

Dan Abramowicz: Hello, Turk, it is very good to meet you. My name is Dan Abramowicz from the Graduate School Class of 1984 or *84. I'm currently the Chief Technology Officer for a company called Crown Holdings, a metal packaging company. And I'm the former chair of the APGA, the Association of Princeton Graduate Alumni. I'm currently a member of the Princetoniana Committee. And, as you know, I'm doing this project on the History of the Marshals for Princetoniana and I really appreciate your help. Turk, if you would, could you please briefly introduce yourself.

Turk Thacher: Yes, my name is Turk Thacher and I'm a member of the Class of 1966 and a proud Honorary Member of the Great Class of 1941, which was my father's class. I am currently a realtor working with my wife and I am the Vice-Chair of Baker Industries, a wonderful, unique nonprofit workforce development company. I was President of Baker Industries for 16 years and I am actively engaged, helping to raise money and write grants and organize grants and other things for the company, as it now sits. From a Princeton standpoint, I was the President of my class for 10 years. I was also Reunion Co-Chairperson for my class for 42 years, from the 10th to the 52nd reunion, when I stepped aside. Although I was dragged in as a volunteer to assist the team that that took over, given the circumstances. Although, I mean, we had a wonderful COVID reunion. It was really very well done, but it's a different world right now.

And I've been devoted to Princeton all my life. When my father died in 1978, I started a scholarship in his memory. That scholarship now generates \$162,000 every year and provides funding for five students at the university, for which I'm very proud. And I get very excited when I meet someone who is eligible for this financial aid. For example, we've had 11 PICS interns at Baker. And the most recent one, Thomas Hughes, declared that he was so touched and so struck by the work that he did with us, that he's going to devote his first career to service. Thomas is a rising sophomore at Princeton.

Dan Abramowicz: Wow ... that's quite a remarkable legacy. Thank you for that Turk and for all of the great volunteer work you have done for the university. And did I hear you right? You were the Co-Chair of your class's reunion for 42 years?

Turk Thacher: Yes.

Dan Abramowicz: Oh, my Lord. So, you know more about Princeton reunions than most people on the planet.

Turk Thacher: I guess I do know a lot.

Dan Abramowicz: Well, I'm certain that you know how to throw a party!

Turk Thacher: And we have, our class has won the Clancy Award twice.

Dan Abramowicz: Fantastic. Well, congratulations for that and thanks again for all of your hard work on behalf of the university.

Now, turning to the P-Rade itself. I understand you were a Grand Marshal for the P-Rade in 1989 and 1990. Were you a Marshal in the P-Rade before that time?

Turk Thacher: No, I have never been a Marshal.

Dan Abramowicz: Okay. So, you went right from the Reunions Committee role to being the Grand Marshal.

Turk Thacher: Yes, I was Chair of the Committee on Reunions during that period as well. And I think there must have been a tradition that the Chair had an opportunity to be Grand Marshal. I don't really remember when that tradition started, but it must have been in place in the late 1980's, because I was never a Marshal or Line Marshal. Therefore, there was no vetting that took place for me to become the Grand Marshal.

Dan Abramowicz: I think you are right. There were a number of years, six years I believe, when the Chair of the Reunions Committee became a Grand Marshal. That's wonderful.

Switching gears, I'm interested to understand your view on the key role of the Marshals in the P-Rade.

Turk Thacher: Well, one of the things that I've done with one of my classmates each year, up until COVID, was to educate the senior class. We had the opportunity to address the senior class, to teach them the locomotive and to lecture them about the role of the Marshals. We encouraged them to pay attention to this wonderful group of underappreciated volunteers that stand out there and try to keep order during the P-Rade. And it's truly a thankless job. There's no doubt about it because they've got to keep the P-Rade moving, keep it orderly, and keep the route open so that the people on the sides don't crowd the P-Rade route too much. And they do a wonderful job of it, I think – they really do.

Dan Abramowicz: I agree.

Turk Thacher: I still don't want to be a Marshal, though!

Dan Abramowicz: It seems that you have developed a great perspective through your extensive experience with P-rades! I was wondering ... is there anything about the P-rade or the role of the Marshals that changed during your tenure or that you can remember during your time with reunions?

Turk Thacher: There was one dramatic change in the P-Rade and that was the change in the route of the event. Up through 1990, the P-Rade went down through 1879

Arch, marched down Prospect Street and then went down to the baseball field or Clarke Field. And the Committee on Reunions, and others, were very upset that the P-rade was taking too long. It was now approaching three and a half plus hours for the P-rade to run. And so we sought an alternative route that would be a little bit shorter, but that wouldn't take away from the excitement of walking through the crowds, because going through the 1879 Arch you see hundreds, maybe thousands of people standing along the side of the route. It was really quite something ... really quite something. So that was the biggest change in my view. And that change took effect for my 25th reunion in 1991, which is one of the pictures I sent you. In the photograph you can see me in my 25th reunion outfit.

