

## MY VIEW

# Reeling in the years at 50th class reunion

What was I getting myself into? I hadn't seen any of these people in 50 years, I didn't live in the city or county where I had gone to high school, and yet, I was drawn to the idea of helping to plan a 50th reunion.

It wasn't even my idea. One of the few people from high school with whom I was in regular contact had asked me via social media if I'd be interested. Sure, I responded. I didn't think about how much work would be involved. Nor did I think about the challenges of planning an event one year in the future and not living anywhere near the location. The fact that a global pandemic had just been announced and life was closing up didn't dissuade me.

Instead, I started to think about the possibilities. I was always proud of being from Mount

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Vernon High School. Mount Vernon, in Westchester County, is a small but densely populated city (70,000 people packed into four square miles). We could walk everywhere and frequently did. My elementary school, through eighth grade, was only about a mile away.

The high school had a diverse population and I met people with different religions and races and, even more importantly, I had friends who were different from me. In high school I noted the talents of people in the arts and music and knew how smart some of my friends were and wanted to learn how they had all done in life.

So, I pondered, if we were going to hold a 50th, how could we make sure we found everyone? By now, there were a growing group of us who agreed to meet via Zoom and our first job was to find classmates from all the elementa-



*Robin Raphael, of Williamsville, reconnected with her classmates over Zoom before they gathered in person.*

ry schools, figuring that would be the best way to broaden the attendance at the reunion.

Every three weeks we met. Some decisions were easy, like having it at the Westchester Marriott on Sept. 11 (the best and only date available). Some decisions were hard, such as how to safely bring together people from all over the United States during a pandemic.

We've become friendly in the year and a half that we've been meeting. We celebrated the marriage of one classmate's daughter and mourned the death of two classmates, one who had worked on the logo and invitation that would become our signature look. We chatted easily and reminisced about childhood and high school.

During one of the first Zoom conversations, one classmate made a comment about my mother and how nice she was. I suddenly choked up as it has been a very long time since anyone in my life knew my mother. This was my history and these were my people.

Later on, as we started to hold Zoom "Happy Hours," inviting classmates to join us and become reacquainted with one another, it happened again. But this time, a couple of classmates remembered my father when he had been their teacher. Again, I felt lucky to connect with my past.

People were thrilled to see one another (and glad we had name tags that had our 50-year-old photos on them). Our partners, friends and even one mother who attended felt welcome and had a wonderful time. We chatted, visited our high school, ate New York-style pizza, and shared our lives. We know that we are the lucky ones. We felt healthy and able to risk getting together during the upswing of the Delta variant.

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**My View** is a first-person column open to all Western New Yorkers. If your article is selected for publication, a photo of you is required. Email submissions to [editpage@buffnews.com](mailto:editpage@buffnews.com).