

CLASS REUNION SPEECH – given by BONNIE WILLEMSEN

If you are like me, you are having a heck of a time wrapping your mind around the fact that we are here tonight to celebrate our 50th class reunion – the FIFTIETH year since we graduated from high school. Don't OLD people go to a 50th reunion? Well, friends, here we are. And I guess I have to say I'm darn glad to be alive and healthy enough to be present at this momentous event. Wasn't it exciting to get all dressed up tonight? The last time I worked this hard to look presentable it was senior prom. Well, I suppose I took a little extra time in front of the mirror on my wedding day. Looking like one of the dancing elephants from Disney's Fantasia in my mother-of-the-bride dress doesn't count. I'll let you in on a little secret – I was so excited about seeing all of you this evening that I even shaved my chin hairs.

We graduated from Aquinas High School in 1966 *full of dreams*. We maybe went to college, got a job, got married, possibly went in the service and we were *full of hope*. We had kids, started businesses, or drifted for a while and we were *full of vim, vigor and vitality*. The children moved out and we retired and we were *full of joy*. We had grandkids or traveled or just sat home with our feet on the ottoman and we were *full of contentment*, and now we are in our late 60's and we tell stories of the good old days to our grandkids and they think we're *full of shhhh...ta ke... mushrooms*. I believe I remember some momentous milestones concerning our classmates. Good old *what's-her-name* was the first woman to give birth to triplets after the age of 50. She was from our class, right? I know I remember reading that *so-and-so* from our class was first runner up in the Miss Fashion USA pageant winning with her ensemble which paired a striped blouse with polka-dot pedal pushers, fluorescent flip flops and a fur trimmed headband. I KNOW I graduated with someone that ended up being the oldest competitor in the Iron-Man contest: he swam briskly from end-to-end in the kiddie pool, biked a whole two blocks and closed by limping one thirty-second of a mile to the finish line. Speaking of athletes, I do remember someone who was a force to be reckoned with on the football field back in the day. He dreamed of having sons that would someday run passes and score touchdowns on that same field...but, God sent him four beautiful girls instead – right Butch Murphy? I'd like to be serious for one minute – only one I promise - I want to mention a couple of dedicated people who are exceptional because they made Aquinas a lifelong commitment – one is Chuck Schmidt, who taught Math and the other is my best

friend for all my life, Mary Kroner, who taught English and who is now their number one substitute teacher.

Do you recollect the excitement of going to a freshman dance and hoping to get asked onto the floor by someone very special? Actually, “special” wasn’t even in my vocabulary. If someone just asked me to dance... wow...that was the stuff that made the party-line buzz. Matter of fact, a miss was as good as a mile. Did he smile at me? I think he at least looked at me. I’m sure his head was turned in my direction. I discussed the possibilities of future encounters in the hallways and the lunch room for days after with my BFF. --- And time marched on. --- We still danced – at Your Uncle’s Club or at friends’ weddings. We perhaps joined a dance club or did the chicken dance at the Oktoberfest or tripped the light fantastic on our 25th wedding anniversary. But now, if someone even suggested going dancing I’d say, “Are you kidding? With my knees!”

Did you, like me, make hundreds of promises to God, asking Him to fix things for you, make things better - intercede on your behalf? Things like; please God, let Mildred or Jeremiah or Ustasis ask me to go steady; or please God, make sure I pass Sister Geneva’s history exam; Dear Lord, make sure mom and dad don’t find out I was smoking behind the bleachers at the game. Then what followed? Of course- the fulfillment of your agreement.... pray the rosary, do six novenas, give money to pagan babies and go to confession. There were dozens of other things I know I pledged Him that seemed a lot easier – like doing the dishes – maybe that’s why my wishes were never granted. Now fess up --- how many of you followed through with your pact? Today I make bargains with God about everything from letting the plane land safely to making sure our offspring is gainfully employed and therefore not planning to move back home, to keeping the rain at bay on the day of the outdoor party -- and most importantly, I bargain big time with Him about stepping it up a little on giving my latest diet a little boost!

