

CLASS DAY REDUX

At Class Day, a sunny afternoon almost exactly 50 years ago, we gathered on the Old Campus in our rented caps and gowns, sucked ineffectively on our long white clay pipes, and listened to some of the more reflective members of the Class tell us in poetry and prose of our collective past, present, and future. Today, few of us wear caps and gowns, fewer of us still smoke (and those of us who do, certainly not clay pipes), and all of us are a bit grayer. Even the pages of our 1956 Class Book have yellowed. The talks we heard that day — the Class History by Tersh Boasberg, the Class Poem by David Slavitt, the Class Oration by Alex Seith, and the Ivy Ode by Rowan Greer — are all period pieces. But we ourselves are not! Though rooted in and conditioned by our time at Yale, we are new people in a new age. Time to revise and update our Class Day events! The following are what the Class Day speakers would likely say if next June were our commencement, rather than our 50th Reunion.

Class History Revised



By Emanuel Boasberg III

In his Class History delivered 50 years ago, Tersh began with an account of a musical cigarette box that played “Boola, Boola” when you opened it. (Our Class Website does the same thing.) He had it with him at the lectern. Occasionally the music box would wind down and he would have to wind it up again. Since then, Tersh has become a highly involved lawyer in Washington with special interests in poverty and historic preservation, but he has never strayed far from Yale or the Class of 1956. He was our Class secretary for a decade following our 25th reunion, when he founded our Davenport summer fellowship program for imaginative juniors. Tersh looms large among his classmates in part because he devotes considerable energy to keeping up with us; he enjoys us, God knows why! Maybe we amuse him. (He amuses some of us, too.) He has also embraced the changes in our country over the last half-century, and thought about them, more than many of us. All in all, he is ideally situated to follow our Class, and many of

our classmates, through the 50 tumultuous years since we graduated. His updated Class History also makes an ideal preface to this entire section of the Reunion Yearbook, putting into context all the essays that follow. All in all, it is clearly time to wind up that old music box once again!

NINETEEN FIFTY-SIX. It was the year the Class of 1906 returned to Mother Yale for its 50th Reunion. The world had totally changed: World War I, the Depression, WW II, Hiroshima. Yale had totally changed: ten residential colleges, Harkness Tower, even a new Yale Bowl. At '06's graduation, the Class of 1856 had returned for its 50th to a new (old) campus, leaving classmates fallen at Gettysburg and living in an amazing new world of automobiles and electricity.

But time and change...

1956. Yesterday. A long time ago. Ike was President, Earl Warren, Chief Justice. Ted Williams hit his 400th HR. The most popular TV programs were "Gun Smoke" and "Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts." The biggest hit tunes: "See You Later Alligator," "Hound Dog," and "Blue Suede Shoes." (I actually owned a pair.) The top films: "Bus Stop," "Around the World in 80 Days," and "Invasion of the Body Snatchers." The best sellers: *Peyton Place* and *Betty Crocker's Picture Cook Book*. Gas was \$.23; average income, \$4,454. McDonald's sold its first burger. Levittown was born.

1956. At our graduation ceremonies in our residential colleges, those of us in Davenport received from the Master a gift of a silver cigarette ashtray. How appropriate for the debonair leaders of tomorrow to ease their transition into the many worlds we held so firmly in our hands that beautiful June day. And just how appropriate for those worlds was our Yale education?

The world...

1956. The U.S. forced Britain and France to retreat from Suez. The British Empire would decline rapidly thereafter. America would fill the vacuum. But 1956 was also the year the U.S. was tested by the Hungarian Revolution. We prudently did not act. We realized then that our power was limited. For most of our adult lifetimes those limits were expressed in a deadly, precarious balance of terror with the Soviet Union. Mutual Assured Destruction or MAD was accurately depicted in the movie, "Dr. Strangelove"; only we found ourselves the real-life actors. How would the world, how would we, ever make it to 2006?

