

A reflection on a tradition...

As oh-so-young college “girls” in the ‘60’s our class could often be heard belting out our theme song. It began, “We’re all together again, we’re here, we’re here” and ended with the line “And who knows when we’ll be all together again, singing all together again we’re here, we’re here.”

Little could we have imagined that someday, as 75-years-olds, we would still be singing this, most recently at the beach house of Mary Ellen Foody O’Leary ’66 on Edisto Island in South Carolina...the singing still robust, the last line gaining in poignancy.

For the past 25 years the Class of ’66 has gathered at Mary Ellen’s for our milestone birthdays. We began in 1994 at age 50, an unbelievably ancient age to us then. That year Mary Ellen and her former 3 ½ year roomie, Nancy Neary (Mary Ellen was replaced senior year when Nancy married Dick Long!), concocted a crazy idea prompted by comments made by Mary Fran Rodzai O’Herron ’65 and Pat Cooper Billies ’66. They would request a class of ’66 mailing list from the Alumni Office and invite everyone in the class to come to Edisto for a long weekend to celebrate our half century.

Yes, the invitees numbered nearly 200 but, considering the distances involved and the busyness of our lives, they thought that perhaps 10-12 might actually come. Then, when 32 of us decided to fly in from all over the country, they went back to the drawing board, multiplied everything by 3, and a tradition was born! Since then we have come together for our 60th, 65th, 68th (50 years after as 18 year-old we became college freshman), 70th and 75th years, once numbering as many as 46 attendees, this last time 33.

The logistical challenges tackled by the planners, Mary Ellen, Nancy, Pauline Angione and Barbara Olmstead Long, give the word “daunting” new meaning. The process has evolved over the years into a rather finely tuned machine (as long as one has a sense of humor). Upon arrival each attendee selects a purple envelope in which she finds her house address (Mary Ellen has had to enlist as many as 5 neighbors’ homes to accommodate us), her room number and her job for the weekend...house mother, cook, hostess, etc. As in college, those who get the same house and room number become roommates. All breakfasts are in the individual houses, but all other meals are eaten together on large tables spread throughout Mary Ellen’s main floor. House mothers are given keys and a large cardboard box containing everything from coffee to toilet paper for their homes. Planners create meals, print recipes and shop for all groceries before the revelers arrive. To prepare the feasts, cooks wrestle with things like industrial-sized tubs of sour cream and cans of tomato sauce, enormous bags of greens, and multiple pork roasts to prepare delicious pork BBQ. And, oh yes, significant quantities of wine are brought in, much of it supplied by classmate Ann Costello Martini’s Anthony Road Winery on Seneca Lake.

Through the years the weekend’s program has been purposely laid-back allowing for long beach walks, an occasional island tour, speaker or cooking demo lead by a classmate, the latter more Comedy Central than Food Channel ready! Mostly, there has been lots of laughter, a few tears and world-class , non-stop talking....talking as only those who share a common background

experience and life stage can do – easy, deep, silly, generous, thought-provoking, supportive talking.

With each gathering we have marveled that a choice we made to attend Nazareth College in 1962 brought us together. As with so many other classes we were nurtured and challenged there. We took what we learned inside and outside the classroom into communities around the world. And, every once in a while, we have come back together again, whether at Edisto Island, at reunions, in small group gatherings, at a class book club or, yes poker group, annual Mystery Tour or on-line chat thorough the techno-magic of Pauline Angione and Barb Long. And, sometimes, just in spirit. More often than not we leave these experiences showhow restored. We are grateful for all of it and for one another.

“And who knows when...How about 80?”