

## CLASS HISTORY, REVISED by Emmanuel Boasberg III

In June, 1956, Tersh Boasberg, in his Class History, told us of a musical cigarette box he had bought that, when you lifted the lid, played "Boola, Boola;" it served to remind him (and us) of events in the four "shortest, gladdest years of life." At the end, when the tune stopped, Tersh concluded, "Well, it's about time to rewind that old cigarette box." Twenty-five years later—longer, perhaps soberer ones, in the course of which Tersh, now a lawyer in Washington, has lost none of his old zip—he has fulfilled that good intention:

Dammit, I *will* rewind that Yale music box I bought 25 years ago from (would you believe) a door-to-door Student Christmas Sales Agency representative. It still sits where it always has, on the table next to the big (translate "my") arm chair. It's no longer one of my more expensive possessions nor particularly decorative. In fact, its inner workings have fared worse than mine and its original contents (Luckies, then Marlboros and lastly, Salems) have been replaced by rubber bands, paper clips and a cigar cutter. Progress of sorts, anyway.

But how that little music box can take me back . . . back to the late spring of 1956 (the year before last) and most particularly to those special days when I was writing our Class History. What could I ever say to all those frigging people at Class Day? What earthshaking event did happen freshman year? Whose name would I forget to mention? Hell, those bastards in Davenport's Lower Court would never listen . . . to me.

And as I tried to gain insight (and a few quotes) by reading past class histories high in the Sterling Library stacks, I fixed on the multi-volume history of the Class of 1856. Their 10th Reunion ranks were decimated by the Civil War. Yet the historian of their subsequent Reunions could embellish his prose with the finest of Victorian encomia. The seven old men who came back to their 65th in 1921 still managed to look forward to what they called the "dawn of this new world." Their records fell silent only a few years before we were born.

I knew my task was just beginning those spring days and that too soon I would write for our 25th Reunion as other class historians had done before me (albeit limited to 1500 words by our laconic Class Editors). What could

possibly happen to us in the 25 years ahead and to our world? Would we retain our confidence, our strength, and would the world continue to be the oyster it seemed that spring?

Why not? Had Yale not taught us well the lessons of the past, unlocked the treasures of literature and the secrets of science? We were ready—ready to seize the future through force of intellect, proud of the nobility of our goals and the purity of our souls.

So, as your duly anointed Class Historian, I set off to make note of your two-year stint in the Marines, your four-year tour as a Navy pilot, successful completion of law or medical school, the first business trip, the first bonus, the first title. We were doing well (though as Slavitt warned, few were doing good).

From the YAM, I kept track of your marriages, the births of your children, more marriages and still more children. Indeed, when we met at our 5th and 10th Reunions, our wives and our children (and most of us) looked rather alike; we were all exactly the same ages and we all felt remarkably fine. (Assimilation at last!)

I kept mental records as I stayed in your homes from New York to Kailua; drank scotch (then wine, then Perrier) with you in the best restaurants off Chicago, Boston and Cleveland (club soda); and went on vacations with your families in Aspen, Nantucket and Williamsburg. I watched you grow (mature, we now say), marvelled at your accomplishments, made sure you weren't doing anything different from me.

We stayed up late solving the problems of the world and those of our own lives. How closely linked they were and always how similar, yours and mine.

If we go back to the 1960's the two dramatic events we least expected were the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War. The first stretched our sensitivities to people we never knew while growing up, alerted us to powerful aspirations which were not in our game plan; and admonished (if we listened) that already our sense of fairness and morality was outdated.

The war in Vietnam destroyed the illusion of our omnipotence as surely as the anti-war groups raised frightening questions about the permanence of our institutions and our own life styles. The oyster that had seemed so securely held at graduation had slipped forever beyond our grasp.

Yet neither the civil rights struggle nor Vietnam, as seen through the prism of our twenties and early thirties, touched many of our lives directly. Blacks were not classmates, not business associates, not neighbors (enough already: Slavic football captains, Jews in Skull and Bones, computers assigning roommates). We were too busy with our careers and our young families to become freedom riders; too old to die in Vietnam; and too young for our children to attend Woodstock.

