HARVARD-RADCLIFFE CLASS OF 1966

Dear Classmates, June 2022

Herewith the June Newsletter.

Also, last month T.D. Allman gave me a piece to include which I couldn't get formatted in time. I've included it at the bottom of this newsletter.

Harriett Katz:

I'm shocked by these words on the cover of the current *Harvard Magazine*:

"The Post-Covid Commencement"

Case and death rates may be decreasing, but the pandemic is not over.

Elayne Archer:

A recent article in the *New York Times Sunday Magazine* on abortion describes hearings held in New York City in January 1970. I went to those hearings with members of a women's health group I was then working with to pressure New York State to repeal its strict abortion laws. I remember the hearings well. The most moving testimony – and there was much moving testimony – was from a young Catholic girl who was sent off to ahome for unwed mothers in Chicago run by Catholic isters. It was little more than a workhouse – she described scrubbing the floor up to the day she delivered. She stayed there for three months after giving birth and became attached to her baby boy. She was the only white mother in the home, and the nuns loved her blond, blue-eyed, red-cheeked baby boy. There was not a dry eye in the room as the young woman described leaving the home and waving goodby to her baby son as a sister held him up in the window.

For the last few years, I have worked with a small group of women called Older Women Remember and Speak Out. We have produced about 14 eblasts discussing issues relevant to abortion and encouraging people to speak out. The last issue, published just a week after the leaked Roe draft, suggests ways to help in these times. You can find it on our website (www.owrspeakout.org) under Archives. At an early meeting of the group a young woman simply did not know what we meant by "coat-hanger abortions." I was interviewed a week ago by a young woman from *The New York Times*. I had responded to a request on the *Times* website for women to phone in and describe their abortion stories.Mine was a good one: I had a safe, legal abortion in 1977 after Roe. She was astounded to hear my description of the situation before Roe—when birth control was often hard to get, when many of us waited anxiously for our period every month, and when crumpled pieces of paper went around the dorm with the name of a doctor in western Massachusetts who would perform an abortion (A senior gave me this piece of paper my first week in Cabot Hall). The young Times reporter said, "It must be amazing to have come full circle on this issue. And indeed it is.

William Neaves:

Photographing wildlife at Priscilla's ranch on the Salt Fork of the Brazos River in Northwest Texas continues to distract me from less pleasant matters.

Here's a Texas Spiny Lizard (*Sceloporus olivaceous*) on June 12, 2022.

In Memoriam:

AB '65	Stanley Yastrzemski	3/30/22	Montoursville, PA
AB '65	Virginia Sara Jordan	3/28/22	Belmont, MA
AB '67	Elizabeth Converse Hunter	2/27/22	
AB '67	Anthony Marks	6/24/21	Aukland, New Zealand

That's it for this month. Have a relaxing summer,

Tom Black
co-class secretary

T.D. Allman:

The first time you got drunk

At Harvard College in October 1962 -- month of the Cuban missile crisis -- getting drunk for the first time was like unsnapping the bra of your first Cliffie.It was a rite of passage for every freshman.

I very clearly remember the first time I got vomit drunk.

It was at Weld Hall in the Yard, directly across from Matthews Hall where I lived. I used to party there with a group of guys who seemed somewhat "cooler" than I was; I wanted to be accepted by them very much, but that was true of everyone and every group when I was a freshman. To the extent I felt miserable and inadequate in comparison to them, that too was true of everyone else and every situation.

I was a typical teenager, in short, and my adolescent misery was only made more miserable by the deepened sense of inadequacy being a kid bright enough to get into Harvard (in part by cheating on my SATs) gave me.

Certainly I didn't get drunk because I felt inadequate.

I got drunk that night to show how cool I was.

It started out as a beer blast and wound up an all-night bridge party where we drank bourbon. My championship drinking that night not only impressed those I wanted to impress; it impressed me. As I recall, when the moment of truth finally came, I projectile-vomited out a window.

I can still remember the taste of vomit in my mouth.

It was the taste of success.

"Three episodes of when you were ashamed of something you said, did or failed to show for."

There are no such episodes.

That first drunk I just described was in October 1962; I got drunk for the last time in November 1998.

