



ESL Podcast 96 – High School Reunion

GLOSSARY

bombshell – something that is unexpected and shocking; news or information that is surprising and usually unpleasant

* The doctor dropped a bombshell when he told his patient that she had cancer.

invitation – a written notice or card that asks someone to come to an event; a request, either spoken or written, asking or allowing someone to come to an event

* Carlotta got an invitation to her uncle's wedding and said she would go.

high school reunion – an organized meeting of people who graduated from the same high school in the same year

* Vince was excited about going to his high school reunion and meeting with all the people he graduated with.

best friend – the friend that one feels closest to; one's most important friend

* Janelle was Adeline's best friend, and Adeline trusted Janelle enough to share all her secrets.

to lean against – to think that one will decide against doing something before making a final decision

* Enrique did not know if he would go to the concert, but he did not feel well so he was leaning against going.

to live in the past – to focus on the past instead of the present or future; to be too interested or too concerned about one's past

* Tonya spends too much time living in the past and thinking about the people she used to know instead of trying to meet new people.

trip – an informal word for a fun and exciting event

* The new amusement park ride moves very fast and is a real trip.

what had become of – what happened to; what had happened in someone's life since the last time one spoke to him or her

* Darren had not spoken to his ex-girlfriend in three years, but he still wondered what had become of her after their relationship ended.

senior – the final year of schooling in high school or college before graduation; a student in the final grade level of high school or college

* Rhonda was a senior who was very excited about finishing her last year of school.



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sophomore – a student in the second year of high school or college

* Stuart is only a sophomore in high school and still needs to complete two more years of school before he graduates.

big crush – a strong desire to be with someone in a romantic relationship; a strong romantic interest in someone, usually without him or her knowing about that interest

* Belkis had a big crush on Jordan, but Jordan did not know that she had romantic feelings for him.

cute – attractive; handsome

* Anne thought that her new neighbor was very cute and had a nice smile.

top of (one's) class – among the students with the best grades or scores; one of the students with the best scores when compared to other students who graduate or finish high school during the same year

* Bruno did very well at school and was at the top of his class.

class clown – someone who tells jokes in the middle of class; someone who acts silly in class, often causing trouble

* Florentina was a class clown, and all her teachers got frustrated with her for distracting the other students by constantly joking around.

sense of humor – having an ability to laugh and make others laugh

* Charlie had no sense of humor and almost never smiled or laughed.

to give (someone) a second look – to notice someone; to find someone interesting or attractive enough to watch or learn about him or her

* Even though Judith was always watching Dale, Dale never gave her a second look and barely even knew she existed.



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CULTURE NOTE

Nice Hair, Good Grades

Being successful in an American school requires, as in other schools throughout the world, that you do your homework and study. However, that is certainly not the only thing that helps determine how well students perform in school as measured by their GPA. “GPA” stands for “grade point average,” which is the combination of your grades from all of your classes. GPAs go usually from 1.0 to 4.0. “Perfect” grades (all As) would be a 4.0 GPA.

A 2009 research study reported in the *New York Times* found that there are other things that influence teachers in determining student grades. This isn’t too surprising, but what exactly are those things?

A U.S. government survey of more than 20,000 high school students asked the survey interviewers “to rate” (give a grade or points) to each student on three factors: their “attractiveness” (whether they are good looking or not), their “grooming habits” (whether they brush their hair, dress neatly, etc.), and their overall “personality” (are they pleasant to be with, positive, easy to talk to, etc.).

The research found that these three factors did influence student grades, but the specific factors were different for boys and girls. For a boy, good grooming caused an increase in his grade, while boys who were “slovenly” (messy, not neat with one’s clothing and hair) got significantly lower grades from teachers. For girls, having a pleasant personality was the most important factor influencing grades, while good grooming was less important than it was for boys.

Perhaps most interesting in this study of American schools was the “finding” (a conclusion based upon the data of the study) that very attractive girls actually suffered a “slight” (small) “decrease” (drop) in grades because of their beauty. Perhaps this is due to the fact that teachers think that beautiful girls are somehow not very smart.



