

THE LAST REUNION?

Seated in the Pittsburgh Athletic Association's comfortable lobby, Joe Novak, Rupert Friday, and Paul Rike (shown left to right) share a laugh. These three—a retired ophthalmologist, ob/gyn, and cardiologist, respectively—are the last standing among the 61 graduates of Pitt med's Class of 1938.

With Friday on the eve of snowbirding to sunny Arizona to escape a long Western Pennsylvania winter, the men trade jokes and memories during a Sunday brunch that doubles as a potential final "class reunion" because, as Novak bluntly says, "We'll probably never see each other again."

The trio started their careers during an eventful year. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed into law a bill establishing the nation's first minimum wage—25 cents an hour—and Adolf Hitler's army goose-stepped into Vienna to annex Austria. At New York University, Jonas Salk was a year away from earning his medical degree.

Now, with nearly three centuries of life between them, the men swap fond stories about instructors and classmates, all departed. "Joe did his best to keep everyone connected, even if just by phone," says Friday. As for their longevity, he playfully chalks it up to brainpower.

"We were the only members of our class to be accepted in Alpha Omega Alpha," Friday says, referring to the prestigious medical academic honor society. "I didn't know you had to be smart to live this long."

Friday admits to believing that he "knew it all back then."

"At the time, I thought there couldn't possibly be anything more I could learn. But over the years, I learned that wasn't true. My grandson is a doctor. What he knows now, I couldn't even imagine when I graduated."

The men plan to pass along a well-aged legacy to future physicians.

"We bought a bottle of 50-year-old Scotch and promised that the last living member of our class would present it to the next incoming class at the Pitt medical school," says Novak. Let's offer a toast to keeping that bottle in storage for years to come.

—Story and photograph by John Altdorfer