During the intervening thirty-six years there was not one episode when I was ashamed of something I said or did, while drunk.

Actually, there was one, though embarrassment is the better word. It happened in Dark Harbor, Maine, during the summer of 1963.

I attended a big party given by some very wealthy society people from Philadelphia. They were so wealthy they owned the Lockheed aircraft corporation. My host and hostesses were several years later murdered by a gunman who burst into their Main Line mansion.

That night I got so drunk I crawled under the shrubbery lining the front verandah, dug myself a hole in the earth and, bunching my dinner jacket up into a pillow, announced I would sleep there, instead of going home.

It gets very cold at night in Maine, even in August. Mrs Gross ordered her chauffeur to drag me into her car and take me home, which he did.

The next morning, mortified at the memory of my behavior, I telephoned Mrs Gross. Following a maid's muffled whisper, one of the grandest dames of East Coast society came to the phone.

I started to pour out my apology, but Mrs Gross cut me short.

"Mr. Allman," she said to this 17-year-old. "Never apologise. Never explain."

That first drunk at Weld Hall had taught me Harvard's essential lesson.

What matters is not what you do. What matters is how well you do it -- and I had projectile-vomited so well there was not a drop on the window sill!

Now a women who was dressed by Dior and photographed by *Vogue* and whose soon to be blood-splattered estate outside Philly had an indoor tennis court taught me another lesson.

At the very highest levels -- at those exalted social as well as intellectual levels it was my destiny to inhabit, and adorn -- one never apologised. One never explained.

To the contrary, one responded to boorishness in others by ignoring it or at most brushing it away, by instructing the chauffeur to cart the drunk home. And the next day when the drunk rose, with the help of a restorative "eye opener," it was as though nothing had happened. A little later, when the drunk showed up for bridge, tennis or backgammon and, of course, afternoon cocktails, no one would mention -- oreven think of mentioning -- the previous evening's lapses. That would have been vulgar or, as my friends in England later described it, "middle class."

Such an approach may sound irresponsible or snobbish. But it was not exclusively permissive; it had its stoic side. Harvard emphasized the very real difference between throwing up on the Oriental carpet and throwing up on the grass; the prohibition against apologising and explaining suggested certain ethical if not moral distinctions as well.

After all, one could not make up for bad behavior by apologising for it, could one? And what explanation could there be for boorish behavior?

Several memories linger of that summer in Maine, the summer I progressed from being an experimental drinker to being a social drinker. I met Adlai Stevenson at a beach side cook-out, and on a flickering black and white TV watched Kennedy, who would be killed the following November, argue for the limited nuclear test ban treaty.

There was an eclipse of the sun which Stephen King later used as an incident in one of his novels. One night a crowd of us "borrowed" someone's boat and sailed over to Camden, on the mainland, to go to the movies. We wound up seeing "The Days of Wine and Roses," with Jack Lemon and Lee Remick. We all hooted at the idea that anything like could ever happen to people in real life -- at least anybody we would know, at least to us. On the sail back we were all so drunk that someone dropped our only flashlight in the water -- it stayed alight as it sank deeper and deeper, disappearing like a dimming star.

Within a year of arriving at Harvard I had become a regular drinker, and a periodic drunk, for the same reason I had started smoking cigarettes and begun coughing up quantities of yellow scum-like phelgm in the mornings.

With a young man's arrival at an Ivy League college, drinking and smoking not only ceased to be forbidden, or at least strongly discouraged. They became customary and normal, almost obligatory -- two of the main four activities that defined a young man's life.

The remaining two of these four activities were sex and finding some congenial avocation -- in my case, it turned out to be writing -- which would assure the rising young man esteem and money in future life, though mere "success" was not the goal.

Alcohol! Cigarette smoke! Sex! Burning the midnight oil over all those term papers and soulful short stories!

If only the sex had come as easily as the boozing, smoking and writing, mine truly would have been a golden youth. In those permissive times, Harvard taught very little. What it did teach, one was not obliged to learn. I ultimately was graduated cum laude in part because of the many B-plusses, and several A-minuses I received in courses I "took" without ever attending a class, or opening a book on the reading list.

