

I LOVE REUNIONS

I love reunions. Let me repeat. I loove reunions. I've been to all of mine...my wife's...my kids...relatives...colleges...grade school...camps. I go to them all. Why? For a couple of reasons. I enjoy seeing people seeing other people for the first time in many years. The look on their faces as they size up their fellow classmates, observing the creases, the crow's feet, the sags, the bumps and the lumps. Or the lack thereof. Trying to decide if they can safely say without trifling with the truth that he (or she) hasn't changed a bit. What they are really thinking is ---- she (or he) looks somewhere between middle age and death -- or he (or she) must have had a face lift.

I derive pleasure from the questions and answers that invariably follow. Where are you living? What have you been doing with your life since graduation? How many kids and grandkids? What happened to so--and--so? Then comes the do--you--remember--whens. Do you remember Mr. Colburn, the chemistry teacher in 11th grade? The one with the violent temper who used to whirl around from the blackboard and shoot eraser missiles at an unruly pupil. Or Pappy Wilson, my homeroom teacher, that stoic man with the shock of gray hair falling over one eye. Oh yes, it's the do--you--remembers that I love the best. I'll confess at once. I am a nostalgia freak. I don't care what the psychologists say about that. Call me someone who always lives in the past, that I never grew up, or I don't want to face the reality of the present. Maybe so. I could care less. For that's what I like best about reunions. It's one mass gathering of nostalgia. I wallow in it like a rhinoceros in mud. To use a 1942 expression -- reunions are SWELL! For one brief moment I'm a kid again. Or as we used to be called -- an adolescent. There's absolutely no other way, no time machine, no magic wand that allows us to march back in time and relive those careless days of our youth as at a reunion.

So come with me as we go down memory lane (You should excuse the expression). Let's explore those days of yore that are no more, those good old times beyond recall, let's reminisce, let's recollect, let's "call back yesterday, bid time return" (Shakespeare's quote -- not mine!).

The year 1942, like all of the war years were momentous, filled with days of headline catching events and bringing to the people who lived through it experiences they never thought possible. The U.S. had only entered the war the previous December and 1942 would be the first full year of war.

The headlines in the Sun--Telegraph in June told of ominous German Nazi drives on two fronts. They were deep into Russia and had just taken Sevastopol. Tobruk in Africa had fallen and its capture had meant that Egypt was now in peril. Here on the West Coast, the war for the first time had reached our shores. Japanese sea raiders in a bold attempt had shelled the coasts of Oregon and Washington.

There was a lighter side to the war as well. Rubber drives and scrap metal drives were organized to help replenish those two much needed commodities. The drives also served to allow the people on the home front to feel a certain sense of

participating in the war effort. An even more immediate awareness that there was a war was the planning for the first nation wide black-out. This was on June 25th and the newspapers were replete with ads from Kaufmanns, Frank and Seder, and Rosenbaums selling blackout paper and shades. The papers listed the instructions that the people were to follow during the black-out which was to begin at 8:30 P.M. and last until 5:00 A.M. the next day. For the most part the populace cooperated fully and the black-out was deemed a success in the next day papers. Incidentally I didn't realize until later in this history that the second night of Graduation Ceremonies were on the 25th of June. I have no recollection of what happened. Do you? Every one of course didn't feel the necessity of cocooning themselves at home and being denied the pleasures of moving about in a lightless city. Black-out parties seem to be a fitting way to spend the evening and the biggest one of all was held at Joe Mazers Restaurant on Washington Blvd. in the East End. Not since the previous New Years Eve was such a good time had by all.

That previous New Years Eve incidentally was probably the last one for four years that encompassed all the conventional exuberances of the last night of the year. Your parents or older brothers and sisters had many choices that night, among which were the Chatterbox in the William Penn Hotel----Brad Hunts music and a five course supper for \$4.25 a person----the Nixon Restaurant with the Al Marsico Orchestra----and again in the William Penn in the Urban Room where Baron Elliott held sway with a seven course dinner for \$6.83 a person. And please----formal wear. I got a kick out of that \$6.83. Evidently pricing that ended in nines hadn't been thought of yet.

The big hotels weren't the only places of course where we could forget the War news. For at least the first six months of 1942 life went on almost as usual, and we sought out the same pleasures and places of entertainment that we had before. Although gas rationing became effective in January it was some time before the average citizen felt the full effect. Until summer and late 1942 people seemed to find ways to get around, even though they had an A card that limited them to three gallons of gas a week.

