

May 3rd- The day of our Fifteen-Year Reunion (99 FEMBA)

I woke up this morning and immediately felt something different.

It's been about six months that we have been preparing for this day – the Reunion, and it's finally here! As it has arrived, I am finding myself excited complete with butterflies in my stomach. The types that I felt when we were on the rope course some 18 years ago. Excitement with anticipation.

It's not always that you wake up knowing that you are going to see your past classmates; people who you went to school with for three years, but most of whom you have not seen in 15 years. As I plugged in the camera's battery into the charger, I took one last look at the list. The list of registered classmates and their guests who I was about to see. How have they changed? What stories do they have to share? Will we recognize each other? The day passes slowly, but it's finally time to get dressed and head out.

The traffic en route to Casa Del Mar is not easy—even by L.A.'s standards, but I left quite early, and now I am at the valet at 5:00 PM. I stroll into the big hall downstairs - the location for the main event - and see few people who have arrived before me. I see Professor Al Osborne standing tall with his Anderson cap, talking to a few of the staff members. I see people from the OAR (office of alumni relations) making last-minute preparations. Registration tables are ready and well attended. Class gifts are still being tallied as there was a rush of last-minute contributions from various classes. Tonight 7 classes are celebrating their reunion. Class of 79, 84, 89, 94, 99, 04, and 09. Around 750 alumni and guests are expected. From the class of 99 we expect around 100 people, around 40 of whom are FEMBAs.

I speak to Al briefly. I offer if I can help with anything. He welcomes me, shakes my hand and tells me with his bright eyes and big smile: "Farhad, make sure you and your class have a good time tonight. You all have earned it". I assure him that nothing will get in our way of having fun. I also see Professor Bill Cockrum with his usual charm (wearing his signature Mickey Mouse tie, and glasses--of course on his forehead). Just seeing these two professors, shaking their hands, and having a drink with them, that by itself is an event worth writing about. They are indeed the pillars of our community. Pillars of Anderson, who for decades have trained and mentored some of the most successful business leaders of our era, and they are not done yet! Not even close.

Dean Judy Olian has also arrived, I say hello to her and introduce her to DeAnne and Janet (in case you guys don't know it, the two of them were instrumental in contacting and inviting most of our classmates). Judy spends few minutes with us asking about the Reunion organizing process, and offers her acknowledgement and appreciation. She then continues to greet just about every alumnus in the room personally. She knows much about the status of each class and the anticipated

participation. She joins Al and Bill in welcoming members of each different alumni class, with admiration and gratitude for supporting the school.

It is 6 PM. Doors are wide open. Alumni and guests are coming in fast. We are standing at a table near the entrance and watching for our classmates to arrive, and they do. In addition to Janet and DeAnne who arrived earlier, Jeff, Amy, Alison, Max, Aimee, Josh, Claire, Peter, Kevin, Vanessa, Scott, Molly, Kent, Janet, Tamara, Aref, Ron, Tara, Walter, Rebecca, Rick, Uzi, Nick, Paul and their guests are present. Also Elizabeth, our class manager (who retired from Anderson a few years ago) is at our table, as she can't stop hugging and holding each of us. But it's not just us, by now the big hall is quite full. The bars are very busy (all 7 of them). Dressed to impress, classmates are greeting each other, laughs and handshakes, screams of joy and excitement are in the air. Friendships are renewed, and toasts are made. Judy, Al and Bill are quite busy roaming the room and talking to just about everyone.

At our table, Janet is holding a most precious item. She is showing our class booklet to everyone; the FEMBA student directory booklet that dates back to 1996 when we started the program. The one that shows our names and pictures from that time. Yes, time has passed, but just one look at those pages, and we are there. Janet also has her photo and memorabilia album from the South Africa trip with her group on the field study. The pages of that album are nothing short of a cheerful bliss into memory lane. Memories of a time in our lives when we were determined to perform at the highest educational levels yet roll in as much fun and laughter as possible. Memories from the Summer of 98.

It's now 7 PM. The room is in full swing, and there is so much happening. Professor Cockrum gets on the microphone. He speaks with the same "tone" that most of us still remember during the cold callings in his famous finance class. This time though, he is calling on big Al, to quiet down so that he can announce it's time to take the party to Shuttlers for dinner. Bars are closing fast, and alums are rushing to get their last drinks before the long journey (100 ft.) on the walkway to the north--which is partially covered with sand.

