

Community news

St. John's High Class of '68 Celebrates 50th Reunion

By SHARON LOVE

You open a drawer, look into a closet, sift through a pile of newspapers and pictures and you ask yourself: What are you saving this stuff for? Well, my "what for" was for the weekend of June 15th, 2018 celebrating the 50th anniversary of my St. John's High School Grade 12 graduation - the reunion of the class of '68. And what a trip down memory lane it was!

It all began last summer when I was contacted by Carolyn Rickey about joining her on a planning committee. Yes, I was interested; but not during the summer. When we had our first meeting in September, (Where else but at the North End Sals?), our committee was in place. We set a date, booked a venue and plans were underway. We went through our Grade 12 year-book, made a list of names, and spread the word to people we knew. With approximately 380 students in our Grade 12 year, believe me, there were many that none of us ever knew. But that did not matter. Our goal was to contact as many people as possible in a relatively short period of time. The reunion had to be this year!

This challenge was more difficult than we had anticipated. A lot of people aged 67 plus are now gainfully unemployed. Several business owners had simply closed their doors, leaving no paper trail. Other retirees' former colleagues could not help us due to current privacy laws. Another big hurdle was, of all things, posed by the cell phone. I can't count how many phone calls were made, both local and long distance, only to reach an automated voice announcing that that number was no longer in service. I felt like I "hit the jackpot" when a human voice at the other end was thankful for the person I was looking for or a family member who could help.

To sum it all up, I made a lot of new friends over the last several months, fellow graduates, their siblings, nieces, nephews, children - anyone who could steer me in the right direction. I found that as soon as I introduced myself and said "St. John's class of '68", I often heard a chuckle followed by a lengthy phone conversation. I hadn't seen some of these people for years, and others I never knew before but it was all OK. There's that certain comfortable familiarity. There had been a previous reunion in 1993 - our 25th anniversary, organized by Steven Sasnow (who came in for this one from Minneapolis), and Carolyn Rickey. However, it was on a smaller scale.

All in all, a lot of us still live here in Winnipeg, in all parts of the city, and some still in West Kildonan and the North End. Some people live in Ontario, but more live in Alberta and B.C. Talk about a small world, I discovered that my dentist's mother was, or should I say is, one of us. That does make me feel not so young. Five of our reunion attendees, Paul Budnick, Cy Fien, Barry Flom (Edmonton), Ian Schaefer and Brian Segal were at Inkster School together, from kindergarten to Grade 6.

Some of our teachers who are still here in Winnipeg are: Wally Holowka, Len Ross, Jean Witwicki, Catherine Thexton, Hubert Ostermann, and Carmen Kostaniuk Ostermann. Al Carr, who now lives in Kelowna and spent his entire 35-year career teaching chemistry at St. John's, sent greetings. (Yes, he is the oldest brother of Jim Carr, Federal Minister of Natural Resources).

Sadly, and this is something that none of us quite anticipated, there are 47 of our classmates who are now deceased.

About 60 people participated throughout the weekend. Several attendees came in from Calgary, Edmonton, Minneapolis, Toronto and Morden, too.

Our celebration began on Friday afternoon in the school library. St. John's Alumni Committee members set up a most interesting display of posters, pictures, banners, yearbooks, trophies, newspaper clippings, and a slide show. There were a lot of smiling faces and much nostalgic chatter. Our Saturday dinner was held at the Canad Inns, Polo Park. The room was decorated with St. John's and 60's memorabilia, the colour theme of course being orange and brown (go Tigers). Carolyn welcomed everyone and led us in the singing of 'Jerusalem', our school hymn. We lit candles in memory of our deceased classmates and enjoyed a tasty meal. I had the pleasure of reading greetings sent in by those who could not join us. A special request was sent in by Ron Charach, now a Toronto-based psychiatrist and author of several collections of poetry. I read his poem titled "Where were you when Kennedy got shot?" This got many of us to thinking and reminiscing, which we all did for the whole weekend. The Sunday brunch was held at the same venue. More memories were shared and many pictures were taken. Greg Berko (Calgary) is putting together a retrospective of the entire event.

Tables were also available for our own memorabilia. I needed two tables for what I brought. Among other things, I put out for display several books published by Ron Charach and by Sheldon Oberman, who sadly left us too soon. I was all too pleased to give away duplicate pictures that I had from our 1993 reunion. My plan was also to hand over some of my memorabilia to the Alumni Committee. However, when I gave David Freedman a coloured photo of himself - probably from Grade 10, and he proudly said that the sweater he was wearing at the time was knitted by his mother, the word "collectible" popped into my head.



Inkster School friends (l-r): Cy Fien, Paul Budnick, Barry Flom (Edmonton), Ian Schaefer, Brian Segal



Three Peretz School friends (l-r): Bella (Sapoznik) Ben-Ari, Barbara (Berenhaut) Shell (Toronto), and Sharon Love



Sharon holding books written by former classmates Ron Charach and the late Sheldon Oberman

While I was packing up on Sunday afternoon, I began to look at my things from a different point of view, because some of them can indeed be classified as "collectibles" (maybe). So I really have to go through them again, but not now when the weather is so great. Everything is back where it can be found again and maybe I will reorganize on a cold, wintry evening and hopefully in time for our next reunion and THERE WILL BE ANOTHER ONE.