1954 Class Reunion Makes Connections From Past to Present

In 1954, students walked through the hallways of Crete High School wearing saddle shoes, cat eye glasses, and letterman’s sweaters.

“We girls couldn’t wear jeans, pants or shorts to school; only dresses or skirts with blouses or sweaters,” 1954 CHS graduate Jody Kerssenbrock said.

Much like today, hallway conversations would consist of what movies were in town that weekend, and who was all going. Downtown Crete was constantly buzzing with people. While the community walked through the mass of people selling corn and other goods, they could faintly hear the sound of “Come On-A My House” by Rosemary Clooney.

The 1954 60th class reunion was held Sept. 27 at the Benne Museum in Crete. The museum, a gift to the Crete community from Myrtle, Arthur, and Cleo Benne (who farmed northwest of Crete for many years), was the perfect setting for the classmates to meet and reminisce of their high school days an era ago.

In 1954, Crete had a number of differences from present-day Crete; gas was 22 cents per gallon, and movies only cost 12 cents. Now, gas is about $3.15 per gallon, and movies cost about $6 for students. The second language one would likely hear on the streets besides English in 1954 would have been Czech and perhaps some German. In 2014, the second language heard is Spanish.

Many members of the class said, in general, Crete was a “close community”.

“The town was a lot closer since it was smaller. The businesses were a close network, and on Saturday night everybody came downtown,” Melvin Krupicka, a 1954 graduate, said.

On Saturdays, the hotspot was downtown Crete. People were either at the movie theaters, the Dime Store where they would find candy on elaborate displays, Stahlhut Drugstore, which had a soda fountain and sold ice cream, or just walking around town with groups of friends.
“Farmers brought their eggs and butter to Fairmont creamery or the stores and traded them for grocery cash at the end of their busy weeks,” Kerssenbrock said. “There wasn’t a single parking space that wasn’t full.”

A historical photo of downtown Crete, Main Street, looking north. Downtown Crete was the social hub for all the students to go on the weekends. Photo courtesy Crete Historical Society

Bob Nohavec also graduated with Jody in 1954. Bob traveled from Utah, where he currently lives, to attend the 60th class reunion. In high school, Bob was an active member in band. He attended the Kearney and Geneva Contest every year during his high school career.

Bob Nohavek was an active member of band and C Club. Bob now lives in Utah and still enjoys telling the 1953 Halloween story.

During the 1950s, Crete High students would participate in contests such as the Kearney Contest, Geneva Contest, and Glee Club. The Kearney Contest was when individuals would compete against people from other schools on various school subjects, much like quiz bowl today. The Geneva Contest was where the bands and choirs from other schools would gather and compete with each other, much like Nebraska Bandmasters, District Music Contest and Harvest of Harmony. In Glee Club, choir students would also compete with other towns near Crete.
also, in the 1950s, they had some of the same clubs and organizations at chs today. the class of 1954 had students who participated in multiple clubs such as future homemakers of america (fha) and future farmers of america (now, simply ffa). only girls were a part of fha, and they would conduct bake sales and sell popcorn at the football games.

while the girls were busy involved in fha, boys would be busy in ffa. ffa stood for “future farmers of america”. during ffa, the members would shear sheep, weld, and work on vehicles, much like the ffa of today.

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“now i don’t want any of you bothering my house tonight,” bob’s speech teacher warned his class. bob continued to explain how his teachers warning did not faze him or his classmates. that night, a couple of them went to their teacher’s house and threw tomatoes at the front of her home. little did they know, the teacher’s father was told to watch the house in the event her students decided to bother it. after a lengthy car chase, the boys stopped and addressed the teacher’s father and received their punishment in the form of a fine for the damages they caused.

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terry hokenstad was the student body president who graduated with summa cum laude, the highest of graduate honors. he went on to receive his ph.d. hokenstad now lives in ohio and is a professor in social services at ohio university. in high school, he was also involved in football and basketball, which were a big deal for him at the time.
“Football means less to me now,” Hokenstad said. When he was not on the field or court, Terry was busy being an active member in C Club, Kearney Contest, Glee, and the Senior Play.

Terry Hokenstad was the school president, and played basketball and football during high school. Terry now lives in Ohio, and is a Social Services Professor at Ohio University.
Jody Kerssenbrock graduated with the class of 1954. In high school, she was involved in the Geneva Contest, Senior Play, and Operetta.

After she graduated, she attended Doane College for one year. She then moved to Omaha to study music and conducting at the University of Nebraska — Omaha (UNO). After she graduated from UNO in 1959, she went to graduate school in New Jersey. After graduate school, she was accepted in a singers’ group called Robert Shaw Chorale and performed as a classical singer for them, touring with them in Europe during the Cuban Missal Blockade.

In 1999, she moved back to Crete and became a substitute teacher for Crete High School for three years.

“Being a substitute teacher was the hardest thing I’ve ever had to do,” Jody said.

Helen Lisec, a 1954 graduate, says she was always in the library getting books.

“I played piano for my own pleasure, and I took lessons,” Helen said. She also enjoys playing the piano now. Helen knows how to speak some Latin. Lisec’s parents decided to move to Crete so she spent her last two years of high school at CHS. Helen was a member of FHA for three years in high school.

“I remember sewing an apron in FHA,” Helen said.

All in all, the members of the Class of 1954 look back on their high school memories fondly and consider the many lessons they learned growing up in small town Crete, Nebraska, USA.

Many consider themselves lucky to have attended a “good school with good people” in the community and many chose to stay in Crete or returned to Crete after traveling for education and/or work.

“Several classmates remained in Crete or in the area; several joined the military; most moved on to jobs or college,” Kerssenbrock said.

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Melvin Krupicka was the Vice President of FFA during his high school years. Now, in his free time, he enjoys playing the accordion.

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FFA stood for “Future Farmers of America” until recently when the organization decided it was just an agricultural organization for students. Crete High still participates in FFA activities and contests, and many of the things learned and contested in the organization remain the same from decades ago.

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