

No, I'm Not Offering To Ramrod The 40th Reunion

Normally this is the time of year that LuAnn and I would be attending our high school alumni reunions, if they were happening. But they're not.

It's always good to have somebody to blame. I was arguably in charge of the 35th reunion of the West High class of '71 last year, which might explain why it didn't happen. LuAnn was arguably in charge of the 35th reunion of the City High class of '72 this year - that one's not going to happen, either.

We have good excuses, of course. Our cat had dental problems, the roses in our garden had the wilt and space aliens were siphoning off our life forces by using a reverse-energy ray that couldn't be deflected by our tinfoil hats.

I said we were "arguably" in charge of our reunions because nobody really seems to know whose responsibility it is to plan these things. What often occurs is that a couple of graduates from the same class accidentally bump into each other at Hy-Vee and realize that the next year represents a reunion year that would end in a five or a zero, and agree that somebody should do something. Sometimes somebody does something, sometimes not.

It's usually incumbent on those of us with the poor luck of having remained at the scene of the crime to make sure that reunions get planned, especially if we happened to serve on the committee for the last one. A major part of the problem is that the first person to say "Let's get together to plan our next reunion" is preemptively deemed to be the chair of the planning committee.

I did happen to bump into a few former classmates at Iowa City West's commencement a couple of weeks ago at Carver Hawkeye Sports Arena. I was there to watch the graduation of the daughter of a 1971 classmate, and her name (Alderman) was the third one announced among the 420 graduates.

Rather than fidget through the remaining 417 names, I wandered backstage and caught up with Dennis Edelbrock, another '71 classmate who was on hand to accept this year's Distinguished Alumni award.

A sergeant-major in the Army and principal trumpet of every military band worth belonging to in Washington, D.C. (not to mention numerous other qualifications), Dennis is a worthy recipient. In fact, several others from my class have already received the award.

Not that I spend a lot of time thinking about it (don't ask me to define "a lot of time"), but my trophy shelf constantly mocks me with its lack of hardware and this would be a good start. Unfortunately, it seems to take more to win than simply avoiding the county jail.

I used to think that if I stayed alive long enough and kept busy it would eventually put me in line to win this award, but evidently not. Worse, every graduating class adds another 400 or so potential award nominees to my competition. I guess I'll take up bowling, instead – the trophies may be cheesier, but they are probably somewhat easier to win.

Anyway, Dennis and I – although we weren't particularly close friends in high school and had seen each other maybe three times since – had a great conversation. We chatted with a couple of current teachers and were a little distressed to discover that all of the teachers and administrators we had in 1971 were either dead or had retired - the final one retired last year.

Our memories were sufficiently dim that we argued about where our own commencement had occurred 35 years ago. He was pretty sure it was in the West High Gymnasium (which was almost brand new back then), and I was holding out for Hancher Auditorium, which (as it turns out) wasn't built until the following year.

We were able to agree that – like it or not - neither of our personalities seemed to have changed appreciably in the last 35 years. The kids that graduated this year might be surprised to hear that the way they are now is not likely to change much.

It was fun to chat about old teachers, classmates and the bonehead stuff we did back then. We agreed that reunions are great, although we were both careful not to propose getting together to plan one.

Somebody should do something. If you're a graduate of West High '71 (or City High '72 for that matter), give me a call – we'll arrange to get a head start on the 40th reunions. But you're the chair of the committee.