

Save Room For Us

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It was an ideal summer day in Nevada as I walked down the street to the 130th Alumni Banquet. The sun was bright in the clear blue mile high Iowa sky. The temperature was pleasant for this time of year. The humidity was low, uncommon for a summer day in Iowa. The leaves whispered in the gentle breeze. Later as night descended, a fabulous full moon would rise. This day was one of those perfect days in the Iowa summertime.

This weekend was the 45th class reunion for the class of '62. We return every five years for a high school class reunion. Our tradition is to gather on Friday night for fun and fellowship. Saturday evening is the Alumni Banquet followed with more fellowship. We ask each other, "Who are you?" Some of us have changed in the last five years. We hug; we kiss, we tell stories, maybe even embellish some stories, and recall our years at Nevada High School.

Our class has a reputation for having a large turn out for the reunion. It is also our tradition to make ourselves known. We are not a quiet bunch. Our volume of people and voice makes us noted. We enjoy each other. After 45 years, we are older, maybe wiser, but we still know how to have a good time. However, it takes us less time to have a good time than it did in '62. After 10 PM, we admire ourselves for still being awake. There are a few youthful souls that will see 2 a.m., but tomorrow they will realize their minds are writing checks their bodies no longer like to cash.

We seat ourselves at the tables for the class of '62 and enjoy a meal. As the classes are recognized, Francy acts as our spokesperson. Francy needs no introduction and does not require a microphone to hold the audience's attention. Francy is the closest thing to perpetual energy most of us will ever know. We supply Francy with adjectives to describe our class: loving, caring, loyal, supportive, friendly, joyful, bold, active, lovey-kissy, and the list goes on and on. Francy notes to the other classes that as seniors, our basketball team was the last Nevada team to beat Ames. Don King, the coach of that team, and his wife joined us for this 45th reunion. For 45 years, we have maintained our bonds with each other and with the teachers that helped form our character.

Our class fills up 6 tables at the banquet—almost twice as many as any other class. The tables are set with purple and gold place mats and decorations, the colors of our beloved Nevada High. On the tables of the class of '62 are 11 purple and gold balloons. Each balloon has a name attached as a remembrance of classmates that have passed away.

As the banquet concludes, the emcee takes out his fanfare trumpet and plays the school song. The girls from the class of '62 lead the singing of the song and the rest of us raise our voices and join in. We are not a bashful group. We are a class of doers. We don't sit on the sidelines and watch the world go by.

After the banquet we proceed, as usual, to the north room for a class picture. As we sort short, tall, bashful, and bold, we get ourselves arranged. We decide to wear our glasses so we can see the photographer to know when to smile. The girls in the front row discuss which way they want their feet to point, right or left. Good grief girls, just smile and let's take the picture.

After pictures, we take the balloons and gather in front of the banquet hall. We prepare for the release of the balloons. It is an emotional time. Voices choke, tears trickle down some cheeks, and we become solemn and silent. Francy asks to release the balloon for Darcy, her twin sister. I hold

the balloons and Francy finds Darcy's balloon, cuts the ribbon and sets it free. Francy holds the balloons as I find the balloon for Maxine, my high school sweetheart and wife for 40 years. I cut the ribbon and the balloon drifts upward following Darcy's balloon. Other class members come forward one at a time to release a balloon for Gary, David, John, Dick, Nancy, Dean, Janet, Dean, and Vic.

The horizon is turning pink as the sun begins to set. The balloons rise and cross the street passing over a park. In the fall of '61, that park was the site of the football field where we played under the lights on crisp, cool Friday nights. Looking at the field brings back remembrances of the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat. The evening air feels still, but the balloons rise and drift to the northwest, floating across the town into the country.

The purple and gold balloons continue to float upward on the unfelt breeze of this gentle Iowa evening. We watch as they follow one another in single file, led by Darcy's. As the balloons rise to the heavens, Francy shouts "Remember to save room for us". We stand watching as the balloons grow smaller and smaller, fading into the pink and purple sunset. As the balloons fade out of sight, we are filled with sweet memories of our classmates, and for some of us, our soul mates. The memories are vivid and will remain with us forever.

Our class is scattered across this great country like the members of most high school classes. Every 5 years we return and are once again bonded together as the Nevada High School Class of 1962. Those of us that remain will continue on this journey of life, trusting in God, and asking God, and our departed classmates, to remember to save room for us.