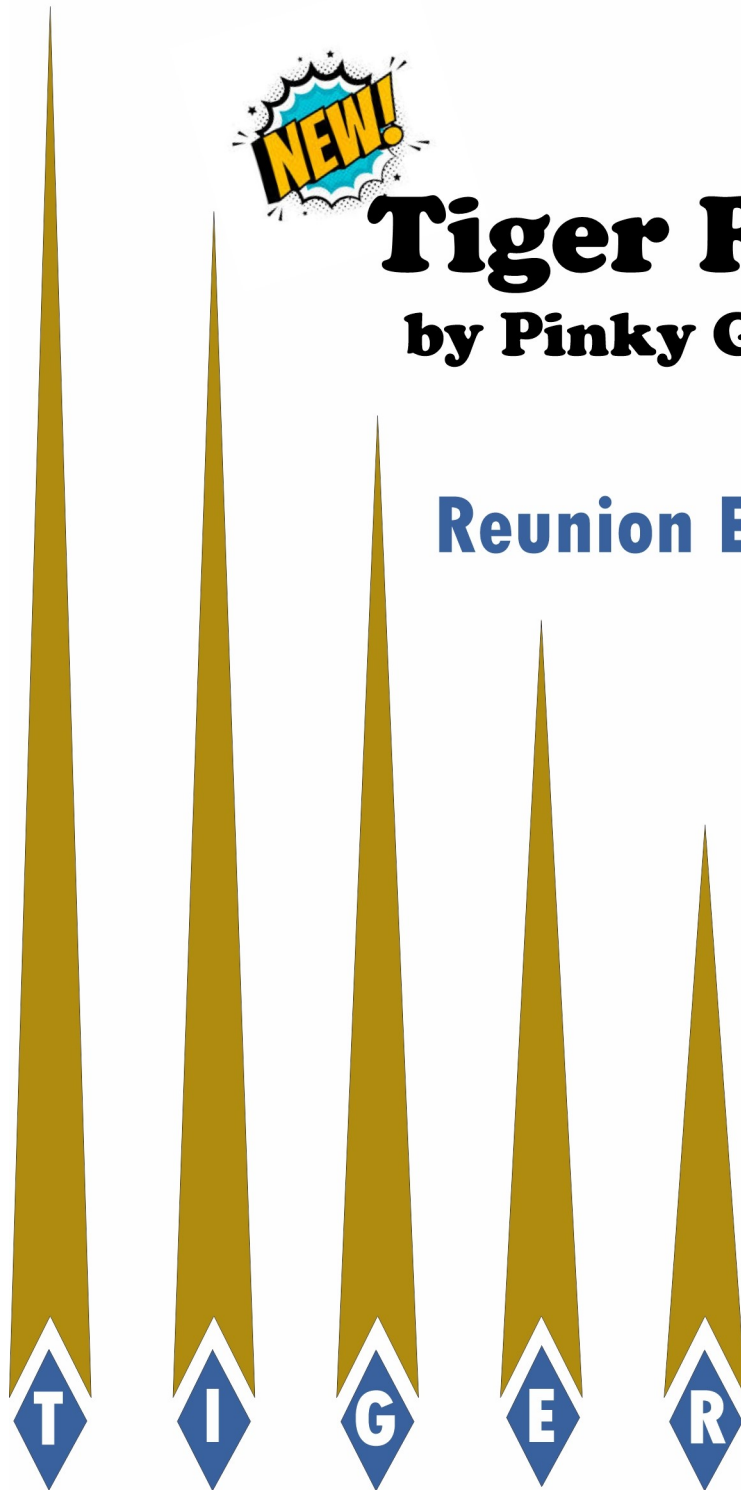




# **Tiger Rag**

**by Pinky Grau**

**Reunion Edition**



**Saturday, September 7, 2024**  
**Seven Oaks Country Club**  
**Beaver, Pennsylvania**

John Grau, Pinky, is the astute observer and chronicler of the life and times of the Beaver Falls High School Class of 1964. Back then, he already had an eye for the action and an understanding heart that helped him make sense of the trauma, drama, and joy of high school as we lived it. Now, after all these years, he has added to this mix the insights gained from a life as a journalist, a husband, a father, grandfather, and a friend. Tiger Rag is his attempt to reconnect all of us. Read, enjoy, and leave your comments at:

<https://bfhs1964.org/TigerRag/>

*Sixty years later . . .*

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**Number 1 . . . So soon?**

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*Sixty years later . . .*

## So soon?

There's no cure for the common birthday.

