

NEWS

Where have you gone, Doherty High Class of 1972? 50th reunion organizers search for alums



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WORCESTER — The Equal Rights Amendment was passed by the U.S. Senate, the Vietnam War was in its final years, five men were arrested for breaking into the office of the Democratic National Committee at the Watergate complex, and the Doherty Memorial High School Class of 1972 graduated.

With their 50th high school reunion this year in June, a small group of alumni, led by David Meyers, are in the process of trying to track down their almost 500 former classmates using a mix of social media, emails and cold calling, among other methods.

"I was involved with the last one," Meyers said. "I got involved with this one because the guy I'm on another committee with mentioned it to me."

Meyers then reached out to Roger Price, a former classmate, roommate and current walking partner to get involved.

Since then, the group has grown to include Price, Nancy Kelley Shaw, Richard Prunier and Richard Dowd, as well as some others.

"We're dealing with 50-year-old addresses," Shaw said. "Taking a shot in the dark that maybe some of them are in their parents' homes or whatever."

The group only has about 400 out of their 500 former classmates on their contact list as the 100 or so missing names have no home address, phone number or email.

"The team has been successful in reaching 155 email addresses," Dowd said. "People with just phone numbers and no email address about 26, and then we still have quite a few, about 150

some odd without addresses without email addresses that we're working on and 30 some odd miscellaneous."

The group recently learned about 35 classmates have since died, and about 10 who have no interest in attending the event.

"There's still about 300 that we have no information, so what we did is we started first, reaching out to all of the emails we did to see if we could get their friends to reach out to their friends and get their emails," Shaw said. "Then we started mailings to all the old addresses. Then we started a Facebook page."

The group also took to Facebook to track down members of their graduating class, which has since grown to about 68 people, as well as doing things such as searching for people through their parents' obituaries, Dowd said.

"I'm finding, as we research and try to find people, I had a few people say, 'I hated high school. I don't ever want to have anything to do with it again,' and it kind of broke my heart a little," said Shaw. "I'm sure that there were a lot more than we are aware of who really had a tough time, although I don't recall bullying...I don't recall seeing blatant bullying."

Down and Shaw agreed that mailing about the reunion is somewhat unreliable as it is hard to know which addresses to trust.

Although, they agreed, it is exciting once an email is answered or some other type of contact is established.

Search process fun

Price also said that the event planning and search process itself has been fun, allowing the former classmates to bond in ways they might not have been able to while in school.

"I was a shy kid in high school and I'm having the time of my life with this," Price said. "I think it's great to not only get reacquainted but acquainted in some ways for people, you knew who they were, but you just never knew them and I think now at this stage in life, we're all kind of happy to be around, and everybody's getting along, and there's no cliques. And it doesn't matter whether you were in a clique or not in a clique. We're all just contributing, having a good time and hoping to make the most of it."

Price said that while the event — scheduled for 5:30-10:30 p.m. June 25 under the tent at Holy Cross' Fitton Field — itself will be great, he thinks the planning of the event itself may

be more memorable as the event will only be a few hours but the group has been and will continue to work together in the months following to plan everything.

It has not only allowed them to bond and forge new friendships but also reflect on their school years and share memories of Worcester in the 1970s, and their time at Doherty.

'Music was amazing in the '70s'

"Music was amazing in the '70s, it really was," Shaw said. "I do recall being very upset that we were only 15 when Woodstock happened. We were too young."

Shaw recalled that her first concert was seeing the band Chicago.

"They sounded exactly like their record and I don't think I've ever seen that," she said.

For students in the 1970s, finding live music in Worcester was fairly easy considering the number of venues where they could watch local musicians play or even major acts such as the Rolling Stones.

For Price, whose favorite bands at the time were the Beatles and Led Zeppelin, he wasn't always sure what he wanted to do after high school but he did know that he wanted to attend concerts.

"I would say I didn't have a clue in high school, probably not till graduate school," he said. "In high school, all I wanted to do was do my homework, graduate and get into college and got to concerts. It was a few years before I figured out what I was supposed to do with my life, and then it worked."

Price went on to work in the hospital computer system business for 42 years, retiring from that career about two years ago.

Seeing what classmates accomplished exciting

Being able to see where their classmates have ended up and what types of careers they had was another exciting aspect of planning the reunion.

Shaw recalled a member of their class, Paul Goldstein, who had moved to Norway and composed about 19 operas.

The group recalled that they and their classmates were generally well behaved and avoided getting in trouble

Although Prunier did recall a moment in which a former classmate may have come to school high on heroin.

