The following essay is intended to provide a general background for four years of undergraduate life from 1950 to 1954, particularly for written memories contributed by classmates, and to a lesser extent for materials relating to our Class Gift campaign of 1985 to 1990.

The writer hopes it may be considered a fair view, even though not comprehensive. The whole story can best be told by collecting a broad range of individual reminiscences. Expansion of such material through an oral history for the University Archives is a goal for the future.

Lesley-Marie C. Walsh
Time Capsule Chair
Class Secretary

October 15, 1990

We were Depression babies whose early childhood spanned the economic, social and political upheavals of the 1930s, followed by the tidal wave of world war in the 1940s. As we entered our teens, victory in war was shadowed by the new atomic age and the "Cold War." As we graduated from high school in 1950, war began again, in Korea.

But we entered the University in September 1950 with high-spirited optimism. Viewed from the unsettled years of childhood, the University was a great rock, strong in intellectual excellence and in benevolence toward its students. It was our beacon to the future. We came to learn, and to play as well, as we grew into adulthood. We were prepared to honor its traditions and to love its beautiful campus.

Observers were to label us the "silent generation," declaring that we appeared to be primarily interested in following conventional paths to self-centered goals, uninvolved with critical issues of the "real" world, as we surged lemming-like toward life in suburban ranch-style homes, with two cars and three kids, transforming ourselves into "happy housewives" and "good providers" with stable marriages, secure jobs, and money in the bank for golden retirement. We found it a little strange to be criticized for wanting the security that had been in such short supply during the first twenty years of our lives.

It might have been more accurate to call us the last generation of old-fashioned "true believers." Idealists like all student generations, differences in emphasis and style set us off particularly from those who came after us.

Like the World War II veterans who made up a third of the student body in 1950, we had learned patriotism during a "just" war. We believed strongly in traditional American government, in the power of democracy, and in the future of the young United Nations created five years earlier in San Francisco.

We had faith in "understanding through education," "peaceful progress," "good works," and "community service." We respected our elders (or tried to), knew what "nice girls" did (or didn't) do, believed in "Mr. or Miss Right." We were sure the world could be remolded if only we could learn the right things to do. We were humble: we didn't think we knew the answers before we'd heard all the questions.

California in 1950 was primarily rural, then as now the leading agricultural State in the nation. San Francisco was its cultural and financial heart. Los Angeles was an amorphous cluster of communities just beginning to be linked by freeways. In sleepy Sacramento, a part-time State legislature adjourned before the heat of valley summers.

Of the 4,505 new students entering the University of California at Berkeley that September, most came from small farming communities or service towns centered around food processing and transport in the great central valleys, or from lumbering and mining towns in the foothills and mountains. Some descended from old, prosperous California families who took University degrees for granted, but many were first in their families ever to set foot in a great University.

The mix included "dustbowl" kids--"Okies"--whose parents made the hazardous trek from the Midwest to California, often to field labor camps, back in the '30s. Children of European and Asian war refugees of the '40s looked to the University to give them full entrée into American life. Foreign students came to learn Western ideas and technology for the benefit of their homelands. And "middle class" kids felt pressure from older relatives to get the education that they had sacrificed to hard times and war.

An increasing number of students were "co-eds," young women who were likely to have heard all their lives that "It's a shame to spend good money putting a girl through college, because she'll only get married and waste her education." Many of them struggled to keep going on a pittance from home plus a 50- or 75-cent an hour part-time job, determined to graduate.

Fortunately for veterans subsisting on the GI bill, and for others barely able to scrape together enough money to come to Cal instead of attending local junior colleges or state colleges, the University provided not only high quality but also low cost education, in the great tradition of State-supported land grant institutions. There was no tuition; student fees were minimal. Costs for University-sponsored room and board varied from higher-priced fraternities and sororities, to moderate dorms and living groups, to low-cost cooperatives.

Married students, a new phenomenon, lived in "villages" in west Berkeley and Albany. Overcrowded and far from luxurious, these "temporary" war-time units originally housed defense workers; vets and their wives put up with their inconveniences to live cheaply near campus. Wives eked out the monthly government check with jobs, and cooperative nurseries provided care for many babies.

