

Class of '62

Pete Liebengood

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Youthful hijinks echo through the decades in this fun and funny mystery that spans generations.

Taking senior pranks to a whole new level, the San Marcos High School graduating class shocks the community of Santa Barbara with their racy mischief. Clever and compelling from the get-go, *Class of '62* is full of mystery and intrigue delivered with a dose of irreverent, laugh-out-loud humor that belies the hurt and controversy continuing to hound the graduates decades later. Pete Liebengood offers an insightful look at how choices made every day can shape the future.

The senior party is in full swing when KEYT-TV's regular airing of Lawrence Welk's *Dodge Dance Party* is interrupted by footage of a pornographic threesome. The "skin flick" carries the caption "Courtesy of the Class of '62, SMHS." Responses range from laughter, ribald joking, and dismay to downright rage on the part of station owner Edna Pendleton Wright. To make matters worse, longtime chief engineer Orrin Burdette suffers a heart attack as a masked student enters the station to air the film. Fifty years later, bad luck seems to shadow everyone associated with the prank, and the seniors themselves get caught up in the curse, which culminates the night of their first and only reunion, the fiftieth, as classmates attempt to solve the mystery of exactly who was responsible.

The characters that populate *Class of '62* are as diverse and colorful as one might find in any public high school, but what stands out is Liebengood's artistry in weaving a well-paced, thoughtful mystery involving more than a dozen people. From homecoming queen Linda Dalby to Wayne Preston, voted "least likely to succeed," students from the class of 1962 are more than just caricatures and stereotypes.

Depth, growth, and surprising development are shown over the encompassed span of fifty years. Even the subplot's delightfully crotchety stars, Cecil Shapiro and Vernon Goldstein, "a pair of balding, bespectacled, philosophical bookends," evolve as they attempt one last heist. After all, "being crooks at age seventy-eight and eighty-one respectively had its drawbacks."

Beginning in 1962, the action jumps back and forth throughout the fifty-year time frame. Usually, but not always, chapters begin with clues that reveal the temporal setting; Liebengood keys into well-known historical events in cues such as "a month since JFK's assassination," or drops referential hints such as a remark about Linda's "new '69 Corvette." The chronology is not always immediately clear, though, and it might be easier to follow—particularly for those who did not live through the events of the '60s, '70s, or even '80s—if indications of dates were included. Grammatical errors seem to keep pace with the story, increasing in frequency toward the climax, but prior to that are few and far between.

Class of '62 is an ideal summer read. Liebengood's often-risqué humor, quirky characters, and unabashed honesty are reminiscent of Carl Hiaasen's style, without the environmental agenda but definitely with the outlandish hijinks.

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