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Time and Again

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We follow the class of '84 on its journey to the past and back again for Homecoming Reunion 2004.



During the 20th reunion dinner, held at the Radisson Hotel in Bloomington, Renee Tomes Dunlap '84 and Steven Dunlap '82 read their classmates' signed notes in the yearbook replica.

Time and Again

By Rachel Hatch

Photos by Marc Featherly and Kristen Schmid

“What we call the beginning is often the end. And to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from.” — T.S. Eliot, as quoted in the 1984 *Wesleyana*

President Ronald Reagan was reelected in a landslide victory. Stonewashed jeans were the rage and the first Macintosh personal computers were sold. Scientists identified the AIDS virus. Gymnast Mary Lou Retton won Olympic gold, and pop singer Michael Jackson's hair caught on fire.

It was 1984 and for members of Illinois Wesleyan's senior class, the year marked a new beginning in their lives. “Coping with Uncertainty” was the gloomy title of that May's commencement talk, but the skies were sunny as University President Robert Eckley conferred degrees upon the 332 graduates, who, as that year's *Wesleyana* noted, “seemed to be excited about their future as IWU alumni.”

With wisps of gray hair and seasoned smiles, dozens of those graduates returned to campus for Homecoming weekend in early October. A lot had happened since they had turned their tassels as graduating seniors. Jobs, marriages, kids. Setbacks and triumphs. Big events and small, precious moments. But, amid the stories and laughter they shared over the weekend, the reuniting classmates seemed determined to pick up where they'd left off two decades ago. Or at least to have fun trying.

For 1984 reunion co-chairs Jane Marks Baffes and Kristine Condon, the reunion officially began early Friday afternoon, at the Hansen Student Center — known in their student days as Memorial Gymnasium. Outside, the wind had picked up and the sky was dark with the threat of rain, but Baffes and Condon seemed too absorbed in setting up the decorations for that night’s kickoff social to notice.

“Have you seen the screwdriver?” asked Condon, sifting through bags of fall flowers. “*Cool beans!*” she declared as one was handed to her, then paused. “Did I say that?” she pondered in mock distress as she began to assemble a large wooden frame that would hold an oversized replica of the 1984 *Wesleyana* yearbook, as well as covers from ’83 and ’85, whose members were also invited to attend the evening’s social. “You know,” she said, tilting her red head over a stubborn piece of wood, “none of this would have worked if Jane wasn’t such a pack rat.”



At Tommy’s, class of ’84 reunion cochairs Kris Condon and Jane Baffes set up a giant reproduction of the 1984 yearbook cover.

It was a campus phone book that Baffes had kept from her senior year that provided the Rosetta stone for the task of reassembling the class. Baffes and Condon, who live in nearby Chicago suburbs, took the names from the phone book and divided them up for their committee of almost 30 classmates representing every living unit, fraternity, sorority and honorary group on campus. “We wanted to make sure we had a diversity of people coming back,” said Baffes, a nursing major who now stays busy helping in her husband’s grocery and raising their four children.

Each committee member had a simple assignment — contact his or her list of people three times between May and October. Some, like Peggy Patten, used e-mail and phone calls. Others, like Karen Wagner, handwrote a note to personally invite everyone on her list. Each person contacted was then asked to contact the people they knew to encourage attendance. “I call it the trickledown effect,” said Baffes, playing off the Reagan-era theme. More than 100 people responded.

“It’s definitely going to be a great cross-section of people,” said Condon, an instructor at Kankakee Community College. “Sometimes with reunions you get stuck in Greek or non-Greek people coming

back. This one is for everyone,” said Condon, a member of Sigma Kappa sorority. “Reunions can be so centered on one group,” agreed Baffes, an Alpha Gamma Delta sorority member, “but we wanted everyone to know about it.”

“Kris and Jane were the perfect people for the job of reunion chair,” said 1984 Class Agent Tim Brophy. “Jane was my fraternal little sister,” added Brophy, a Sigma Chi member. “She’s just someone everyone loves. Heck,” he laughed, “she’s raising four kids, which makes her more qualified than any CEO I know.” The choice of Condon was natural, according to Brophy. Editor of the class newsletter for 17 of the last 20 years, Condon has made it her mission to keep classmates in touch. “She’s just the glue that holds the class of ’84 together,” said Brophy.

On that Friday afternoon, the glue of the class was working hard to piece together the oversized replica of the 1984 yearbook. With pride, Condon showed how the yearbook opened for alumni to sign two pages enlarged from the actual yearbook. Condon’s father created the replicas. It wasn’t his first IWU-inspired piece. Richard Condon carved the plaque for Illinois Wesleyan’s Sesquicentennial in 2000, and made several seals on campus, including one in the Admissions Office. “My parents were never the type to just drop me off and say, ‘See you at Thanksgiving,’” said Condon with a smile.

Later that night, a light rain began to fall on the green and white outdoor umbrellas outside Tommy’s Grille, a popular campus eatery and the location of that night’s social. “I can’t believe there’s a bar right across from where I used to live!” said Dave Garner, an accounting major who now works with GE. Students 21 or older can in fact purchase beer or wine (no hard liquor) at Tommy’s, under strictly enforced guidelines.

