

St. Mary 2008 Class Reunion By: Jill Schmidt

So, who is not going to admit that at one time or another during our grade school years, as our minds drifted off during any number of classes, that we sat and tried to figure out just how old we would be at the turn of the century. Well, here we are 8 years after that fact and 40 years out of grade school! Oh my!

After a few months of planning, and what seemed like a million phone calls, more than 40 people came to spend time reliving fond grade school days. Lots of time was spent catching up with some people we hadn't seen in years, but later felt like we last saw them just yesterday.

The party was held in the conference rooms of St. Mary School building. This is located a little south of but on the same floor as Marian Hall. Our last reunion was in Eschweiler Hall. That has since been turned into kindergarten and science rooms, and the kitchen has been taken out. I went over to set up about two in the afternoon. Tables were already set up with clean white tablecloths. The main table set up for the food was ready, as was the table with coffee and space for the beverage coolers. Tables and easels were positioned for the many displays. An area in the corner behind the displays was picked out for the CD player and 60's era music. After putting out the signs showing the way to the reunion I went back home and got ready for mass. Robyn and Barb came right before mass and brought in the decorations, coolers and beverages.

Our night was to begin with the 5 p.m. mass at St. Mary's Church. Living in the second house just west of the church, I was the first to get there. We had 5 pews reserved in front to the left. The first classmate to arrive was Steve Wros and his wife Deborah. They had already stopped over at the conference rooms just to check it out. When they got to church, after hugs and kisses and introductions, I showed them where we all were going to sit. My sister made pins with ribbons in our school colors for all of us to wear. Some of us still had our original graduation ribbons! Next came Paula Allen and her mother. Mrs. Allen, Mrs. Gnabasek, Mrs. Etzel and Mrs. Otzelberger were invited to the reunion, as they were a few of our Girl Scout leaders in grade school. Maripat, Paula and I sat in the front pew with Robyn in her wheelchair in the isle right next to us. We eventually talked Steve into moving up and sitting with us instead of in the last row.

Right before mass started I had the privilege of singing a solo. "Tis the Gift to Be Simple". By the time I was done we had more classmates join

us. Gary and his wife Debbie, Dennise D., Cathy C., Loretta K., Patty J. There were others who opted to sit in different areas of the congregation, but their presence was felt non the less.

With the prelude done and more ribbons passed out we gathered with “Here I Am Lord”. The voices of my classmates all around, gave me a sense of we’re all back “home” again. How many weekday morning masses had we all celebrated together as children? (At least this time we didn’t have to fast for twelve hours before receiving Communion.)

Sitting together right behind us was Mrs. Gnabasik, and Mrs. Allen. They were just chatting away and enjoying a visit even though mass had started. I turned to Maripat and whispered “Do we have to separate those girls?” Well, then we started to giggle.

Maripat did a wonderful job with the first reading. Robyn, who had been a reader for years at St. Mary’s, read the second reading from her chair while Deacon Tom Wuchterl held the book of scripture and Nic our choir director held the microphone. Tom’s wife Shirley was also one of our former Scout leaders as was her sister Dorothy Koefler, (Nancy’s mom) both of them, passed away in the last few years, as has Nancy.

Prayers of the faithful included a special prayer for those classmates who have died. Deacon Tom was noticeably verklempt when he read his niece’s name.

As Steve and Paula were the first to arrive, they accepted when asked to bring up the gifts at the offertory.

The sign of peace was a joyful expression, as our classmates shook hands, gave hugs and kisses and wished peace to all.

“On Eagles Wings” was our Communion song. As the congregation passed us on their way up to receive, we flashed smiles at our other classmates that were seated in other areas. Whispers of congratulations came from others in the congregation.

Final prayer and blessing were given but we weren’t done in church yet. Everyone at mass from in our class, was instructed to gather over at the blue memorial candles, in the East wing. After Father Greg joined us, seven of us lit one candle for each of our deceased classmates.

Robyn lit a candle for Jane Clark

I lit a candle for Tom Albers

Patty J. lit a candle for Gary Schaezel

Barb lit a candle for Jean Ische

Maripat lit a candle for Jim Kreuser

Paula lit a candle for Nancy Koefler

Cathy C. lit a candle for Mike Lundwall

Fr. Greg led us in prayer after the candles were lit and burning brightly. Then we headed for the party.

Following the signs, everyone made it into the hall in a few minutes. The first table was filled with a nametag for each of us. Audible moans and groans coupled with loud bursts of laughter were heard as everyone noticed the nametags also had on it, individual 8th grade pictures. The tables with the displays were next in line. Each of the three classrooms of first, sixth, and eighth were identified and on display. Pictures of the teachers and Fr. Eschweiler were next. Also, a picture of and a letter from Sr. Rose Eschweiler (Sr. Carlotta) with a nice write up of her 80 Year Jubilee Celebration as a nun. She also just turned 96! The next displays were pictures of students that were “traded” for other pictures. Also a collection from scrapbooks from a few of us girls, of different parties, get-togethers, school events and after school to do’s. There were pictures of the girl scouts along with a sash with badges! Football pictures and a few of the cheerleaders were also shown. Finally at the end were enlargements of our two graduation pictures. There were so many kids in our class we had to have a picture each done of the boys and girls. We’re still trying to find out if our class was the largest at 112 graduates.

