

5/27/08

**“Take Me Home... Country Roads”**

by

Tom Holbrook

**"On the road again, I just can't wait to get on the road again," but next time, let it be on the road home to Florida's Friendliest Hometown, The Villages!**

**I'm currently in Charleston, W.Va., sitting at my hotel's business desk computer, made available to those like me whose laptops crash and burn. It has been a whirlwind two weeks, visiting sons (by order of appearance) in Lynchburg, Va.; Greensboro, N.C.; Roanoke, Va.; Lewisburg, W.Va., and a sister in Huntington, W.Va.**

**Finally, we are able to unpack our suitcases and stop living out of the back of the car for another week's stay while preparing and participating in our 50th high school reunion to be held at the Charleston Civic Center, just a few steps away from our hotel.**

**I have reported to you guys and gals previously about other trips home for reunions and how adventurous they can be, especially our 45th reunion, just five short years ago, when Judy and I saw each other "across a crowded room" for the first time in more than 25 years, and after walking through all the sparks that were generated, were engaged six weeks later. Wow! Talk about an exciting reunion.**

**Of course that won't happen again this year for obvious reasons, but being \our class' "big one," the 50th, this is going to be really special for both of us. Our class of 208 graduates is spread far and wide throughout the United States, but we have 97 classmates who have committed to return, along with their spouses or other guests. Considering that 39 of our classmates are deceased, we feel the number returning is very meaningful. This is the first reunion attended for many of them.**

**Coming back to our hometown is always exciting for Judy and me — running into those whom we haven't seen in ages and seeing the physical changes that have taken place in our old haunts. The alleys that echoed with our yelling, "Ollie ollie oxen free" or "Red rover, red rover, send Judy right over" — all of them seem so much smaller for some reason.**

**One big change was that Judy's childhood home, which she occupied from age 3 to age 12 with her mother and two sisters, has been demolished. Bummer! Otherwise, everything was pretty much the same, except the normal wear and tear inflicted by time and weather.**

**One place we always try to visit is Diehl's Family Restaurant in Nitro, W.Va., down the road a piece from Belle. It has genuine home-cooked meals with a motto of "One of the few remaining restaurants that still fixes and prepares food from scratch." According to their menu, they serve more**

than 1,400 pounds of potatoes weekly — 350 pounds on Sunday alone — and they still fry those potatoes in an old iron skillet. They home brew their tea using real sugar to sweeten it; they hand bread their fish and chicken before frying; and they would never think of serving anything but home boiled and mashed potatoes, with real butter and whole milk, as opposed to the instant potatoes for which many restaurants have opted. For 48 years, Diehl's has served thousands of delicious meals and if you are ever in the Nitro area, be sure and give them a try.

Just to give you an idea of what is ahead for our attendees, a few of our graduates have done well since leaving the farms and hollows of West Virginia and they are paying the hotel bill for everyone, for three nights, on everything above \$45 per night. For door prizes, one individual donated a couple of 36-inch flat screen HDTVs, two laptop computers, tickets to Disney World, Universal Studios and Sea World, and a seven-day Caribbean cruise.

That is not including large canvas bags in school colors with the school logo, full of goodies such as special CDs with 1950s music; a large memory book with up-to-date info on what our classmates have been doing for the last 50 years; and a professionally produced DVD that will be received post-reunion, for no charge, that will include childhood pictures and pictures from our grade school, junior high and high school days with appropriate music. We also will have someone taking pictures of each event at this reunion and will include them on the DVD.

Well, I have to get going so I can spend some time talking to some lifelong friends who are coming into the hotel to register. I'll be giving you a follow-up on the entire reunion later. I know you are all a-twitter knowing that, so take care and have a great week. In the words of that immortal bard, "Here's looking at you, kid."

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