



What are Reunions, Anyway?

EVERYONE HAS AN IDEA about what reunions are. But since those ideas spring mainly from personal experience, everyone's ideas are different.

When I was developing *Reunions* magazine as a product (over 24 years ago), I'd posit my idea to anyone who would listen. At the time it was focused to a great extent upon adoption/birth-parent reunions, which most said was of no interest to them. But without missing a beat, they'd say, "But let me tell you about my reunions"...which included family, class, military and

very creative so they've not had to cancel or postpone reunions. They understand some of their members have difficulty affording a reunion so they make many adjustments. They cut the number of reunion days. They go camping instead of staying in hotels. They have a picnic closer to home instead of traveling. They have fewer activities that cost but more that are free or low-cost. But they all add the codicil that they look forward to a time when they can add the extras back in. Overall, reunions are still important

reconnect with important relatives.

Mention of funerals is important in the formation of reunions because they are often the occasion when family members look around the room in earnest and see a generation dying and other generations not connected. Ask anyone how their family reunion started and a very high percentage will answer that someone at a funeral suggested meeting during happier times. There is the strong undertone that they are also honoring those who are gone.

Often reunions are the only places where cousins see one another

other reunions. It was that last list that really got my attention and once I began to review all their ideas, focus of the magazine began to take a 180-degree turn toward the kind of reunions people really were interested in.

REUNIONS ARE IMPORTANT

Reunions, everyone said, were not just important but "very" important. We revisited the question immediately after 9/11 and lately during the economic crisis because both seemed able to negatively affect reunions. But the "very" importance of reunions was maintained in both instances with a slightly different point of view. After 9/11 the response was that "terrorists are not going to stop our reunion!"

When, more recently, the economy has been the issue, it affects individuals who have problems affording the reunion but does not affect reunion events. Reunion planners have gotten

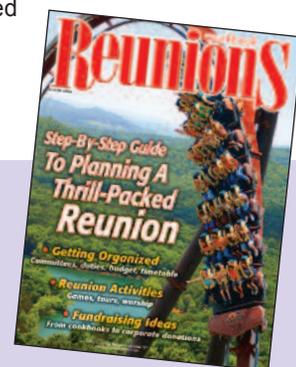
enough that most make the sacrifice to plan them and to be present.

Reunions continue to be the way most people stay in touch with what was important in their lives (school friends, military buddies) and what is important to stay connected to (families).

Reunions maintain connections to the past and, for family reunions, to the future. In an American society whose mobility is sometimes at warp speed, reunions serve the very important purpose of sustaining connections. For many families the reunion is where cousins meet and bond. Early on I learned about a grandmother who, at the funeral of her husband, realized her grandchildren did not know one another. So she, of course, started a family reunion. Often reunions are the only places cousins see one another. And if the tradition starts early enough, they are eager to attend to

REUNIONS ARE FUN!

The reunion planner is a magician who, over a year or two, develops a party that can last from a couple hours to a long weekend or even weeks. Well-planned reunions include access to fun and games that many



Reunion organizers will find valuable ideas in the 12th edition of *Reunions Workbook*, a step-by-step guide published by Premier Tourism Marketing as a planning supplement to *Reunions* magazine. Subjects range from choosing a date and location to budgeting and setting up committees. Also covered are accommodations, meals, activities and fundraising. To order *Reunions Workbook* (\$9.95), log on to grouppuniversity.com.

members enjoy together and reunion after reunion. And many reunions occur every year because for some families reunion time is the only time they get together. And they cherish it.

Edith Wagner is founder and editor of Reunions magazine. Visit reunionismag.com for reunion planning ideas and to request a free sample copy of the magazine.



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