In the '60s and '70s, Vietnam took center stage. It took a searing toll on those who were unfortunate enough to get caught in its maw; but our "lucky generation" (a term more appropriate than "silent") mostly avoided the killing fields. We were left with the task of sorting out the meaning and the costs of that projection of American military power. While this is not the place to discuss our latest military adventure, the comparisons between Vietnam and Iraq are more than coincidental. Indeed, at our age, and as patriotic as we are, it is hard for many of us to see how much good can come from the Iraq war.

Our history, of course, is not complete without mentioning the tragedy of

9/11. This has changed our world, perhaps, with greater long-term consequences than Vietnam (currently, our major supplier of shrimp and T-shirts). It is revolting, today, to be forced to face the deadly odds of being in the wrong building or plane or subway at the wrong time. But then, as a legacy from the Cold War, we will be staring down 2200 nuclear-tipped Russian ICBMs until at least 2012. Choose your poison.

We can be proud of our classmates who chose the world stage to act out a good portion of their lives. There could not have been a brighter or more humane Soviet expert than Warren Zimmermann or a better, more understanding Middle East specialist than Rocky Suddarth. Ivan Selin at State, Jacque Gansler at DOD, and Jerry Post at the CIA all played major roles. Classmates like Skip Vilas, minister and member of the UN Interfaith Advisory Committee, Gil Leppelmeier, one of the top scientists in the Finnish space program, and many other '56ers have served honorably overseas, in the military, international organizations, and multinational corporations.

But perhaps the most significant development to shake our world is the subject of this recent ad in my daily newspaper:

4.6 pounds, 12.1-inch widescreen LCD (1,280 x 800 pixels), 1.6 GHz Intel Pentium M, 512 memory up to 64 MB shared for graphics use, 75.8 GB hard drive, CD-RW/DVD+/-RW drive, SD Card slot, Ethernet, WiFi, modem, PC Card slot, FireWire port, two USB 2.0 port. (\$1,479).

Moreover, most of us use one (and many even can decipher the jargon). According to Tom Friedman's *The World Is Flat*, the advent of the personal computer (the first IBM PC hit the markets in 1981, the year of our 25th reunion), combined with a user-friendly Windows operating system (1990), connected to a worldwide telephone network (early 1990s), launched the global information revolution. Add such recent advances as workflow software, open-sourcing, out-sourcing, insourcing — you get it: a whole new world.

Friedman quotes our own Henry Schacht, former CEO of Lucent, as saying that with current advances in fiber optics, one could "transmit all the printed material in the world in minutes in a single cable." What all of this means to India, China, Japan, Africa (and to our embattled U.S. education system) is just coming into focus. What it means for the future of world poverty, world health, and, yes, world terrorism is not far off. But, for sure, the world will never be the same.

The nation...

1956. Mickey Mantle was in center field; Sam Rayburn in the Speaker's chair; and, "I Love Lucy" was the rage. The good old days — that is, if you happened to be white, waspish, and a little wealthy. The '60s hit us from out of nowhere. The civil rights of African Americans could no longer be systematically denied. The images rush by: Birmingham, Philadelphia, Mississippi, Selma, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X. The movement would force us to look deeply into our souls, to re-examine perceived notions of liberty, equality, fraternity, and social justice.

Yet, before we could even digest the larger meaning of the civil rights movement, a new concern for the environment grabbed the headlines. Rachel Carson's

Silent Spring was published in 1962. The women's movement was launched in earnest by Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, and Ralph Nader (then, not a candidate) came out with *Unsafe at Any Speed* in 1965 to jumpstart a national interest in consumer safety. Hey, slow down, already.

In 1967, Detroit went up in flames, with 43 Americans dying. Then 1968 saw riots in more cities following the murder of Martin Luther King. In 1969, 400,000 people came to Woodstock. It was too much. If our innocence was not lost in 1963 with the assassination of President Kennedy, it was surely gone by the end of the '60s and buried after the 1972 Watergate scandal and the debacle of Vietnam.

Welcome to 1981, our 25th reunion and the first year of Ronald Reagan's presidency. It may have been morning in America, but it was middle age for us. It makes little sense to sum up the national scene during the last 25 years. Our memories are not that far shot. Suffice it to say that the liberalism of the '60s and '70s (our youth?) has gradually been replaced by the conservatism of the last 25 years, with troubling consequences (it seems to me) for our cities, the poor, and the environment, as the suffering in New Orleans may well demonstrate.