"Off campus," apartments and rooming houses in Berkeley and nearby towns varied widely in price and amenities. Students from homes near the Key System electric trains and San Francisco Bay ferries could commute. As our class arrived, electric streetcars from Oakland were being replaced by diesel buses. Not many students could afford cars, but bicycles abounded. Those who had neither developed the "Berkeley lope" from racing up and down hills from house to class and back, loaded down with books.

Registration was everyone's first chore. For freshmen, the bloom began to fade from the rose at the sight of "reg" lines, our first experience with bureaucratic confusion. Overwhelmed by rapid post-war growth in numbers, the University had barely begun to automate. September 1950 students received the first computer-printed registration cards, but virtually all other procedures were done by hand, generally by hastily recruited student workers. Right through our 1954 graduation, official student record cards were handprinted. As a result, degrees presumably granted in June were not actually certified for three months; we got our diplomas in September, by mail. In 1955, computer record cards appeared, although delays caused by primitive technology made the process virtually as slow as before.

After registration we lined up for classes. Many newcomers were bewildered by choosing courses and "sections," even though we received counselling. Sometimes we had to make hurried, "on the spot" decisions when classes filled up as the person just ahead in line walked through the door. The Loyalty Oath crisis added to the problem in 1950. Following termination of 40 tenured faculty who refused to sign the oath imposed by the Board of Regents, 46 classes were cancelled. A number of untenured faculty had also left.

Naturally everyone wanted lecture courses from the most famous, popular professors, and hoped for sections with the cream of graduate Teaching Assistants (TAs). The unlucky student might end up with 15 weeks of boredom, or classes at strange hours, or with TAs who were so involved in their thesis topics that they never got around to discussing the rest of the course material. Generally, though, we managed to balance good and bad, and learned quickly how to fight our way through the catalog in time for the second semester.

The first major disillusionment was likely to be the discovery that not every faculty member was a great teacher. Word of mouth from housemates and fellow sufferers in line quickly informed us who were considered "great," who were merely adequate (from student perspectives), and who taught lower division students only under departmental duress, while longing for more time for research.

There were indeed great "stars" to whom we gravitated: In English (a universal experience, as we were all required to take at least English 1A), the most popular were Sears Jayne, George Stewart, Benjamin Lehman, Mark Schorer, Josephine Miles, and James Hart. We revered Ira Cross in Economics, Peter Odegaard in Political Science; Kenneth Stampp and Henry May in American History; Joel Hildebrand in Chemistry; Harvey White in physics; Otto Struve in Astronomy, to name only a handful who taught superb lower division courses.

Classroom experiences were enlived by the vets, tough, bright, determined. They challenged younger students in every way, and increased competition for grades. They did not hesitate to open class discussion with professors, given the slightest opportunity. Younger students generally viewed faculty with awe, and found class discussion somewhat alarming. Some faculty responded well to challengers, but many did not. In classes where grades were perceived to depend in part on how and when you opened your mouth, many younger students erred on the side of caution. Some professors actively sought more exchanges with undergraduates and were understandably disappointed with students who were mum in class, avoided office hours like the plague (a summons to a conference being considered a death-knell), and who came to faculty coffee hours only reluctantly. Some outgrew that initial diffidence before they graduated, but others passed through four years without a single personal exchange with a faculty member.

The University's size did indeed foster impartiality, especially in lower division. To critics, class size appeared to be the culprit, but during the '50s the ratio of faculty to students was quite favorable. Giant lectures were not the real difficulty. The pressures of time, necessarily short office hours, and the rather poorly developed skills of some TAs contributed to the problem, which has never been solved, although many attempts at improvements have been made over the years.

We faced exams and papers with the same combination of dismay and bravado as any other generation. Blue books for written tests were five cents. Pens were required, because less alterable than pencil. The new ball-point pens were available but considered risky; they had a way of running dry in the middle of crucial paragraphs. Ordinary fountain pens also failed, but free ink was available in a special inkstand outside Stephens Union. Some superstitious souls made a ritual of filling their pens there on the way to execution. The cautious carried a spare pen, their own ink, and pencils for dire emergencies.

