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A Remembering Time

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The building was crowded. Everyone was talking at once about those days of youth and roses. We poured some coffee and sat down at a table in the cafeteria to greet old classmates, watch, and listen as they eagerly reached out for yesterdays.

The girls had improved with time. Those smooth, lovely faces remained frozen in the glory of youth. Their hair was as luxuriant as ever, and lips looked as sweet as they had been a million kisses ago.

Buddies of that long-ago time were still as handsome as ever. We had traveled Western Oklahoma streets together in cars as battered as the time that bred them.

Many were the nights we had sat and talked and once had driven out to steal what we thought were watermelons. We tried to burst them only to have them bounce on the local park grass. We found it impossible to burst a pie melon. The image of delicious heart of melon vanished as we laughed at our foolishness.

We remembered moving Case equipment down to the John Deere dealer and vice-versa on those glorious Halloweens while dodging the local marshal who came hunting us down as though we had committed a felony.

Although we were mischievous, we did not wantonly destroy property or go out and shoot someone simply because we weren’t in the best of moods. We were always doing something, while not constructive, not destructive either—just enough so that our parents and friends would recognize that we weren’t neutered.

We often drove to neighboring towns to see a movie. A carful of carefree boys, happy to be going somewhere, and free of restrictions. We tried to return the misplaced trust. At least that’s what we thought.

On one of those trips just as the driver topped a hill, a semi’s lights blinded him, and the perfectly good Mercury’s driver side was bashed in. After the driver finished trembling at the thought that six boys could have gone up in smoke, he helped pull out the fender from the front wheel and continued on home as sober as a judge.

At the reunion we remembered first loves. One couple had been dating and had married after graduation, happy and content in what they had found in each other. They had spent their childhood as well as their adulthood together. That it had lasted surprised no one. They were well suited to travel life’s road hand in hand. Another might have remembered first love and wondered why it died aborning.

It had been exciting, those long summer evenings of swimming in a farm pond and kissing while muddy water ran down their chins. The mystery of what they were tugged at them, tried to give purpose to their lives, only to fade as emotions faded. There would be no warm fireplace on winter evenings as they watched their children grow. A decision had been made that it was not to be.

Classmates smiled at one another in remembrance of fond yesterdays. Warm feelings returned as memory came out of hiding: playing hookey by going to the river to walk barefoot down the sandy bed with a warm sun adding to their comfort. They were not disturbed by the thought that there was a penalty to pay or that someone might come hunting them.

The mixed group sat on a log, idle-talked, and kissed in front of all the wild animals while God kept watch overhead. In those moments, they lived for the momentum, not realizing they were building memories for some distant tomorrow.

Someone might have remembered the hay and sleigh rides and that our laughter caused our mouths to shovel snow. The pain came later when swollen tonsils had to be lanced because there had been more snow than thought.

Memory always brought back the laughter as time dragged its heels against the foundation during a youth time.

Never had the roses smelled sweeter or the nectar of honey tasted more sublime.
The restroom was a favorite place to sneak a smoke between classes. We hoped that a breath mint would kill the smell.

And there was the shop with the pile of scrap iron behind it that the class had to move from one spot to another as punishment for making too much noise when the teacher had to leave the room.

Our favorite English teacher who had a sense of humor put up with us when we raised our hands to ask permission to leave the room. When she asked why we wanted to leave the room, she laughed when we told her we wouldn't ask her that!

Those were the days of great dreams, great ideals, great promises. The world was an apple, and we thought we knew what the core was like—only to find out later that we knew nothing at all. The apple was much, much larger than we thought and much more complicated than we had ever dreamed.

The crowd multiplied as classmates came from near and faraway to sup once again and remember the urges of that glorious time when youth ruled in that fantastic illusion of power and grace from which we could never fall.

Proving that we were the greatest ever to venture forth was impossible. It was only when we realized that every other person we met also deserved the love we had reserved for ourselves that we grew up and became responsible citizens. We learned to share ourselves with others who also waited for some light in a world that seemed filled with darkness.

We gave memory meaning when we took our place in society as adults doing some small task contributing to the whole.

Our responsibility also included a reunion with classmates and a look at the care lines of those beautiful faces out of our past that helped shape what we are today. *

(ORV OWENS of Watonga does free-lance writing and has submitted to WESTVIEW before, beginning with the Spring 1990 issue.)