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You never know about reconnecting

By Curtis Seltzer

BLUE GRASS, Va.—One of the nice things about living at the foot of Snowy Mountain is that I don't run into people who knew me as an adolescent five decades back. I only have to deal with those who have seen more recent bad behaviors.

Internet search engines, however, provide access to some whose names I can still recall as well as to more than a few who I'm sure would prefer not recalling mine.

I never know what kind of reception I'll get to an emailed, "How ya' doin' after 50 years?"

Some don't reply. I'm not good at interpreting this silence. It could mean anything from the email was never received to "Oh no! Not him!"

When the other side doesn't want to play catch in the old backyard, I'm guessing they're either happy and don't want to be bothered or unhappy and don't want to go into it.

A second group offers a short, perfunctory response. A couple of college friends shared where they got their advanced degrees and a two-sentence job history. Too busy with current events, I concluded. But maybe they saw no percentage in a catch-up correspondence.

A third group has issues too thorny to handle. I did something wrong; they did something wrong; we did something wrong together or, worse, to each other. Some grudges are best left like sleeping dogs. Belated apologies are no better than...belated apologies.

A fourth group surprises me. They turned out more rebellious, accomplished, complicated or troubled than I expected. Many had a rocky start and kicked around for a decade trying to sort out the 60s and 70s. I've discovered shared interests in my 60s with some with whom I never shared a crayon. Homecoming queens now talk to me; life is inexplicable.

There's always the possibility of doing a bad job when trying to repave an old road. Unease, even shame, can be involved. No kid gets everything right with everybody all the time. Everyone would like a chance to do some things over. Botching it up a second time is never out of my reach.

I've noticed that shame seems to be losing its grip on America. Some kinds of shame certainly deserve to be tossed into a Freudian dumpster. But when did you last hear a primetime television script have a character say before being caught, I'm ashamed of what I did?

Today, after a politician does something wrong, he or she makes a lot of money trading on his or her name. I guess a society of second and third chances is better than the alternative—one chance and you're out.

Reconnecting confirms that the past actually happened, which, in some cases, you may not want to do. While the past is gone, it's not forgotten, which, as Faulkner suggested, means that it's neither dead nor past.

I've chosen to avoid trying to reconnect with some people as they have with me. Things were left unresolved or just left. A case can be made for closure. A case can also be made for not stirring old pots. Another good case can be made for not deciding between either one.

The Internet also allows reconnecting without the mess of actually doing so. As the poor-man's FBI, search engines allow anyone to track anyone. The accuracy of the information found, however, is hit-and-miss.

I'm listed on some posts as a lawyer (not true), a real-estate broker (not true) and a "high net-worth individual" (not true, although I certainly aspire to high virtue). One post has me owning 1,000 acres in Blue Grass—news to me. On the other hand, I did intentionally flunk a course at the University of Massachusetts' School of Education, entitled, "Survival Techniques in the Educational

Bureaucracy”—a moment of continuing pride in my short academic career.

Connecting is easy to do. You get to know people because they live on the same street, go to the same school or come to be in your show one way or another.

Reconnecting is more deliberate, and a lot touchier. Nonetheless, rewards beckon.

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