 16, when I had an experience that literally changed my life and to this day gives me pause. I walked to school each day and sometimes if I had change I would take the bus. This day I walked and had arrived at school early and I went directly to the science classroom. I sat down in the back of the classroom by the sinks and all the Bunsen burners and beakers and all the cool stuff. I really respected my teacher, Ms. East. She was incredibly intelligent. She was a beautiful very thin African American woman in her early 20's. And she loved to teach. She was always upbeat and smiling which was infectious to her rag tag group of students.

I was looking at the doorway, waiting to see who would come in next, as I was the only one in the classroom at the time. All of a sudden, two guys came running into the room. One I had seen before – although he was new to the school. The other I didn't know. I sensed something was up. They were coming right for me. And it wasn't good. The kid I hadn't seen before was older. He came right up to me and demanded money. I thought to myself that I wouldn't be bullied, so I replied, "No, man." He came closer to me by the counter I was sitting behind, and again demanded I give him so money. I said no. The other kid was getting nervous, and kept looking at the only way out which was at the front of the classroom. Soon the other kids would be arriving, as well as Ms. East. The older kid pulled out a small handgun and said, "Man, you better give me some money." And I thought, "Uh oh." I was cornered by them, with no escape, and was very scared. I was shaking, and I couldn't think. But no way could I say yes. "I can't be bullied," I thought. "No" came off my lips. "No way man, I'm not going to be bullied." The other kid said, "Let's go – they'll be coming in here soon." The older kid didn't move. Instead, he raised the gun to my head and said, "Man, give me some money, or you're dead." At this point I'm thinking I'm dead, it's over. He's serious, and I can't get by them. This kid means it. He has no fear – he has the power of the gun. At this point I'm numb and trembling, but my lips say "No, I'm not going to do it. I'm not giving you any money."

Quickly he says, "We're going to be back tomorrow, and you better have some money for us." I said, "No way, man." He said, "You want me to do it now?" I said, "No. And I'm not going to give you any money." At this point the other kid was heading for the door. "Let's go, man. They're coming!" he yelled. The older kid looked at me kind of stunned and bewildered, and lowered the gun, and said, "We'll see you

tomorrow." I started yelling, "I'll never give you any money." I was shaking uncontrollably and started to cry. I started to get up from my chair and hoped someone would catch them in the doorway or down the hall. I was afraid they would be waiting for me outside the door. As I slowly tiptoed towards the door, I saw Ms. East coming down the hallway. I bolted down the hall, past Ms. East, and out of the school, and didn't look back. At this point it almost seemed like a dream. I ran by people, crossing busy streets, through buses and cars, not caring about the street lights. I just wanted to get away. I ran all the way home.

When I got home I told my mom what had happened. She was very distraught. I then called the school and told Ms. East what had happened. She had me tell the principal, Dr. Kelly, as well. Dr. Kelly was a great man. He told me that those boys would never be back to the school ever again. He said, "I'm sorry it ever happened." I got off the phone with Dr. Kelly, and my mom told me that she didn't want me to go back to that school. When my dad got home he told me he felt the same way. I said no, and went back to school the next morning. I'm glad I did. I was okay.

I felt different. This experience was something incredibly scary that changed my life, and I stood up to it. I wasn't afraid to stand up and hold to my values and core instincts, my sense to do what was right, at an early age. Since that day I've learned that death can stare you in the eyes many times. Be happy every day in some way. People ask me why I wear a yellow band around my wrist. It's for those people who have cancer, for I can never forget them and how strong and brave they are during their difficult times.

Hold to your principles. The time in my life is now to do what's right for the District and garner those funds that are needed for the future. Some things you never give up on. It's going to be a beautiful day, a great Spring and a good year.

### **From Pirates to Prospectors**

Argh! A final shot over the bow of me ship to the City of Gold. Tha treasure be found, but I'll be back with me mates, someday. Argh!

Keep watch for the coming tall tales and gold trails of Wagon Wheel Bill!

### **Quote**

"Train beyond your Ability. Perform beyond your Expectations. Reach beyond your Imagination." Bill Spizuoco

### **Fun Facts**

The microwave was invented after a researcher walked by a radar tube and a chocolate bar melted in his pocket.

TYPEWRITER is the longest word that can be made using the letters only on one row of the keyboard.

No word in the English language rhymes with month, orange, silver, or purple.

### **FRRPD Upcoming Events**

March 14-15 – California State Old Time Open Fiddle & Picking Championships. Oroville State Theater. March 14 at 3 PM, March 15 at 8 AM.

March 16 – Kids Art Day at the Municipal Auditorium from 10 AM-2 PM. Imagine, learn and have fun creating art!

March 17 – CPR class at the Municipal Auditorium, 5-9 PM.

March 18 – Cartooning class begins at the Municipal Auditorium, 4-5 PM.

March 19 – Art for Kids begins at the Municipal Auditorium, 4-5 PM.

March 19 – First Aid at the Municipal Auditorium, 5-9 PM.

March 22 – Easter at Riverbend Park. Come see the Easter Bunny and hunt for more than 10,000 eggs! There will also be face painting, egg dying, egg tosses, a bounce house, snacks, and pictures with the Easter Bunny. The fun starts at noon.

See you in the parks!