Where did we go? There was a full gamut of diversions to take our minds off the War news. For night clubs there was Jackie Heller's Yacht Club with Herman Middleman's Orchestra at Liberty and Water Street; Al Mercur's Nuthouse in Millvale, and the one we all remember, Bill Green's out on Route 51. In June of 1942 Bill Green's was featuring the Don Bestor Orchestra in their outdoor terrace that seated 1100 people. For a \$1.00 minimum per person charge, 35 cents for mixed drinks, and a \$1.50 filet steak dinner you could have the time of your life. How many of you have a photograph at home from Bill Green's depicting you and your favorite beau smiling at the camera as if you didn't have a care in the world? For a quieter evening there was the Gay Nineties Lounge of the Silver Grill in the Hotel Henry at Fifth and Smithfield. Holding hands while Dorothy Nesbit played the piano was a romantic way to spend the night.

Feel like dancing? Brad Hunt was appearing at West View Park and if you could wait until the Fourth of July, Benny Goodman was booked into the ballroom at Kennywood. If you weren't into jitterbugging, but only took a less passive part in

the Big Band scene, the 27 year old Harry James was on the Stanley Stage.

Other musical pursuits in town now that summer was here took place on the Schenley Hotel lawn where the Victor Saudek Band under the managerial hand of May Beegle was playing. Or how about the organ recitals magnificently played by Dr. Marshall Bidwell at the Carnegie Music Hall?

For pure spectator enjoyment, the Nixon Theatre had Pal Joey, Duquesne Gardens had the Ice Follies with Frick and Frack, and the Johnny Jones and Clyde Beatty Circus was drawing crowds at the North Side Expo Park. And oh yes, the Pirates were in town at Forbes Field, trying desperately to improve their fifth place position, thirteen and one half games off the pace. Some of the Pirates who by wars end would no longer be with the team were Frankie Gustine, Elby Fletcher, Bob Elliott, Maurice Van Robays, and Al Lopez. Another Forbes Field event that took place in June was a heavyweight fight between Harry Bobo and Melio Bettina.

For many of us however, the only game in town was the movies. For nothing more than a little bit of change we could get together with our pals or maybe a date and enjoy a romantic evening...depending on the sex of our companion of course.

The Squirrel Hill Theatre (only one screen!!) had Betty Grable and Victor Mature in "Song of the Islands". The Manor was showing that fine young actor Ronald Reagan in "Kings Row". At the Beacon (now the Gulliflys Restaurant) Ann Sheridan and Walter Pidgeon were appearing in "How Green was my Valley". Downtown at the Stanley after the Harry James stint, the Raymond Scott Orchestra was due in while on the screen Barbara Stanwyck and Joel McCrea would be seen in "The Great Man's Lady". If you could wait until the Fourth of July, the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra and Judy Canova were the top stage attractions. The Fulton was showing "My Gal Sal" with Rita Hayworth and Victor Mature. Other theaters downtown were the J.P. Harris, the Ritz, the Barry, the Art Cinema, and for keeping up pictorially with the War news there was the Newsreel Theatre.

For your dining pleasure before or after the movies? Believe it or not, not many Italian or Oriental Restaurants in town. Among the favorites in the East End were Frenchys, the Villa D'Este, Gammons, Bernie Liflanders, and Joseph's Steak House on Forbes Street. Downtown there was Kramers, the Nixon Restaurant, the Hofbrau, Kleins, the Union Grill, the Norse Room in the Fort Pitt Hotel and Sammys Steak House on Centre Ave. In Oakland there was the Haddon Hall Hotel Restaurant, Cantors, the Pittsburgh Playhouse Restaurant and the King Eddie Dining Room. For the happy hour there was the Tarry Bar in the Royal York and the Boots and Saddle in Webster Hall. Of course, most of us didn't have the funds for such sophisticated dining. For a great milkshake or at best a coke we had our favorite soda fountain up and down Forbes and Murray. There was Meyer Rosens, the Sun Drug, the Beacon Pharmacy, Callahan Drugs, Sols Pharmacy, the Phillips Pharmacy, and finally the Morrowfield. If you were able to coax a few bucks from your parents you might end up at Schulbergs, the Hebrew National, Abrams and Friedmans, or maybe even Poli's Grill.

Then again there was some of us who were without any kind of finances, and

so a more manageable method of escape was with our Philco or Zenith radio. Everybody could afford a radio. Why Kappels, Downtown was advertising a super heterodyne radio for only \$7.95 and listen to this...they would even arrange terms!! News was foremost on everyones minds and the national radio commentators achieved what we call today...high visibility. Only we couldn't see them so we huddled close by the radio to pick up the war stories from Gabriel Heatter, Raymond G. Swing, and Lowell Thomas. Locally there was Beckley Smith, Louis L. Kaufman, and Bob Prince for sports news. Lighter listening could be found on the dial with Vox Pop, Dr. I.Q., Lux Radio Theater, the Telephone Hour, Amos and Andy, and the Sons of the Pioneers.

