

Proud Graduates

Remember? Draped in black robes, we had recently taken our seats after days of drills, our happy families seated behind us, to witness our smart diplomas. People talked and prayed but we didn't hear very much.

We began dving the summer after graduation. All of us looking forward -- but a car wreck claimed the first. Many left town, army or college bound, left friends, left family, left that funny grown-up innocence that

marked our long ago high school years. The PA had brought us Shepherd and Glenn in space. Our teachers were still fresh memories, respected professionals or mocked eccentrics, some distant, some close friends.

Life brought war -- our classmates died in Nam. Our war became the pivot point of the 60s -- the Eisenhower-past shrinking in the rear view mirror and the assassinations and riots, bombings,

marches for peace, the funerals and a presidential resignation, marking our passing years. We entered the workforce, stumbling across the threshold of our first real job, and perhaps our first serious

relationship too. Marriage, or not, and families, or not, some divorces, some kids and sometimes splendid grandkids. Jovous years for the most part, but exhausting too. We spent years washing dishes, children, dogs, years

spattered with the vomit and poop that marks the passing of childhood. Then: suddenly, we watched these same kids graduating, leaving home and our homes quieted, did they not, except for family weekends and reunions, except for weddings,

funerals? Our country was turning itself away from the past, away from tradition-and traditional values, turning away from community. We had thought that we were so smart: we had urged everyone we met to "Do your own thing."

Today we are a little shell shocked by life, on the cusp of seventy years. We have watched our parents buried and our friends struggle with disease. We watch, silent, our young progeny march through the old, same patterns.

Today we are fewer than we were, and our hair is whiter our backs are bent now, and we sometimes walk with a cane or on the arm of a friend or a son or daughter. We are a little less confident, perhaps, but we still hold our heads up, don't we?

George Friend