

My 50th High School Reunion

By Curtis Jerry Smothers



I once heard a comedian quip that he went to his class reunion and there were all these old people who claimed to have gone to school with him.

The same thing happened to me at my high school's 50th a few years ago. Our class of 1960 met in an American Legion Hall in Missouri (a good place for old fogies to congregate). There were all us dumpy old persons gathered to reminisce about our suburban scholastic experiences in the days before the conquest of acne.

A glimpse through the creepy time machine

My fellow alumni all had sticky badges with a copy of their school yearbook photo along with their name. It was sort of creepy seeing firsthand evidence of the ravages of 50 years of time on

many of the folks whom I have not laid eyes on since those ghastly days of my “geekdom” (yes, I was an unpopular dweeby little geek in high school).

From the expressions of many, who would surreptitiously look at each other’s yearbook photo, I gathered I wasn’t the only one appalled at the condition of many of our time-ruined classmates. (I, on the other hand, make sure that all the food I eat contains preservatives. This accounts for my continued boyish looks.)

The forgotten social strata

I remember thinking back on the social order rankings, which either made high school years a joy, or condemned one to the outside looking in. In fact, when I went to high school in the 1950s, lo, those many years ago, we had a definite social stratification.

Those highest on the strata were whom nature endowed with early maturity. They were more like grownups, and their parents had money. The girls with the Jayne Mansfield “headlights” and the jocks with the big physiques and hairy arms and other parts that looked good in the shower were the alpha players.

The second tier people were the intelligentsia, the kids who held student council offices, wrote for the school newspaper, and who were generally the teachers’ pets. Of course the latter group included a few of the alpha players (jocks and cheerleaders) and were known as alpha-plus types.

Then there were the rest of us, which included me. My wife, an outsider from England, who came with me to the reunion, was astonished that many of the people we met would say things like, “Oh, you wouldn’t remember me, I wasn’t one of the popular kids.”

Time is the universal leveler of the playing field

However, with a few exceptions, there did seem to be an inverse relationship between a person’s level of popularity and how young and healthy he or she looked at the gathering. The alpha gang (girls with Jayne Mansfield headlights and knuckle dragging boy jocks) seemed to have succumbed to the erosion of time somewhat disproportionately to their years.

It seemed that we who were relatively hairless in high school, who traded “looking good in the shower” for one that worked, were destined for a somewhat more extended youthfulness.

Here is an unscientific , and admittedly stereotypical, list of examples:

The Jock

In high school, Russ was as big as a house and our football team's fullback. He also played center on our basketball team and was a star heavyweight wrestler on our state-champion wrestling team. As I recall, he also looked pretty good in the shower. (I, on the other hand, was subject to the sad phenomena of shrinkage.)

Now 50 years later, Russ had let himself go it seemed. He was still gigantic, but he showed up way overweight and completely out of shape. He also wore a knee brace and walked with a cane. Poor guy had also lost most of his hair. This was sad because, next to looking good in the shower, Russ always loved to slick down and comb his wavy, red hair.

The Campus Queen

Who can forget Sandra (of the Jayne Mansfield headlights, no less). She was breathtaking in every way. Her eyes were the bluest of blue and she reminded me of Marilyn Monroe. Just sitting in the same classroom with her was like being in the presence of an angel. She was head cheerleader, Homecoming Queen, Spring Fling Princess, everything. Sandra had taken good care of her figure, although, as one might expect,

Sandra appeared to have sagged a bit in places, and she dressed like a Las Vegas hooker. She had waged the good fight against facial wrinkles as well. I'm no expert in these things, but I would say from the plastic expression on her face and the total lack of wrinkles around her eyes and forehead, that she, Botox and her neighborhood plastic surgeon were involved in a symbiotic relationship.

The BMOC (Big Man on Campus)

Jeff was the president of everything: Student Council, Honor Society; you name it. Moreover he was an alpha-plus, because he was our football team's place kicker. Jeff even got his own page in the front of the yearbook along with his own written inspirational message. It was heady stuff like "We are the citizens of tomorrow, and unto us the torch will be passed."

Jeff later wrote in his reunion biography that he served two years in prison for draft evasion, apparently preferring to serve over 700 days of his tomorrows in the big house, rather than go to Vietnam.

Now, Jeff is portly and balding, but sports a ponytail. I learned that he is a left-wing activist and writes a lot on internet sites like Move On.com. Since I am rather conservative, I avoided joining his table where they were discussing the plans to retroactively impeach George Bush. (That ponytail really was annoying, though.)

Fun flies when you're doing time

Has it really been over a half century since our class of 400 paraded in cap and gown together and sang our sentimental school song , "Dear Alma Mater ... , we will remember thee"?

At our 55th most of us (not yet pushing up daisies or floating as dust in the cosmos) will be well into our 70s, and I'm guessing that the event planning will include an ambulance outside the reunion room in case the jitterbug dance contest ends tragically.

I heard someone say that time is the fire we all burn in. In that respect, reunions of superannuated alumni do somewhat resemble a burn unit in a hospital where all patients are equal in the end. Time has a way of equalizing everything, and today I look OK in the shower. But at my age, who wants to look?