By our 15th Reunion the cracks began to appear—both the crowsfoot kind and the smile lines; cracks in conformity and in the shells we had built in order to better strive, to perform (as others expected) and to succeed. I remember my wife remarking at the 15th, "People seem so much nicer now." She meant, of course, there were fewer drunks and she found someone (probably another wife) to accompany her to the Yale Art Gallery.

That marvelous house organ *Comment '56* went to press and it greatly simplified my historian's task. Obviously, vocational stars were rising—law partnerships, corporate vice-presidencies, Civil Service promotions—but more than a few of us had shifted careers, moved to new cities, or (God forbid) stopped paying class dues altogether. We now read of classmates practicing law in Vermont, leaving business to enter teaching, or toughing it out in Moscow or Stockholm. Our children grew (not always in our own image), parents aged and many became sick. A few of our classmates died and the outlines of our own mortality clearly emerged. Welcome to middle age!

During the 1970's we were moved by two events equally as forceful as the Civil Rights and Vietnam struggles of the '60's. These were the fight for women's rights and the complex of problems associated with the energy crisis. This time, however, the problems struck closer to home. Women's issues deeply touched many of our wives and would have a lasting impact on our daughters. The energy crisis directly affected our jobs; inflation hit our family pocketbooks; and we had to question our nation's ability to produce enough goods and services to maintain our current standards of living.

Through the prism of our late thirties and forties,

these twin events shaking the outside the world somehow also mirrored our own personal conflicts. Wives became fellow workers; hostesses became partners; marriages became more honest or they broke under the stress.

And as our nation's ability to shape its economic destiny appeared to weaken, so too, control over each facet of our personal lives seemed to wane. Our children grew to adolescence; the demands of our jobs changed through forces not of our own making; dame (now person) fortune intruded on our best laid plans; back muscles spasmed and tennis elbows became chronic. Was it merely reality?

All of this we sensed as we gathered for our 20th Reunion. The understanding was there in the Whiffs' rendition of "Yellow Ribbon;" in Joel Daley's humor; in our panel's reminiscences—"Yale and Me + 20: Overweight and Underloved."

But most of all, we felt it as classmates wandered from the dance floor to the rotunda of Woolsey Hall and joined hands with Dick Parke and Don Collenback and along with the entire Glee Club sang the night away.

In the last five years much has happened: an agency chief appointed, a corporate presidency reached, a school head elected, a Congressman returned, articles written, lectures delivered, books published. We have skiied in the Rockies, sailed in Maine, and summered in England and France. Children have entered (and even finished) college. But parents and teachers also have passed on, families have been shattered, and promises broken.

The words of twenty-five years ago come back hauntingly: Dick Sewell's words about ambiguity and tragedy; Uncle Sid's, "Every now and then take a good look at something not made with human hands—a tree, a star, the turn of a stream;" Maynard Mack on *King Lear*, "Reality—reality is merely hints and guesses."

Not to worry. NOT TO WORRY!

How many of us in 1956 could run (jog, trot) five miles; or write a Supreme Court brief; or arrange a Gershwin medley; or administer a state school system? How many then could perform parathyroid surgery; buy and sell (hopefully for more) a business; lead a parish; or write for the *New Yorker*? And who could distinguish a Verrochio from a Veronese, an hibiscus from an hydrangea, or a Bordeaux from a Burgundy?

To my oh-so-carefully-chosen closing quote that June Class Day, William Graham Sumner's "The only security is the constant practice of critical thinking," I would add: there's a lot more out there than security. And to the need for critical thinking, I would add a dash of emotion, a dose of love, and a little help from my friends.

To those of you coming back to our 25th . . . a hearty welcome and how's your old wazoo! To those not returning . . . we will miss you more than you know.

Well, it's about time to rewind that old music box.