

# 'I WISH YOU A HAPPY REUNION'

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Since graduation from Seneca High School in 1969 I have had the opportunity to be in attendance at a number of class reunions. In addition, I have had the pleasure and privilege of serving on several of the reunion planning committees. As our class consisted of about 650 people, it has been a challenge to keep abreast as to what has happened to individual classmates. And often what is learned about a person can run the gamut as to what took place in their lives after the high school years.

Back in 1999 I was attempting to locate some old classmates and came upon the name of George Hammerbeck. I had been in class with George during seventh and eighth grade and remembered him in a number of ways. He was the biggest kid in our class. He was athletic and seemed to have a degree of leadership ability. Yet it also seemed to me that, as with many of us, he was going through a number of significant inner struggles. And though he did not finish high school at Seneca, I still thought it would be appropriate for our class to include him in the reunion activities.

I could not find information on George directly, but I was able to locate his mother and gave her a call. I explained my purpose in calling and asked for her help. I was immediately told that unfortunately George would not be able to attend. The reason? George had died suddenly of a heart attack in 1985. I was in shock upon learning of George's passing. Yet at the same time I sensed that even after 14 years Mrs. Hammerbeck was still feeling a great deal of pain as to the loss of her son.

I expressed my condolences to Mrs. Hammerbeck during our conversation, but afterward felt I needed to do more to acknowledge her loss. So I went to a nearby Hallmark shop and purchased what I hoped would be an appropriate card. I then added a personal message and mailed the card to her. I cannot tell you to this day anything about the card I sent to her or what I wrote. Yet shortly thereafter I received the following letter from Mrs. Hammerbeck:

*April 13, 1999*

*Dear Sam,*

*This is to thank you for the beautiful card I received from you. Your words of compassion meant more to me than I can express. Your understanding of how devastating it is to lose a child touched me deeply. It leaves a hole in the heart that doesn't go away, although time does have a way of alleviating the sorrow, but not the missing.*

*George had a rare joy of life that radiated around him. I miss that very much. He loved and enjoyed people and I'm sure that he would have liked to have been a part of your class reunion. Thank you for remembering him.*

*I'm deeply grateful for the three wonderful children he left in the world—a son and two beautiful daughters—a precious legacy.*

*I wish you a happy reunion!*

*Sincerely,*

*Joan Hammerbeck*

Over the years I have become increasingly appreciative of the opportunities that reunions (whether it be family, high school, college, or in any other form) can provide to each of us. Perhaps the reunion can provide a healing experience, enabling us to come to terms with a difficult time in our lives. Or perhaps the reunion is simply a time to reconnect with long lost friends and/or relatives. To this day I am appreciative and touched that Mrs. Hammerbeck took the time to respond to my card. And in a way I believe she was also extending an invitation to me (and to all of us) to reconnect with people who have been a part of our life history. It is her hope (and mine) that you will take full advantage of the reunion opportunities in your life. Look forward to seeing you there.

Sam Denny  
Class of 1969