

Once a Blue Devil, Always a Blue Devil

A few weeks ago my wife and I had the opportunity to spend what turned out to be a glorious evening with about seventy five others as we celebrated the WaHi Class of 1953's, 65th high school reunion. Hands down, this was one of the most memorable moments I have experienced since assuming the role as our district's superintendent.

About a month prior to the occasion I received a phone call from Dean Derby, a member of the class of 53', who I have come to know and seek guidance from on several occasions. Our discussions together are most often held over a cup of joe at "his" table at Coffee Perk (let's hope the remodel is done soon so we can rekindle our caffeine conversations). I had quickly come to appreciate his reverence for his WaHi experience. What I didn't know at the time was that I had only begun to scratch the surface of his passion, and that from his classmates'. Boy, was I in for a surprise?

Over the phone Mr. Derby invited my wife and I to join him at the country club for the reunion event, and asked that I speak to his classmates about the school district. He mentioned that class of 52' and 54' graduates would also be in attendance to celebrate the evening together. Without hesitation, I humbly accepted his invitation, only later pondering what this school superintendent would be able to share of any relevance with an audience almost twice his age.

What turned out to be another beautiful late summer evening at our country club, my wife and I arrived having no indication of what we were about to experience. Apart from the second-glances we received from the first few attendees (obviously, we weren't class of 53 graduates from the look of us), we were immediately embraced by Dean and his wife Shari. After brief introductions to a number of guests still mingling before the dinner hour, the night was a storybook in the making from that point on.

Classmate after classmate began to enter the room; some accompanied by their spouse, some by their caretaking children, and others without partner. For many in attendance, years had been spectacularly kind (I can only hope that I am in as good as shape at eighty-something as many of them are). For others, it was apparent that they were closing in on the long journey that is destined for all of us.

Hugs, smiles, laughter and tears were abound. But unlike any other reunion I had experienced, this one was different. As the microphone was passed around, story after story was told. Stories of high school pranks and high school sweethearts married - athletic championships and academic feats - great grandkids born and loved ones lost. I distinctly remember a spouse speaking for her husband who had recently suffered a stroke. She openly admitted that she broke him out of assisted living just so he could be there to celebrate with his classmates and former football teammates. Others flew across the country for the event. Another moment worth recalling was when one graduate spoke of her glorious WaHi experiences. Weakening to hold the microphone, her hand slowly began to drop. Her daughter, accompanying her to the event, gently pushed her mother's arm up, bringing the microphone back to her face, so she could be heard. This happened 4-5 more times throughout her speech. With smiles on our faces, and tears in our eyes, my wife and I continued to take it all in.

When it was my turn to address those in attendance there was only one thing fitting to say to the audience; a heartfelt thank you. I thanked them for the legacy that they had created. I was surrounded by a room full of legends and pioneers, and I reinforced how their 65 year old legacy still flows in the

veins of our students today. I reminded them that they helped pave the way for what a Blue Devil means, stands for, and honors, even to this day.

Fitting to this experience, I took an opportunity to review the 1953 yearbook (The district has archived all yearbooks online and can be accessed at: <http://www.wwps.org/district/information/yearbooks>). In the front few pages, a message from The Blue Devil states: "Dear students: I, the Walla Walla Blue Devil, have been a symbol of life at Wa-Hi...I dance at your frolics, cheer at your games, worry about your exams, for everything you do is part of me. I've always been proud of us, and this year I'm exceptionally proud-I can't contain myself any longer. Every year we improve ourselves and we improve the school with us...I hope you'll look at this book now and remember the happy times and ten years from now I hope you'll still be reminded of them when you turn these pages...Sincerely, Blue Devil."

What Mr. Blue Devil didn't know at the time, was that this same message holds as true today, some 65 years later, as it did back then. We continue to bleed blue. We continue to keep tradition alive.

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