We took exams on the honor system, with a minimum of proctoring in only a few classes. It was a matter of pride for professors to leave the room and to return only to give the "time" warning.

We turned in postcards with exam papers in order to receive unofficial reports of grades, which saved waiting for the University to post all the record cards, but which tended to spoil semester breaks if the news was bad. Grades could be appealed before they were recorded by the Registrar's Office. There were chances to do make-up work, or re-take an exam. Seniors who fell ill during their last finals were excused and took whatever grade they had earned to that point. Otherwise, fast footwork was needed to garner an "incomplete" that could be erased later. Each professor developed his own grading system. Most were reasonably frank in describing their methods at the first class, when there was still time to bolt elsewhere if the procedure sounded too grim. No one liked grades, but no one knew of a better system, so discussion was moot.

Finals required special rituals. The Campanile bells ushered in "silent week" before finals by playing "The Hanging of Danny Deaver" at noon on the last day of class. Only the hour chimes were heard until the ordeal was over. At night, eerie cries for "Pedro" echoed from living group to living group on both sides of campus. The "Pedro" legend existed in several versions; which was correct did not concern us. We either believed calling "Pedro" helped, or we didn't, but the tradition did add to the atmosphere peculiar to finals week. Housemothers were affected also, tending to disappear tactfully into their rooms after meals, and to refrain from adding to the tension with untimely admonitions to get more sleep. Relationships among roommates and romantic interests flourished or floundered under the strain. The last final was frequently celebrated by some form of overindulgence--usually in food, drink, or sleep.

Life inside Sather Gate was full of surprises and challenges, not all academic. After World War II and the advent of the "Cold War," the United States was gripped by national malaise as powerful men within and without government pursued the "Red menace." The military threat was real, as Korea demonstrated. From Congress to local school boards, the crusade against internal communists raged. Brave individuals who fought its wilder manifestations did so at great personal cost to reputations and livelihood. At the University, the issue was whether to sign the Regents' oath after having signed the required State oath. All students felt the tension as the faculty fought among themselves, with the University, and with State government. (In that period, the State Legislature provided the major portion of the University's financial support, a great weapon in their hands.) Student opinion polarized on both sides, although public pronouncements were decorous indeed by later standards. Public restraint did not mean that the issue was not hotly debated among us, however.

Other kinds of struggles took shape at the same time. Designed chiefly to serve the needs and interests of undergraduates, the Associated Students of the University of California (ASUC) operated under the University's critical, paternal eye. The student body was getting bigger, older, and less inclined to be deferential about matters perceived to be essential to improving student life. No one could fail to see that housing was inadequate in quantity and quality, and often subject to rent gouging. Student jobs were getting scarcer. Always poorly paid, students often suffered from unfair terms and squalid working conditions. "Fair Bear" housing and job standards concerned us greatly.

Funding student activities from reg fees and athletic ticket sales (primarily football) raised a number of critical issues. Who would have the greatest voice in deciding how the budget would be divided? Who would make and enforce regulations for sponsored groups and services? In particular, what kinds and levels of services were necessary or desirable? Should money go to a new student union, or to expanded health care, or both? Graduate students demanded more voice in campus affairs, and raised the cry of "taxation without representation" as they paid their reg fees. TAs argued about whether to unionize to achieve higher pay and better working conditions. Students' First Amendment rights, particularly in relation to political activity on and off campus, already concerned many, even though the "Free Speech" issue of the early '50s was tame in comparison to later years.

The student body as a whole appeared apathetic, however; turnout at ASUC elections was low. Only an active minority led skirmishes with the University that, as it turned out, drew the battle lines for the later 1950s and 1960s, when conflict would escalate in ways undreamed of in 1950-54.

Into this volatile mixture came Berkeley's first Chancellor, Clark Kerr. Renowned as a quiet, forceful labor negotiator, he was liked and respected by his various constituencies. Demonstrating a sincere interest in student issues, his willingness to listen, learn, and act encouraged many. The struggle to anticipate the demands and needs of the second half of the century would expand during Kerr's tenure as Chancellor and President, as the "mega-University" and the concerns of the larger community in which it thrived came into open conflict. Everyone agreed that times were changing. Was the University to lead the way, or was it destined to follow where political winds blew?