And then there was music. Lots of music. Only it was generally a live band pick-up from some hotel or ballroom, such as Glen Miller at Frank Daileys Meadow Brook in New Jersey, or Tommy Dorsey from the Roof Garden of New York's Hotel Pennsylvania. Fortunately, in 1942 the great A.S.C.A.P., B.M.I. war was now over. This was the battle for control of the air waves between two composer societies that resulted in records being made with only vocals and no musical background. But the problems were finally negotiated and now in 1942 some of our favorites were back playing their familiar theme songs for our radios, phonographs, and juke boxes. See if you remember some of them. Charlie Barnet's "Cherokee"... Ben Bernie's "Its a Lonesome Old Town" and his cozy closer in which he talked the lyrics of "AU Revoir, Pleasant Dreams"...Les Browns "Sentimental Journey"...Henry Busse's "Hot Lips"...Frankie Carle's "Sunrise Serenade"...Larry Clinton's "Dipsy Doodle"...Stan Kenton's "Artistry in Rhythm"...Kay Kyser's "Thinking of You"...Alvino Rey's "Nighty Nights"...Claude Thornhill's "Snowfall", and the most famous of all, Glen Miller's "Moonlight Serenade" complete with the clarinet lead and the ooh wah brass. That my friends was music.

The other media available was the newspaper and we had three of them. The one missing today is the Sun-Telegraph and if you were to pick it up in June of 1942 and get past the war news you might read about our Mayor, Cornelius Scully or you might have checked the weather from City Meteorologist, W.S. Brotzman. In those days, Joe didn't say it, Donny Dingbat did. Or you might be concerned with an article about a strike by the Pepsi Cola driver salesman. They made \$25.00 a week and were asking for \$5.00 more. The sports news featured the aforementioned Pirates and the hockey Hornets, but the big item of the day was the family spat between Billy Conn and his father-in-law, Greenfield Jimmy Smith. If you were like me however, you turned to the comics first and pored over Smilin Jack, Barney Google and Snuffy Smith, Tillie the Toiler, Mandrake the Magician, Skippy, and Harold Teen. A full three big pages of comics in the Sun- Telegraph.

A big event indirectly connected with the War was the upcoming Army-Navy War show to be held in Pitt Stadium on July 4. This was for the Army Emergency Relief Fund and 1642 men and women and 700 vehicles appeared. Maybe you remember it. I do. It was quite a spectacle.

If you were the shopping kind, the ads in the papers were full of bargains. Kaufmanns was showing "women's ice-cool dresses in stunning prints of tubable rayon crepe for \$2.95". Also men's tropical suits for \$24.75. Claffey's eight beauty

shops featured Hollywood style permanent waves complete at \$1.45 and a French steam—oil wave for \$2.50. The most exciting shopping news in town concerned the Grand Opening of Spears Department Store in the former McCreary Bldg. which had been empty for 14 years. Having teeth problems? Dr. Rasnick was advertising two sets of transparent teeth (made out of lucite?) for the price of one. Dr. Baum, not to be outdone, advertised two sets of upper and lower teeth at no money down...fifty two weeks to pay at 50 cents a week. Having a hernia problem? Hites at Federal and Ohio Streets on the North Side had "the perfect truss." Needed a portrait taken? There was Florence Fisher Parry. Flowers? See Randolph — McClements. And drug bargains could be found at Rands deep cut—rate drugs. And how about this bargain? A 1941 Nash for \$750.00. If your folks were looking to move, the real estate section ran an ad for a house at 1132 Murray Hill Ave. with 11 rooms, 2 baths, and a coal furnace for \$5650.

All of this and what you've been reading came from the now defunct Sun—Telegraph. The Press and Post—Gazette were published then, but since they are still around today they do not qualify for nostalgia. What however is around and does qualify as nostalgia is our school newspaper, The Foreword. Why does it qualify when the Press and the Post Gazette do not? Because my fellow classmates, there is absolutely no comparison between The Foreword of 1942 and The Foreword of 1987. I had the opportunity to scan a recent issue. The topics and the news concerned the problems we are all too aware of today. Drugs, alcohol, disciplinary cases, teenage suicides...it goes on and on. Hardly anywhere in the four pages could I find "fun stuff", the kinds of high school activities that was the substance from which we built our memories. The proms, the sports events, the hay rides, the debates, the plays, the clubs, the "A" lunches, and oh yes, the flag pole. Of course we didn't have anxieties in 1942. Well, there was the War. But we coped. How? Read on and see how we spent our senior year by going through the diary of the 12 A and 12 B classes of 1941—1942. Those items and dates with the asterisk are directly from the class journal of 1942. Those not I've filled in from the issues of The Foreword loaned to me by George Hawker.