"We all had to do oral presentations...one of the students got up and he said, he started talking about, 'You know how when you go to the doctor's, you get a shot? Well, that's what heroin is when you inject it into your veins,'" Prunier said. "He was going on and on about it and all of us are sitting there, 'What is he saying?' and he said the hardest thing of overcoming heroin and shooting with your veins is the needle. And that was (what) his oral presentation (was) on."

Shaw also remembered the hill near Doherty being a popular destination for students to get away with smoking weed.

The group was also fortunate to be grandfathered into being able to legally drink under 21.

Prunier remembered a saying making its way through the school, "18 by 72."

However, aside from those instances, they said that they and their classmates typically stayed out of trouble, instead choosing to get involved with activities in and outside of school.

Sports were big at Doherty

Dowd, who played baseball for three years between junior varsity and varsity recalled the excitement surrounding the school's different sports teams.

"I can remember where they even started selling tickets to the basketball games outside the cafeteria because they used to draw so many people," Dowd said.

He said football and basketball drew the most interest and remembers going to Friendly's after the games.

Outside of school, Shaw helped campaign for Worcester's first female mayor, Sara Robertson, although Shaw said she was not very interested in politics, otherwise, and was looking more for a reason to get out of the house.

Major political, social events

Despite not much interest in politics, it would be hard to not notice the major political and social events taking place in 1972 and the years preceding.

By the time they had graduated, the group would have lived through the civil rights movement, the Cold War and the Vietnam War, as well as the assassination of a president and other major political and social figures.

"We were at a pretty tender age when JFK was assassinated; when Martin Luther King (Jr.) was assassinated; when Robert Kennedy was assassinated," Price said. "We were just coming of age in elementary school when that was happening and I think we all can still remember exactly where we were."

In the months and years following their graduation, Richard Nixon's presidency would be hanging by a thread and the Vietnam War would be drawing to a close.

By the time Meyer, Prunier, Dowd and Price turned 18 and graduated, the draft for the Vietnam War was suspended.

"After we graduated, soon as we turned 18...we got draft cards," Meyers said. "They had technically abolished the draft but we all got numbers. I lost that one. Mine was 315, so I was happy."

Shift in women's rights, social norms

The 1970s also saw a major shift in women's rights and social norms, such as girls being able to wear pants to school.

"Girls had to wear dresses...Girls weren't allowed to wear long pants until, like, our sophomore year," Shaw said.

She welcomed the change, especially since many of the students would walk to school at that time, including her.

Doherty was also a space for students to socialize, usually in the parking lot before school or showcase their talents to their fellow classmates.

"One of the highlights was the variety show, being a part of the variety show," Shaw said. "It was a very big deal. It was very well produced, semiprofessional."

The variety show, which was called "Sisyphus Triumphs," was put on by students in the school and included performances by musicians at the school, as well as the school's orchestra.

Bomb drills for possible nuclear war

The campus was fairly open, the group recalled, although that may have been in part due to the lack of present-day security technology and procedures.

"They didn't have the safety features that they have now," Meyers said. "It's not that they didn't care. We just didn't have those problems."

While students today practice safety drills in case of threats of gun violence in schools, students in 1972 instead had bomb drills in the event of nuclear war.

Although Prunier does remember a few fake fire alarms going off while in school.

'Second period Breakfast Club'

Prunier was also a member of the "Second Period Breakfast Club," which would meet at Country Kitchen on Park Avenue.

"A group of us used to go over there and have breakfast during second period and nobody from the school missed us," he said.

A photo of the group made it into the school yearbook.

Another exciting part of planning the reunion has also been finding out where their classmates have ended up and how they have changed in 50 years.

"It is something when you don't know the story of somebody for 50 years, and then you find out what they did for the last 50 years," Price said. "Some of it can be shocking, surprising, but we're all in the same boat. I mean, you almost go around trying to figure out who do you recognize and some people are easier to recognize than others but it's fun. Once you find out who the person is, it's like you're best old friends."

Recently, the group has been able to get commitments for the reunion from former classmates who not only live in Massachusetts and around the United States but also around the world in Israel, Australia, Switzerland and Norway.

The group will continue searching for their classmates and keep their Facebook group, where they can share photos and play games, such as guessing the name of a song based on some of its lyrics, active and engaged.

Members of the class of 1972 or those interested in helping search for members of the class can join the Facebook page, or send an email at tourwife852@gmail.com.

Tickets for members of the graduating class can be found on Eventbrite.