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 96: High School Reunion.

You're listening to English as a Second Language Podcast episode 96. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Now let's get started with this podcast on High School reunions.

[start of story]

When I got home from work, I opened my mail. The letter turned out to be a bombshell. I held in my hand an invitation to my 10-year high school reunion. It was a shock because I couldn't believe it had been 10 years. The first thing I did was to call my oldest and dearest friend, Maria. We had gone to high school together and we had been best friends.

Maria said that she had received her invitation in the mail, too. I told her that I was leaning against going. After all, why live in the past? I thought, but Maria convinced me that it would be a trip to see some of our old friends and to find out what had become of them. At the very least, we would get a chance to see each other and to talk about old times.

And, Maria said, Jeff McQuillan might be there. Ah, Jeff McQuillan. He was a senior when I was a sophomore, and I had a big crush on him. I thought he was so cute and he was smart, too. He was at the top of his class. He wasn't the class clown, but he had a great sense of humor and was voted most likely to succeed. He never gave me a second look, but I always made sure I sat next to him in class. I wonder what he's doing now and whether he'll be there. Hmm, maybe this reunion will be more fun than I thought.

[end of story]

In this podcast we hear about a high school "reunion." I should say, right from the beginning that I did not write this podcast, and you know this is not true for a couple of reasons. This is a work of fiction because first, I was not cute or good looking in high school and second, this is not my 10th year anniversary of my high school graduation. I wish it were. Anyway, we're talking about high school "reunions" here and a "reunion" is when you have a meeting or a party with



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people from your old high school or college class. And in the United States, it is very common. Most high schools have reunions, sometimes every five, sometimes every 10 years, usually a 10-year, 20-year, 25-year, where you go back and you talk to the people and you have a small party with people who you went to school with either in high school or in college. Though college – because college isn't so big, it's not quite as common.

This is a story about Lucy getting a letter in her mail and she says the letter “turned out to be a bombshell.” When we say something “turned out to be” we mean it resulted in the – or we might say “it ended up being.” The idea is that you have some information or something happens and then you wait a certain amount of time and then you discover or find out what the actual event or what the result is. For example, the doctor finds a small bump or lump on your arm and they examine it closely and it “turns out” to be nothing serious, meaning they find out later it's nothing serious. Here, she looks at the letter, she opens it and it turns out to be, she says, “a bombshell.” A “bombshell” is something that is a big surprise, an incredible surprise. It could be a good surprise. It could be a bad surprise. Lucy then says, “I held in my hand an invitation to my 10-year high school reunion,” That expression, “I held in my hand,” seems a little obvious, a little redundant, a little repetitive. When you hold something, it's probably going to be in your hand, but we use that expression in English to give more emphasis, to make it seem more dramatic. “I hold in my hand the winning lottery ticket.” Well, not really, but that would be an example of using “in my hand” to give more drama to an announcement.

The high school reunion, we already talked about, is a meeting or a gathering of people, in this case, ten years after you graduated from high school. And Lucy says the first thing she did was call her “oldest and dearest friend,” Maria. The expression “oldest and dearest” means someone who I've known for many, many years and is a very, very good friend. To be a “dear friend” (dear) means to be a very good friend. “He's a dear friend of mine.” He's a very good friend of mine. It's a little old-fashioned to say, “my dear friend.” It's not quite as common anymore to hear that expression but “oldest and dearest,” you will still hear, which means very good, in this case, friend. The “oldest and dearest” would often be your “best friend.” Your “best friend,” you can guess, is the person you are closest with who is your friend.

Maria said – Lucy's friend, Maria, said that she received her invitation, and Lucy said, she was “leaning against going” “To be lean against something” means you haven't made a decision, you're not sure if it's going to be yes or no but your thinking is going towards a certain direction. “I'm thinking about not going.” “I'm leaning against not going, but I haven't made a final decision.” Lucy says, “After



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all, why live in the past?” meaning why re-live or live again those old memories? Why think about what happened in the past? Maria convinced her, however, that it would be a “trip” to see some of their old friends and to find out what had become of them. The expression, “It’s a trip” (trip), or, “It would be a trip,” is an informal expression for mostly younger people and it means it would be a lot of fun. It would be very exciting or very interesting. Sometimes, we use the expression also to mean something incredible, something unexpected. “I was in the grocery store yesterday and I saw Tom Cruise, the movie star,” and someone else would say, “Wow, that’s a trip,” meaning that must have been amazing or interesting.