"Novel hypothesis but your analysis of the source material is cursory," would run a typical comment by the graders after I'd winged it on the mid-term exams. I particularly recall furiously writing in my blue examination book a passionately argued essay on Utilitarianism, a subject of which I knew, and cared to know, nothing.

Harvard's near-total indifference to teaching me anything provided my most valuable learning experience. Within two semesters, Harvard's policy of educational neglect -- a natural continuation of my childhood of parental neglect -- had helped me master on my own the four activities that would occupy most of my waking hours for most of the ensuing four decades.

In Matthews Hall, and later at Lowell House and Claverly Hall, I would spend my nights and well as most of my days engaged in the activities that later would occupy most of my time in places as farflung as Laos, El Salvador and Tiananmen Square.

Drinking, smoking, writing and sex by my eighteenth birthday already were the pillars of my life. They would be my life. Almost from the beginning -- even before I became a war correspondent -- I recognized there was a link between pleasure and death when it came to sex and writing. But the realization that drinking and smoking could kill me -- that they were killing me -- only came much later, in the case of alcohol around one AM on November 22, 1998, while riding a taxi south on Broadway between Times Square and Union Square in New York City.

"write about your last drunk."

I have had several moments of absolute clarity in my life.

One of them occurred in Cambodia in 1970 while I was rescuing some massacre victims. The bleeding people filled my car. There was blood all over me and the steering wheel was slippery with blood.

I switched on the car radio. It was Michael Jackson singing "A,B,C."

"It's as easy as it can be." And it was. People talk as though saving people is some difficult moral decision. Nothing could be further from the truth because the choice is so starkly obvious. Either you save them or let them die.

That's it. Not a shadow of ambiguity; no gray areas. You do or you don't.

Now I found myself in an equally clear-cut situation, also while riding in a car, though I was the passenger this time, in a New York taxi. There was another resonance. For some reason, this happened to be the anniversary of the Kennedy assassination and so, in a skewed way, things had come full circle from those Harvard days when my drinking had begun.

I remember that moment of clarity so perfectly, down to the bounce of the taxi on the pot holes as it jolted south on Broadway.

I had hailed the taxi after having been drunk and boorish for quite a number of hours at a party on West 54 Stret. The party had been given by a very nice Cuban man named Angel. I had met Angel online, and we had discussed Cuban history and Latin American literature. He lived with a writer from Virginia named Wesley. While Angel and I had met several times, I had never met Wesley, though Angel had spoken glowingly of me to him.

In essence Angel, who at that time was working cleaning offices, and Wesley, whose novels earned very few royalties, had decided to give a party in my honor.

They invited a number of their friends, including artists and writers. The party was a significant expense for them. More important, they had spent much time preparing the food and choosing the wine and other drinks, also telling their friends about this interesting writer whom Angel had come to know.

I was very pleased -- tremendously pleased at their kindness, and the chance to meet new people, perhaps even form a new circle of friends. This was especially so since I now spent much of the year outside New York, in France, and in New York I was deadly tired of the normal social rat race of preening semi-celebrities and back-biting writers who populated most of the social events I attended.

The party was for Saturday evening, and I began celebrating in early afternoon, by drinking a magnum of white wine. I drank most if not all of another magnum before leaving for the party. That is, I had consumed some four bottles of wine even before I got there.

Angel's apartment occupied a rather eccentric space in an old building. For example the living room window looked directly across the street at an exercise gym, though from a slightly lower level. So when you looked out the window you saw all these frantically exercising legs, crotches and thighs, but not the faces that went with them.

The crowd at the party had a similarly off-center, somewhat eccentric appeal. At least forty people had crowded into Angel's apartment. I believe many of them were interesting though I never really got to know.

I never got to know because almost immediately upon arriving I became fixated on two people, in fact enraged at them. The first was a young woman from Ohio who had just returned from spending several years living in Berlin.

"Oh, I was there when the Wall came down. I interviewed Kohl," I said, expecting this to be the launching pad for a friendly conversation.

Her exact response was: "You're lying. You never were in Berlin. You never met Kohl."

I could not believe it.

