

**Magee High School Presentation**  
**By Shelley Sperling**  
**May 28, 2005**

It was hard to stand up in front of the class and talk. I kept expecting Mr. Sutherland's ghost to appear and demand that I write "I WILL NOT TALK IN CLASS" 500 times.

Seeing everyone on Friday night made me realize that we've all held up pretty well, and despite the knees that crackled and popped when we had to kneel down to pose for the group photo, it seemed to me that we looked in really good shape and were still recognizable as the very same kids we were back in 1955.

It reminded me of the story of the woman who died on the operating table and went to heaven. God meets her at the pearly gates and says, "*This was a mistake. You were destined to recover from your operation and live to be a very old lady.*" Then he sends her back to earth.

Then she wakes up from the operation and recovers, and figures since she's got this wonderful new lease on life, she might as well enjoy it. So she not only gets her hair coloured and a total makeover at Elizabeth Arden, but also gets a face lift, has her eyelids done, gets botox injections, a tummy tuck, breast enhancement surgery, liposuction – the whole works.

A week later, she's hit by a drunk driver, and killed. She arrives back at the pearly gates, really furious. "*I suffered through all this surgery because you promised me I was going to live to a very old age!*" she complains.

"*I'm sorry,*" God replies, "*I didn't recognize you!*"

Back in our teens, 50 years ago, we were brimming with untapped talent, untested strengths, as we were waiting for our whole lives to unfold. Back then, we were too self-absorbed, too anxious about adolescent concerns, too worried about acceptance, to really understand who we were or to plumb the depths of our capacities or have much inkling of awaiting destinies. Now, we know; we've experienced the joys and triumphs, the pain and heartaches of lives lived for another half century. We're older and wiser. Can we credit this to experience, learned coping skills, will and character – or to better medication, like Prozac?

Joking aside, I believe in our hearts we all know the answer to that. In the words of the author, Jeffrey Eugenides in the novel *Middlesex*, "*Biology gives you a brain. Life turns it into a mind.*"