

Service of Thanksgiving and Remembrance

Harvard/Radcliffe Class of 1981
35th Reunion

May 27, 2016

“COMMON BONDS”

Rev. Dr. Mark D. Hostetter '81

Good morning!

We come from so many faith traditions. In a class of 1,600 people strong, in our spiritual lives – whether our faith comes from Buddhism or from Christianity, Islam or Judaism, by whatever name, by whatever tradition – today we focus on our common bonds, our conviction that there is something more, something greater, than the bounds of this earthly life.

Even as we pray that the One from whom we find our strength will surround all those, all of us, who have been shaken by loss of 60 of our classmates, even as we pray we will be surrounded with a sense of an ever-present love, we are filled with thanks.

We give thanks for all that went into the creation of their unique personalities, and made the world richer for their presence. For all the goodness that enabled them to discover the joys of this earthly life, we give thanks. We give thanks that we knew them, and give thanks that we will always remember.

We each have our own stories of relaxed moments and joyous laughter. The common bonds, the common memories, that we share with each other and with those who have departed too soon, the common bonds will remain forever.

From those first envelopes postmarked 02138 that came to our homes in late 1976 and early 1977 that started our journeys here today. To that first September meeting in the Harvard Square Theater, the only space in Cambridge that could hold all 1,600 of us, where we were told that there were 5, or 10, or maybe it was 100 applicants for each seat we then sat in.

We had the original Facebook. What fun to see again those hair styles. The Freshman Mixer in Mem Hall that first week. The drinking age was 18. I'm not sure how, but I think there was beer and wine at that one.

Together we remember the events in the world news while we were at college. Roman Polanski fled to France, the Unification Church mass weddings, serial Killer Ted Bundy. The launch of “Dallas” and “Dukes of Hazzard”, the return of the Panama Canal, the Shah of Iran, Anita Bryant. Annie Hall, Grease, the Camp David Accords, Jonestown, Harvey Milk. Susan B Anthony dollars. And that was only '77-'78.

Our music: Rod Stewart, The Eagles, Chicago. Stevie Wonder, Rita Coolidge, Jimmy Buffet. Marvin Gaye, Boston, ABBA. And KC and the Sunshine Band. Undercover Angel, Dancing Queen, Car Wash. You're a Rich Girl, If You Leave Me Now, Margaritaville. And of course [gesturing with arms], Y M C A .

You know, last weekend I pulled out from my attic an old tattered box marked "Harvard." Literally hours later I emerged thinking about so many of our common bonds, our common memories, that few others can claim to share.

I found a "Tuition and Fees" pamphlet. Our tuition for the whole of our freshman year, the whole year, was \$4,450. Room and board was less than that. Health insurance was \$114. That's not per month, that's for the full year, summer included.

And numbers, ones I thought I would never ever forget. My Harvard ID: 900 4414 10. My Coop Card: 415037-1. I even found the CENTREX phone directory, listing all of us. For those college years, I was 617-498-7301. I brought that book along just in case anyone needs a phone number.

There was the maroon "Handbook for Harvard/Radcliffe Freshmen 1977-78," with everything the College thought we needed to know. And then the blue "Unofficial Guide to Life at Harvard" published by Harvard Student Agencies with everything we really did need to know. Remember the "Confidential Guide to Courses," that one by the Harvard Crimson, with inside info on concentrations and classes?

Remember the 750 students in Sanders Theater for Ec 10? The survey of Fine Arts 13 with Emily Vermule? "Darkness at Noon" we called it, as we watched all those slides. Pre-meds remember Chem 20 Organic Chemistry. And then life after Chem 20 Biochem 10.

And on the other extreme, the "guts." Eric Chaisson's Astro 8, where sections were optional, and an "A" guaranteed if you opted for a project on the telescope. And "Rocks for Jocks?"

Our technology: Correcting Selectrics, right? And Gnomon Copy, my personal temple, to clean up all that cutting and pasting, putting together senior theses.

We all bring back names long hidden in recesses: Admissions Director Jack Reardon, Freshman Deans Henry Moses and Burris Young, Archie Epps, Henry Rosovsky. What about those Freshman dorm proctors? And of course, Mem Church's beloved Peter Gomes.

There are the places, some remain and some long gone, but not gone for us. Grendel's Den, Elsie's, Tommy's Lunch, Harvard House of Pizza, Pinocchio's. Bay Bank and Coolidge Savings and Charlesbank Trust, now long merged into memory. Hong Kong Scorpion Bowls, Plough and Stars, the Wursthau with its 100 beers. Fathers Six over on Bow Street, Ferdinand's and Blue Parrot and Iruna. One Potato Two Potato. Mug 'n' Muffin!

