

Reunions

I don't know why, but I'm a sucker for reunions. Some people I know, could (or is it "couldn't?") care less. But me, I love them. Curiosity? Nostalgia? Loyalty? School Spirit? A feeling of indebtedness? Maybe all of them.

I believe my first effort to pull together a reunion was in December 1951, less than a year after the graduation of the ILGWU Training Institute. There were 34 of us, and we were assigned, as organizers, to different ILGWU offices across the country. Since almost all of us were from New York, I thought that they would be coming home for the holidays. I wrote and called my colleagues and organized an evening reunion at my office on West 46th Street. I saw it as an opportunity to compare notes with regard to the work we were doing and the compensation we were receiving. About a dozen showed up. We all found it useful, and agreed to keep in touch.

Twenty five years later, I got the bug again, and organized a 25th Anniversary Reunion of the Class of 1951 Training Institute. This required a lot more work. It was 1976 and I was working for the US Civil Rights Commission in Washington. I contacted ILGWU President Sol C. (Chick) Chaiken to explain what I was planning, and to get his OK. I thought the best place for such a reunion would be Unity House, the union's summer resort in the Poconos. He went along and asked Gus Tyler to work with me. I pulled together the addresses of as many of my classmates as I could locate, contrived a "Reunion Committee" and wrote to everyone. We held the reunion over the Memorial Day weekend, and managed to get a respectable group together. A good time was had by all.

Not one to give up on a good thing, in 1991, I set about to pull together a 50th Anniversary Reunion. I chose the Memorial Day weekend again, but there was no more Unity House. In fact, there wasn't much left of the ILGWU. It had merged with the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, which had earlier merged with the Textile Workers. The union now called itself UNITE. Using the same approach, I contacted the union's president; this time it was Jay Mazur. For the reunion's location, I suggested the union headquarters, 1710 Broadway, where we had all started 50 years before.

I persuaded Jay to allow us to use the Union's large conference room, and he even provided breakfast for us. He was invited to address the opening of the reunion and was delighted. Jay was a graduate of the Training Institute a few years after us. This was his last year in office. He was to be succeeded by the Amalgamated's Bruce Raynor, who joined us the next day. My friends came through: Irv Weinstein, Dan Jordan, Nick Bonanno, Martie Berger, Aileen Hernandez, Jim Amos, Mimi Brin, Lou Brin's widow, and Hal Etkin. Several sent their regrets, and described what they had been doing for the past 50 years, which were read to the group. I had asked Stan Aronowitz and Ron Bloom to serve as discussion leaders. We pulled it off. But there is not going to be another one.

I feel a profound loyalty to all the schools I attended: PS 62, JHS 52, Stuyvesant High School and City College. I don't feel the same way about NYU, which I attended for 2 ½ years, the same amount of time that I went to junior high school. Possibly because I was going after work, was really not committed, and was attending in order to keep out of the Army.

Whenever I learned that Stuyvesant or CCNY were having class reunions, or some special event, I would try to get there. It became more difficult after I moved out of New York, but there were several occasions when I went to New York for the celebration. It usually required my convincing my friend Bob to go, and we would meet and go together. Neither of us had attained BMOC (Big Man On Campus) status, so we didn't go for recognition. Just for one or more of the reasons stated above.

When Stuyvesant High School closed its building on 345 East 15th Street and moved to a brand new facility at 345 Chambers Street, not only did Bob and I go, but we convinced several of our friends who went to Stuyvesant, to go as well. When, the CCNY class of 2009 graduated, and the school celebrated the reunions of classes that graduated in 1939, 1949, 1959 etc., I couldn't resist. I drove down, got together with Bob, and we joined about 20 others to celebrate our 60th Reunion. We had our picture taken, were given fake straw hats emblazoned with "City College of New York," and had seats of honor for commencement.

Next year is 2012. It will be 70 years since we graduated from Junior High School 52. I think it would be nice to arrange a reunion of our 9BR class. I suspect there may be a half-dozen of us still alive. We could expand the reunion to include the entire graduating class. The average age would be 84. Why not?

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