

Tales of the tests we loved to loathe

By **MARK KAPLOWITZ**

I was shocked and dismayed when I read that the Empire State might jettison some of its Regents examinations to save \$13.7 million ("June tests up for cuts," March 6). I remember the Regents exam — a three-hour, No. 2 pencil-fest in a stifling classroom in June.

In earlier grades, the school year ended quietly, with most assignments finished well before the actual last day. When the Regents became the last thing we did, however, the school year grew more intense as the weather got nicer.

My first Regents — you never forget your first — was Sequential Math One in the '90s. We had been warned about it all year, but nothing could prepare us for the marathon sessions with the Barron's Review book that we all had to buy.

I studied like mad, using the pencil sharpener in our garage so often that in a fit of anxiety I scrawled "I hate Regents!" on the wall. When I closed my eyes, I saw Xs and Ys.

On the day of the exam, I was ready, and after 2½ hours, I was the only one left in the test room. My teacher, a very smart woman who drank the blood of students who forgot their homework, sensed that I, too, was done and came over to collect my exam paper. I insisted on staying the full time, in case I spotted a computational error or a stray mark on my Scantron sheet.

Junior year was the United States History and Government Regents. The instructions: Choose one from essay questions 1 through 4, two from questions 5 through 8 and two from questions 9 through 12; or, one from 9 through 12

and either another one from 1 through 4 or another one from 5 through 8, unless question 11 was chosen, in which case a maximum of two essays from questions 5 through 8 would be read. Students' hands went up. My teacher's hands went up, too, as he sang the Pinball Number Count song from Sesame Street. Had I not been laughing so hard, I probably would have finished the exam.

The best was the Global Studies Regents. One student, upon handing in the exam 25 minutes into the allotted three hours, turned in the doorway and directed a string of profanities at our teacher. Funny, I remember the student's sequined denim jacket, but not her name.

Some Regents exams went better than others, and I knew plenty of people who struggled. A guy with a locker near mine took the biology Regents three times.

I'm not sure if the third time was a charm for him, but I hope I never see his name on a sign with "M.D." at the end.

These stories are worth far more than \$13.7 million. If I were the television journalist/book writing and plugging type, I might ask you to send me your own Regents stories. I would publish them in a book, in which I would have running commentary in the margin like Rashi, so I could say the book was "by" yours truly.

But I'd rather you kept your stories. When our dear friend the Regents exam has gone away, and we're all paying \$17 for a liter of orange soda, these memories will sustain our cherished belief that misery loves company.

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