

Roots in Ripon

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Chuck Roots

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Vikings Rule!

What a fun week Isaura and I had in Huntsville, Alabama with all of our Overseas Brats friends.

Every year there is a reunion of folks who sometime in the past attended a Department of Defense (DoD) school somewhere around the world as children of a military parent. They are known as Military Brats. In 1986, Joe Condrill and several other Brats decided to have a reunion with those "kids" they had known previously. It has only grown since then as more Brats are located. To attend such a reunion is a combination of American history dating back to 1946 and world geography writ large.

Two of the Brats in attendance this week were in their teens when they traveled to a foreign land with their parents in 1946. Class sizes in the DoD schools were as small as five kids! Many of the schools were located on military bases within the United States. But the places around the world where other schools are located would be a challenge for the most knowledgeable geography professor. There are 133 schools represented. Many Brats attended more than one DoD school as kids. Let's see, there's Ankara, Turkey; Bad Aibling, Germany; Bushy Park, London, England; Chateauroux, France; Dreux, France; Garmisch, Germany; Jonathan M. Wainwright, Tainan, Taiwan; Kaiserslautern, Germany; Kobe, Panama; Lajes, Portugal; Machinato, Okinawa; Oslo, Norway; Salzburg, Austria; Tehran American School, Iran; Wheelus, Libya; Yoyogi, Japan; Zaragoza, Spain, to name a few.

The shared experience Brats have bonds them with each other for life. We may not have attended the same schools at the same time, but the challenge of being dropped into a new place, often a new country, language, and culture, causes you to grow in ways you simply could not experience in any other way. My sister Joy and I attended the junior high school at the Oslo American School in Oslo, Norway. At the same time, our brother John, attended high school in Dreux, France.

A different location is chosen each year for our gathering. Next year we'll be in Fort Worth, Texas. But I have to tell you: If you've never been to Huntsville, Alabama, you should make every effort to come here. The people are very friendly, the city is full of history going back to the Revolutionary War.

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Our time each gathering always includes sight-seeing trips in the local area, which often includes a dinner at some local eatery.

This year, however, brought a twist to our local visits. Friday evening, we were to attend a performance at the Mark C. Smith Concert Hall next door to our hotel. However, plans were changed because President Trump was arriving in Huntsville to lend support to a congressman running in a special election, so the concert hall was taken over for the rally. We heard the anti-Trumpers shouting, and then the pro-Trumpers shouting down the anti-Trumpers. The place was packed to capacity (seats 5,000), and there were apparently several thousand more supporters outside. The badges which were made for us so we could enter the concert hall were stamped: CANCELLED due to a visit from the President of the United States.

The time we spend together catching up with each other and what has taken place in the intervening years is special. We really do feel a sense of family when we come together.

Because those of us who attended the Oslo American School are known as the Vikings, on the last evening together we always wear our Viking paraphernalia. I bring out my imitation Viking helmet replete with horns, plus I wield a plastic, life-sized Hammer of Thor. The twenty of us representing the school present quite a scene as we arrive all attired in Nordic costumes. We comprise the largest group from any one school, so Vikings Rule! But otherwise, we're harmless.

At the end of three days, there has been a vast amount of talking and sharing, with promises to see one another again the next year, Lord willing. It is not at all unusual for tears to flow as we say goodbye yet again, but leaving having been refreshed by the renewed comradeships.

Many of us are in our twilight years, so each year together is special. Many of our number are no longer with us. It is our hope to pass the baton of our reunions to the next generation of Brats.

For many of us, these were the best years we experienced growing up. Next August, we'll drag out our Viking helmets and Nordic stuff and gleefully descend on Fort Worth, Texas to join the host of other Brats who are our Brat Family.