

Texas A&M University Class of '69 Reunion on the 50th Anniversary of Graduation

It lasted four days and it was packed full of all manner of tradition, reminiscence, conversation, and reacquaintance. We were together on a daily basis for four years as cadets, until one day fifty years ago - graduation. Since then we've seen each other only very rarely. Then, fifty years later, we spent four days together again in celebration and sometimes solemn sorrow for those who didn't make it back. There were about 550 who registered and showed up. But, we easily found our way into smaller groups based on old ties and common trials. My brothers from Squadron 7 of the Cadet Corps were at the tables I sat at while taking my meals. Our wives and partners were subjected to our constant stream of stories that flowed out of our hearts and would have fallen on deaf ears had they not been there and determined to listen and understand. I was blessed to have my two Aggie daughters and now Aggie grandson there. They seemed glad, almost surprised, to meet and know the men who actually bore the names they had only heard for years.

There were so many highlights. The "private" Class of '69 Muster, at the hotel - complete with our own role call and response. The schedule full of "Hospitality Room" time that allowed us to simply sit and visit - to talk about our campus years and learn of the years since those years in each other's lives. Air Force years and careers. Vietnam War stories. Careers after the Air Force. Careers after the careers after the Air Force. Retirement. Grandkids. Future plans. There was the Muster BarBQ and Yell Practice. Of course there was the highlight of the Campus Muster, itself, where we were the honored class. In a culture that values history and tradition and loyalty, how can it be better than to be viewed as the senior-most individuals - as the personification of history and tradition. Also a highlight was the dedication of the Spirit Plaza built by the Class of '69 in the middle of the campus and the entrusting for its care to the Class of '19 (the current seniors) until their 50th, when they will entrust it the Class of 2069. Wow! Talk about establishing a heritage. Yes, it was a gathering of old men (mostly men) wearing the name tags of young men, but it somehow afforded the opportunity to feel young once more.

Because it was so serendipitous and surprising, there was one highlight that stood out and shines the brightest in my remembrances. Somehow a connection was made with a Junior cadet who is currently a member of the recently recommissioned Squadron 7 (now Challenger 17). He was expressing a desire on his part, and that of several of his fellow cadets, to meet with our Squadron 7 alumni so they could hear from us old stories of our shared Squadron 7 lineage. We established a rendezvous time and place and began a two hour conversation that gave great joy and feelings of assurance, to the old Ags, that the Aggie heritage will live on and, to the young Ags, feelings of connection and a sense of history. Further, the cadets were able to get a perspective on life-after-A&M from men who walked in their boots a half century ago.

As my grandson walks the halls and streets of Texas A&M he is now third-generation Aggie. I'm not sure how blessed that makes him feel, but I know it fills my heart. There are many strands involved in the Aggie lineage - ones' immediate family, the Class of '69 cousins, the Squadron 7 brothers, the long line of the Cadet Corps and the Squadron 7 descendants. Actually, there are more, but the point is established. "We are the Aggies. The Aggies are we. Heirs of a spirit that can ne'er be told - the spirit of Aggieland." Gig'em!