— *John Glenn*

Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter.

— *Mark Twain*

Well, now . . . this has all gotten really uncomfortable, to say the least. Again and again, I am catching myself sounding like an old person.

“Seems like just yesterday . . .”

“Ya' know, back in the day . . . .”

“This ain't the (fill in the blank) we had when we were growing up.”

That old person I had long promised myself I would never become. The grumbling grandparent. The querulous neighbor. The preachy uncle. The sanctimonious windbag at the end of the bar. The kind of old person at whom I had so often rolled my eyes while quickly changing the subject knowing that a long, tired reminiscence, lecture or harangue would otherwise be on the way.

Funny thing — it happened anyway. Without my permission.

More and more, I find rolling eyes, patronizing looks and audible sighs, as well as curt, impatient and dismissive replies coming *my* way, from home repair service calls and medical appointments to visits with my children.

It's not like I haven't been paying attention. Nagging reminders that I have been *growing older* have been part of my emotional landscape for some time now. There have been, of course, the ever-increasing number of medical and physical therapy appointments, the mounting prescription bills and the snap-crackle-pop of my skeletal system sagging into place while getting out of bed in the morning.

In addition, there are the odd, sometimes funny but always uncomfortable little realizations that randomly crop up.

Like noticing I am turning the volume of my music down instead of up. Or, conversely, I am turning up the volume on the TV or switching on subtitles.

Or like the irony that, just as back when we were kids, I need to start heading home when the streetlights come on.

Or like when I check in to the Class of 1964 web site — as I do every five years when these reunions come up — and notice in that photo from a pep rally our senior year how much younger Roger Alexis keeps getting.

Funny thing — it now appears that I am just plain *old*.

That discomfoting conclusion came last summer as I began contemplating what I might write for this reunion. It struck me that it would be a good idea — finally — to at least have accurate definitions for “senior citizen” and, particularly, “elderly.”

At the time, I was bemused that I had managed to ignore this subject for this long without really thinking about it. That is, save for whenever the word “discount” is used in the same sentence as “senior citizen.” A Google search immediately revealed the not-so-laughable news.

Senior citizenship is generally regarded as beginning at age 55, although we all know that AARP is willing to let us start warming up when we turn 50. Meanwhile, “elderly” is generally seen as starting at age 65. Worse, there are two subcategories of elderly, “early” and “late.” The crossing threshold is at age 75.

And there I was, about to turn 77, thinking, “What? . . . Did I miss all the fun?”

Since then, my advancing age has felt like I’m riding an ice yacht racing across a frozen lake at full sail — and picking up speed.

Awhile back, I bought a cheeky T-shirt that reads: “I thought getting old would take longer.” It was intended as a joking response for my children, who are no longer concealing their rolling eyes.

Then one evening I decided to wear the tee to a favorite restaurant on the night of its weekly senior citizen specials. The response was eye-opening. On the way to being seated, I was greeted booth by booth with remarks that said, in sum, “You can say that again.”

Certainly, you guys know what I’m talking about — better than just about anybody. After all, we’ve been on this trek of our lives from the beginning. From coming of age to old age. From having everything to prove to having nothing to prove. From finding our way in life to the unexpected places life has taken us.

Funny thing. Through all those years and all the far-flung distances we may have traveled, somehow it still feels like we’re all in it together.

And what a comfort.



*Sixty years later . . .*

## The past is never far

The past is never dead. It's not even past.

— *William Faulkner*, “Requiem for a Nun”

To see things as they really were — what an impoverishment!