Dan Abramowicz: That's terrific. And that really was a major change. I know that the route has changed many times, but generally in smaller ways. At one point the P-rade incorporated Nassau Street and that changed. But you described a big change, because up until that time, the reunion was a way to celebrate the Princeton Yale baseball game. And the P-rade would culminate on the baseball field. I'm not sure if it was right before the game would start. So, this change that you presided over, so to speak, in 1990, was probably one of the most fundamental change in the route. That's a great thing to capture here from a historical perspective ... thank you for that.

On another note, can you think of a memory of Marshals involved in the P-rade that comes to mind? Something in particular that they may have done that brings back a memory in any way?

Turk Thacher: Not really. Just the fact that my class typically likes to stop and cheer every major class along the route of the P-rade and the Marshals had the difficult task of trying to get us to speed up and not allow any large gaps in the P-rade. And it was such a thankless job for those poor people, but they're great volunteers. But no, nothing else that comes to mind.

Dan Abramowicz: Okay, thank you. What about some of your fondest memories of the P-rade? Either marching in it in your many years coming back for your class reunion or perhaps as the Grand Marshal?

Turk Thacher: Well, my favorite memory is my first memory. I was only three or four years old, walking with my father's class in the P-rade and my job, together with the son of another classmate, was to carry a galvanized bucket of beer and not spill it. And I just remember being terrified that I was going to spill it. And another favorite memory was during our 20th class reunion. We had the beer distributor construct a cart that would carry two kegs of beer in the P-rade. And by the time we got to 1879 Arch, the cart was just about empty. But we couldn't get the cart down the steps. So, we took the cart around the Arch and the whole P-rade followed us briefly around the Arch until the Marshals took charge. And, needless to say, beer carts were outlawed in the P-rade after that!

Dan Abramowicz: Well, that's a remarkable bit of history. It sounds like you took your job seriously. And even at a very early age, you were honing your skills for efficient delivery of beer through the P-rade!

Turk Thacher: Absolutely! Another memory is when I was 15 years old, before I could legally drive. My father was up there at his reunion and he and all his classmates were so inebriated that he had me drive one of his classmate's cars back to the New Jersey shore and I didn't have a driver's license at the time.

Dan Abramowicz: That's fantastic ... that's another great memory.

Is there anything else that you would like to add? As I recall, you have been the P-rade Narrator twice. First in 1990, if I have that correctly, when it still ended on Clarke Field ... when it culminated in the baseball field.

Turk Thacher: Right.

Dan Abramowicz: And then the next year in 1991, where I assume it ended at Poe Field.

Turk Thacher: Yes, in 1990, Dan White from the Class of '65 was head of the alumni. I'm not sure what his title was. But he asked me to narrate the P-rade primarily to try to keep his class entertained as they sat in the stands for their 25th reunion watching the P-rade. He asked me because I had a good relationship with many of his classmates and I had a lot of fun doing it. And I did it again the following year for my 25th class reunion. And then Gregg Lange took over and he did it forever.

Dan Abramowicz: Wow. So, you taught Gregg Lange how to do it?

Turk Thacher: Well, I'm not sure I taught him anything. He was pretty good on his own, but he observed me. I'll put it that way. I'm not sure he'll admit that though! I'm not sure he'll admit, but I have photographic evidence, as you can see.

Dan Abramowicz: I do, yes. And I'll be sure to include those photographs in the history, as they show the background for the end of the P-rade changing during those two years. This has been wonderful and I've heard some really great stories and history to include. Is there anything that I might have missed or anything else you wanted to mention before we conclude?

Turk Thacher: Well, nothing except to say that there's no place that does reunions like Princeton University. And I think most universities covet us for our ability to galvanize so many alumni and get them so enthusiastic about an event and the place. It's amazing. It is just amazing.

Dan Abramowicz: You are right. The university takes its relationship with alumni very seriously and creating that sense of a vibrant "university community" is one way they do it. They do it many ways, but one key way is through the reunions.

Turk Thacher: I think one of the smartest ways is to focus on the class as an entity. So, it's not only a Princeton reunion, it's very much the Class of 1966 reunion as well. You know? So, it's really wonderful.

Dan Abramowicz: You mean, "The Great Class of 1966!"

Turk Thacher: Absolutely. The Great Class of 1966.

Dan Abramowicz: Yes. Well, Turk, this has been a real pleasure and a lot of fun.

Turk Thacher: Super, thank you Dan, very much. I appreciate it.

Dan Abramowicz: It was a real pleasure, Turk. Thank you again.