



STAYING EVERGREEN WITH OLD BONDS

Reunions have a way of bringing out the child in us

BY: LITTA JACOB

It is a feeling that brings a silly smile to your face and a twinkle in your eye. An all-encompassing sensation of warmth, anticipation, a little trepidation, and a sense of belonging. Each of us has experienced this buzz while attending school or college reunions, and for most, the experience is liberating.

Neuroscience has an answer to the elation when reconnecting with peers. Seeing a familiar face after a long time activates the brain to release dopamine, a neurotransmitter associated with pleasure and reward. Even the anticipation of a reunion and the excitement leading up to it can release dopamine. Another pleasure neurotransmitter, oxytocin, is also released, particularly while hugging or holding hands. So why not bring on the hugs?

The many positives of these get-togethers are what drive Rhea Daruvula, 52, consultant psycho-oncologist, from Bengaluru, to make a concerted effort to attend them, even to out-of-town locations. "It may require logistical planning, but rekindling friendships, gaining new perspectives, and creating lasting memories outweigh the inconveniences," she says.

For Prithvi Rao, 58, trend forecaster and designer, Bengaluru, the most important reason to get together "is that girlfriends are fun! Meeting them is therapy and so good for the soul. If you have a group of friends that you want to stay in touch with, and still have much in common, you put that effort to make a reunion happen," she says.

"On the flip side," says Daruvula, "is a certain anxiety or fear of change, especially if we haven't met in a long time."

However, meeting up allows us to see how others have evolved, the paths they have taken, and the lessons they have learnt, she adds. "These interactions can prompt personal reflection and sometimes lead to reassessing one's own lifestyle choices. Additionally, reunions are a support system of people who understand your history and story."

Shraddha Sidhwani, psychologist and psychotherapist from Mumbai, finds there has been a surge in social anxiety after COVID-19, and such gatherings are a perfect reason to connect. "Reunions are occasions to go back to one's own history. We are allowing ourselves to be fun-loving, spontaneous and carefree children once more. Reliving past experiences is also important. As we grow older, our responsibilities may make us rigid. Here is a chance for us to have fun conversations, not the intellectual talk at the workplace," says Sidhwani.

Rao vouches that responsibilities and tight schedules do bog us down.

"Organising a reunion today is nothing short of a miracle," she says. With not just our work schedules to match, but our children's and partner's schedules, this 'matching of dates' is hard. But once we cross that hurdle, the excitement kicks in, adds Rao.

BASIC NEED

"Relatedness" (or connection) is one of the three basic psychological needs propounded by psychologists Richard Ryan and Edward Deci, in their self-determination theory. It denotes that people need to experience warmth, bonding, and care, and are satisfied by connecting with and feeling significant to others.

Sidhwani acknowledges that peer networking and fostering mentorship are additional positives. "The alumni meets serve as a focal point for networking. We can also become mentors to the younger batches," she says. Usually, the bonhomie generated at alumni meets kicks off several groups that evolve into strong support systems.

However, reconnecting can prove detrimental to a person who was bullied in school, or had experienced teasing or body-shaming, says Sidhwani. "Such persons will choose to stay away for fear of triggering earlier traumas."

CADET MUSE

Col Shivaji Ghosh (retd), a septuagenarian, attended the 45th National Defence Academy golden jubilee reunion at his alma mater in Khadakwasla. Some of them met each

other after 50 years. The gathering became a muse for Col Ghosh who penned his take on Rudyard Kipling's poem "If." It encapsulates the essence of reunions and resonates with us all.

IF - BY COL SHIVAJI GHOSH

If you can remember your course-mate after 50 years

When all about you are forgetting your name, If you can trust yourself to climb the stairs to your old cabin

When others are holding their knees and hesitating,

If you can hear stories of old times that didn't really happen,

Or being joked about, and yet laugh and move on, If you can look back—and not judge the present by your past,

If you can speak—and not feel depressed if others disagree,

If you can meet with those who became generals And those who missed the boat, and treat both equally

If you can hear to hear the truth you've spoken Twisted by others who may not have aged as gracefully as you,

Or watch the traditions you gave your life to, broken,

And accept that the world has moved on,

If you can forget the half century that intervened And go back to being a teenage cadet again,

And hug one another like long-lost brothers, If neither religion nor rank nor age

Can break those bonds built so long ago, If you can fill these precious two days of the reunion

With 50 years' worth of distance run, Yours is the Academy and everything that it stands for,

And—which is more—we proved that we became men, my brothers!



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