The physical campus felt the stress of growth too. The "T" buildings, temporary wooden barracks erected around campus to absorb the overflow of wartime training, still housed a variety of classes and activities that could find no space elsewhere. They endured to the early 1990s, when the last of them fell to new construction.

Wheeler Hall was the focus of classes, as it had been since the time of President Benjamin Ide Wheeler, but the old oak died, and Wheeler could no longer accomodate enough classes and seminars. Its great auditorium served as an inadequate theatre as well as a lecture hall. Sets had to be struck after every performance so class could resume the next day.

The Old Boalt Hall near the Library gave way to the new law building at Bancroft and College. California Hall, the Life Sciences Building (LSB), Hearst Mining building and other campus landmarks were bursting at the seams. While South Hall, one of the first campus buildings of the 1860s, was preserved, Bacon Hall, site of the first library, came down as the burgeoning demand for science classrooms overwhelmed sentiment. Concern arose over the projected loss of campus open space, and the University eyed the surrounding Berkeley community for sites for new facilities and student housing. The tug of war between "town and gown" over University expansion became an increasing source of controversy in decades to come.

Dwinelle hall, which quickly became the subject of student nightmares and legends, opened before we graduated. Deciphering its labyrinth to find the proper floor, level, and wing became a major topic of coffee-house conversation. It was seen as a portent, vast, soulless, and visually unappealing. Fortunately for us, the greatest crimes against John Galen Howard's master plan for the campus would be perpetrated after we graduated.

(The results of 40 years of campus building had not a little to do with the choices our class made when given the opportunity to build our Gate on the north side of campus. We opted for a style that would blend with older tradition, not violate it.)

Whether we liked new buildings or not, we all recognized the necessity. It was no fun to stand in the back of the lecture hall or sit in the aisles if you were late. More enjoyably, in nice weather small classes often met outside on lawns and glades. Squirrels, bluejays, and campus dogs frequently enlivened outdoor sessions.

On one thing we could all agree: the campus was very beautiful, and inspired great affection for its hills and valleys, creeks and trees, lawns and flowers. From the Botanical Garden high in Strawberry Canyon to the Eucalyptus Grove at the west end, we roamed, studied, relaxed, and courted. The view of the Bay area was still smog-free. Although Strawberry Creek was devoid of fish (a fact carefully concealed from green freshmen), the campus teemed with bird and animal life. Possums and raccoons were encountered on evening strolls. The aforementioned squirrels chattered angrily from the pines around the Campanile as frustrated dogs barked and leaped at their tormenters. Spring on campus was specifically designed to encourage romance--not that anyone required much encouragement. Around the campus, the Berkeley hills provided open space at Tilden Park and other sites in the East Bay. Across the shining Bay was San Francisco, the mecca for Big Dates, and Culture with a capital "c." We envied no other University its campus, and carried the love of ours with us into our adult lives.

Undergraduates who lived in University housing faced a number of social hurdles. Wise newcomers made it a priority to learn the degree and style of manners imposed by housemothers and rule committees. Roommates' ideosyncracies often required painful adjustments of life styles. Household chore assignments traumatized males and females who had never dried a dish or swept a floor at home, let alone carried armloads of dirty clothes to washing machines of dubious mechanical soundness.

Those who went through "rushing," the selection process for fraternities and sororities, faced a nail-biting period of social insecurity that ended either in happy acceptance of a "bid" or the trauma of rejection followed by a frantic search for space in crowded dorms.

Virtually every group had initiation rites, some mannerly and some bizarre. Among the publically memorable was a men's organization that required initiates, wearing top hats and strange garments, to propose to every girl they met on campus. Less harmlessly, fraternity "hazing" annually aroused concern and activated disciplinary committees.

Women undergraduates endured more social restrictions than men, including "lockout" curfews at night. ("Just relax, will you? I'll get you back before lockout!") Missing lockout resulted in being "campused" on a weekend--having to stay in and study instead of going out on a date.

