

Wausau East/West 50th Reunion July 2022

A greeting from Judy Stephen Spence

I am imagining some of the Class of '72 gathering together this weekend and am sorry that I couldn't be there. I may not have recognised you, and you certainly wouldn't recognise me with my short hair and wrinkles! I have very special memories of my time attending Wausau East High School as an AFS student, and of many students and staff with whom I interacted. I still have my yearbook, a scrap book and some other memorabilia of 1971-72 stored in a box, and enjoyed opening it up the other day and reminiscing about people and events.

One of the highlights for me was the East/West game. I don't remember who won, but I do remember feeling overwhelmed at the beginning of the game when everyone in the stadium stood up while the national anthems of South Africa and Chile were played. My American "father", Mr Les Brenton, had arranged the South African anthem from a piano score, and the harmonies of the band were beautiful and very moving.

The Brenton family hosted me during my year in Wausau. They were warm and accepting and did everything they could to make me feel welcome. Ann became a very special friend. We shared many interests, bonding initially through playing piano duets together. A highlight was when Ann and I were asked to do a two-piano accompaniment of the choir singing Dan Packham's "Christmas Cantata" and some of Brahm's "Liebeslieder". We have communicated over the years, and it was a delight to have her come with her family to Cape Town for a few months during the 1980s.

I have been in touch over the years with Arzelee Drown, who was a wonderful teacher in Racial Minorities and English Novels. She taught me a great deal, and we seemed to be "on the same page" regarding our love for literature. I think she was surprised to come across a teenager who enjoyed Thomas Hardy, and she took the trouble to mail me one of my essays years later. It was a delight to spend a couple of days with her in Wausau when I visited the US in 2004.

I imagine that many of you have had a number of knocks and disappointments alongside joy and fulfilment over the past five decades. My first marriage of 33 years ended in 2008. We had lived in Cape Town, Pietermaritzburg and Stellenbosch in South Africa; studied in Oxford, England; and worked in Nairobi, Kenya. After seven years in Kenya, I moved back to Cape Town, where I had been at school and University, and was completely content on my own in a small apartment, with family and friends nearby.

However, this changed when a friend from my time at the University of Cape Town, Ian Spence, quite unexpectedly reappeared in my life. We had gone our separate ways in 1971, when I came to Wausau as an exchange student, and he went to Sheffield University, in England, to study Structural Engineering. We lost touch for 49 years. By this time, he was living in Brisbane, Australia. After his wife died, we reconnected, realised after a short while that we loved each other and were married in January 2021!

We are enjoying life together, and we both love travelling, so I am hoping that we will be able to come to the US at some stage in the future.

I look forward to reading about the reunion and seeing some photos.

With my love and best wishes,

Judy