

Holding It All Together

by Amy McCollom



The Thing About Graduation

My twins, Rosa and Rudy, graduated from Villa Grove High School this past Sunday. Graduation ceremonies back in our day used to be held on Friday nights. For some reason, for the last several years, Villa Grove School has been having the graduation ceremony on Sunday afternoon.

The thing about graduation, especially on Sunday afternoon right after church, is everybody is rushed. When people are rushed, they get agitated. When teenagers get agitated, parents get agitated. With so much rushing and agitation, soon cats are running through living rooms, dogs are scampering under beds, and teen girls are throwing things around their room looking for their black heels while screaming and dripping makeup from their crying eyes. At least that's what happened at my house. Screaming, crying, gnashing of teeth! It was terrible!

I blame the gremlins that cause things to disappear, but somehow Rosa's shoes went missing, and with just 15 minutes to spare, she begrudgingly put on a pair of "just hideous" black combat boots to wear with her green satin dress under her graduation robe. Frustrated and

running late, it was an even more painful ride out to the school behind a very slow driver.

Luckily, getting to graduation late doesn't always mean a bad parking spot. We lucked out and found a spot in the front drive, so John dropped us off at the front doors and only had to park a little ways down. We had just gotten in the doors of the school when Rudy informed me that the tassel from his cap was missing. Are you kidding me????!! I backtracked our steps and ran to look in the van before John locked the doors to see if we could find the missing tassel. Nada. Fortunately, someone at the school had the foresight to order more tassels and a duplicate was given to him as he was lining up for the procession. See, Jesus still answers quick prayers.

There was a train on the tracks, and several students were trapped on the other side of town, so the graduation ceremony started about 15 minutes later than scheduled. If I knew I had a few extra minutes, maybe some of my hairs wouldn't have turned gray on the spot. Oh well.

We ended up sitting on the next to last row, and directly in front of a toddler who

liked to sing Baa Baa Black Sheep the whole time, except for when the choir sang, and then he said loudly, "They're terrible!"

Everyone in the rows in front of us I swear were all over 6 feet tall, as they formed a large wall of heads and shoulders that I couldn't see beyond. I believe that short people should have the first 5 rows of seats automatically, as being short is technically a handicap. We should also get booster seats, custom sized furniture, step ladders in grocery stores, and closer parking spaces due to our short legs having to take more steps to get into the building.

I think all valedictorian speeches should be limited to 500 words and narrated by Morgan Freeman. I also think some good songs for choirs to sing at graduation are Closing Time, It Ain't Easy Being Green, and Somewhere Over The Rainbow. Especially today, in a world that has the capability to dream big, perhaps a fresh breath of inspiration, ingenuity, and a handful of glitter really can change us for the better.

The thing about graduation, those young people wrapped in those blue robes are our future. We can still help keep the wind underneath their wings as they launch out and fly. Encourage, guide, help, lead, and pray for them all. We may know how to write in cursive and drive a stick shift, but who's going to help us with our cell phones or set up our smart TV's? May God bless the new graduates with success and a humble heart.

Hook, Line and Sinker

With Tony Hooker

We all thought we'd change the world

With our great works and deeds

Or maybe we just thought the world

Would change to fit our needs---Statler Brothers, 'Class of 57'

Four decades. 480 months. 14,600 days. 350,400 hours. It's still hard for me to fathom because deep down inside, I'm still the same 14-year-old knucklehead who's misbehaving in Mrs. Meller and Mrs. Krejci's study hall, but the VGHS class of 1982 has been unleashed on the world for that long. We recently gathered for our reunion, and I was struck by so many memories, both good and bad, that I thought I would share a few.

40 years ago, my mom and stepdad were separated, and rather than celebrate my mama, the Reebster, for being the amazing, bad-a\$\$ warrior princess that she was, raising three kids on a \$5 an hour job, I resented the fact that I couldn't have all the pretty things. This resentment led to feelings of self-doubt and of maybe not quite being as good as the rest of my class. With the passage of time, I realize that I brought that same misguided sense of being an

outsider to the first 5 reunions our class had. Looking back, this sense of not fitting in, especially after the class of 81, whom I was especially close to, had graduated, probably gave me many of the character traits, the good, the bad, and the ugly, that I possess today. I had/have an almost pathological need for people to like me. I tend to overindulge in EVERYTHING! Food, drink, music, fun. You name it, and I've always wanted ALL of it. At a recent leadership conference I attended, we participated in the CliftonStrengths insight test, and to the surprise of none, the personality trait I scored highest in was called "Woo," as in trying to win people over. Trust me when I say that I fit the definition of a "Woo" to a T.

The crazy thing is, I think that I was and still am, my biggest critic, as about 99% of the citizens of the world are. It seems strange to me that it took to this point in my life to realize that my classmates weren't judging me. I was judging myself. So, here's to you, class of 82. I'll see you next time.

