

Gym Rat Rantings

by Bob Ring



Not Just Another Football Weekend

Pat and I attended a football game last month. So what's the big deal?

Well this game happened to be in the "Big House" at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Along with 110,000 other people, we watched Illinois trounce Michigan 45 to 20.

But this was not just another football weekend for us. Pat and I both graduated from Michigan, tho at different times. I met my wife there – a nurse at University Hospital. Pat was born in Ann Arbor; she lived there on and off for years. Pat met and married her husband there. After a serious heart operation at University Hospital, Pat's mother died and was buried in Ann Arbor. Pat's grandmother also died and was buried there. With our former spouses now deceased, we have lots of emotional attachments to Ann Arbor and had not been back for years.

So why did we go? Pat's son David, an attorney in Phoenix, had told us of some special things he wanted to do before he was 40 years old. High on that list was to go to a football game at the Big House. David's interest was the spark that convinced us to return to Ann Arbor. We got tickets through the alumni association and the three of us flew out of Phoenix early on a Friday morning.

We arrived in Detroit in time to rent a car and drive to Michigan's campus for a ride-around and walk-through. Talk about changes – the engineering campus that I frequented more than 45 years ago had moved miles to the north. I was able to find the apartment building (old house) that was my home in 1965. Some of Pat's former class buildings were still there, plus her old residence dorm. The law campus was largely unchanged; the brick buildings were still covered with ivy – just thicker.

We drove around town, past former residences, and remembered good times. We were able to find the beautiful cemetery where Pat's mother and grandmother were buried so many years ago. With unerring memory, Pat easily found the gravesites; we stopped to visit – a very emotional moment for Pat. Several deer approached through the nearby forest, as if to join our meditation on the lush rolling green hills of the cemetery.

Pat arranged a special dinner for us that night – at a place called the Gandy Dancer (old railroad term). Following her wedding in 1971, she and her husband had hosted the wedding party there, the best restaurant in town then. It's still the best restaurant in town – what a meal! We drank a "Bo Schembechler" merlot and brought the empty bottle home as a memento.

Before the game the next day, we attended a gigantic raucous tailgate party inside the Indoor Track Building along with 2600 alumni, the Michigan glee club and marching band, and the cheerleaders. Wow! And then the game ... David was properly impressed with the Big House, if not the Michigan football team.

So we lost the game. Who cares? It was one of those wonderful, life fulfilling experiences! David was thrilled with the trip. And certainly Pat and I learned that you can (and should) go home again.