

MOORE: An ode to an old and dear friend

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One of the problems of old age is the loss of dear, dear friends. I was struck by that thought when I woke up early the other day. Many of the men and women you grew up with are gone. But we are thankful that we shared time with them.

The blessing is that we have enjoyed their friendships for a long, long time. It is good to think about those wonderful times, as I did this morning when I woke up.

When I started at the University of Notre Dame in the fall of 1941, I was enrolled in the Naval ROTC there in addition to being in my chemical engineering courses. There I met my first roommate, Walter LaBerge. We both served in the Navy in the Pacific War and both returned to ND immediately after our war service.

We were able to resume our careers as roommates and those days, I remember, were the happiest days of my college career.

Walter had started ND as journalism major, but early in his career switched to major in physics. Eventually he got his doctorate in physics and started his new career at the Naval Propellant Plant in China Lake, Calif. He was one of the early developers of the Sidewinder missile. Eventually he became undersecretary of the Army.

But what I want to remember most were the times we had together, frequently visiting nearby Saint Mary's College for dates. Post-war, he and I and a couple of other students would perform at St. Mary's College events.

What has rolled through my memories today were a couple of ditties that this highly trained physicist wrote to our amusement and that of the St. Mary's belles.

Take it down to the Laundry

Take it down to the laundry; take it down to the plant.

Put all your clothes in a little sack, many that will never come back.

For it's rip, tear and shred you get at the old laundry.

My favorite was the Harry Nicodemos song. Every morning at ND the radio, tuned to the South Bend radio station, would blast out with the following commercial that Walter parodied:

Harry Nicodemos is plumbing out your sewer.

His methods are electrical, his gadgets they are fewer.

He guarantees no damage and he cannot hurt your lawn.

Once he smells a cesspool he will work until the dawn

He thrives on what you wouldn't touch but seldom does it free.

If you need call 38633. (that number was, way back then, the phone number to call for Harry.)

Walt was fun to be with. We both journeyed to St. Mary's and eventually we both married St. Mary's young women.

Both Joanne and I miss him and thank God that we had Walter for so many years. Tomorrow I will tell this story to my Socrates Café class. We, who will be here in this assisted living place for the rest of our lives, need some happy memories to cheer us when we get blue.

Thinking about Walter eases my pain. I was graced to have known him.

EUGENE MOORE is a community columnist. His commentary usually appears every other Monday, but was delayed this week.