

Homecoming Takes Toll on Neurons

I had intended to get up early today and get a head start on tailgating for UI Homecoming, but I have a nasty headache, so I slept in. This column was written several days ago, but I knew how I'd feel today because I've been unwell every Homecoming Saturday morning for the last 30 years.

I'm beginning to suspect that it has something to do with the UI Alumni band, which I joined (what do you know!) about 30 years ago. Come to think of it, the band's only gig is every Homecoming weekend. Many of its members tend to stay out until the wee hours after the Homecoming parade, playing the same three tunes for tipsy bar patrons while drinking numerous adult beverages themselves. It may just be a coincidence.

Most of the band's members don't play regularly during the year. As a result, flaccid lips soon fail, and correct notes stop emerging from horns after about 20 minutes (for those of us playing the correct notes in the first place). We brass players tend to wake up with swollen lips the next day, looking like we were hit in the mouth with a softball. As if the hangover alone wasn't punishment enough.

If you've never hung around downtown Iowa City after the parade, you're probably a mature responsible adult with no time for such juvenile pursuits and it's no wonder that nobody wants to party with you. The rest of us were having a great time roaming from bar to bar while the band played tunes for intoxicated patrons who were too hammered to remember the lyrics to "In Heaven there is no beer"

We also play the Michigan fight song (Hail to the Victors) complete with alternate lyrics so profane that I'm too embarrassed to sing them. Printing them in a family newspaper and substituting random characters for the naughty parts would wear out the top row of keys on my laptop.

Equally rude lyrics exist for every other Big 10 school song, and if you're really interested you can view them (the really dirty words are blanked out) at <http://members.fortunecity.com/hmbjoesgang/hmbsongs.htm>.

Even if you stayed home last night, you haven't missed out on all the fun if you have a ticket to the game. I estimate that 75% of my Alumni Band cohorts haven't touched their instruments since last year's Homecoming, and haven't touched their toes since well before then. This makes for a very amusing pregame, where we take over the Junior Band's usual ritual of marching downfield and (hopefully) spelling out IOWA and HAWKS on the field.

The advantage of a 7:05 p.m. kickoff is that a serious hangover can be hydrated into borderline submission in time for Alumni Band members to attempt to memorize the songs and learn the steps required for pregame. Even under ideal circumstances, it's an iffy proposition for those of us older alumni with aging neural synapses, let alone those of us who are already handicapped with moderate alcohol poisoning. I subscribe to the Buffalo Theory that alcohol only kills the slowest and weakest brain cells, leaving the healthy, vigorous ones intact - that's why you always feel smarter after you've had a few beers. But I digress.

There is only so much that can be accomplished in a one-hour rehearsal before the game, and that will be evidenced by crooked ranks, cracked notes and confused middle-aged musicians in random locations making the words IOWA and HAWKS all but illegible. We're scheduled to go on at 6:50 p.m., so be in your seat by then if you need some comic relief.

Disclaimer: If I'm making Homecoming sound like a drunken Bacchanalia for everyone involved, well, for some it is. I try not to be judgmental about such things, but as long as there are bars and college kids there will be what clinical psychologists refer to as "butt-dumb" behavior. I outgrew this phase years ago, but I do suffer an annual relapse.

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