While everyone was perusing the displays, one of our grade school teachers arrived, Sr. Gwen Floryance (Sr. De Maria). Also one of the coaches, Roger Klein was able to join us. Before we got too into visiting and the food, we all got together for a group picture. Also taking pictures was a reporter for the local newspaper. He got a good group shot and talked to a few of us. (The write up was in the Banner Express, a local free paper, a week later.)

We had sixties music playing in the background. The food was set out between 6:30 and 7p.m. and was out all evening so that no one would go hungry no matter how late they joined the party. There was sliced ham and beef. Croissants and rolls with all the fixings for a great sandwich: tomatoes, relishes, ketchup, mustard, and mayonnaise. Two different cheese platters, veggie tray with dip and lots of fresh fruit and a pasta salad filled the table. For those looking for something sweet there were chocolate chip cookies, brownies and mini eclairs. Coffee was available as were coolers filled with beer, soda, water and two boxes of wine. There were always people up at the table getting more to eat. There were plenty of places to sit and visit while eating. The tables were all decorated with blue and white balloons.

The whole night was so comfortable. More classmates showed up during the course of the evening. There were some who even called the night before. We told them to just bring their money along and join the party.

One of the biggest surprises of the night was when Michael Kamps showed up! He was reported deceased at the last reunion. Ten years ago as we were putting the 30 yr. reunion together, we had trouble trying to find Mike. His great-aunt contacted me and told me he had died. I called Maripat and told her the news and she didn't believe it. "No, no no!" She said. His mom and brother I think, but I'm sure he's not!" I told her I thought his great-aunt should know...so that's the info we went with. We had his picture on the memorial page and even had a mass said for him! A year or two later, I ran into Mike's great-aunt and she told me she had made a mistake. Mike had not passed. Well I eventually got a hold of him and we talked on the phone for a long time. I told him the whole story and he asked if we were going to have another reunion. I told him yes, in 2008. He swore me to secrecy. "Don't tell ANYBODY!" He said. "I'll just show up for the next reunion!" A few months before we sent out the invitations, Mike contacted me to see if the plans were still on. I kept in touch with all the info he needed. I thought Cathy C. was going to faint dead away when she saw him. He drove all the way from Indiana for the party, and then he was going to drive back home that same night. Hope you got home safe Mike! It sure was a good surprise to see you!

Pictures, stories, laughter, memories and lots of catching up went on all night. Every group of people could be heard saying "remember when we....." or "Who was the one that...." and such.

One of the funnier moments of the evening was when Ruth Etzel brought along one of the old plaid girls uniforms! It still had the school emblem on it! A few of us girls had our picture taken with it. At least we didn't have to kneel to see if it was long enough!

There was my graduation charm bracelet on display. All of us girls got one. One charm that says "JOY" on it, and it still fits. After much thought a few of the boys remembered that they got a tie clip. Hope one of the boys can find one by next reunion!

So, with the pictures taken, books passed out, hugs and kisses given all around the evening came to a close and the crowd started to head home between 9 and 10. The remaining veggies and cheese plates were put onto paper plates and wrapped with plastic wrap. There were different size containers that could hold fresh fruit, pasta salad, ham, beef, and whatever food that was left. Nothing went to waste. People were invited to take a plate or two. The few brownies that were left went fast. No one went home empty handed. Beverages and nosh were taken along with the balloons. It didn't take long to pack everything else up. It will all be put away for another ten

years. Keep looking through your own memorabilia for something to bring along next reunion!

Those who came to the 2008 reunion;

Teacher

Sr. Gwen Floryance (Sr. De Maria)

Coach

Roger Klein and his wife

Girl Scout leaders

Mrs. Allen

Mrs. Etzel

Mrs. Gnabasek

Mrs. Otzelberger

Students

Allen, Paula

Alt, Peter

Badke, Jill (Schmidt)

Bilgo, Ron and his wife

Cisewski, Kathy (Miller) and her sister Jane (Lundwall)

DeDominces, Denise

Etzel, Ruth

Fredrichs, Hank

Glenn, Patty (Melnick)

Gnabasik, Maripat (Blankenheim) and husband Bob

Herrick, Debbie (Brummer) and husband Craig

Johnson, Patty (Sherman)

Kamps, Mike

Klemm, Loretta

Luebke, Mike

Otzelberger, Barb (Moesch) and husband Hal

Pomeroy, Pat

Riehle, Jane

Schneider, Gary and his wife Debbie

Schryer, David and his girlfriend Barb Helm

Steger, Cindy (Matoush) and her husband Lee

Tietz, Robyn (Turtenwald)

Walczak, Jim

Wilcox, Ron and his wife Mary

Wros, Steve and his Deborah

Camera man

Mr. Etzel

Thanks to all who helped make this reunion possible. Thanks to all who came and enjoyed the evening. Prayers go out to all who couldn't be with us for whatever reason. Hope to see you all in 2018.

Love to all,

Jill