

Renewing Old Friendships

by Beverly Denver

Some people love to make traces in fresh white snow; others do the same thing in warm dry sand. Still others delight in leaving traces on foggy mirrors and windowpanes. But, thankfully, there are those few people who leave deep traces on our hearts. The women I vacationed with last month in the mountains of southern Colorado are those kind of people.

All seven—Dianne (our most gracious hostess), Francis, Jeanne, Myra, Nola, Stog and Sue—were high school girlfriends and graduates of my same class. Most left Bossier City, LA after commencement and traveled along with me to the same university. Back then we lived in the same dormitories; we saw each other daily and talked for hours about every detail of our young lives. We were together to celebrate achievements and together too to commiserate over setbacks that seemed so daunting at the time. We took our friendships for granted and figured nothing would ever change them. When graduations from college sent us off in eight different directions, we bid our farewells with promises to keep in touch and visit often. We declared we'd never let distance come between us. But, then, life happened!

Some of us went on to pursue advanced degrees. Some went to work. Some got married. Some did all three.

In the early years, Christmas cards would tell of new jobs, new houses and new babies on the way. Before we knew it, yearly news reports centered on the activities of our kids — and less and less about ourselves. Sadly, somewhere in time, the annual cards stopped coming. Many of us moved often, and keeping up with who was where became a problem.

You'd think with each of sharing the same hometown (and family remaining there to visit often) connecting with each other in the summer or during holidays would be easy. Well, with rare exception, it wasn't. Conflicting demands on our "time at home" made adding old friends to the agenda nearly impossible. Before we knew it, we were seeing each only at class reunions — every five or 10 years!

At each of those reunions, we would hug when we met, cry when we parted and renew our vows to keep in touch. But, growing families, enlarging careers and just too many responsibilities to say grace over prevented us from keeping our promises!

Amazingly, all that changed four years ago. Thank goodness!

Planners of the last class reunion (a major one, by the way) started early—a full six months out! They used the Internet to send notices about the reunion, as well as emotion-charged messages to hype the event. They did this as routinely as Southwest flights depart Houston for Dallas.

Hourly, it seemed, we Bossier Bear Kats would open our mailboxes to find e-mails from Buzz, head of the reunion committee. Some had information pertinent to our Homecoming; others featured favorite anecdotes about days gone by. Each inspired a response (and another story) from a classmate, which in turn, inspired another and another!

By the time the reunion rolled around, we classmates were acquainted and connected in ways much more personally than ever before. When we finally got together that fall, we picked up where we were, not where we left off decades earlier!

It no longer mattered where any of us went to college or what kind of career we had. Many were already retired, for heaven's sake!

What did matter, it seemed, was finding out what kind of person each of us had become: what we thought and cared about, what challenges we had faced, how we see our futures, and most unexpectedly, how soon we could get together again!

Yes, we had bonded on a deep level, as only adults with common roots and a lot of life experience can do!

Last month's adventure-packed trip to Colorado wasn't the first since that blessed class reunion of 2001, and it definitely won't be the last. All eight of us went to see old friends we loved and cared about; we came home feeling very much loved and cared about ourselves. How great is that?

I could write volumes about the specific events of that time or go on and on about how much those reconnections mean to me. Instead, I will simply encourage you to do two things: First, turn to page 17 and read Jane Mulholland's article, *Girlfriends: Females Tend, Befriend and Bond for Life*, and secondly, organize your own gathering of childhood pals. The nurturing effects of such meetings are powerful and real but fully understood only when you've experienced one yourself.

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