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When I first walked into my High School Sophomore year, the first thing that struck me was the newness of it all. After all, this was the first year of Shadow Mountain High School. Not just for me, but for everyone there. Shadow Mountain was a new school. Only freshmen and sophomores were there. No upper classmen, no traditions, nothing. Everyone was confused, everyone was excited, everyone was new.

A month or so into the year, the students were asked "What mascot would you like for this brand new school?" The powers that be asked the students to come up with their own choices and a vote would be held. Well, there's a question. Lots of possible answers presented themselves to us. Shadow Mountain is a bit of a bear to say. Tacking some multisyllable mascot on the end of it would only make it worse. The "Fighting Shadow Mountain Armodillos," for instance, would just be too long. By the time an announcer at a football game got all of the words out, the opening kickoff and three plays would have been completed. Something classy yet clever was called for.

Perhaps something like The Spacers would work. The fact that there is no Shadow Mountain in Phoenix didn't stop the city from naming the school that. We didn't have to actually go into space to be the Spacers. No that wouldn't work. Too many jokes intrinsic in that name. How about the Shadows? That was my first choice. The mascot could be almost anything and even though shadows are quite insubstantial, it would be mysterious.

Unfortunately for me, the Shadows was not picked. In fact, we ended up as the Shadow Mountain Matadores. "What? Where the hell did that come from?" were my first thoughts. I guess someone took the 'no Shadow Mountain' attitude a bit too far. There are no bulls in Phoenix, either.

I think this beginning made me very aware of school mascots. So much so that when I chose a college to attend, part of my decision was based on the mascot. My choice? Scottsdale College and those

vicious Artichokes. No kidding. The official mascot was the Artichokes. We had a nine foot tall aluminium artichoke statue in front of the school and we liked it that way. It was chosen because the school wanted to emphasize scholastics rather than athletics. I guess whoever came up with the idea felt any sports team our school might field would be so embarrassed that they wouldn't play well. If that was true, money would be funneled to academics rather than a successful sports program. The fact the our football team was first in the league didn't seem to fit in with the overall plan.

When I left Scottsdale College, I didn't expect to meet anyone who had a stranger mascot. I was wrong.

A fellow Vagrant once told me that he attended Laguna Beach High School, and that their mascot was the Artists. I can just see the headlines now, "Big game this friday: The Laguna Beach Artists vs The Mendicina Mass Murderers." What a game.

"Okay," I thought, "I won't meet anyone with a stranger mascot. Again, I was wrong.

During a recent trip to Des Moines, I learned of an even stranger school mascot. Someone who shall remain nameless but that I'm married to went to Doweling High School in Des Moines. And their mascot, their trademark, their representative? The Doweling High School Maroons. Suddenly images of Bugs Bunny murmuring under his breath, "What a maroon" popped into my head. Blech!

Wait, new headlines: "The Artists paint the town off-red with the Maroons' quarterback."

I'll take the Artichokes (dipped in melted butter) any day.

As always, Apa-tizer is brought to you by the sick and twisted mind of

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ALSO HEARD FROM...

When I heard that the topic for this month was education, I almost didn't submit anything, because, out of all the people I know, I'm the one with the least education. I only attended 2 years of high school and didn't graduate (although I have a diploma). I never went to college. So I've always felt a little out of my depth when all my friends talk about college. I did, however get quite an education. I went to airline school for three months and had a career in that field for eight years then I went to dealer's school for three months and have had a career as a dealer for the last six years.

There was never a "special" teacher in my past, or a class that changed my life. Perhaps if there had been, I would have stayed in school and my life would be definitely different. I also would never have had the chance to learn how to fit in at a pub in Sydney, or how to bargain for trinkets in Martinique. My education has always been grimly practical, so I never learned underwater basket weaving or discussed Taoism with a bunch of college freshmen. Instead, I learned how to flip a playing card into a hat from five paces, or how to find the area in an airline computer that spells out in phonetic Spanish how to keep a Spanish-speaking person on the line to be assisted by another Spanish-speaking airline person.

So which is better, a formal college education or technical training? Well, I guess that depends on your life goals. I wanted a job that lets me accomplish the fun things I want, like travel or playing games. Ken wants a career that lets him help save the Earth or educate people, so he must have a degree that "proves" (like the Scarecrow in Oz) that he is a deep thinker and is qualified for the position of park liaison or whatever. I think that many of the young people that are accepted into college should have been steered into technical schools or that they at least should get a job for a few years to get a better idea of what career they'd be suited for so they won't get "useless" degrees or are be unhappy in careers that they can't afford to change. I know that Ken feels that the insignificant stuff they force you to take in college makes for a more well-rounded person but I think that an interesting life and travel make that round shape more smooth. I'd rather talk to someone with practical experience than someone who "knows" it from a class. Call me a snob.

Aileen Forman for Ken's zine