

FIFTY

Fifty is a significant number.

There's the saying, "That and 50 cents will get you a cup of coffee."

We can get a senior coffee at McDonald's for 50 cents.

When we turn "nifty fifty," we begin sliding downhill, straight into the arms of the AARP.

50 Shades of Grey is the name of an erotic novel by E.L. James.

Fifty Fifty is a craft brewery and restaurant in California. It is also the way two people share equally.

Our country has 50 States.

If our 50th wedding anniversary is golden, so should be our 50th college reunion.

In 1960, three times 50 plus 15 (165) of us arrived at Salem.

Upperclassmen welcomed us,
and the Sophomores made us wear beanies and sing to their boyfriends.

50 years after graduation, we are again welcome, as girls of yesteryear,
in old, moth-eaten blazers with pockets full of memories.

We can still close our eyes and let the smell of freshly baked Krispy Kreme doughnuts and Dairy Barn bologna burgers take us back to a time when our greatest worry was nothing more than tomorrow's term paper.

We can hear the rat-a-tat-tat of typewriters, punctuated by the scurrying of rats in the attic of Sisters Dorm and roaches in South.
We can feel the smutty carbons on our fingers.

After lights out, we hide in our closets with flashlights to study.

We remember strict curfews, which led to a few extraordinary efforts to sign in a roommate suffering the results of her discovery of adult beverage.

We remember limited class cuts, required chapel, and parental permission required for our myriad weekends and overnights off campus.

Our contact with the world outside consisted of snail mail and one rotary phone at the end of each hall, with a student assigned phone duty at night.

In spite of this, we managed to fall in and out of love and receive our share of fraternity pins and engagement rings.

Although skirts were required on front campus, we sometimes attended class in pajamas under raincoats.

We didn't lock our doors, and almost never, ever cleaned our rooms.

We fought water battles, encouraged party raids, played pranks by filling friends' rooms with crumpled newspaper and hiding their clothes.

We sunbathed in the empty swimming pool, cooked grilled cheese sandwiches on our irons, and held philosophical debates by the Lily Pond.

Since only Senior dorms had television in their living rooms, we watched The Ed Sullivan Show through the open doorway of Bitting. We danced barefoot in the wet grass on the lawn in the dark, and fell madly in love with the Beatles.

We were insulted that the author May Sarton called Salem "bland," and thrilled that Robert Frost's daughter, Lesley, shared her father's words

that a poem was a “momentary stay against confusion.”

We agonized over Civil Rights struggles and the dream of Martin Luther King.

Although too young to vote for President Kennedy,
we were too soon old enough to grieve for him.

We loved and admired most of our professors, although we suspected
some
were disciples of Ivan the Terrible’s henchman who wrote in his diary,
“Today I did no harm to anyone. I was resting.”

Our minds opened to new concepts, setting records in marathon reading
and research
in the least amount of time closest to the deadline.
We grew to care about the world beyond ourselves.

In 1964, 50 years ago, 50 plus 42 (92) of us graduated from Salem..

Our speaker at Commencement, U.S. Commissioner of Welfare, Dr. Ellen
Winston, urged us to play a role in breaking the cycle of poverty in this
country.

After 50 years, the poverty cycle remains unbroken.

Now we are mothers, grandmothers, widows, career women, activists.

We may have white hair, dyed hair, joint replacements, facelifts –
or makeovers and new outfits for this event.

We have survived whatever kitchen sink, office desk, sales counter or
podium
behind which we found ourselves.

Our friendships have lasted 50 years.

We are as old as Salem College and as young as our newest grandchild.

Now that geriatrics has been divided into three categories:
the Young Old, 65-75; the Middle Old, 75-85; and the Really Old, 85+,
we're happy to be in the middle of the Young Old.

At 50 plus 21, we may not know what the meaning of life is, and we haven't
yet found, among the icky facts filling our brains, the shining essences of
ourselves.

We still struggle with the history exam question,
"What would you do if you met Robespierre in the Montgomery Bus
Station?"

But we have computers, tablets, smart phones,
and children and grandchildren to help us use them.

We email. We text. We tweet.
And write thank-you notes by hand.

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