Do you remember picture day? We primped and fussed and combed and flipped and asked everyone in line around us how we looked. Check out your senior photos – go ahead, look at your nametag - did you ever in a million years think that someday we would have gray hair and double chins? If we have any hair

now (and I'm speaking to the women as well as the men) it's definitely gray and of course, it's in all the wrong places. Just a month ago John Perlich proudly claimed he still has **lots** of hair but unfortunately it was growing out of his ears. I know my parents complained that I gave them gray hair and 20 years later I worried about job and family and started plucking gray hairs from MY head, and now we ALL have gray hair and don't you try to say it ain't so – 'cause we all know about Clairol and Hate that Gray Wash it Away.

It says in your reunion book that I served on the reunion committee – but, I only wrote this speech. Believe me, the rest of the committee did a stupendous amount of work and I'd like them to raise their hands now. I bet none of you checked off a box at our graduation that said, I know what I want to do – I want to work hard *behind the scenes* for *endless hours* to make our future reunions fun and fantastic, and I want to do it for *NO pay*. Let's give them a round of applause. "There, committee members, didn't that make it all worthwhile?" I want to share with you that the committee had discussed having our Friday night meet & greet at Hooters but unfortunately it closed down a few years ago. They wished we could have had the golf outing at Hillview - at night – remember the lighted golf course? It wasn't the fact that Hillview is gone, but the fact that no one could stay up that late made them opt for daytime golf instead. Some of the members suggested the Mary E Sawyer auditorium but *unfortunately* a time machine has not been invented yet to take us back; and there was a bit of discussion about a skating party on the lagoon but the ice is pretty thin in September. They thought about rendezvousing at the Big Indian Statue in Riverside Park but the politically correct term nowadays would be "disproportionately-sized Native American plaster statue" and they figured no one would know where the heck they should congregate. They tossed around the idea that it would be fun to assemble at the corner of Cass and West Avenue and march to OLD Central, throw water balloons at the windows, and run away - but, old central is no longer there, no one could RUN away, and for sure no one could walk all the way to the NEW Central building.

Speaking of Central makes me remember the fun and rivalry during football season. You remember, don't you ladies, when we girls marched up and down and back and forth in the stands pretending to be interested in the game but really hoping that the boys were noticing our bouffant hairstyles and our latest

matching sweater sets? Nowadays I wouldn't go to a football game if my life depended on it 'cause first I'd have to climb at least a million steps and then sit on cold, hard cement and later eat a hot dog which would, of course, drip on my lap --and all the while be listening to people around me yelling and doing the wave. But the worst part of going to Memorial Stadium again would be enduring the long lines for the women's bathroom. I'm not as nimble as I used to be so by the time I actually got to the front of the line, **urgency** would have turned into **emergency**.

I have been a columnist and writer for about ten years, so I thought, "I know what would be fun for the reunion, I'll tell some great stories about my old boyfriends from high school." Now before some of you that dated me duck down in your seats, I have to confess - I don't remember any of your names anymore. I barely remember GOING to high school and boy am I glad I still have my 1966 year book cuz in preparation for tonight I looked up my name and sure enough, I did go to Aquinas and I did graduate. Memories, or the lack of, are great -- aren't they? I do remember that freshman year Mr. Nockles kicked Janice Hoeschler and me out of class and we didn't know where to go 'cause we didn't have a hall pass, so we hid in the girl's bathroom till the bell rang. I remember Fr. Falconer throwing chalk and an eraser at me because I was turned around talking to John Topinka. I remember Sr. Laurinda, the German teacher, telling my parents that I could be a good student if *only I would apply myself*. Ah yes, good memories. I especially loved those agonizing hours waiting for my folks to return from a parent/teacher's conference.

Remember summers, when we worked so hard on our tans and didn't care if we burned to a crisp because we wanted to look COOL- and cool meant TAN? In our 40's we noticed some age spots and no, that wasn't as cool as it once seemed, but we didn't worry because *over the hill* was miles away - and now we have cancer spots that are being burned off at accelerating rates. Yup, Coppertone moved over for zinc oxide, and those safe tanning beds were shunned in favor of SHADE 45. Now we say, "Doctor, can you make me look youthful again?" And the answer is....no way!

My apologies to Jeff Foxworthy for this next bit, but how will he ever find out?
TEN REASONS YOU KNOW YOU ARE A 1966 AQUINAS GRADUATE.

