

Googling Michael Larkin

by Michael Larkin

THIS PAST summer, as my 20th high-school reunion neared and spam announced that dozens of people were searching for me, Michael Larkin, on reunion websites, dread descended like fog. I, Mr. Most Likely to Succeed, Las Lomas High School Class of 1986, felt the press of my classmates' judgment. Was I the Michael Larkin they expected to see in 20 years' time? Had I done anything truly substantive? Clearly, I needed to find out what Michael Larkin had been up to for the past two decades.

So I googled myself.

Apparently, I needn't have worried. Michael Larkin has been hugely successful! And busy. Reassured by my life's search-engine narrative, I rolled into San Francisco for the reunion alongside Michael Larkin's wife. It was great to see everyone after so many years. Lots of hugs and laughs. I always asked first what people had been up to, because as you may know, Michael Larkin is quite modest about his considerable achievements. "Not much," they'd say. Then they'd ask, "How 'bout you?"

Well, I'd say, I retired after 34 years as a pilot for TWA; now I write poetry. I direct a choral group in Delaware and have over 170 musical compositions to my name. Been selling homes in Denver. Also running a business in Oregon that fixes conveyer belts and pinball machines. And finding homes for stray dogs in Melbourne. Working as a landscape photographer in the Australian countryside. I'm an assistant principal in Bristol, Connecticut. Plus I'm CFO of a San Diego company that helps, and I quote, "leading retailers to outperform the competition and generate significant top-line and bottom-line results and achieve Retail Excellence." I don't know what that means either, I'd say, and my classmates and I would have a good laugh.

I added that I'm a professor of bacteriology at Queens University in Belfast; among my interests are "*Rhodococcus* spp and their catabolic abilities." (Their eyes would glaze over on that one.) Got PhDs and master's degrees *ad infinitum*: in musical arts, psychology, physics, philosophy, marine biology, among other fields. Teaching at the University of Birmingham (UK), William Rainey Harper College, University of Miami, just too many campuses to count. My curriculum vitae goes on and on. What can I say? I'm an eternal student, ever curious.

"Wait. You've *done* all that?" my classmates would ask, incredulous. "No," I'd correct them, "I'm *doing* all that." Simultaneously.

That is, when I'm not busy restoring old cars in Riverside, or developing *Star Wars* video games, or working on the technology crews of

Tarzan and *Mulan*. Also done a little acting. Got a production company, too. No biggie. In my spare time, I play Celtic folk rock in Chicago and investigate paranormal activity outside Kansas City. Had a big disappointment when I ran for office and only got 0.33 percent of the vote in County Tipperary, but what's life without some adversity?

Having a pretty good run in athletics. Selected in the 1991 NHL draft by the Chicago Blackhawks. If being drafted in 1991 seems late for a guy who graduated high school in 1986, I'd remind people I was born in 1973. Also been holding my own on the NGA Hooters Professional Tour; at the Quicksilver Golf Classic in May, I won \$865.

Cincinnati Reds legend Barry Larkin is my second cousin. By the time I finish at Miami University of Ohio, I'll likely hold all the school's career receiving marks. Matter of fact, the first catch I ever made was a 56-yard TD from current Pittsburgh Steelers star QB Ben Roethlisberger. If people expressed skepticism about this, I'd tell them, hey, I wasn't born yesterday either, I was born in 1982.

The whole closely-related-to-Barry-Larkin thing would confuse them too, since my cousin Barry is African-American. They just assumed from my reddish beard and my pale skin that I was some sort of Caucasian—Irish or something—just like I had been in high school. What, a guy can't grow? Jeez, some of my old classmates sure are racist.

It wasn't only at the reunion, however, that I was reminded how far I've come since senior year. Two summers ago, I came home to a voice-mail message from what sounded like a 15-year old boy, who was, of course, me: "Hey, um... Mike Larkin? I just saw you online and I was like, whoa, dude... because Mike Larkin, that's, like, my name too. Funny, huh? Ha Ha. OK." *Click.*

Man, sometimes I can be so inarticulate.

After the reunion, riding home on BART with Michael Larkin's wife, I had time to reflect on what I'd done with my life. Twenty years is a kind of checkpoint on the highway of life's accomplishments, so I had to face facts: Michael Larkin is a little too driven. Collectively, Michael Larkin is a force. Just google me yourself, and you'll see. Michael Larkin is pretty impressive.

Still, I'm feeling the need to dial things down. The world is too much, perhaps, with Michael Larkin. So, in the interests of avoiding confusion and leaving more room for the Michael Larkins of the world, I shall henceforth be known as Mortimer X. Cervantes de Nabokov.

See you in 10 years. ● ● ●

This Michael Larkin writes the "Culture Mulcher" column for KS and teaches at UC Berkeley. Really.