SENIOR DIARY

September, 1941— June, 1942

- *September 3 —School opens and everthing gets started.
- *September 10 —Miss Riddle's First test. I wonder if the first report counts, anyhow?
- September 26 —First outdoor assembly in school history. Warm—up cheers a la carte. The long—awaited issue of the Foreword arrives.
Foreword explains to incoming Freshies which stairs to use to eliminate ups and downs in their lives.
Foreword makes plea for girl cheerleaders to go along with majorettes.
Football team loses non—league game to Wilkinsburg. Two touchdowns by little Frankie Ali called back due to penalties.
- *October 10 —All—City Orchestra plays for Teachers' Institute and as for the others—well, we got out early.

- *October 17 —History is made as the team ties South Hills in spite of the numerous casualties.
- *October 31 —Hallowe'en parties in great evidence this year—witches, goblins, and even jitterbugs attending. Football team chalks up 9 first downs to Westinghouses 7, but loses in last 3 minutes, 7 — 0.
- *November 6 —Ye olde Dogpatchers celebrate Sadie Hawkins Day at an uproaring dance in the gym where all Daisy Mae's have the chance to catch themselves a Li'l Abner.
- *November 10 —Moron jokes are quite the fad these days.
- *November 20
and 27 —Perplexing, aren't they? These two Thanksgivings.
- *December 7 —War declared; patriotic Alldericians register for service.
- *December 9,
10,11 —College Daze—Class Play—makes a big hit.
- *December 23 —Say, did you see my name on the honor roll? Well... neither did I!!!
Basketball team with six different players slated to see alot of action warming up with pre--season games. The six are I. Molever, I. Schwartz, N. Jorgenson, R. McCarthy, J. Felix, and I. Shapiro.
- *January 8 —Had our first air raid drill today. No casualties. The complete evacuation was done well except for the fact that after the drill there were about 150 students around the flag pole waiting for their friends.
- *January 29
February 13 —The seniors were commenced last night.
—Carol Hafers 11th and 12th grade girls basketball team defeated Helen Millers team 16—1.
- *March 10 —Recommended to election in the Hall of Fame are the 121.7 students and teachers who dug and clawed their way through that record—breaking snowfall.
- March 20 —Dr. Ben Graham, Superintendent of Schools passes away. School and city mourn.
- *April 14 —New Fires, the sure fire class play hit, played this week. Eddie Golden looked like a Wall Street someone.
- April 24 —Prize remark of the week is credited to Ted Mallinger, one of last years cheerleaders, who after an unfruitful search for Coach Slesinger went to the lost and found department of the Book Room and asked, "Did anyone turn in Coach Slesinger?"
- May 8 —Girls in the sewing department with Miss North have completed 65 hot water bottle covers for the Red Cross. The girls all deserve much credit for their extremely good work.
- May 22 —Allderdice stole the limelight at the 15th annual

- Scholastic Magazine Contest when Philip Pearlstein who won first prize last year (and had his work reproduced in Life Magazine) came out on top again.
- June 11 —Senior prom with Earl Truxell and his Airliners. Price, \$1.50 couple.
Gurk the Ice Cream Man, back in business again as popsicle season begins.
- *June 24,25 —We are commenced. Five hundred hopefuls go forth to make their mark. Let's hope they all find success and happiness.

This is only a sample of the nuggets of nostalgia I was able to glean from the School Journal, The Foreword, the Pittsburgh Sun—Telegraph, Polks 1942 City Index, the now defunct Bulletin—Index, and from the deep recesses of my own memory. Now you know why I love reunions. I hope that you, for the few brief moments you have read this commentary, have magically erased 45 years from your present age.

As for myself I feel that I've finally satisfied the advice permanently inscribed over our school auditorium stage, as well as in my own heart and mind. Know Something I've found out quite a deal doing this research. Do Something....I've done something for myself as well as for you by writing these words. Be Something....Perhaps now I can put my youthful sentimentalities to rest and be what I am. Or perhaps being a romantic is enough.

With love,

SANDY BASKIND
Class of '42
June 1987