The expression “What had become of them” – Maria says they can find out “what had become” of their friends. To say or to ask “What had become of someone” means what happened to them. You haven’t heard about them or seen them in a long time and you don’t know what has happened to them, and that was when you would use this expression “what has become of.” “What became of my old friend John? Did he go to college? Did he get a job?” That’s the use of the expression, “what became of someone.”

Lucy says that “At the very least,” she and Maria would get a chance to see each other and to “talk about old times.” “At the very least” here means even if nothing else interesting happens, even if none of the other things that they are expecting or hoping for happens, they will be able to do this, and it’s sort of another way of saying, the minimum, the very least that can happen, and if you think perhaps, that not everything that you plan on happening will happen, you might use this expression. “I’m going to go to the beach today and I want to swim but at the very least, I want to get a suntan.” So, even if I don’t swim, I’ll be able to do this. “Old times” – the expression “to talk about old times” simply means the past.

The final part of the story is Lucy talking about someone at the reunion that she wants to see. This happens to be someone named “Jeff McQuillan.” I don’t know him personally. Lucy says he was a “senior” while she was a “sophomore” and you probably know in American high schools and colleges, the first year – there are four years – the first year is the “freshman,” the second year is the “sophomore,” the third year is the “junior,” and the final year is the “senior” year, so someone who’s in their final year would be called a “senior” and someone in their “sophomore” year is obviously in their second year. Lucy said that she had a “big crush” on him. “To have a crush on someone” means that you like them romantically. We usually use that expression for teenagers or children. “My niece, who’s a freshman, has a crush on a movie star,” meaning they like them. They’re not in love with them but they like them romantically, they’re attracted to them.



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Lucy says that this mysterious Jeff McQuillan was so “cute” and was smart, too. “To be cute” here is what a girl might say about a boy or a boy on a girl. “She’s cute,” meaning she or he is attractive, good looking. Lucy says he was “at the top of his class.” When you say someone is at the “top of their class,” we mean they’re one of the smartest. They’re getting one of the best grades or some of the best grades. He wasn’t, according to Lucy, the “class clown.” The “class clown” – a clown, of course, is someone who dresses up in a funny suit, often with a big red nose to make children laugh, but the expression, “class clown,” describes that person, and there’s always one, who tries to make everyone laugh, who tries to be funny all the time. That’s the class clown.

Lucy said that the fictional Jeff McQuillan “had a great sense of humor,” meaning he could laugh and liked to make jokes, and was voted “most likely to succeed.” The expression, “most likely to succeed,” means that he was voted most likely to be successful. In American high schools, it is common that they take a survey or a poll of all the senior class members before they graduate and people who vote for certain categories such as, I don’t know, best student or best looking or most athletic. It’s a very American high school – common American high school phenomenon. I don’t know if it’s common in other countries but – and then they take this list of people who are voted and they put it in the school newspaper or, perhaps, put it in what we call a “yearbook.” And a “yearbook,” all one word, “yearbook” is a book that has everyone’s picture in it and most high schools have yearbooks. Well, “most likely to succeed” means this is the person who would probably be most successful later on in life. That’s the idea. That was, of course, not true. Now, Lucy said that, “He never gave me a second look.” “To give someone a second look” means to pay attention to them, to look at them. In this case, “He never gave me a second look” means he didn’t pay attention to me. He wasn’t interested in me romantically.

Well, now that we’re done with that story, let’s listen to it again, this time at a native rate of speech.

[start of story]

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[end of story]

That's going to do it for this podcast. Thanks for listening. From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. We'll see you next time on ESL Podcast.

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