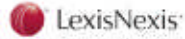


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REMINISCES

Cha-cha-changes

Reflecting on how things change, and how they stay the same.

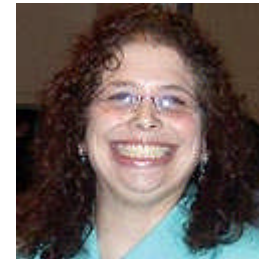
Tracey I. Batt

December 14, 2009

I recently attended my 25-year high school reunion. It made me think about how many things have changed in the last quarter-century. Many younger people today cannot imagine a time when not every household had at least one computer, or if they do imagine that time, they imagine the people in the household wearing powdered wigs.

When I was growing up, very few students had access to computers, and those computers were enormous, clunky, and not particularly helpful. In my hometown, very few businesses had word processors as well, although I imagine that the "city folk" had such equipment long before we did. I was in graduate school before I obtained even a rudimentary word processing device.

Nobody had a cell phone back then, either. Voicemail was non-existent, and many people did not even have answering machines. There was no such thing as Caller ID. If someone called you, you answered the phone, and you had no way of knowing in advance whether the person on the other end of the line was going to be your grandmother or an obscene



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caller. If you called someone and she did not answer, you called back later.

Communication was different in those days. It was not instantaneous, and it was not ubiquitous. Mass communication was limited to the mass media. When you communicated, you communicated with an individual. You did not Tweet every inane thought to the world, and you did not upload a photograph of your car stuck in traffic to your Facebook Wall to kill time while you were stuck in traffic. You wrote letters, and you thought carefully about what you were saying. If you made a mistake, you whipped out the correction fluid. There was no spellchecking program on the good old IBM Selectric – if you were not sure how to spell something, you looked it up in a dictionary.

Of course, on the plus side, you could not ruin your career or your life with one wrong click of the “Reply to All” button, either.

This has always been the pattern. People have always looked back over time and realized with a start that things have changed drastically. In fact, during my high school days, I worked at my father’s law office with people who had at that point already been working in law firms for 25 or even 50 years, and they would reminisce about manual typewriters and carbon paper instead of electric typewriters and photocopiers. I guess it’s what you’re used to.

In any case, at the reunion, I realized that many things had changed in 25 years. Many people had changed, as well. Numerous professional-looking people on the cusp of middle age, bearing pictures of well-behaved and photogenic broods, laughed at the memories of the completely different people they had been in the early-to-mid 1980s.

And then I walked in the door, on the arm of the same man I had taken to all the previous class reunions. Did I look like a professional? No. Did I look like an attorney? No. Did I look like a law school professor? No. In fact, I looked an awful lot like I looked in high school. Although my hair is more gray than the color it was in high school (actually any number of different colors, as it was the ‘80s), it is still a wild tangle of curls. Someone photographed my escort and me holding the picture from the yearbook in which the two of us were labeled “Most Individualistic.” Even back then, I understood that that roughly translated to “Least Likely to Be Like Anyone Else,” and I knew that it was not a compliment.

Despite all the things that had changed in the previous 25 years, despite all my education, all my fancy jobs, all the places I have lived and visited all over the world, I was still the same ill-tempered misanthrope, dancing to the tune of a different drummer. Probably literally. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

Which begs the question: Should a middle-aged woman who is an attorney, the executive director of a legal services non-profit organization, and a law school adjunct professor be instantly recognizable as the school iconoclast 25 years later? Despite my [repeated bragging](#) about [staying true to myself](#), isn’t it about time that I grew up?

Tracey I. Batt, Esq., is the Executive Director of New Jersey Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts, Inc., and an Adjunct Professor at Rutgers School of Law – Camden. Before joining NJVLA, she was the Associate Director and Legal Services Manager of Philadelphia Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts as well as an associate at Weil, Gotshal & Manges LLP in New York, where she practiced copyright and music licensing law for seven years.

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