REAL INDIVIDUALITY—REAL CLASS

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(1) When I was five years old, Ivanhoe Elementary School was the grand focal point of my life. I remember the first day of kindergarten; a sense of uncertain expectancy filled my stomach as I approached the building, which seemed to stretch across a boundless expanse of land. There were more windows and doors than I could count. Looking through a window from the outside, I could see into one of the classrooms. It contained about a hundred or so tables and chairs, and its walls bore huge blackboards. It all looked so complex.

(2) Even more frightening than the huge building were the giant kids. From my first day on, they gave me the impression that there wasn't anything too prestigious about being in kindergarten. During that year, they would take my lunch money and laugh at my homework, but somehow I managed to hold back the tears and hope for the day when they would respect me.

(3) Even though the older kids mistreated me, I envied them. They had so many more privileges than those of us in kindergarten. They were allowed to buy hot lunches, play on the monkey bars and, best of all, they could have their very own lockers. I dreamed of the day when I'd grown tall enough to reach them. The ultimate luxury, however, would be my very own locker instead of a common shelf in the classroom where the kindergartner's coat becomes just another number in the masses. Yes, those older kids had real individuality—real class!

(4) Several years after graduating from Ivanhoe Elementary, I returned to visit my alma mater as an eighth-grader. I approached the tiny building with a cool confidence and a sense of nostalgia. There were little kids running around on the playground. I decided to take a seat on a set of nearby monkey bars and watch, a few yards away, a familiar scene take place: a bully demanded money from a much smaller kid, who, wide-eyed and struck dumb with terror, handed it over with no resistance at all.

(5) I arose from my seat on the monkey bars and entered the building. The ceiling seemed to have been lowered about two feet, the hallways narrowed, and the lockers lining the walls reduced to the size of bread boxes. I continued down the hall and saw a line of about fifty kids anxiously waiting to get into the cafeteria. I inhaled deeply and caught the aroma of a very poor imitation of pizza. Repelled by the smell of the cafeteria, I decided to go in another direction and peek inside one of the classrooms; there were tiny chairs outlining midget-
sized tables scarcely one foot off the floor. The blackboard could hardly contain the giant letters printed upon it.

(6) About five years after that visit to Ivanhoe, I came to Valparaiso University. A sense of uncertain expectancy filled my stomach as I approached the campus; whose buildings seemed to stretch across a boundless expanse of land. Even more frightening than the huge campus were the vast numbers of people. From the first day that I arrived, they gave me the impression that there wasn't anything very prestigious about being a freshman. They may not have bullied me out of my meal card or laughed at my homework, but I was intimidated by the cold stares I would get in return for asking such stupid questions as, "Where's the chapel?" Even though those upperclassmen must have thought I was a complete jerk, I envied them. They could live in co-ed dorms, skip the meal plan and, best of all, they could have their own cars on campus. Yes, those upperclassmen had real individuality—real class!