September 2022 saw another joyous celebration by several dozen former sportsmen and sportswomen who represented Bangor University at various sports back in the glorious ‘60s and ’70s. This was another in a series of reunions which have seen not only sporting alumni but also many from various academic disciplines gathering together to recapture the essence of what was a particularly joyful time in our lives when we first headed to North Wales for our teenage adventure. The Beatles had told us that “All You Need is Love”, Joni Mitchell had told us that “we are stardust, we are golden…”, and Scott Mackenzie had remined us that if we were indeed going to San Francisco we should “wear some flowers in our hair.” It seemed then that that was all we needed to know!

The magic of Bangor was palpable to all of us who drove along the A5 past Penrhyn Castle, around a bend in the road and down the hill passing The Nelson on our left, as the serene beauty of a sparkling Bangor Bay gave us the same thrill as it had done decades before when we first entered our new, Welsh Paradise, on our way to meeting our new friends for life.

Friday, September 2nd saw pockets of alumni arriving and meeting up here and there in favourite old pubs and other former crime scenes – there can be few more uplifting feelings in life than the one you feel when, retracing your Bangor steps, you suddenly hear a (vaguely) familiar voice call your name, and find yourself once more in the company of warm, happy people with whom you once shared your lives so generously.

In response to an e-mailed request a cluster of attendees met up around 4:30pm on the Friddoedd Site to see the ‘unveiling’ of two new outdoor table-tennis tables installed outside the students’ Bar Uno, funded by donations from sporting alumni. There were some gallant attempts made to demonstrate the skills required to play ping-pong before we reverted to less demanding pursuits, which would continue until ‘last orders’.

On Saturday, after a night in the student hall accommodation that had been made available to us, we gathered again, in Bar Uno, for a hearty buffet breakfast before making our way to College Road and into the University building. The ghosts of our former selves and Uni mates stepped aside and smiled at us as we walked again along Top College’s stone corridors past the familiar lecture rooms. In one of them we were treated to talks from a current student, who outlined the sporting provision afforded by Bangor University’s Athletic Union, and from Dr Andy Cooke of the University’s Sports Psychology department, who described their work and research which benefited not only Bangor students but also a world-wide range of external bodies involved in elite sport.

There was plenty of time available during the day for socialising and revisiting fondly remembered places – Bangor Pier in the sunshine particularly felt increased footfall – before we headed back to Bar Uno for the highlight of our reunion: early evening drinks were followed by an excellent buffet supper together, after which we enjoyed an entertaining address by Brian Charnley, a stalwart organiser of these reunions, who reminded us in his inimitable way of various aspects of student life and sport that made the Bangor experience so unforgettable to us all; we all had a moment of reflection when the toast was called “To Absent Friends” and we remembered their contributions to our lives.

Then it was time to sing! Stan Moore tuned up his guitar, distributed his song-sheets and Bar Uno rang to the strains of “Sloop John B” – Brian Wilson would have been so impressed by the zest and the harmonies that we achieved as we once again performed that particular Bangor anthem; Paul Simon would have been overjoyed by the plaintive vigour that we applied to “The Boxer”.

Treasured photographs passed around offered crumpled windows onto our pasts, their old format eagerly copied into today’s digital devices that were pure science-fiction in the days of the originals, and which would now bring new clarity and longevity to the faces of those who had posed.

Old lost-contacts were to be re-connected through the intervention of mutual friends; promises of further meetings at suitable junctures were pledged.

And how was all this possible after 50 years or more? In fact, Mary Hopkin had already explained that in her own words when we sang the last song: “in our hearts our dreams are still the same.”

I can never forget the happiness, the friendship, the love, the laughter and the optimism shared by various cohorts of Bangor students back in those very special ‘60s and ‘70s, and I feel immense pride in the contributions that our generations have made to society in our lifetimes. I have no doubt that those ‘Bangor values’ that we knew have been passed on to our children and grandchildren for posterity. And I hope that we, and others, can continue to experience them for the foreseeable future at further Bangor University September reunions.

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