

Off the Walls

Reunions recall misfit woes

By NANCY WALLS SMITH

One of my neighbors mentioned to me the other day that she has bravely decided to attend her high school reunion this year. Another lady friend said wistfully as she said, "Wouldn't it be nice if we all looked the way we did in high school?" My reply was subtle. "Ye Gads!! No!"

High school definitely was not one of the peak experiences of my life. Probably the highlight of those adolescent years was the time I got my finger stuck in a Vick's jar and had to be rushed to emergency to have it taken off. Talk about your embarrassing moments.

My entire high school career seemed to go along those lines.

I was the kid who threw up in the middle of the night at biology camp because I was so homesick. I'm the one who refused to participate in gym class because I ran like a duck (still do, in fact). I was the type of person everyone forgets. In those four uneventful years, I must have said four words. A subtle butterfly I wasn't. Not exactly the kind of stuff dreams are made of.

So when it came time for my own 10-year high school reunion I wasn't exactly thrilled at the prospect of attending. It was more a case of literally being dragged there by a friend who proclaimed, "I'll go if you go, but I won't go alone, and if I don't get to go I just die." That kind of guilt I don't need. I took a tranquilizer and went.

Not surprisingly, that evening we were given little name tags at the door

to wear with our high school pictures on them. As I was looking at my picture, musing over how I had changed, I realized that it wasn't me. It was my name next to a picture of another girl who also had frizzy hair and glasses. I quickly handed back my card saying, "This isn't me. It's another homely girl." Nobody seemed to appreciate my feeble attempt at a joke as they all just about broke their necks apologizing. The evening was starting off well.

Right away I saw two girls who I had known, except I couldn't remember if we had been friends or just casual acquaintances. I went over to them and said, "Hi, Patsy!" in my most cheerful voice. To which she said, "Hi." (I couldn't remember the other girl's name).

What followed seemed like 10 minutes of outrageous silence. I introduced Dan.

"This is my husband." "Hi," from him. "Hi," from her. More silence.

After an eternity, I blurted out, "I'm pregnant." No one seemed willing to comment on this obvious bit of news (I was in my eighth month), so I said "See ya," and Dan and I fled. This was about as much fun as gym class.

As we threaded our way through the crowd, we accidentally joined a circle of people standing around Mrs. Murphy, who was a least 80 when she taught geometry 10 years earlier. She seemed to have aged 20 years. Even when I had been in her class, she could never remember our names.

When she looked at Dan he broke out in his most winning grin. In response to

this she pointed at him and said, "I know you!" (he had gone to a different high school). Spotting her name tag, he pointed back and said, "Mrs. Murphy!" She was obviously trying very hard to remember the name of this student who she had never taught, saying "Don't tell me, don't tell me," while I'm muttering out of the side of my mouth to Dan, "Tell her! Tell her!"

She finally looked at his name card and said, "Dan Smith, of course, how could I forget a name like that?"

I managed to drag him away before the two of them could get any more involved in their conversation and start reminiscing about things that had never happened.

As the band was setting up, I decided it was time I searched out the ladies room. Slowly maneuvering myself through the narrow aisles between the tables, I heard someone shouting my name. I looked to see the round cheerful face of a girl I had liked a great deal in my senior year, but now, for the life of me, I couldn't remember her name.

I could remember, though, that she had been an absolute fanatic about Elvis; so I smiled gleefully and shouted, "Elvis!" She shouted back, "Bobby Rydell!" (I, too, had been a fanatic). At this point our exchange fell rather short as we both tried to remember any other significant things we might have shared. After a few rounds of "How have you been," I announced my intention of going to the bathroom to her and everyone else at her table.

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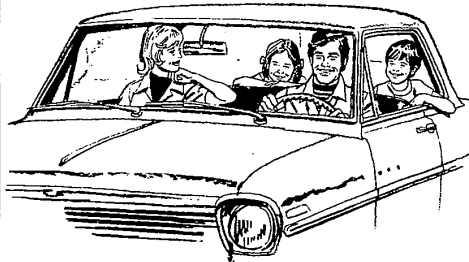
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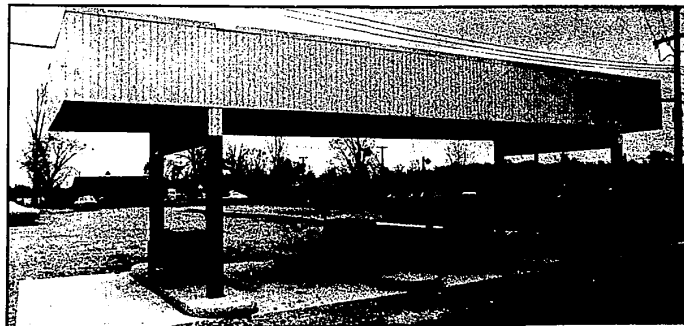
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