

Patio of Fifty

by Becky Valigorsky Bricen

At our age, retrieval from the memory bank can be a challenge. Have you considered why some memories are vivid, some are easier to remember, some are just plain lost? At the recollection forefront, repetitious events can compete with events which happened only once. For instance, from our first fall at Juniata, do you recall the President's tea? The whole class was invited to a sort of "meet and greet" at the home of President and Mrs. Ellis. Wearing our Sunday attire, we walked up to the beautiful home between the campus and the cliffs. I recall a flagstone patio. In any case, it was a warm welcome for all of us, even if it was a sort of "passing through style" open house. Perhaps you can fill in the details of whether there was really tea or refreshments.

Surely, it is easier to recall dinner hour during our Freshmen and Sophomore years. After a day of scattered classes or an afternoon lab, you might have looked forward to meeting up with a lab partner, a special someone or just good friends for dinner. From Leshar, North, Cloister, we headed to Founder's to walk through the basement hallway to wait in the crowded, but cozy, gathering space. Dinner was at six; tables of eight. It was a family style meal and just like family, we caught up on the day's events and planned for the evening of study or for the upcoming weekend. How we were all able to fit in Oneida, I am not certain, though some students lived off campus, some students worked the dinner hour and then, of course, the football team had an after practice special seating.



If you ever shared this college dining scenario with friends who attended larger schools, they were likely in total disbelief. Their response might have been, "You wore TIES to dinner?" or "The WHOLE college ate together?" or "There was only ONE menu of the day"? These disbelievers were used to what became our new norm as we transitioned into Ellis dining. It was convenient, but not nearly as fun.

Through the years, Pam and I have shared some of these recollections, especially fall of '19 when we attended our third President's Commission. We always look forward to stepping back on campus, a chance to reflect and refresh. For a minute, a chance to be rejuvenated.

The Thursday night welcome is always a very nice gathering. For our first two President's Commissions, happy hour and dinner were in the ballroom of Ellis Hall. (Remember, can you.....this was where we met for colloquy meetings of the first "Earth Day", April 22, 1970. If that won't age us, nothing will!). The 2019 event was hosted by President and Mrs. Troha at their home. Another beautiful location; another personalized touch. So, in our better attire, we headed for campus, with no information on the location of the president's house. When we arrived at the campus, we realized that the Troha home might NOT be near campus. Our first resort was to ask the first student we saw on campus. She was a Freshman. She had no clue. The next several students we encountered were equally uninformed. In disbelief, we pondered how these students could be so unaware of the president's location.

Our next resort was to text our '70 friends who were on the guest list. Well, cell phones didn't help because the Troha home was rather isolated, a location that would have put Siri or a GPS to task. Lucky for us, near Ellis Hall, we spotted the college vans which were doing transport from campus to the Troha's. Lucky too, we made in time for a little happy hour!



And happy it was. As we left the van, we saw the smiles of a Juniata gathering. We shared greetings with the dedicated leaders we would rejoin for the President's Commission. How delightful to be amidst classmates, friends and acquaintances from the class of '70, some we recognized, some we had kept up with, some we had not seen since in just too many years. Might we still recognize one another? Pam and I ended up at a table, seated with our friends, Terry and Bill, from the class of '70 (with whom we have traveled with their wives to France) and President and Mrs. Troha. It was a beautiful evening. Fine food, delightful conversation, laughter and the perfect opportunity to be updated by our hosts on college life and events.

Pam and I flashback to September, '67, at 17, walking across the patio at Dr. Ellis' home and waiting numerous evenings for dinner at Oneida. In September '19, meeting our guy friends, at 71, for dinner on the Troha patio, a patio of fifty. Sometimes you never know the value of a moment, until it becomes a memory.