My class, like all the classes before and after it, has had our share of wild successes and horrible tragedies, but it was

fun to talk about where we thought we would be when we were 18, versus where we are as we approach 60. Kenny was going to be a cop until he discovered another route and became a highly successful school superintendent, shepherding 3 different districts through the dangerous, ever changing regulatory and fiscal waters. Paul was going to be, and became, an engineer, making his mark on the world through alternative energy sources. Kirk was going to be a cop, probably from birth, and retired from the Illinois State Police Dept a few years ago. I'm not sure what Kris's plan was when we graduated, but he too took the Law Enforcement route and has recently retired from a highly successful career with the County Sheriff's Office. Denise told me she always thought she would be a secretary or a flight attendant, and she ended up doing both. She's no longer part of the friendly skies, but she lived that dream. As for me, I truly had no clue just a vague notion of wanting to write. Or something. And for the past 7 years, I've been able to indulge myself in a tiny bit of word therapy every week. And for that I'm grateful.

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Pastor Stahl's Weekly Message of Faith

Hello Everyone!

I hope everyone had a Blessed Memorial Day holiday, as we thank God for the men and women who died in the service of our country. Coming up on June 6 is the 78th Anniversary of D-Day. On that day, thousands of

troops invaded the beaches of Normandy, France early in the morning of June 6, 1944. The United States, along with Great Britain, France, and Canada were beginning the long battle of liberating France from Nazi Germany. It was truly the most important day in the 20th Century. If the attack failed, Germany would retain control of France and there is no telling how long the war would have continued. Supreme Allied Commander Dwight D. Eisenhower had two letters to release to the press: one if the invasion was a success, the other if it failed.

I wanted to see the troops before they left for the northern coast of France. He didn't have to leave his headquarters in England, but he wanted to see the men, to look them in the eye and thank them for their service. The invasion over the next few days was a success, although many men died in the effort. It was the most critical battle of the war and turned the tide in America's favor. The beaches of Normandy are holy ground, consecrated by the men who gave the last full measure of their devotion.

Eisenhower later wrote: "Of course, Operation Overlord did not fail. How could it, with so many brave men from all corners of the world, all determined to do their best to

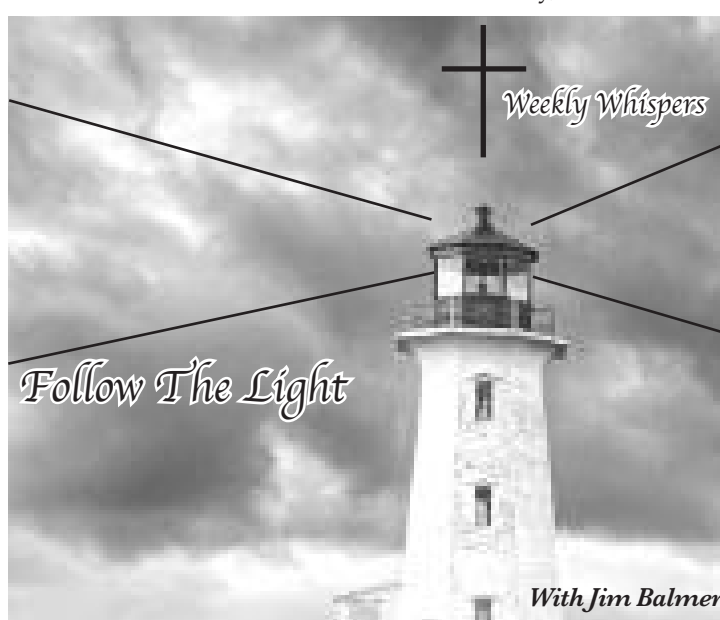
free a world gone half mad? But the loss of even one of these men is a loss to decent humanity everywhere. These men knew the odds were against them, these great crusaders, but they went anyway. Too many of them are now with God. We may never see their likes again. We may never see their likes again."

We thank Almighty God for all the men and women who gave their lives on the Altar of Freedom. They teach us the eternal lesson that freedom isn't free. We have the right to vote for the candidates of our choice because men and women died to give us that right. President Harry Truman once said the voting booth on Election Day is the most valuable piece of real estate in the country, and if we ever lost that right, we might as well forget about the whole ballgame.

In a very real sense, each Sunday for a Christian is a Memorial Day, and each Sunday is Resurrection Sunday, because of what Jesus did for us. He Answered the Call to follow God and die for us so we could have eternal life. He went to the Cross so we would have to.

May God Bless each of you, and may God Continue to Bless America.

Blessings! Pastor Jeff Stahl
 Countryside and Ogden United Methodist Churches



Psalm 3
 English Standard Version
 Save Me, O My God

A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son.

3 O Lord, how many are my foes! Many are rising against me; 2 many are saying of my soul, "There is no salvation for him in God." Selah 3 But you, O Lord, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head. 4 I cried aloud to the Lord and he answered me

from his holy hill. Selah 5 I lay down and slept; I woke again, for the Lord sustained me. 6 I will not be afraid of many thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around. 7 Arise, O Lord! Save me, O my God! For you strike all my enemies on the cheek; you break the teeth of the wicked. 8 Salvation belongs to the Lord; your blessing be on your people! Selah

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