

Aging Lifestyles: A 50th college reunion

by Joe_Volz

We must have sung the Rutgers alma mater 50 times when I went to my 50th reunion in New Brunswick, N.J.

We blared out, "My father sent me to old Rutgers and resolved that I should be a man." The words of the song showed just how sexist our all-male college really was back in the 1950s. Nobody would have thought for a minute that Mom played any part at all in deciding where we students matriculated. It was a man's world.

The women were relegated to their own smaller college across town, then known as New Jersey College for Women, but shortly changed to Douglass College.

Of course, the alumni, the college and our world have changed drastically since then. The changes were in stark display as we wandered around the campus with our snow white hair and beards exchanging glances with each other.

In our days as students, Rutgers was just becoming a full-fledged state university and was still fairly small. We rarely had more than 30 students in any class and there were only about 400 in our graduating class.

Now the college is gigantic. An entirely new campus has been born where once only a small ivy-covered football stadium and the Institute of Microbiology stood.

I still remember the words of our aging dean - younger than any of us are now - warning us during Freshman Week to look to our left and our right because one of the three of us would not be there four years later for graduation. So true. About a third of our class dropped out.

Those of us who made it through the four years recalled together what an impact that time had on the rest of our lives.

Many have maintained close friendships with classmates we met then.

In my case, my days as the editor of the Rutgers daily marked the beginning of 50 years in this business. I

still keep in touch with some of my fellow student-journalists, although, sadly, few stayed in journalism. They became lawyers and pols and, of all things, college English professors. Journalism wasn't such a big deal in the days before Woodward and Bernstein. We were the Silent Generation.

But just as our generation has changed and seen our youth evaporate into a sea of ailments, we also have observed some major changes at Rutgers that discourage us. Many of the alumni noted with apprehension the emergence of the school as a big-time football power to the detriment of lesser sports.

In 1957, Rutgers, which played its first intercollegiate football game back in 1869, was still fielding truly amateur teams. Our team wasn't good enough for the Ivy League. We played little teams like Lafayette or Lehigh or Muhlenberg or Ohio Wesleyan in a tiny stadium by today's standards. It seated only about 25,000.

When I first arrived on the banks of the Raritan River, our mascot was not the bold Scarlet Knight, who now prances around on a horse at Rutgers games, but rather, more appropriately, a squawking rooster cheering on our team - the Chanticleers.

Today, Rutgers is a national football powerhouse. Finishing 12th in the nation last year, Rutgers competed as a dark horse for the national championship. The team plays in a big stadium and of course in bowl games. The coach, imported from the University of Miami, makes more than a million dollars a year.

But what price glory?

We grads noticed that Rutgers president, Richard McCormick, is disbanding a number of intercollegiate teams made up of true student athletes. The swimming, fencing, and tennis teams along with the crew are all being ignored. The explanation the college brass gave was that the school loses money on the teams. However, all of those teams combined cost about half of the football coach's salary.

The bottom line is football brings in big alumni donations. Swimming and crew don't.

We all wore red and white stickers on our blazers, next to our Class of 1957 name tags, urging the president to save those sports. But it is not likely to happen.

Big bucks now rule on the Banks of the Old Raritan. We have turned into another Penn State.

How sad.

E-mail Joe Volz at volzjoe2003@yahoo.com or write to 2528 Five Shillings Road, Frederick, MD 21701.

Â© Copley News Service

Aging Lifestyles: A 50th college reunion by Joe_Volz