

1940 VIC HIGH GRADS – TOGETHER AGAIN

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On Wednesday May 14, 2008, a group of senior citizens, all in their mid 80s, were seen at noon, entering The Pantry Restaurant on Douglas Street. Who were these people? They were the 1940 Grads of Victoria High School getting together once again to celebrate their 68th reunion. They came from Victoria, Up Island, the Mainland and the United States to greet old friends and reminisce.

The first time we met as a group since Grad was in May 1990 – when we celebrated our 50 year reunion. This was our first attempt at gathering together. What a massive task we had undertaken in attempting to locate 250 students, many of whom we knew not where their lives had taken them. A good group met with our annuals in hand and endeavoured to discover what had happened to each of them. Gradually we managed to locate them by using the telephone book and searching for someone who might be a relative and could lead us to the one we desired. The fellows were fairly easy to locate, but, for the girls, it was a massive task to discover whom they had married. The records at the school helped us with the lists, but gave no information about them after graduation. The computer was not yet a household item. But we even located our Japanese friends who were relocated from Victoria. And they came to be with us again!

What a weekend we had! The first night we gathered at Vic High to walk the halls. If one stopped to listen it was almost as if we could hear the voice of Mr. Harry Smith, that wonderful school principal, resounding down the hall as he yelled “You boys down there! Stop running in the halls!” And they did stop! We sat in the old auditorium that was so familiar to us for morning assembly. The then teacher of the domestic class and her students arranged some wonderful refreshments and we even managed to have Mr. Brand, one of our last remaining teachers, to be with us that night.

The next day was a luncheon at the Chinese Village where grad class member and owner, Jack Lee, welcomed us. That evening we were out to the Gordon Head Racquet Club for a banquet and entertainment. Grad Lorne Fuller had arranged to have his singing group, “The Village Squires”, to be with us. They gave us a real lift by singing the old school song a good many times! Harvey Lowe, our Yo Yo Man in 1940, who, even though he had already graduated, came back to the school each spring to show us his tricks, came to be with us again to show that he had not lost his touch. A wonderful weekend came to a close with a drive to Duncan on Sunday to spend a day enjoying the sunshine and the company. There was lots of chatter at the home of fellow student Laura Bapty Williams and her husband.

Ten years later, in May 2000, we gathered again to celebrate 60 years since Grad. This time the banquet was at the Princess Mary. We filled the old banquet

hall and we listened to Peter Smith, as he told us of his recollections of his days at Vic High. Yes, we were getting older, but the highlight of the evening – for the girls anyway – was to have Harriet Doull Esselmound, our old PT teacher, join us. Her daughter brought her in a hospital bed! Her body was getting weaker, but she certainly made us all sit up and take notice when she spoke from her bed in that familiar loud voice. She passed away a short time after that night.

Then we decided we best not wait another ten years to get together again. We met in 2005 for a 65th year reunion. The group was getting smaller, but we still managed to fill the main dining room of The Princess Mary just prior to its closing. Once again, Lorne's singing group, now called The New Pacific Aires, entertained us. And we all sang together "We'll Meet Again" before the afternoon came to a close. Vera Lynne had no worries about our rendition, but it certainly brought a few lumps to our throats!

In 2006 we discovered that The Pantry had a very nice room available for small groups and we have gathered there to celebrate our 66th, 67th and, again this year, 2008, our 68th year since Grad! Yes, our group gets smaller and smaller. Under 50 attended this year but Jack Lee wants us to make it to our 70th! The eyes are failing and the hearing is worse, and the walkers and canes dominate, but we will try again just for the sheer joy of being together.