

My 50-Year High School Reunions

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I never attended any of my school reunions before this year, but now I've had two 50-year high school reunions!

After graduating, I choose to disappear and not join any alumni associations, so no one was ever able to contact me. I did not keep in touch with anyone and didn't care. That changed last year when I accompanied my spouse Karen to her 50-year college reunion at Santa Clara University. She had so much fun spending the weekend with her former classmates and seeing the school again that I realized I was missing out on a life experience. Also, time was running out if I was ever going to have such an opportunity.

I attended two different high schools and was in the class of 1972, so 2022 was the 50-year anniversary. Thanks to the internet, it was easy to contact my schools and find out about reunion plans. What made things complicated was that I did not graduate with either!

The high school that I was enrolled as a freshman and sophomore was Sacred Heart of Mary, a girl's Catholic academy. That was my "happy" school where I had friends and enjoyed attending. However, the recession in the early 1970's made it too difficult for my family to support 3 of us in private school and 2 more in pre-school, so we all had to transfer to public schools in the fall of 1970.

Because of the advanced academics of the Catholic school, I was put in mostly senior classes at Palatine public high school. I did not want to be there and hardly talked to the other students. Because I was the oldest of five children, I had to help my mother after school, so I could not participate in any sports, music or other activities. At the last minute, I was given a diploma the following summer so that I could start at the local community college in the fall as there was nothing left for me to take as a senior. As a result, I was not listed as a graduate in any yearbook and never attended a graduation ceremony.

When I contacted the Catholic school alumni coordinator, she assured me that I was welcome to come to the reunion, it was for anyone who attended with that class, not just those who graduated! Next, I contacted the person in charge of the public high school reunion. I scanned a copy of that diploma and attached it to my email request to join the reunion list because I knew that I was not mentioned in the yearbook, which I never purchased but was now able to view online. Again, I was welcome to attend!

When the reunion dates were announced, they were six weeks apart, so that meant two separate trips to the Chicago area. The Palatine High School reunion was at the end of August. My sister Michele attended that school as a freshman the year after my one year, so I invited

her to join me because that reunion invited everyone from the 3 classes before and after my class of 1972.

My sister and I had a great weekend hanging out around the town of Palatine, where we had learned to drive and spent our teenage years! We walked around the neighborhood where we lived and also visited with our cousin Kathy, who still lives in the Chicago area. The reunion itself was an informal gathering at Durty Nellie's, the local bar where we could legally drink at age 19 at that time in Illinois. I did not remember anyone there and was not surprised that no one remembered me. However, a couple of people remembered one girl that I remembered from one of my classes, so that helped me feel that I belonged there. Even more surprising, there were others at the reunion who did not remember anyone because they also hated being at that school, but like me, decided it was their only chance to attend a reunion! I was also not the only one to graduate early. The school did not have advanced placement classes, so it was not uncommon to graduate early in those days. Learning this made the Palatine reunion worth the trip! Also, my sister actually met a couple of people at the gathering that she remembered, so we were both glad to attend.

The second reunion was held on the second weekend of October and my spouse Karen accompanied me. Sacred Heart closed in 1987 and the nearby boy's Catholic school, St. Viator's, then went co-ed, so they hosted the joint reunion. There was a reception on Friday night for just the girls from Sacred Heart. Karen was the only spouse to attend, but she was made to feel welcome! On Saturday, there was a full afternoon and evening of activities. After a tour of St. Viator's school, there was a reunion Mass, followed by cocktails, group photos, then a formal dinner. Because Santa Clara University is a Catholic, Jesuit college, Karen had plenty to talk about with the alumni from Sacred Heart and St. Viator's! Although none of my close friends from that school were there, I was able to talk to some women that I remembered and who remembered my friends. Because my brother Keith had attended St. Viator for one year, I had that connection to talk about too. At the end, we received commemorative coasters with the old Sacred Heart of Mary High School logo. Overall, this formal reunion made up for all the years that I never had a celebration of high school!

Karen and I stayed in the Chicago area for a few extra days to do some tourist things to make the trip from California worth it. I also spent some more time on my own driving around the areas I remembered and visited my parents' graves. Being retired, it is nice to not be rushed and to let memories take over. Part of me wishes I could go back in time and tell my high school self that in the end, I will be happy again!

I will probably not attend anymore high school reunions as 50 is usually the last big one. However, I would now like to attend my 50-year college reunion. Unlike high school, I have kept in touch with a couple of classmates from my graduating class, so I will encourage them to come too! Hopefully they will see the value in this, but if not, I will still come for the experience and have no regrets.