The raging hormones of late adolescence naturally occupied everyone's mind. Clark Kerr once remarked that his chief responsibilities as Chancellor were to provide enough parking for faculty, athletes for the alumni, and sex for students. The University and doting parents favored cloistering co-eds from the depredations of rakish males, providing decorously chaperoned opportunities for the sexes to mingle safely.

Group living was encouraged for its presumed "civilizing" effects, and lauded for fostering "leadership qualities" and "social responsibility." Rule challengers of both sexes were hauled before house judicial bodies, and if that proved insufficient, there was the threat of the campus Judicial committee, and the Dean's office.

How well did the social system work? Ten years after we left Berkeley, the rules and regulations had virtually vanished, although the University dorms and other kinds of living groups remained, in greatly diminished numbers.

Veterans and male students necessarily focussed considerable energy on getting adequate financial support and maintaining high grade points in order to stay in school and out of Korea. Before admission, men took an exam that determined whether they became freshmen or draftees. Some elected to join one of the services through the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC), which added the incentives of possible scholarship aid and a commission upon graduation. It also meant at least two years on active duty.

On the civilian route, most men expected to trade book bags for field packs right after graduation, war or no war, thanks to Universal Military Training. Vets could be called back for Korean duty if they were the right age and had no dependents. The presence of war sharpened normal dilemmas concerning romance and careers, adding considerable stress to the lives of women as well as men, as it had in the '40s and would again in the '60s.

That may be one reason we played hard at every opportunity. The GIs egged on younger students, having missed much of their own late adolescence. In retrospect, some events seem remarkably juvenile: "Ugliest Man on Campus" and teeter-totter contests; water fights; the Frosh-Soph Brawl, carried over from prewar years; beauty queen competitions for every possible occasion. Worthy causes benefited from funds raised by these activities, however.

The University encouraged participation in a smörgasbord of musical groups, dramatic arts, intramural sports, hobbies, publications, and so on. As each semester began, it seemed as if any activity with appeal to more than three students had a sign-up table.

Many organizations thrived noisily in cubbyholes in Eshleman Hall, a center of student life with adjacent Stephens Union. The Cal band's home was in Eshleman basement, and most major publications were scattered through the building: the Daily Californian, "Monarch of the College Dailies" to its admirers but a hotbed of student radicalism to the Regents; the yearbook, Blue and Gold; the Pelican humor magazine, generally in disgrace for being too racy and outrageous; and a tribe of short-lived literary magazines, often broke and in hot water for attempts to be avant garde.

Coach "Pappy" Waldorf and the Golden Bears were in their heyday. The last Rose Bowl game of three in a row highlighted the 1950-51 New Year break. (Sadly, team fortunes went mostly downhill from there.) The most important tribal rites took place on football Saturdays in Memorial Stadium, where the California Marching Band was cheered as loudly as the team. Oski pranced and climbed goal posts that were still vulnerable to being torn from the (real) turf in post-game frenzy. Immense rooting sections performed elaborate card stunts and yells, led by a Rally Committee of manic enthusiasm. Rooters turned their caps from blue to gold at half time, and shouted appropriate insults at the sight of hated Stanford red. The segregated women's section waved pompoms on cue, as the notorious men's section rolled some unfortunate body up to the stadium rim and down again. At the Cal-UCLA game, President Sproul democratically changed between Bears and Bruins at half time and professed to be loyal to both, but all good Bears suspected they knew where his true preference lay.

Raids on landmarks at Cal and Stanford, usually involving liberal use of paint, enlivened Big Game week. The Big Game rally ended with Professor Garff Wilson's reading of "The Andy Smith Eulogy" in the candle-lit Greek Theatre. Warmed up for

the Game by the bonfire, ("Freshmen, more wood!"), we prepared to see our entire season stand or fall by the outcome on the field. The Stanford Axe might or might not arrive to change hands, depending on whether it had been stolen by one school or the other. Big Game also provided a good opportunity to observe Alumni in their highest state of "Old Blue," a condition many of us strove to emulate as we grew older.