-- *L.P. Hartley*, “The Go-Between”

So . . . every five years *The Question* comes up. It surfaces in various ways, but usually goes something like this:

“You’re going to your class reunion? Are you still having those things? After all these years, what do you get out of it?”

So . . . why DO so many of us keep coming to these reunions? It is a question I keep asking myself. The answers, I think, are more than can be ascribed simply to nostalgia. It is a conclusion that was brought home to me two years ago when belated word of Carter Nulton’s passing reached me.

I was surprised, in fact disturbed, at how hard the news hit me. Carter and I had been more than chums growing up on Patterson Heights. We had a bond borne of not fitting in with the expectations of the times, to put it mildly. But I hadn’t seen Carter or his wife, Linda (Patterson), in more than 40 years and had lost touch with them altogether.

Shortly after tracking down Linda to convey my condolences, their son, Dan, contacted me asking if I could send along some memories of his dad back when we were growing up. I agreed, thinking it would be quick work to jot down some anecdotes of our youthful exploits. Four months later, I had written a 7,000-word remembrance. And along the way, I discovered something astonishing.

The past is never far.

In fact, the past is stubbornly close. Memories daily come unbidden, often as not for no apparent reason, playing random hits from some odd, perverse playlist. Frequently, their intrusions are little more than a passing view paddling down the daily stream of consciousness. Other times they ambush us, triggering regret, sadness or sorrow. Still other times they bring a pause to savor some warmth, sweetness or satisfaction.

Much is written about the imperfections and unreliability of memory. Additionally, it is taken as a truism — a largely unexamined one, I think — that as we age and our short-term mental acuity slips, we simply gravitate to events that somehow have been archived. More prosaically put — often by disapproving younger observers — we are living in the past.

But that doesn’t answer the question of why some memories of otherwise everyday, hum-drum mishaps or kerfuffles, episodes that others present at those scenes have long for-

gotten, stand out so vividly for us personally. Or how enroute to the tasks of the day, or at night in our dreams, we inexplicably find ourselves traversing some overgrown memory lane.

There is an old saw among writers that everybody has at least one good novel in them. That novel is our very lives. A story that begins for us all with the seeming accident of our births, a monstrous enigma that thrust us willy-nilly into time, place and circumstance not of our choosing.

Yet, as writers and philosophers point out, at the other end of life we are brought to an undeniably absurd — at times almost comical — sense. That our lives appear to have had the logic of a plot, as though composed by a novelist. Events that seemed entirely accidental and incidental along the way have turned out to have been central to the story. And in that story lives a collection of people who are inseparable from its outcome.

Strangely enough, even as time and aging take their natural toll on memory and details of places and events fade like an old photograph, those people stand out in even greater relief.

Since these blogs began 15 years ago, the central theme has been that there are no people in the world quite like the kids you grew up with. They are the ones who knew each other when. Before we crafted those polished facades that we would present to the world as adults. The ones who were witness to all the awkwardness, the embarrassing moments, the growing pains of adolescent angst that constitute coming of age. And they were OK about it. They were the people who not only made the journey with us but made the journey what it was.

They were the ones with whom we learned to play ball, rode the bus to school, hung out with at the schoolyard, the store on the corner and places that would forever be our secret. The ones with whom we rooted for the Pirates and Steelers; had the last dance to “16 Candles;” snuck around the woods and back streets smoking cigarettes we stole from our parents; had that first date; double-dated to the drive-in; took to the prom; ate junk food until we threw up at the school picnic at Idora Park; shot pool at the Blue Room; cruised the local burgers and fries stands; and countless other adventures and misadventures that made those growing pains tolerable.

So . . . why DO I come back after all these years?

I come back to be with people who remember how the story began. Some who go back to before even memory itself; a given in my life, permanent and unquestioned.

I come back to see how things have turned out for those people who continue to live in my memory. To hear how their own stories continue to unfold.

I come back to recapture that feel of hometown that rests in the comfort of people who need no explanations. Who know where all the roads go. Who know the setting and characters of every tale.

Mostly, I come back to celebrate.