Next I was introduced to a Cuban who described himself to me as a writer. Although he had been born in Cuba, he had lived in New York most of his life, and in truth he probably had not been published much, if at all. Not that it mattered. Finding he was Cuban and a writer, I told him I had written a book on Miami.

"Miami is a loathesome place," he said in very arch matter. "Why would I bother to read your book?"

Then he said: "Of course I read Joan Didion's book on Miami."

"My book is better," I said.

He looked at me pityingly. "I didn't read Didion to learn about Miami," he said.

"I read Didion because she has such an intresting sensibility."

I could not believe it.

How would I react to these two encounters today, while sober?

I think I still would be deeply offended. But more than hurt and outrage, I think now I would react with disdain and amusement.

Here was a limited little woman from Ohio, on a stop-over in the great city of New York, who had come from Berlin. She imagined hereself sophisticated. Yet when she actually met someone who was the eye-witness to great events and who sat down with the chancellor of Germany, her reaction was that he must be a lying braggart.

And here was an affected Cuban, a preening "writer" who imagined being a writer meant you turning your back on your roots and life experience -- becoming a kind of aesthetic female impersonator, in this case of Didion's wan, precious, exhausted little insights.

Yes, today I would probably laugh -- both at them, and more important, laugh at me, at the fact that I once really cared whether total strangers like them were impressed by me. Then, moving on and forgetting them, I would have sought, among the remaining thrity-eight people at this party, some people who were less offensive, more congenial -- or at least polite not to gratuitously insult me, as those two had.

I did not do that. Instead I wandered the room, findly myself increasing angry, isolated, lonely and rage-filled. I did notice even then that by this time, none of my attempts to strike up conversations lasted very long. Periodically I would find myself encountering the Cuban or the girl from Ohio again. I would try to restart the conversation -- try to make them understand that I had been in Berlin, that my book on Miami was worth reading, that I was a worthwhile person entitled to their respect.

I noticed that Angel had not spoken to me for a long time, in fact that he was ignoring me, and not introducing me to any other people.

Did my drukennes justify the behavior of the two people who hurt me? Even now, with the clarity of sobriety and the elapse of nearly a year and a half, when I look back on the night, I remember how truly vicious those two people were.

But is there any reason they should have seized upon the occasion to treat me so contemptuously?

Quite recently I had dinner with a Southern lady of a certain age and she described the first time she had met me. It was about a year and a half before I stopped drinking -- that is, pretty near the bottom.

"I had heard what a truly fine person you were," she said. "Friends had told me about your accomplishments, your writing, your fascinating life and what a kind and good person you were."

Here she took my hand.

"Well all I can say, darlin', is that you were quite a sight that night. You were not the man who had been described to me."

I'm sure I was quite a sight that night at Angel's. It's important not to over-dramatize. I didn't shout. I didn't hit anyone. I did not throw up. But how were people to react to this fat, florid, drunk who grew irate when people did not listen with awe and appreciation to his tales of what a great guy he was?

Most people in such situations will do what most people did that night: ignore the spectacle, distance themselves from it, go on as though nothing had happened -- pretend I didn't exist.

But as every alcoholic knows (and indeed everyone should know), in every room of forty people there are always at least two who will take advantage of your drunkenness (or some other frailty) to hurt you because there are always people who will hurt you for no reason if you are willing to be hurt for no reason.

I left before the party ended, although by then the crowd had been thinning out for some time. At the crowd diminished, it became clear how truly alone I was.

There were still at least eighteen or twenty people there, but some invisible barrier seemed to separate me from everybody else.

I walked without staggering, alone, over to Broadway just as forty-two hours later would walk without staggering, alone, into my first AA meeting.

I hailed the cab, got in without trouble, and coherently gave the driver instructions.

Then I leaned back in the seat, and the moment of absolute clarity occurred.

"This time there are no extenuating circumstances," I found myself saying.

"No extenuating circumstances."

"NO EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES."

In the past I'd made scenes at parties, made spectacles of myself in public, many of them.

But always there had been extenuating circumstances. To mention a very extreme example, one time at the U.N. I accosted Khieu Samphan, one of the three main leaders of the Khmer Rouge, at a diplometic reception.