Many of our classmates were active on the national scene. The senior senator from Vermont, Jim Jeffords, held the sway of the entire government in his hands for two years at the dawn of the 21st Century. This feat, however, should not overshadow Jim's very real, long-term legislative accomplishments in education, health, and the environment. And, I'm sure that John Varick Tunney hoped (as we did) that he could serve more than one term in the Senate from California.

Fred Abramson, before he died prematurely, was a civil rights activist, both with the EEOC and as president of the Washington, D.C. Bar Association. Joe Williams was a dynamic two-term chairman of the nation's largest environmental organization, The Nature Conservancy. And Bucky Buckwalter put into practice the tough community organizing tools of Saul Alinsky for the benefit of minority groups and economically marginalized residents of Maine, Ohio, and Arizona.

In medicine, three of our classmates are representative of our national prominence. Jordan Cohen is president of the influential American Association of Medical Colleges; Marshall Kaplan was the associate editor of the prestigious *New England Journal of Medicine*; and John Phair was the chair of the federal government's first national AIDS panel. In law, Peter Hutt literally wrote the book on food and drug practice and, in the remaining 40 hours of his week, devoted his *pro bono* efforts to the humane treatment of alcohol and drug abuse offenders. Peter Bull established the first national center for juvenile justice and youth law in San Francisco.

However, it may have been in the field of "interstate commerce" that our classmates most excelled, with obvious national consequences. In finance, Parker Gilbert led Morgan, Stanley; Bob Shapiro was president of Klingenstein; Ed Barlow, head of Whitcom Partners. Men like Henry Schacht and Joe Williams (both also Yale Corporation members), John Akers, Roger Hollander, Joe McNay, Bill Poorvu, Angus Wurtele, and John Wallace led (and, often built) successful businesses. And at this point in the narrative I am most in danger of losing my fellow classmates, either because I have (inadvertently, of course) left you off this *purely symbolic* list, or was about to commit the deadly sin of fingering the most successful.

Moving right along, some '56ers used the state level as a launching pad for their national reputations. Gordon Ambach was the Commissioner of Education for New York State before he ran the Chief State School Officers' Association in Washington. Reid Williamson led the largest state preservation program in the country from Indiana, while, at the same time, setting national historic preservation priorities. John Fitz Gibbon was instrumental in catapulting modern California artists to national prominence. And no one can know what national prominence Pete Tomei might have achieved after his work on the Illinois State Constitution.

But the two classmates who probably had the greatest influence on our national culture were the immensely talented author and editor of *Harper's*, Lew Lapham, and the reclusive writer of the award winning TV shows "Mary Tyler Moore" and "Cheers." This distinction goes to David Lloyd, who accurately read the pulse of millions of Americans as they pondered and laughed at life's vicissitudes.

Our communities...

1956. The Federal Highway Act (with its incentive of 90% federal funding) was signed, and while we didn't know it at the time, the new suburbs thus facilitated would radically transform our country's social, political, and economic life. Perhaps no single legislative act in the past 50 years had a greater impact on the type of communities in which we live and the kinds of people with whom we rub shoulders.

The plight of our urban centers — crime, poor schools, substandard housing — is, in some ways, a direct consequence of the separate legal jurisdictions maintained by the (now) easy-to-reach suburbs. Similarly, the loss of millions of acres of agricultural lands and large-scale ecosystem destruction is also, in many ways, a result of an endless highway network offering easy (but increasingly expensive) access to the new housing and commercial development stretched along its length.

As one would expect, classmates have been quite active at the local level. Architect and planner Herb McLaughlin has designed stunning modern residential and commercial structures across the country. He has been no less creative in his adaptation of historic buildings to modern uses in San Francisco, Dallas, Cleveland, and many other cities. Charlie Cook, after retiring from a successful banking career, became the chief financial officer for metropolitan Nashville. The voice of Chicago will always be TV anchorman Joel Daly. And the voice (and music) of New Orleans will always be Jazz Fest Chair, poet, and raconteur Nikki Barranger.

