Until now, I have considered the old-time graduates of Tarrytown and Sleepy Hollow as those who walked the venerable halls of Washington Irving High School and North Tarrytown High School. But it's time for me to face the fact that my alma mater, Sleepy Hollow High, has begun to admit candidates to the rolls of the "old-timers." Sleepy Hollow High School opened in 1957.

In 1957, at the age of ten, Rodney Rodriguez came to Tarrytown from Sancti Spiritus, Cuba. The Rodriguez family was among the first Cuban families in town, anticipating the wave of Cuban immigration that would begin only a few years later. The family moved into "the Cliff House," a large white apartment building. Today the site is occupied by the condominiums above Cottage Place and along Main Street. Rod lived with his father Julio, his mother Arminda, and his sister Yolanda. A few years later, his father bought a house at 98 Main Street.

Rodney attended the public schools, learning all the course material as he contended with the language barrier. By high school, he had learned enough English to overcome his disadvantage.

At Sleepy Hollow High, he was involved in many sports – basketball, baseball, and soccer, a sport he had never played before coming to the U. S. Baseball was the sport in Cuba. Rodney made the varsity soccer team as a freshman and, by his senior year, he was a four-year, all-county player, and he served as co-captain on a team that competed in the sectional finals. He was also a standout high school baseball player.

Among his high school buddies were Matthew Kelly, Tommy Wilmot, Butch Remmel, the DeCecchis brothers, Victor Souza, and Mike Piedmont. There were also Geoff Herguth, Bill Herguth, and Carl Caivano. Among his teachers he readily remembers Mr. Stutts, Mr. Kozsilla (Gym), Ms. Kloha (English), Mr. Wilmott (his soccer coach), Doc Rasbeck (Chemistry), Mr. O'Tool (Shop), Mr. Sager (Gym), Mr. O'Neill (History), Mr. Caivano (Art).
He had many high school jobs – driving a taxi, making deliveries for Biloone’s Drug Store on Orchard Street, and bussing tables at Tappan Hill Restaurant. Following graduation he went to work as a carpenter for Hatfield Brothers, a Tarrytown furniture manufacturer. The company’s mill was located next to the H-bridge near depot plaza.

1964 was a busy year for Rodney Rodriguez, known fondly as “Rod” or “Cha,” a nick name he acquired on the soccer field for the verbal punctuation he gave his shots. That school year he was active both in school and on the athletic field; he also had to make a decision about college – to go or not to go. Would the money be there? Should he avail himself of the athletic scholarships offered? Could he afford to give up the income he realized from his many after-school jobs? Rod thinks that his senior prom was held at the Hilton Inn (today’s Doubletree). He remembers going to the beach afterward. The graduation ceremony was staged in the high school gym.

By the time of graduation, he was still undecided about college. He finally opted to go to work after high school. In 1965, Rodney was one of thirteen men drafted into military service from the Irvington, Tarrytown and Sleepy Hollow area. Among them he easily remembers Robert Singer, Johnny Fuchek, and Johnny Blalock. Rod received basic training in Kansas and spent one year in Vietnam, of which six months were spent in combat missions in the rice paddies of the Mecong Delta. He was promoted to Sergeant. Says Rod, "There were good times and some very bad times."

Upon his return to Tarrytown, he continued work as a union carpenter for thirteen years. One day he asked the man who cashed the carpenters’ checks if he would like to sell his business, a tavern on Beekman Avenue. Rod bought the business in 1976, and he subsequently sold it in 1988, opening Village Wines right next door. Today Rod operates one of the oldest and most successful retail businesses in Sleepy Hollow. As a businessman, Rod is still a familiar face in the community.

He lives with his wife, Nelda, nee Rivero, in Cortlandt Manor. She is also originally from Cuba, and she serves as the registrar of Pace University Law School in White Plains. His daughter, Alyson, who lives in London, did her college work at Williams College, Middlebury College, and the University of Madrid. Their daughter, Melissa, is a graduate of Boston University and lives in Jerez, Spain.

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Caption
Sergeant Rodney Rodriguez in Vietnam. An enemy bullet would later pass through his rucksack. “Had I been facing the other way I’d be dead,” he said.