He was a mass murderer, responsibile for the deaths of at least a million people, and here were diplomats from civilized countries and diplomatic ladies in flower print dresses chatting away with a Khmer Rouge killer, exchanging smiles with him, and shaking his hand.

"Don't you realize you'd be tortured to death for attending such a party in Cambodia," I said to one startled woman as I elbowed her out of the way.

The Khmer Rouge killer extended his hand to me. I did not take it. I glared at it.

"They say you didn't save your own mother from the death camps," I said to Khieu Samphan. "You didn't save your own mother."

I gave him a little smile, almost a wink. "Or was it that you couldn't save your own mother?"

Had something of what I'd said penetrated into the brain behind those blank, shiny eyes?

"Vietnamese imperialist propaganda," he replied. "There have been no killings."

The wonder of alcohol's effect on the brain is that eventually trivial people who are rude to you at parties on West 54 STreet gain the same capacity to enrage you as Khmer Rouge mass murderers.

Earlier, I said that before this night of absolute clarity there were no episodes when I was ashamed of something I said or did. But that was only because of blind pride.

The truth was that, by now, there were scarcely a dinner party or cocktail where I did not wind up behaving -- toward someone or other -- the way I'd behaved toward Khieu Samphan that time.

Over the years I'd insulted ambassadors, CIA station chiefs, cabinet ministers, editors in chief, millionaries, maitres d'hotel, waiters (though never bus boys; I was still the ally of the exploited, after all! I was only attacking these overbearing cads because they deserved it. I only attacked those who had it coming!)

But who had deserved it that night at Angel's? Who had had it coming at that party he had organized with such kind and unselfish good will?

Certainly not Angel.

He certainly had not merited me showing up boorish and drunk. I had soured his party; he had welcomed me into his life as a friend and I had abused his trust and hospitality. The true measure of how very little I esteemed him was that not once, in the course of the entire evening, had I even thought about his feelings. It never once had occurred to me that I might have some obligation to make the evening go well for him.

By then alcohol was beginning to harm by body. The blood tests showed that. Even in France, where everybody drank so much, I was beginning to get a reputation for being an angry drunk. And in New York -- I pondered this in the taxi -- how had it come to be that my only real friends, at least friends I saw on a regular basis, were the delivery boys from the liquor store?

The blinding clarity of the moment concerned the kind of person I had become.

Until then I had always seen myself as hero – sometimes flawed, sometimes with feet of clay, but still the heroic protagonist who saved people. I did not hurt them, whatever harm I did to myself.

And now I had hurt two very nice people, who had very little money and no power, and yet who had offered selflessly and joyously the kind gift of their friendship.

The gratuitousness of the hurt I had inflicted appalled me. But even more contemptible, I clearly saw, was the triviliy of my oafishness.

I bragged about meeting world figures, but I couldn't even behave myself at a little party given by a nice guy who cleaned offices for a liivng. I boasted about confronting the great moral issues of our times, but I couldn't even behave like a decent person when a couple of strangers offended me.

Whatever contempt the Ohio woman the Cuba writer felt for me was nothing, now, in comparison to the contempt I felt for myself.

I could see now.

I could see with absolute clarity not only that I was an alcoholic, but I had become powerless in the face of it, and that it was not just destroying my life.

It was destroying the qualities in me that made me a worthwhile human being.

It was time to apologize; it was time to explain.

I phoned Angel the next morning. Weley answered. Angel didn't want to speak to me, and when he finally did come to the phone, he was cold.

"I apologize," I told him. "I'm an alcoholic," I explained. "I think I need to go to AA."

"I think you do too," he said, clearly not believing I would ever do that, let alone stop drinking.

But all that Sunday, and the following Monday I drank nothing.

And then, Monday evening, November 23, 1998, at 6:45 pm, I attended my first AA meeting at Grace Episcopal Church in Brooklyn Heights, New York, and a wonderful new adventure in my life began.

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EPILOGUE

A few weeks later I was having dinner with a group of new friends at a local restaurant.

One of them was named Colin.

"I hear you were Berlin when the Wall came down," he said, "and interviewed Kohl. That sounds very interesting. Can you tell me about it?"