



Joel
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Fast Times, 20 Years On. I'm the most famous guy at my high school reunion. That plus \$122 gets me a Coors Light

FOR YEARS, I HAD A PLAN FOR MY 20TH HIGH SCHOOL reunion: I was going to hire a giant-breasted hooker with lots of makeup and tell everyone she was my wife. Unfortunately, my actual wife Cassandra totally didn't get why it was funny for her to stay with my mom in New Jersey while I went out with a hooker. She wasn't even willing to dress like a hooker, though she did tell me not to wear a blazer because it would look as if I was trying too hard to impress my classmates. I thought I had already covered that by writing a column about my life in *TIME* magazine and appearing on every TV show that asks me, but apparently the blazer pushed me over the edge.

When we got to the conference room at the Crowne Plaza in Edison, N.J.—perhaps the perfect adult analogue to being in high school—the people who worked for Reunions Unlimited Inc. asked me for \$244 in cash. This seemed like a lot for a bad buffet, Coors Light and finding out what people I knew as teenagers look like, how many kids they have and what they do for a living. When Reunions Unlimited Inc. came up with its pricing plan, it was clearly unaware of Facebook. Or the career paths of people who went to public school in New Jersey.

The 150 or so people inside—about a third of my graduating class—were not a random sample of J.P. Stevens High School students. There were almost no Asian kids, black kids, burnout kids or even-nerdier-than-me kids. No, these were solely the kids who went to keg parties. It turns out that people who liked to get together in big groups and get drunk still like to get together in big groups and get drunk. They also like to listen to music from 1985 to '89 when nostalgiaing, yet Reunions Unlimited Inc. managed to find the only DJ in America who wouldn't stick to '80s music.

If you've ever wondered what it's like to be the most famous person at your high school reunion, it's awesome. You don't have to awkwardly walk up to anyone, because all the pretty girls and cool guys awkwardly walk up to you and tell you that their tenuous connection to you makes them proud. Sure, they're referring not to your journalism career but to the fact that they saw you on *E!* at the gym with the sound turned off, but after a few Coors Lights, this does not bother you at all. The only downside is that your good friend Col-

leen, who prepartied pretty hard, spends much of the night yelling from across the room, "Oh, it's Joel Stein! He's too famous to talk to me!" followed quickly by "Oh, look! The famous Joel Stein has come to talk to me!"

The worst part of the reunion was that this guy Jeff—who for over a month in elementary school tricked me into giving him the dessert my mom packed in exchange for "future" Mystic Mint cookies he kept track of on a ledger—brought a beautiful, large-breasted, heavily made-up woman wearing exactly the kind of dress my imaginary hooker would have worn. And she actually was his wife. I hate Jeff.

I also discovered, to my surprise, that I'm a lot like the person I was in high school. Several women told me about comments I'd written in their yearbooks about their breasts. When I went up to a woman named Dana and told her that she looked exactly the same, she said, "But you never thought I looked good." I, for some reason, said, "But at least you don't look any worse," and walked away. Coors Lights can really pile up.

Still, even if I hadn't changed, I did not expect to feel that I could happily go back to hanging out with these people. After high school, I was able to seek out

friends who had similar interests and ambitions instead of those who happened to live a bikeable distance away. And yet, as the new book *Connected* by Nicholas A. Christakis and James H. Fowler shows, we actually do choose our friends through proximity and shared activity. Sure, I might now select a slightly different mix from the J.P. Stevens pool—especially if you threw some Indians, black dudes and supernerds back into it—but this was a group that could make me laugh and think as much as the carefully culled group I hang out with in L.A. You know, the ones who had a kid at exactly the same time we did.

I left a little before midnight, when Cassandra got bored, even though Jeff's wife didn't look bored at all. But most people closed the party, then the bar and then went upstairs to Colleen's suite. And apparently the potent mixture of nostalgia, Coors Light and a \$122 investment caused some possibly otherwise married people to hook up. This, it turns out, is the reason spouses go to reunions. I'm definitely going to Cassandra's. Sure, it was an all-girls school, but I'm not taking any chances. ■

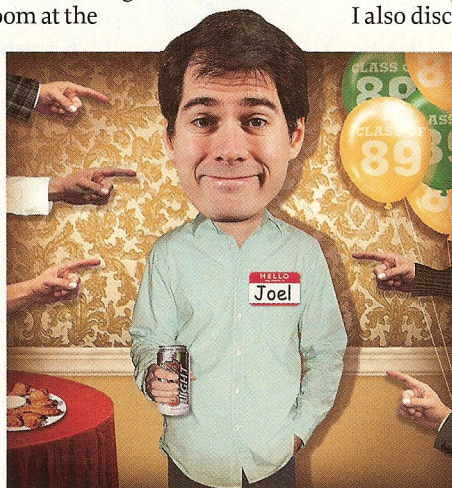


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