“You know, they didn’t have alcohol on campus when we were here,” said Garner’s fellow Sigma Pi fraternity brother and former roommate, Sam Porritt, an executive with Payless Shoes in Lawrence, Kan.

“Well,” said Garner, leaning back in his barstool at Tommy’s, “I wouldn’t say they didn’t have alcohol on campus. They just didn’t allow it on campus. You had to look at the back of the fridge,” he added with a laugh.

The Hansen Student Center — named after Tom Hansen ’82, who donated \$4 million toward its renovation — also sparked recollections among alumni who remembered the building’s past life as a gymnasium. “I think this was the swimming pool,” said reunion committee member Peggy Patten, a music performance major who now lives in Peoria Heights. “I think I swam on this floor.” Laughter trickled through Patten’s group as she recalled the petite pool, where students were required to take a swimming test and which was closed when Fort Natatorium opened in 1986. Other buildings new to campus since the class’s graduation include The Ames Library, the Shirk Athletic Center, and the Center for Natural Science. Said Porritt of all this growth, “Sure, the only new thing we got was Evelyn Chapel,” finished in 1984. “But it makes you proud when you come back and see it all. I mean, this is our school.”

Members of the class mingled with some students who had stopped by Tommy’s, and their presence prompted the question: what specific memories do you have of Homecoming from your time as a student? “Did we have any Homecoming memories?” Anne Gentry asked with a laugh as she leaned over to sign the yearbook replica next to an entry reading: “The best class ever!”

“I mostly saw Homecoming from the field,” chimed former IWU cheerleader Renee Tomes

Dunlap, now a doctor at Gailey Eye Clinic in Bloomington. Many alumni mentioned the competition of rope pulls and chariot races at the Titan Games, but more specific memories were scarce. “Oh, gosh,” said Baffes. “I remember throwing a cow chip into the crowd during the throwing contest. Does that count?”

“Beats anything I have,” said Condon with a laugh.

“You know, I’m not sure any of us remember Homecoming as a series of events,” said Kevin Lust. “There were always great events — fraternity dances, away track meets.” A former business administration major and Tau Kappa Epsilon member, now a professional speaker in Springfield, Lust remembered how, as an IWU student, “it was the everyday moments” that made the time so special. “You could be sitting in the front room playing cards and, the next moment, be playing football with the guys in the front yard. That’s the fun stuff. IWU taught me how to think, but also how to have fun.”

* * *

By Saturday morning, the rain had cleared, and the October air was clean and crisp: just right for football. The emerald grass of Wilder Field seemed reflected back in the sea of fans adorned in Titan green who were finding their seats to await the opening kickoff. From the IWU locker room, a rising chant pulsed through the closed doors as players psyched themselves for the ensuing battle.



Déjà Vu: At Homecoming 1984, IWU defeated Elmhurst (photo right), and again, 20 years later, the Titans beat the Bluejays, 44-26. At left, the hometown crowd gives a cheer.

Members of the class of '84 congregated near the locker room as the ceremonial torch was lighted on the field. The oversized, full-body costume of the team’s mascot prompted Jane Raab Hoffman, an elementary education graduate who resides in Bonfield, Ill., to ask: “Didn’t Tommy Titan used to be just a guy in a toga?”

“I think so,” said Baffes, still in a bright mood, even after closing down Tommy’s at 2 a.m. the night before with several of her classmates. “I remember his legs,” she added with a wink.

Baffes and Hoffman, both members of Alpha Gamma Delta, were known as “the two Janes,” yet it is Hoffman who carries a tradition known as the “Wesleyan family.” As she speaks, three broad-shouldered men approach. Hoffman introduces her brothers, Jeff Raab '77 and Greg Raab '80, and her uncle, Richard Raab '65, all of whom played football for Illinois Wesleyan during CCIW championship years. Her father, the late Paul Raab '55, played baseball under the late Jack Horenberger. “I always knew I’d go here,” said Jeff Raab. “We were all involved. Even our little Jane was a cheerleader.” Hoffman smiles fondly. “I think I’m starting to remember the

routines,” she said.

“It was more than the games,” said Brad Barclay ’84, a former defensive back for IWU. “It was about the friendships. Coach Larson and all the guys meant so much to me. It was a great experience.”

Of course, while some remember games from the vantage point of the field, others recall their experiences as spectators. “I don’t think I sat once during a game,” said Gentry, pulling her coat against the brisk autumnal winds. “We walked around the entire time.” A debate ensued about where the fence around the field originally stood, and whether students could walk on the track during games. “What do you remember, Miss Homecoming Queen?” Kathy Anderson Zimmer asked teasingly of Sara Thomas-Woods. “You couldn’t even find the field!”

Thomas-Woods’ hands flew to her face, muffling a small shriek. “I only won Homecoming Queen [in 1983] because the music and theatre people voted for me,” explained Thomas-Woods, a music performance major and Kappa Kappa Gamma member. “When my dad came down to help drive me in the parade, he asked me, ‘Do you even know where the field is?’ I teased him, ‘I was hoping you would tell me!’” Zimmer and Thomas-Woods enjoyed a long laugh together. Though both now live in St. Charles, Ill., they said they don’t see one another too often, and they clearly relished the chance to renew their bond. “The reunion has given us a way to find each other again,” said Zimmer, a high school administrator. “We even have a group e-mail going now.”