1. If you still dance with enough space between you and your partner for the Holy Spirit, you might be a 1966 Aquinas grad.
2. If you still wear blue and gold but claim it's because you like those colors, you might be an Aquinas grad.
3. If you have 13 children because you never quite figured out how that rhythm method worked, you might have graduated from our local Catholic high school
4. If you are a man and still wearing black socks with your sandals you might have graduated in 1966.
5. If you are a woman and you still call your capris *pedal pushers*, you probably graduated in the 60's.
6. If you kept your poodle skirt and saddle shoes, hoping they would come back in style one day, you graduated before 1970.
7. If you are a woman and you still curl your hair in a flip or iron your hair on the ironing board to get that 17 year old look, you could be a 1966 grad.
8. If you are a guy who buys a pack of candy cigarettes to roll in your sleeve and expose those killer biceps you imagined you had in high school, you might be 68 years old.
9. If you stuff your bra with tissue like you did in high school – but now it's to look less saggy, you are a 1966 graduate of Aquinas High School.
10. If you still scoop the loop in downtown La Crosse every Saturday night to see whose eye you might catch, you are definitely a BluGold.

Have you noticed how our conversation and communication has changed through the years? First there was “sweet talk” with your honey; then “big talk” when you tried to convince your superiors of how important you were; next was “trash talk” as you got with your buds for a beer; later it became “marriage talk” with your significant other; and then “baby talk” to your kids; followed by “no talk” with your life partner; and now it's forgetting what you were TALKING about in the first place. And don't you love the lingo we oldsters have adopted? It's like a Morse code for the baby boomer generation. Words we never knew about in high school – EXLAX, Depends, bifocals, dentures, colonoscopies, Rogaine, age restricted communities, and assisted living are now as common as getting up five times a night to go to the bathroom. My husband, Jim, and I get dressed at three to go

out for dinner by four so we're sure we get the senior citizen discount. And have you noticed that when we meet up with friends for lunch all we talk about are our medical issues? Here's a sample of one of those conversations.

I ask, "How did your mole surgery go?"

She says, "No melanoma."

I reply, "Repeat visits?"

She grumbles, "Back again in six months."

I report, "PT has me walking stairs after my knee replacement?"

She looks impressed. "You must be superwoman."

I ask, "Waiter, please bring me the turkey bacon walnut burger, gluten free bun, dairy free cheddar, and sugar-free catsup."

She says, "Me too, but no seeds on the bun - diverticulitis. Are there nuts in the carrot salad – allergic. Leave off the tomato – heart burn."

I announce, "I'm having dessert."

She grins. "Me, too."

I tell the waiter, "We'll split the double-fudge mocha caramel silk pie."

She continues, "Say, didn't your brother have a total hip?"

I answer, "Lord, yes, just ask him about it."

She sighs, "I hate it when people do nothing but talk about their aches and pains, don't you?"

Time waits for no man – or woman. Think back to how the clock in homeroom ticked soooooo slowly when it was near the end of the day and it spun way too fast when we had a curfew to follow? In our teens the old-fashioned grandfather's clock drove us nuts, in our 30's our biological clocks ticked too quickly, and now we have the Apple 42 mm stainless steel iPhone wristwatch that wakes us up, reminds us to take our pills and rattles on us to our doctor about the number of steps we've *really* taken. Oh and that's not all, it pays the bills - all the while keeping track of email and assuring us that our hearts are still beating. Ahhh, technology. I'm still stuck on how to get our VCR to run. Yes, life has changed quite a bit in the last 50 years. We've gone from doing the Twist to

twisting a knee; from drive-in theatres to drive-in funeral homes; from soda fountains to baking soda for acid reflux; from a Boy Scout compass to needing GPS to find our way out of the parking lot; from physical education to physical therapy; from sunglasses to cataract surgery; from hip hop to hip replacement.

I've been asked to make an announcement before I close. There is a sign-up sheet in the lobby for our 60th reunion. The committee is asking each of you to send a check for one thousand dollars - NEXT MONTH. With inflation, the committee figures it will be very cost efficient to pay in advance. They have already reserved Rudy's Drive-in for the event – plenty of room to park our walkers and canes and oxygen tanks.

I wanted to close with some memorable thoughts about Aquinas and life along the way to our 50th reunion– but, I don't have any so I think I'll leave you with just this one thought - LAUGH TILL YOUR ABS HURT – THEN YOU DON'T HAVE TO WORK OUT and thank Heaven scientists are saying that SEVENTY is the new FIFTY so we still have lots of good years ahead of us.