A special word, also, about the heroic contributions made by Charlie West in the ghetto schools of Bridgeport and by Peter Randolph in the low income psychiatric clinics of Boston. They are emblematic of those classmates who chose teaching, the ministry, government service, medicine, and many other altruistic fields as their way of life.

Finally, there is no way to recount the voluntary contributions each of you have made to local non-profit organizations, schools, charities, churches and syn-

agogues (even one mosque that I know of), Little Leagues, cultural institutions, historic houses, theaters, you name it. I am amazed at the generosity, the devotion, and the diversity of our classmates' local activities. And, I should add the same (if not more) can be said about the accomplishments and contributions of our wives and significant others.

Personal worlds...

1956. At graduation, it was probably easier to think about what we might encounter in the outside world than it was to analyze our inner selves. Introspection came hard for the Yalie of our era. We never talked to our fathers...about that kind of stuff. We didn't cry, and we certainly didn't hug.

Out of 1,000 hale and hearty young men, we didn't have a homosexual in the Class...that we knew of. Or who might have known himself, if he could have spoken to anyone about it. We had, maybe, five African Americans. A friend told me that in 1956 he could get virtually all the Blacks at Yale in one station wagon when they went to the annual NAACP dinner in New York. Asian-Americans, Hispanics, maybe another carload — probably not a station wagon, though. Hell, it was tough enough being a Jew (within the about 10% quota) without having to worry about how the other minorities were getting along.

And women! Well if they weren't sexual objects, what exactly were they? You mean we should drive all the way to Smith and Vassar and Wellesley for intelligent conversation? And did we ever smoke? And did we ever drink? And flick out? (I know Fitz Gibbon and Barkwill played the horses.) But few of us ever did other than converse with our dates, even if we may have talked about it interminably with our friends.

Fifty years later. We *have* come a long way. Wives are partners and best friends, as well as lovers. We still have sex because, as comic Wendy Liebman cracks about her parents, Ken and Toni, "They want more grandchildren." We are immensely proud of our own children: gay, straight, single, married. Most of us have a diverse set of friends. (Some of my best friends...well you know what I mean.) They are young and old, men and women, Black, white, and brown, in failing health and robust, from every conceivable background. Otherwise, life would be just plain boring!

And we have wrestled with our own demons. Some have struggled manfully to overcome substance abuse; some have failed. Some received a short hand when the genetic cards were dealt. All of us have had to shrink our ambitions and learn to live with life's imperfections, and (I think I can confidently say) none of us has conquered all the worlds we imagined were in our hands in 1956.

As we have (I guess you would call it) matured, we have also seen sickness, depression, and death: of parents, brothers and sisters, good friends, fellow workers, classmates (about 200), and most horrible of all, children and little grandchildren. Yet, from our tragedies, some also have found the strength to enrich the lives of others through living memorials ranging from simply planting a grove of trees, to funding a scholarship, to establishing a foundation for the prevention of the disease that carried away our love.

Yale worlds...

1956. And so we come full circle back to Yale. First of all, just how appropriate for these worlds was our education? Forgetting the silver ashtray for a moment, I think most of us would answer, "Damn good." We understood that Commencement 1956 would be only the beginning of a life-long educational process. We learned that we should be skeptical; that change was good or, at least, manageable (and that it was inevitable, anyway); and that maybe the greatest virtue of all was tolerance. And (most of us, anyway) learned to tell the difference between the sophistry of intelligent design and the science of evolutionary biology.

But time and change...

Time and change of course were affecting Yale as well. Under Whit Griswold, according to historian Geoffrey Kabaservice's recent book *The Guardians*, "Yale was an institution that educated men who would hold property and power in a society that deferred to upper-class standards and leadership." One example he cites: During the first five years of the 1950s, Yale accepted 275 graduates from Andover; seven from the Bronx High School of Science. Talk about change...

