"IT SEEMS Like Only Yesterday" — the Berlin Wall had just gone up in August, and the Bay of Pigs Invasion had been just six months before. Most of us had never heard of the small Southeast Asian country called South Vietnam which, in just a few short years, would play such an important role in our lives.

"West Side Story" won the Oscar for Best Picture and Andy Williams' "Moon River" won a Grammy. Arnold Palmer captured The British Open and Gary Player won The Masters. Floyd Patterson was the Heavyweight Champion of the world.

George Bush was working in the oil fields of West Texas, and Nolan Ryan was "throwing heat" in his home town of Alvin. Roger Maris hit 61 homers to break Babe's record. The Yankees won the Series. Twenty years earlier Ted Williams became the
last ball player to hit over 400. Alan Shepard Jr. became America’s first man in space.

Rock & Roll, “Twist & Shout,” the Bop, the Stroll, ’57 Chevys, T-Birds, flat tops, and bobby socks were still the rage. Roy Orbison’s “Running Scared” (we fish could certainly identify with that) was at the top of the charts. “Pretty Woman” was not in sight for Orbison or Aggieland at the time. Chuck Berry, The Big Bopper, Rickey Nelson, Conway Twitty — my kids think we had it made; I believe we did.

The population of Bryan/College Station was less than 30,000, and the price of gasoline fluctuated around 24 cents a gallon. The enrollment at A&M hovered around 8,000 students who were mostly Texans. Participation in the corps was compulsory for two years, and there were no females for miles.

Kevin Costner was six. Elvis was twenty-six and the “King of Rock & Roll.” And I was in love with Natalie Wood. Yet, to me and my fish buddies, other events would soon fill our hearts and minds with memories never to be forgotten, memories similar to the ones going through your mind right now.

The year was 1961. Most kids from small Texas towns — (towns like New Boston, Van Vleck, DeKalb, Alvin, Mart, Hondo, and Gonzales) went to A&M as a green and unsuspecting boy of 18. Yes, we soon found out we were not too different from those kids from Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio. None of us could have dreamed of what was ahead. It was a good thing because most of us would not have gone to Aggieland in the first place had we had an inkling of what lay in store for us during our fish year. I am glad we didn’t know because many of us would have missed out on the best years of our lives.

We arrived in September in the midst of one of the worst hurricanes in Texas history, Hurricane Carla. While other classes might not have descended upon Aggieland riding the wings of a storm, I’m sure they knew something was brewing as soon as we stepped foot on the campus. Little did we realize, at the time, that the fury of the storm was mild compared to the fury of those hungry, mean, and less than-understanding sophomores who came to be known as “wet-heads” (or something like that). This was a very appropriate term for them, but that is another story . . . back to the beginning.

After haircuts, uniform issue, and dorm assignments, we finally arrived at our home-away-from home. It was there we began our journey to becoming a life-long, maroon-bleeding, fightin’ Texas Aggies.

There we were, three of us in a room big enough for one, stacked on top of each other in a three-section bunk bed. Being the shortest, I was assigned the top bunk. I still have bumps on my head from hitting the ceiling when the “Whistle Jock” would blow, “first call for chow, fall out for chow ...!” It did not take
long to realize that this was not exactly how college life was depicted in the current Sandra Dee movie showing at the Wacca Theater in New Boston when I left home. I was beginning to think that maybe my mom was right after all. She had wanted me to go to Baylor. (Don’t hiss her too loudly, she became one of the all-time great Aggie supporters before my first semester ended — just like all Aggie moms.)

Then came our first “big” event — “All College Night.” And it was just that, because it was the first time that all students were gathered together in one place. The site was G. Rollie White Coliseum, the “Holler House on the Brazos.” I will never forget it — what a night. After marching to G. Rollie and “wildcatting” into the coliseum, we fish, all khaki clad with shaved heads, took our place in the stands on the west side of the gymnasium. Talk about everybody looking alike! There we were — Ted, David, Johnnie, Herb, Ron, Steve, Larry, Roy, Buddy, George, .... But on that day in 1961, we were all just plain ol’ fish Jones. What a class, the Class of ’65 — “All for one and one for all.” Anyway ...

That’s when the head yell leader, Jim Dais, Class of ’62, jumped on the platform and looked all of us fish in the eye. (I’m sure you Aggies remember how it seemed; it was just as if the were looking straight at you.) Then, he said, “I want you to look at the man on your right and the man on your left because he won’t be here at the end of the year.” I thought to myself that what he said was at least a half-truth because I wasn’t even going to be here at the end of the week, much less the end of the year. Why, my “fish ol’ lady” hadn’t even unpacked yet! (Don’t laugh too hard, most of us probably hadn’t unpacked either.)

Nobody had ever made me feel so low and unworthy as those upperclassmen did. Even marching was a test of survival. I had never marched in my life. They kept telling me to “dig-in” my left heel on ‘utt.” The problem was every sound the First Sergeant made in calling cadence sounded like “utt.” I always wondered, but never asked, if all my fish buddies thought the same thing. We were beginning to wonder why we were paying our hard-earned money to be treated like that. Of course, we know now that the cost was infinitesimal in comparison to what we received. But that wasn’t what I was thinking as he was yelling “utt.” Frankly, I was still too scared to move. Well, back to “All College Night” ....

The head yell leader began to introduce the football team and coaches. He taught us a few yells and talked about what it meant to be an Aggie. I listened to every word. Then it happened! For the first time, as a member of the Twelfth Man, I participated in the singing of “The Spirit of Aggieland.” I was “gigged” from then on. That’s not to say I never felt like leaving again, because I did — especially on a Saturday night when the upperclassmen would pass by our windows with their dates. I probably would have hit Highway 6 in a hurry if it hadn’t been for the encouragement given to me by former students.

Just when we were about to be “down for the count,” they would come to lift us up, doing all the things; older Ags have done for younger Ags throughout the existence of A&M. What a tradition! What a school! It was rough, challenging, trying, testing, hard, almost impossible — but the oneness, the togetherness, the comradeship, the esprit de corps, overwhelmed those of us who stayed. It was great! Yep, the blood was at least mauve at this point and getting deeper maroon by the day.

And here we are 54 years later. We’ve lost many of our Classmates in Vietnam and in countless other ways. Gone, but not forgotten as we witnessed on April 21, 2015 at our 50th Anniversary Muster Reunion. We will never forget the sound of our voices as we answered “HERE” in unison as the names of our Classmates who had passed were called.