Pre-game parades, victory "serpentines" down quiet Berkeley streets, and noisy parties along "fraternity row" sometimes got out of hand. The police broke them up without knocking heads or throwing anyone in jail.

Other great teams flourished in basketball, baseball, soccer, track, swimming, rowing, and tennis, to mention only major sports. All had rabid fans and garnered their share of headlines in Bay Area sports pages. Monday mornings, reading the favorite or most detested sports writer provided one means of getting one's blood up for the rush to class.

Presiding over us was President Robert Gordon Sproul, whose booming, vigorous voice and manner was indelibly imprinted as we shook his hand at the Freshman Reception, or listened to him at University meetings. On Charter Day, we watched him lead the faculty procession, splendidly medieval in satin and velvet, up the hill to the Greek Theatre while the Campanile played "Happy Birthday." As the University community celebrated his 20th year as President, we sang "Old Bob Sproul Is a Merry Old Soul" with enthusiasm. Much as we admired other leaders in later years, none ever left the golden glow of Robert Gordon Sproul.

In 1954 the new year brought an outbreak of "Senior panic," as no doubt all other graduating classes recall. Whether we suffered quietly or noisily, we could chart the symptoms.

Job recruiters from major corporations appeared; so did the CIA and FBI, who considered campuses happy hunting grounds in those days. Military service became a reality.

Those not being sought by one of the above, and who needed urgently to earn an income, felt some envy toward friends who managed to stay on for graduate school. A number of new BAs went to work in University offices instead of to industry. While campus jobs were often lower-paid, they offered familiar surroundings and, perhaps, a degree of emotional security.

Emotions were indeed rampant, not all of them happy. While engagements and marriages occurred by the hundreds, other romances and relationships came to final partings. Roommates swore eternal friendship, or vowed never to see each other again. Kicked out of undergraduate housing with Commencement, anyone wishing to remain in Berkeley had to hunt for new accomodations. A few found a new home at International House, a remarkable institution in its own right.

With finals came Senior Week. Senior activities included (if you were male) defending the sanctity of Senior Men's Bench for the last time--and if you were female, violating taboos by sitting there. Permanent Class officers had to be elected; it was time to decide about joining the Alumni Association; Blue and Golds had to be explored and autographed. During the last week we trooped in our best clothes to the President's reception; relaxed at picnics; appeared appropriately solemn at the Baccalaureate service, and attended separate breakfasts and banquets for men and women. On graduation day we dressed in caps and gowns early in the morning for the Senior Pilgrimage, our farewell to campus landmarks; lunch in Faculty Glade with parents and friends followed. The afternoon Commencement ceremony took place on the grassy field of Memorial Stadium. Waiting (as usual) for the procession to begin, we photographed each other, exchanged addresses, and worried whether our relatives would spot us from the stands. That evening we danced at the Senior Ball.

And then it was over. We had a great accomplishment on our side: A University of California degree, literally as good as gold in the outside world. Having turned up our noses at small towns and degrees from "cow colleges" as most State colleges were called, many now drifted back to take jobs in the businesses, banks, law firms, schools, and libraries, and at those "lesser" institutions of higher learning. We were welcomed for our talents, even though we might run a gamut of criticism of the University, in the process of "being taken down a peg" by our new coworkers.

Alumni status did indeed open doors even in big cities, where we found coteries of Cal grads ready to bring us into the fold. Dean Witter & Co., a large stock brokerage, was typical of such firms; it proudly listed Cal alums in its advertising, as it still does today.

While many employers still cared more about typing speed than major field, women graduates were likely to find wider ranges of choice than earlier generations, if they pursued careers. Equal opportunity for women, as for minorities, was still a long way off, however. While many women spent at least a few years working, most did indeed marry and become "homemakers." As life presented new challenges, a good percentage repolished their skills and even returned to school in later years.

Wherever we went as Cal alumni, across the nation or around the world, we found contacts and Cal clubs. In our turn, we have welcomed generations after us, even when we found their politics incomprehensible and their life-styles alarming.

If offered the chance to live again without the experiences of 1950 to 1954, it is unlikely that we would accept. We have remained proud of the University, and its motto, "Fiat lux," lives in our hearts.