Today's 1,323 entering freshmen, the Class of '09 (chosen from 19,451 applicants) are 50% women, 9% African-American, 14% Asian-American, 9% Hispanic. Some 55% are from public schools. Admission is need-blind; 43% qualified for financial aid, averaging \$24,000 in grants. Alumni kids are about 10%. The students come from all 50 states and 42 foreign countries.

But to get where it is today, Yale (like the rest of us) had to weather some pretty rough times. Remember 1969? The Boston police were busting undergraduate heads with glee in Harvard Yard. Black students with rifles and bandoliers were pictured triumphantly leaving Cornell's administration building after bringing the university to its knees. On May 1, 1970 Yale was under siege as the Black Panthers, Weathermen, SDS, and thousands of radicals converged on New Haven ostensibly to show support for Bobby Seale, who had earlier announced (in Battell Chapel) that the Panthers "...would cross out the racist pig ruling class; that today's pig was tomorrow's bacon."

Yale survived, due to some pretty nifty footwork on the part of the Chief of Police and Kingman Brewster (and yes, he *did* make that statement). But the real heroes were the faculty and the undergraduates, who kept the residential colleges open and welcoming, and the (recently admitted) Black students who acted as effective mediators. I remember being so worried at the time that I wrote of my concern to my favorite teacher, historian Bill Dunham, then master of Jonathan Edwards. He was effusive in his praise for Brewster, the students, and the entire Yale community and much relieved that these worlds would survive.

What was so remarkable about Yale's resilience (and, hopefully, our own) was not so much the peaceful passing of the old order, but the democratic, non-violent acceptance of the new. Nations have fallen under comparable upheavals. But Yale has never been stronger than it is today.

In this generational transition, no one played a bigger role for a longer period than our Worth David, dean of admissions for 20 fast-paced years. I can't imagine how Worth (greatly helped by Bob Wheeler) could sort through 20,000 applica-

tions from the cream of the crop and somehow glean those qualities in less than 10% of them that would make them leaders on life's many stages and likely to return to celebrate their 50th reunions. Well done.

...can naught avail to break the friendships formed at Yale.

And that brings me, at last, to our remarkable Class: a band of brothers with a great capacity for having fun; for supporting one another; and with a well-placed affection for our *alma mater*. You all deserve a pat on the back (OK, a hug).

No other class has held *annual* Harvard/Princeton fall weekend dinners for 60-70 people *and* spirited regional (Aspen, New Orleans, New York) mini-reunions, *as well as* our regular New Haven quintennial reunions. (Many thanks to our energetic and gregarious reunion chair, Bud Prince and Marv Berenblum.) No other class came even close to supporting an initiative like our "I Have a Dream" program for 56 New Haven 4th graders; and backed it up by raising almost \$800,000 to see the kids through their college years (thanks to Bob Wheeler, Ed Barlow, and Tom Jamieson, with a major boost from Kim Chace). And no other class has had a 23-year relationship with a residential college (Davenport), highlighted by the awarding of three annual Class of '56 Fellowships to adventure-some juniors "in thanks for truths learned and friendships formed at Yale" (kudos to Ed Selig, John Rindlaub, and Gib Durfee (respectively, our Boston, New York and Washington committee heads).

But, you say, no class history can be complete without a glimpse into the future. Ah, I tell you, I have seen the future. It looks like Warren Jones, Yale '99, winner of a Class of '56 Fellowship for a summer of work with autistic kids in New Haven. He's now studying at Yale for a Ph.D. in neurology while he continues his research work in autism at the Yale Child Study Center. And, it looks like Peter Ehrenkranz, MD, MPH, Yale '96, winner of another '56 Fellowship, who spent his summer on a bicycle visiting doctors in rural Zimbabwe. Now finishing a public health fellowship at Michigan, he writes,

I have no doubt that I would be in a very different place if not for the Class of 1956. A trip that began with a search for a successful application led to a defining philosophy, a career, and a mission. It was the most important learning experience I had in four years at Yale. Thank you for giving me the incentive to discover my impossible dreams and the opportunity to make them come true.

Thank you, indeed. Nice work, guys. "Friendship lasts." See you in June.