



## .....STRAIGHT FROM THE HORSES MOUTH

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This weekend was a busy one for me. Not only are we preparing for the Nebraska Grazing Tour and keeping an eye on the final day of 4-H and FFA entry forms (June 15), but I attended two days of the three day -Wilcox High School Reunion. While many may not think that is all that remarkable, I guess I see it a little differently. This is the season for those, most small town and large city schools have these events all over this great country. Oh, I know that some will say “Big Deal” or “Why the heck would you waste your time on that?” Others wouldn’t cross the street or come in from the farm to something so trivial. Others will fly in from around the globe, or drive hours or even days to get there. What is the fascination? Why is it important to those of us who do attend these events? Because this is fresh on my mind, and I am just coming down from a bit of a high from seeing old friends, I think we should explore the fascinating world of high school reunions this week.

First of all, it is hard to believe that I am fast approaching my 50<sup>th</sup> class reunion, even we will not get to walk across the stage or be recognized for hitting that landmark because my alma mater just does their all-class reunion every five years. A lot can happen in five years and for you that are older know what I am talking about. I think this actually makes a reunion like that even more poignant as you know that the next Alumni Banquet will not have some of the people you see that night in attendance. You can no longer reminisce, compare notes, talk about you old sports heroics, compare notes on medical procedures or meds, or marvel on how they have not aged all that much or “what in the heck happened to them?” or “they are the same person they were so many years ago.” They are now at the big reunion in the sky.

As an old teacher, I can tell you that many students cannot wait to get out of this school, or this little town and think they will never darken the doorways of that institution ever again. Plus, I do know that for some facing a class reunion can be daunting enough to make a teetotaler crave a stiff drink and I am sure many probably to either before or during the celebration. But for most people that I know that do attend, they feel it is worth the effort. For at least one sweet, nostalgic night you can revisit the best parts of high school without worrying about the silly stuff. You can see that others have aged, just as you have and perhaps in some cases you may even feel better about yourself because you may look around at your classmates or even those after you and wonder – “How did they get so old, and I didn’t?”

I used to wonder why high school reunions seem to mean so much more to people than college or even family reunions. I guess you can put me in that category. Even though many of the friends I have today were my college classmates, I still seem to gravitate more to my high school memories and friends. I think the late editor and columnist, Meg Greenfield, put it in her memoir: "So far as I have been able to discover, nobody, regardless of station, gets over high school." If you think about it high school is where we begin to shape the adults we are about to become for the rest of our lives. It is a monstrous task confronted by complete amateurs. Even if I sometimes crave the simplicity and innocence of those days, the activities like music, FFA, 4-H and of course all the sports events I don’t know if I would like to go through all the uncertainties, hormone changes, trying to ask a girl out for a date, or all the other intimidating things that young people go through.

In comparison to the “growing” in high school, class reunions are, by comparison, actually are low stress, and really rather relaxing. Of course our school mates become history detectives, probing our past to take a fresh look at who we were and what we put up with before we reinvented ourselves into post-graduates. Some remember every little thing that happened, who dated who, and all the shenanigans that they or their friends committed. Others remember absolutely nothing about high school, but attend just to compare notes or see their old friends and how they turned out. Some had not or never will attend their high school reunion and could not be dragged to the event by the Budweiser Clydesdales!

I for one believe that reunions have a therapeutic value. They prove just how right your parents were when they assured you, back in the throes of teenage angst, that time heals all wounds -- and wounds all heels. The bullies, snobs, hustlers and clowns who once brought you daily torment may be passed away by now -- or in witness-protection programs -- or simply humbled as we all are by advancing years and slowed metabolism. Age is a great equalizer. Even more amazing is that some of the “flowers on the wall” that you barely noticed in the halls bloomed into individuals that would have been hard to imagine back then. In many cases, some of the most popular “jocks”, “prima-donnas”, and the “mostly likely to succeed” types really didn’t do all that well out of the confines of the halls of our high schools and of course some exceeded all expectations. Bill Cosby used to say that “It is not hard to recognize your classmates at a reunion because they all look like their parents used to look.” For me and my classmates, after 48 years? Try grandparents!

For those who are mathematically advanced you probably figured out that my graduation date from WHS was 1967. Just a few words of advice if you're facing a class reunion: Resist the impulse to ask your fellow alumni, "Do you remember me?" This is particularly true if there is any chance that the other person doesn't remember you at all or you made no impression or have dramatically changed. I used to find that question to be awkward or embarrassing. Now it can fill me with fear of early Alzheimer's. But then I really did want to know who that person over there is. Gosh, did I date her? I know I should know that guy/gal. That face is sure familiar! Or, I would recognize that laugh anywhere. Where's the bar?

**The preceding information comes from the research and personal observations of the writer which may or may not reflect the views of UNL or Nebraska Extension. For more further information on these or other topics contact D. A. Lienemann, Nebraska Extension Educator for Webster County in Red Cloud, (402) 746-3417 or email to: [dlienemann2@unl.edu](mailto:dlienemann2@unl.edu) or go to the website at: <http://www.webster.unl.edu/home>**