Patty Perschke Young and Kerra Schaefer Guffey are in a similar situation. Though both work at Memorial Hospital in Springfield, Ill. — Young as a nurse and Guffey as a vice president — they run into each other with surprising infrequency. “I live a mile from Patty and we rarely see each other at all,” says Guffey. “It’s strange ... but this is my chance to get reacquainted with all the people I knew and know.”

The crowd erupts into cheers as the smooth cadence of announcer Scott Seibring ’85 (who is also IWU’s director of new student financial aid) flows across the stadium with the happy declaration: “Touchdown, Illinois Wwwwwwwesleyan!” Seibring’s melodic voice bestowed more good news as Illinois Wesleyan soundly defeated conference rival Elmhurst, 44-26. In 1984, the Titans also beat the Bluejays. Alumni were clearly pleased to see history repeating itself.

* * *

On Saturday night, alumni celebrating reunions from 15th to 60th gathered at the Radisson Hotel and Conference Center for an elegant evening of socializing, dining, and dancing. The evening’s topics of conversation split into two general categories: the past (professors, classes, favorite memories) and present (family, careers, health). Straddling both categories was the topic: “Wow, hasn’t the campus changed?”



Class of '84 friends Kathy Anderson Zimmer, Laura Gerdes Ehrhart, and Sara Thomas-Woods have fun watching watching the "Reflections of 1984" video produced especially for their reunion.

"It's amazing to see how it's grown so dramatically," said Lori Semple Palmer, a nurse at Carle Clinic in Champaign. "You can't even see all the way across the quad now. But," she added, "the infrastructure of what was is still there. And as big as it gets, it still feels small and cohesive." Palmer's husband James agreed. "Since we live in Champaign, we've always thought of our 5-year-old going to the University of Illinois," he said. "But after today, we looked at each other and thought, 'Maybe here.'"

After all the attending alumni mingled for a cocktail hour, individual classes adjourned to their respective dinners. Condon and Baffes shepherded their group into a section of the ballroom that had been cordoned off for them.

At the entrance, perched above a bowl of green and white M&Ms, Condon had placed a message board filled with photos and regrets from those who could not attend this year.

Under the ballroom's golden chandeliers, 1984 class president Dave ("Hawk") Hawkins rose to begin his duties as the evening's master of ceremonies. In his opening remarks, Hawkins described IWU as a kind of "utopia."

"It's the kind of place where you can still walk on campus, look people in the eye, and say hello," said Hawkins, before introducing a special video program entitled "Reflections of 1984" that portrayed campus life in the 1980s. Illinois Wesleyan's new president, Richard F. Wilson, accompanied by his wife, Pat, stopped by to share some thoughts on the University's future progress. Nicholas Showalter '83, who is a Methodist pastor in Villa Grove, Ill., led the pre-dinner invocation.

"You know, my wife, Lori, introduced them," James Palmer later said of Showalter and his wife, Jill Shirey Showalter '84. Lori Palmer rolled her eyes. "I think he caught her eye long before I stepped in," she said.

Members of the Illinois Wesleyan University Jazz Band, who performed throughout the evening, sat down for dinner with alumni, including class of '84 members Paul Nolte and John Van Renterghem — both of whom were disc jockeys at Illinois Wesleyan's student radio station, WESN. "I remember walking from Dolan [Hall] to Kemp [Hall] with 30 to 40 albums under my arm," said Nolte. Eyeing the young students, he jokingly asked, "Do you guys even know what albums are?"

IWU junior and bass performance major Phil Krawchuk responded, "Yeah, I think CDs are great for clarity, but LPs have a much greater warmth." Nolte nodded his approval. Soon the table was bouncing with debates on digital vs. analog, music downloading, and MP3s. The former WESN

deejays were startled to hear that, for certain hours in the day, the college station was now on a computerized automatic pilot.

“We were live 24 hours back then,” said Nolte, former WESN program manager. “The worst shift was midnight to 3 a.m., and we still had a waiting list of DJs.”

Changing topics, Nolte challenged the students to name, in reverse order, all the presidents and vice presidents who had held office since they were born. The students complied, stopping with Reagan. Nolte asked them, “Do you remember when Reagan was shot?” Junior Kevin O’Keefe gently reminded him that most students hadn’t even been born when that event occurred. Groans ensued, but smiles followed. The point was clear: the torch had been passed.

The lights dimmed as the partitions separating the reunions were rolled back and the student band struck up a lively jazz tune. Many alumni took to the dance floor. Others, facing long trips home, made their goodbyes. The weekend had rekindled friendships and sparked memories that made it seem like 1984 again. But tomorrow it was back to 2004.

“This was great,” said Baffes, giving a classmate a farewell hug. “You know the best part? I’m still learning new things about everyone. What a success — all of us, I mean. The reunion, and the class of 1984.”



Jim Michels '84 and his wife, Janette, share a dance at the post-reunion party.