

8/17/85

BEFORE THE SECOND AND LAST EVENING OF THE 20TH REUNION OF THE HARDING HIGH SCHOOL CLASS OF 1965, WE THINK IT APPROPRIATE TO SPEND A FEW THOUGHTFUL MOMENTS REFLECTING UPON THE LIVES OF ITS MEMBERS, AS WELL AS HARDING ITSELF.

SHORTLY AFTER THE THUNDER OF THE GUNS OF WORLD WAR II HAD ENDED FOREVER, A GENERATION OF AMERICANS BEGAN A MORE NORMAL FAMILY LIFE. WE WERE THE CHILDREN OF THOSE FAMILIES, THE "POST-WAR BABY BOOM," THE "FUTURE" OF A COUNTRY AT PEACE.

A CALENDAR THIRTY-EIGHT YEARS IN LENGTH WOULD TRACE OUR TIME ON EARTH THROUGH THE KOREAN CONFLICT; THE AGE OF TELEVISION; ROCK AND ROLL; ELVIS PRESLEY; THE BEATLES; THE ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT KENNEDY; CIVIL RIGHTS AWARENESS; VIETNAM; A WALK ON THE MOON; THE RESIGNATION OF PRESIDENT NIXON: YOUNG AND PROMISING CARREERS; AND OUR OWN FAMILIES.

OUR CLASS WAS THE SUBJECT OF AN ILL-FATED TELEVISION SERIES OF THE SAME NAME, AND, MANY OF ITS MEMBERS PROBABLY FOUND THEMSELVES IN A MOST POPULAR MOVIE, "THE BIG CHILL." THE VAST MAJORITY OF US COMPLETED COLLEGE AND SEVERAL HAVE RECEIVED GRADUATE DEGREES. CLASS MEMBERS INCLUDE LAWYERS, DOCTORS, ARCHITECTS, ENGINEERS, BANKERS, ACCOUNTANTS, INVESTMENT BROKERS, REALTORS, EDUCATIORS SALESMEN, HOUSEWIVES, CALLIGRAPHERS, SOLDIERS, CHEMISTS, BUILDERS, ARTISTS, NURSES, POLICEMEN, RESTAURANTEURS, A GOLF PRO, AND, OF COURSE, OTHERS. AS FAR AS WE KNOW, ONLY CRAIG DAVIS, SCOTT MCCOLLUM, AND MIKE SCHUBERT ARE DECEASED AND VIETNAM CLAIMED NOT ONE OF US.

DURING THE LAST YEARS OF HARDING'S LIFE AS A HIGH SCHOOL, IT BECAME A PUBLIC PLACE OF LEARNING THAT, I DOUBT, COULD EXIST ANYWHERE TODAY. IT WAS PROBABLY AS CLOSE TO THE PATRON-CONTROLLED, STRICTLY-DISCIPLINED, PUBLIC EDUCATIONAL IDEAL AS ANY SCHOOL HAS EVER BEEN. IT WAS THE EPITOME OF WHAT HARD WORKING, "DEPRESSION-ORIENTED," FINANCIALLY RESPONSIBLE PARENTS DEMANDED FOR THEIR OFF-SPRING. HARDING

WASN'T STAFFED WITH JUST TEACHERS EITHER, BUT REAL EDUCATORS, MOST OF WHOM WERE DEDICATED PROFESSIONALS, AND, ALL OF WHOM WERE RAISED RESPECTING A SIMILAR ENVIRONMENT. THEY WERE STRONG-WILLED, REPETITIOUS AND EXACTING TUTORS OF LIFE AS THEY KNEW IT. THE MOST DEVASTATING OF TODAY'S TEMPTATIONS WERE, THANKFULLY NOT, DISTRACTIONS TO OUR YOUNG LIVES. HOWEVER, HAD THE EVILS OF TODAY BEEN DISTRACTIONS, I SUSPECT THAT THE MARJORIE MILLERS, THE MARY STEWARTS, AND OTHERS, WOULD HAVE PREVENTED MOST OF US FROM SUCCUMBING TO THEM. WE ATTENDED A HIGH SCHOOL CRAFTED OF THE FINEST CRYSTAL, PAINTED WHITE THROUGHOUT AND GUARDED BY SENTRIES ARMED WITH PARENTAL SUPPORT. HARDING DARED A "REAL" WORLD TO THROW ROCKS AT IT, TO TARNISH IT AND TO CHALLENGE THE PRACTICALITY OF ITS EXISTENCE. INDEED, HARDING MAY WELL HAVE BEEN, "ONE OF A KIND." DO YOU EVER WONDER IF WE ARE BETTER OR WORSE BECAUSE OF HARDING? IT UNDOUBTEDLY SLOWED THE PROCESS OF OUR GROWING INTO THE REALITIES OF LIFE AND MAYBE THAT'S JUST FINE. I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, BUT I LOOK AT OUR DAUGHTER, AND HOPE THAT SHE WILL GROW TALLER SLOWLY, EVER SO GRADUALLY CHANGE SHAPE, AND NEVER, NEVER KNOW ANY MORE ANGUISH THAN A BAD DREAM. MAYBE THE SANCTUARY THAT HARDING PROVIDED GAVE US JUST A LITTLE MORE TIME TO BE UNKNOWING, UNTROUBLED KIDS.

APPARENTLY MANY OF OUR CLASSMATES ARE NOT FOND OF THE MEMORIES OF THOSE YEARS OF GROWTH REPRESENTED BY HIGH SCHOOL. WE HOPE THAT MUCH OF THE GROWTH THAT WAS MOST PAINFUL IS FORGOTTEN. HOWEVER, ALMOST 2/3 OF THE CLASS IS NOT HERE BECAUSE MANY WOULD NOT SEPARATE THIS CELEBRATION OF YOUTH FROM THOSE DIFFICULT MEMORIES AND THEIR PERCEPTION OF HARDING IN THE MID-60'S. IN LIGHT OF THIS, WE ARE ESPECIALLY HAPPY THAT THOSE OF YOU IN ATTENDANCE HAVE DECIDED TO POSITIVELY ADDRESS SOME OF THE EMOTIONAL CONFLICTS THAT A REUNION CAN PRESENT. WE HAVE ELECTED TO REKINDLE OLD ACQUAINTANCES AND TO REMEMBER A BRIEF 48 MONTHS THAT OCCURRED OVER HALF A LIFETIME AGO. WE ARE ENJOYING A WEEKEND WITH THE ADULTS, WHO, AS CHILDREN, SHARED THOSE DAILY STRUGGLES WITH US. APPROACHING 40 YEARS OF AGE, PERHAPS WE SHOULD TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO REFLECT FOR A MOMENT, AND LAUGH AT A VERY SHORT PERIOD OF TIME RELATIVE TO THE LONG AND REWARDING LIVES THAT STILL LAY AHEAD OF EACH OF US.