The Quincy House bagpipers are still here – we heard them yesterday morning at the crack of dawn. But so many things remain only in our common memories, yet remain so much a part of us.

The Freshman Union, and its circular side room. North House up at the Quad. The IAB – remember everyone had to pass the swim test – that’s now the MAC. No more Harvard chairs in the dorm rooms, at least mine doesn’t have one. We could pick our houses, or try to, in the housing lottery. And not only are there no more Adams House clothing-optional swims, there’s no more Adams House pool.

We seldom ventured out of Harvard Square, but when we did in those peak years of disco, there was Boston Boston, swing dancing at the Parker House, the brand new Quincy Market. And getting home, even after a night’s revelry, was foolproof, since Harvard Square was the last stop on the T.

Remember the computer lab in Science Center 112b – a UNIX 11, with its DEC tape drives, and card and tape reader? The “HR Student Timesharing System: HRSTS.” A whopping 35 users at a time, 12 telephone-linked and 23 hard wired. Does anyone even know Fortran anymore?

Hasty Pudding shows while we were here: A Thousand Clones, Overtures in Asia Minor, A Little Knife Music, Serf’s Up. Pudding Men and Women of the Year: Beverly Sills & Richard Dreyfuss, Candice Bergen & Robert DeNiro, Meryl Streep & Alan Alda. And Mary Tyler Moore & John Travolta.

And of course, the great storm of Winter 1978, that first week in February our freshman year, the first time Harvard had closed since the American Revolution I think. We took to the streets as our personal playground, and didn’t give them back for a week. Didn’t they have to have the National Guard bring in supplies to keep us all fed? Cross country skis, jumping into the Lamont Library pit, clearing out the shelves at Store 24. Ah, to be 18-years old and have such excitement at snow days!

You know, I believe I’ll always think of my Harvard classmates as eternally 18 years old, whether we’re gray and grandchildren-ed, or gone before to another shore. Yes, the common bonds, the common memories that we share with each other and that we share with those who have departed too soon, the common bonds will remain forever.

We know that death leaves a hole, an absence, an emptiness. But that very gap, as long as it remains unfilled, preserves the bonds between us. The tears, when they come so intensely and so unexpectedly, remind us of just how important they were to us, and still are. And how much our love is still alive. Maybe God doesn’t fill the gap, but keeps it empty; and so helps us to keep alive our relationships with each other, even at the cost of pain. And so we embrace the tears, we welcome the tears. For tears reveal the deepest language of the heart: that which makes us most human, and that which makes us most like God.

We give thanks for perhaps the greatest lesson life shows us. Realizing that our lives are as brief as the hyphen, the dash, between the dates on a gravestone, the hyphen between the date of birth and the date of passing on to another life. Realizing that it’s not how long we live, but how fully we live that hyphen.

We need to live the hyphen fully, as our classmates so energetically did. Moving onward with our eyes and hearts, open to all the wonders of this world, appreciating the wonder of each day. We give thanks for the rich fullness of our classmates' lives.

And most of all, we give thanks for our faith. We give thanks that deep within the human heart is an unquenchable trust that life does not end with death. And that the One who has made us will not forsake us, but will accept us and care for us beyond the bounds of our vision.

In our faith, we find the strength we need to live today, and the courage to face tomorrow. The faith that conquers our fears and quiets our anxieties; the source where we find the everlasting truth, that which gives life and meaning to our experience.

And so, won't you join me, as I lift up prayers today to the One who is the source of all life. Let us pray:

Let the peace of your spirit bring to us the insight of a triumphant hope. Let it possess our hearts that we may cast all our care to you. May this faith abide in our hearts, and grow, that by night and by day, at all times and in all places, we may without fear commit those who are dear to us to your never failing love, for this life and the life to come.

Give us eyes to see and hearts to feel the undefeated courage, the acceptance, the fortitude, the incomparable love, the quiet dedication that you have revealed to us in these loving friends, brothers and sisters, who have now passed to their reward.

Fill our hearts with gratitude and an unshaken conviction that no distress, nor suffering, nor challenges, that neither death, nor life, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, can separate them from your love, or ours.

Let the light which we beheld in them never leave us, that they may continue to live through us. Their influence on each one of us is profound, and will be with each of us, forever. Bless us with an ever-abiding sense of their presence.

All this we pray through you, our source of strength, who gives us the certain knowledge of life everlasting. AMEN.