As we disembark Casa Del Mar, professional cameras are snapping pictures as hundreds of MBAs are walking towards the other Hotel. It is conceivable to say that the short walkway had never seen such a large number of perfectly dressed, somewhat tipsy, laughing MBAs who are trying to snap "selfys" and "groupys" on their phones while tip-toeing on the sand-covered road. Suffice it to say that in spite of all the "dangers", we all endured the "long" walk and made it to Shuttlers.

Each class is sent to a different location for dinner. Of course class of 99 is different from any other class! We (for reasons that I cannot simply disclose here in writing, but have to do with our level of participation), were selected to eat by the pool, outside on the roof. We had the pleasure of watching the sun setting on Santa Monica bay while dining. So there is no surprise that when we get up to the roof, no one was ready to eat yet. It was time for about 106 classmates and guests present on

the roof to mingle and take photos. To talk about family, career, and life after graduation. To discuss parenthood, memories, interesting travels, news of other classmates, future plans, and to sip on red wine while basking in the beauty of the Bay and the sunset. It was our quiet time to get to know each other – again. As the 99 class were talking and moving around, I am snapping as many photos as I can, capturing all the precious moments.

We are now starting dinner. I see Al, Bill and Judy walking towards the center stage. Intesar (president of 99 full time class) and his team of volunteers are gathering around getting ready to present the check as our class gift to the Dean. I find DeAnne and Janet and the three of us join them in the center of the terrace. Thanks to all of you who contributed, we present a check for \$185K to the school. Judy graciously accepts that check, thanks us for all of our hard work and thanks the entire class for being supportive of her vision and execution—a vision that has brought the school so much success and growth since she took over as Dean. We take a few pictures with all the team members all holding the check.

It is time to continue the dinner and carry out more of the conversations. Some people change tables for dessert so that they can re-connect to other classmates while we have the time. As we finish dessert, we are called to head back to Casa Del Mar for the last part of the evening: the dance party! We took the same loooooong walk on the walkway, but this time in a southbound direction. The night scene on the bay, the sound of the waves and the smell of the sea are no less astonishing than the sunset time when we traveled to the north, about two hours earlier (the whole 100 ft.).

As we are arriving back to Casa Del Mar, it is photo booth time. Classmates gather around in small groups and take crazy shots, with black & white prints to share. The large screen in the center of the stage shows many of these photos, as well as many photos from different classes and different experiences from Anderson's past, from beer bust to graduation, from field trips to class discussions, so many memories are in full display.

Music is getting louder and people are dancing. Of course we are doing our share as well. In fact, I would say that if they were going to give out any award for dancing, Molly and Aref would have won, hands-down, or more appropriately hands-up! At some point during our group dance, Al joins us and shows some of his “moves”. I am telling you all, Professors Osborne can indeed dance (and I have the video proof in my phone). The music continues to play as alums and guests show their dance routines.

It is almost midnight, and time to end this glorious night has come. Classmates and friends are exchanging business cards and contact information, shaking hands and saying goodbye. Happy to have been a part of this reunion, they are all vying to not wait another five years to re-connect again. The last 10 people from our class gather

around for one last picture, and then it is time for us to shake hands and say our farewells to each other.

At around midnight, our Reunion is over. As I collect my camera and head to the parking with Aref, I reminisce about the last six months, about how the Reunion was organized, about the many hours spent on planning, communicating, and inviting the class, and encouraging maximum participation. As we walk past Al and shake his hands and hear him thanking us for our diligent work, I realize that the evening itself has been the sweetest reward. An evening which we spent together in beautiful Santa Monica Bay. An evening where we (reportedly) broke the record of class participation in a FEMBA reunion (almost 30%). An evening in which we renewed our connection to each other and our commitment to Anderson's future. An evening where we drank and we partied in a way that I don't think we ever did when we were going to school!

What else could I have wished for when I woke up that morning?

To those of you who did not make it, we missed you.

To the rest, to those who were present at the Reunion, my sincere gratitude for coming and making it such a fun-filled, memorable and record-breaking evening. One that will not be forgotten anytime soon.

Farhad Rostamian '99

