**45th Reunion Memories**

My excitement grew as I rode through the New England countryside from Bradley Airport to South Hadley in anticipation of reuniting with friends and classmates I had not seen in ten or more years. The various hues of green along the heavily-wooded roadsides contrasted with the drought-stricken yellow and brown hills of California that I had left earlier that morning. As the car approached South Hadley, I remembered the day in September 1966 that my parents drove me to campus for the first time.

After registration at Mary Woolley, I joined the other members of the Reunion Committee and class officers for dinner at Willits-Hallowell. Then we adjourned to Ham, our home away from home, for wine and a time to enjoy each other.

On Friday morning, I awoke in my twin bed in a bare dorm room, gazed out the window overlooking Upper Lake and remembered where I was. I gathered my towels, toiletries, etc. for the trip to the common washroom (ah, sweet memories……) At breakfast in Willits, we mingled with other classes exchanging memories of the Mount Holyoke experience. Back at Ham, members of the class drifted in and were welcomed and greeted. Cries of delight at seeing old friends reverberated throughout the dorm. Then it was off to Back-to-Class. A sampling of comments about some of the sessions follows:

President Pasquerella answered questions about MHC including the endowment, ranking and retention.

The “Whither the Liberal Arts?” session was sponsored by the Class of ’55, and included a discussion by faculty members on the relevance of a liberal arts education in today’s world.

A geologist gave a beautifully-presented and reasoned explanation concerning the need for us to switch from carbon-based energy sources. Unfortunately, it was poorly attended, perhaps demonstrating our unwillingness to grapple with this and other important environmental issues on such a glorious day. (I needed to make one political statement, as I am a member of the Class of ’70!)

The session on planning for your funeral was surprisingly fun and full of life.

The session on transgender students had impressive speakers. One attendee was pleased to hear the thoughtful and compassionate approach to a challenging situation.

Another Back-to-Class, also sponsored by the Class of ‘55, concerned how books and literature made an impression on our lives.

Later a cocktail hour and a buffet dinner were held at Ham, followed by informal gatherings and discussions, with more catching up re the 45 years and memories past. A poster with names of classmates who have died had been set up, and everyone stopped by it in remembrance at least once during the weekend. Thirty-three classmates have died and the whereabouts are unknown for another twenty-eight.

Comments from classmates during the evening included:

“See how we have evolved over the years, and are still the same vibrant, intellectually-alive individuals. It is so much fun to reconnect and connect!”

“Relished a class in which discussing Oprah and Skinnerian satiation in the same breath is not considered the least bit weird!”

“I am cherishing the delicious moments of this personal pull-out program. Love reunions!!”

“It’s fabulous to be in the company of great women!”

“The great thing about our class is the mutual respect that each person has for other classmates.”

Another glorious day in South Hadley awaited us on Saturday – a little cool and breezy, but sunny and bright. We gathered on Skinner’s steps for our class picture, then meandered to Mary Lyon’s grave for a brief ceremony before beginning the Alumnae Parade, led by the bagpipe band.

We marched with placards that portrayed our views as expressed in the class survey. As always, it was wonderful to cheer for the older classes as they paraded past us, and just as great to root for the younger classes as we marched by them.

The Alumnae meeting was great. Members of our class who received awards included Susan Swart Rice and Barbara Cooke Monks, Alumnae Medals of Honor, and Laurie Fendrich, Alumnae Achievement Award. The Class of 1970 won the Lion Award for most dollars given over five years to all funds, and received a Pegasus Award for the most dollars raised for the Mount Holyoke Fund in the fiscal year 2015. The class history was presented by Sharon Murray Lorenzo.

On Saturday afternoon we had two class discussions in Ham Hall. One concerned creative writing and was described by one of the participants:

“Hearing from four of our classmates who have achieved success in various aspects of creative writing was truly inspiring. Their presentations and anecdotes made me so proud that they were a part of our class. I loved learning about their published works and the creative process. The industry that they devoted to the craft was riveting.”

The other discussion was a free-wheeling conversation about retirement:

First we went around the room soliciting comments from each person in attendance. The ideas offered are summarized below:

Pre-planning activities; hobbies; practiced retirement by taking days off; transition by consulting part time; doing things I always wanted to do; one year of discernment, permission to say no; change to different environment ;eased into it; play, then maybe need to refocus; get up and dressed then do something difficult followed by something what I want to do; needed structure, exercise; crafts, church ; travel, home exchange; classes, retire on own timetable; gradually taking up other skills and interests; volunteer for what you want; group with similar interests; redefining who I am; challenge spouse without interests; are you retiring from your job or retiring from work?

Other suggestions for consideration included getting rid of stuff, moving, traveling on the cheap and preparation for death. To get rid of stuff, it was suggested that you take out five things every day or one garbage bag full per week. Organizations such as freecycle.org or gooddonor.org may come and pick them up. Go through things and ask what brings you joy. If you have children, ask them what they want and give them a firm date to decide. If they don’t want the stuff, donate it.

Decide where you want to spend retirement and then move before it is too late. Make new friends while it is still possible.

We discussed traveling on the cheap. One classmate advocated home exchanges using the website homeforexchange.com. Airbnb International is another cheap travel modality. If you want to combine cheap travel with a wish to volunteer, then try looking at peacecorps.gov and check out the Facebook page peacecorps50+. You can also travel to new places by volunteering for Habitat for Humanity, through church or through the American Friends Services.

We are all mortal and need to prepare for death by getting our affairs in order. Financial issues include wills, trusts, art with value, etc. Make sure your survivors know where your documents are, including advance health directives. Be sure your personal physician is aware of your wishes.

A private tour of the Art Museum had been arranged and many in the class attended. The tour was led by Art Museum Director John Stomberg. The museum was founded in 1876 after the College received many gifts from graduates who were missionaries around the world and gifts of contemporary works by Albert Bierstadt (Hetch Hetchy Canyon) and George Inness (Saco Ford). These were works that made a contemporary political statements and were given during the same decade that saw the founding of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and the Philadelphia Museum. We heard about the recent acquisitions of a Renaissance altarpiece and a neoclassical painting of Coriolanus. Then we learned about the acquisition of a surrealist painting that has captured the imagination of current students, three photographs by a South African artist depicting the plight of gay women in South Africa and a photograph showing toxic nickel tailings in a Canadian landscape. The overall message was that contemporary art makes a statement about change in the environment of the artist.

Our class dinner followed in Ham Hall, after which we gathered in the living room for a talk by Professor Vincent Ferraro, who discussed the present state of developments with Iran. Following his talk, more conversation ensued, with folks one by one going upstairs to bed.

Sunday morning dawned with continued good weather. We departed for home, with vows to return in five years for our 50th Reunion.

**See you all there!**

* Submitted by Jean Olson