Dancing, Laughing, Smiling
©2020 Ted Schaar

Janesville, Wisconsin, Craig High School classmate Nanette Porter, who died in a 1968 car crash along with fellow juniors Sally Mixon, whom I didn't know, and Pat Steinbicer, whom I knew a little from my years at the city's Wilson Elementary School, stays in my mind.

In the fall of 1962, I met Nanette when I was the new sixth-grade kid at Roosevelt Elementary School after my parents moved from Putnam Avenue to Fremont Street. She sat next to me in Mr. Graper's classroom.

Her mom was an English teacher at Craig who years later took an interest in my writing and encouraged me. I don't think Nanette knew because I had nothing to do with her after sixth grade. However, I always was aware of her uncut hair. She usually wore it in a long pony tail that fell down below her waist. Finally one day, probably during our sophomore year, she arrived at school with her hair cut. I noticed and I'm sure many others did, too.

Not long after, Nanette attended a school dance in the lower-level cafeteria at Craig and was accompanied by some friends or relatives from out of town. Might have been her cousins, I can't remember, but someone at the time said they were from the Milwaukee area.

What I do recall vividly is one of the boys (classmate Kris Craigo mentioned recently his name was Jim, and he was from Whitefish Bay, a Milwaukee suberb) in her group was a superb and completely uninhibited dancer. He took Nanette out on the floor and just tore it up twirling and twisting her every which way, and she proved adept at matching him step for step. It was one of those scenes where others moved away to give Nanette and the guy more room and those on the sidelines were treated to a Hollywood-like performance.

I can see it like a movie in my head.

What's embedded even deeper, though, is the big, wide grin on Nanette's face. She was smiling and laughing and having the time of her life. I never saw her like that before or after.

But she'll always be dancing and laughing and smiling in my memory.

* * *