

“Mr. Quinq”

A planned visit to Reunion stirs memories of a fortuitous rescue more than 50 years ago. By DR. ALLAN L. DRASH, BA’53

I MISSED THE QUINQ INDUCTION ceremonies with my classmates last October. In fact, I missed the entire Reunion. I became quite ill on the drive down to Nashville and was admitted to Vanderbilt University Hospital where I remained for the next three days, missing all the Reunion activities. It was not all bad. I had the opportunity to experience Vanderbilt medicine “up close and personal.” A number of my classmates managed to slip in to see me.

These personal reunions were great, despite the surroundings. My major motivation to return for Reunion was the Quinq induction and my strange attachment to Mr. Jim Robins (1892), known at Vanderbilt during my years there as “Mr. Quinq” because he founded the Quinq Society back in 1947. Over the years, I had come to believe that the Quinq “induction ceremony” was really a cover for the public, while the real action was the ordination of each of us as angels.

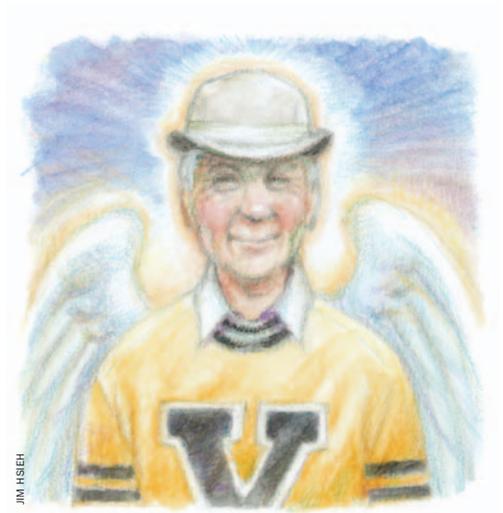
Explaining what I mean by that is a complicated story:

I arrived on the Vanderbilt campus in mid-August 1949, several weeks before most of my classmates. I had been very fortunate to be awarded a full athletic scholarship to play football, having come out of the highly competitive Birmingham, Ala., city football league. My school, Ramsay High School, had won the Alabama State Championship for three of my four high-school years. During my senior year I was voted “outstanding running back” in our conference, sharing the honor

on a tie vote with Bobby Bowden (MA’53 Peabody) from Woodlawn High School. You may recognize the name. He is the great Florida State University coach who has just taken over first place in career college victories.

My first year at Vanderbilt can only be described as “wonderful.” I became entranced with the joy of learning—everything. In high school my academic performance was only marginally above average. At Vanderbilt I became an increasingly excellent student.

Vernon Sharp (BA’53, MD’57) was a “walk-on” for the football team. What he lacked in physical attributes, he more than made up for in grit, determination and character. He became a special friend. We decided to do something unique for the summer of 1950 in order to get in great shape for the fall football season. We wound up in Washington state, working for the Weyerhaeuser Timber Co. in the deep forests of southwestern Washington. We lived in a snug log cabin, where we were met each morning at our front door by several deer, patiently waiting for a daily nutritional supplement. By day we worked very hard, cutting fire trails through the forest and burying large metal drums to be used as water storage to fight fires. In the evenings we listened to the national and world news on our little radio, very aware of the expanding American presence in Korea. Our one escapade of the summer was to drive our fire truck across the Canadian border into British Columbia where we watched the movie “Ecstasy” at a drive-in. The film was not allowed into the United States because of its pornographic nature. How times have changed!



JIM HSEH

Most of the current television shows are far more explicit.

In the spring of 1951, I and thousands of male college students across the country received a letter from our draft boards. The letter explained that since the end of World War II, the draft policy had been to defer the drafting of college students until their classes had graduated. Because of the increasing requirement for American soldiers in Korea, the policy was being changed. Students now were required to identify their career goals, and the local board would rule whether those goals met a national priority, thus leading to a deferment. I was directed to complete the enclosed questionnaire and return it to my draft board in Birmingham.

If the truth be known, as I headed toward the end of my second year at Vanderbilt, I had no idea about career goals. On arrival two years earlier, I expected to become a football coach. To my dismay, I soon learned there were no “football coach courses” in the Vanderbilt curriculum.

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Without consultation, or much thought, I filled in the blank for career goal as “law.” Shortly thereafter, I received another letter from my draft board, indicating that “law” did not meet the requirements for deferment and that I should prepare myself for induction in the next several weeks.

That letter got my attention. At that time I was moving toward a major in psychology and was very much interested in the therapeutic relationship in clinical psychology. The same would surely be present in medicine. I wrote another letter explaining that I had carefully and seriously reconsidered my earlier decision and had now decided on medicine as my future career. With almost the speed of sound, a third letter arrived from my draft board, ordering me to appear before the full board two days hence.

I took the train home from Nashville to Birmingham, spending the night before the confrontation in my own bed. The next morning my father, J. Wayne Drash, minister of the First Christian Church in downtown Birmingham, dropped me off at the draft board and went on to his office. I don’t remember which of us decided that I should face this ordeal alone.

After 52 years my memories of that morning are understandably somewhat cloudy. I was ushered into a room with the appearance of a small court room. At the front sat eight to 10 draft-board members, all male of course. I was directed to a seat in the “dock.” To my surprise, there were people in the audience, 15 to 25 in number. Who were they, and what were they doing there?

The questioning got under way, and each of the board members took a shot at me, all

suggesting that I was attempting to avoid the draft, which was a criminal offense. Just as I was about to conclude that my next stop would be Korea, a wizened little old man rose in the back of the room and began to speak. Basically, he pointed out that our constitution did not interfere in any way with its citizens changing their mind on any issue. He pointed out that I had changed my mind, something I was perfectly entitled to do. I had chosen to pursue a career in medicine. The draft law was perfectly clear. I could not be drafted until my medical training was complete.

There was a long hushed silence, broken by the chairman who thanked the speaker and agreed that his comments were correct. The meeting was adjourned and that was that—or was it?

Who was the man who stood in my defense? I recognized him immediately. He was Mr. Jim Robins—“Mr. Qinq.” He was a Nashvillian and famous on the Vanderbilt campus. He was a frequent observer at our football practices. I think many of the students knew about him and his contributions to Vanderbilt through campus publications, but I had never met him and had not spoken to him either before or after the Birmingham episode. As I do not recall sharing my draft-board problems with anyone at the time it was happening, I am at a complete loss to explain Mr. Jim’s presence or actions. For me, he has simply been my special angel. I had not discussed this extraordinary event with anyone until plans for returning to Vanderbilt for the 50th Reunion stimulated many long-buried memories.

My last two years at Vanderbilt were exceedingly busy and demanding. I had to make up for the pre-med requirements I had missed

in the first two years, along with completing the heavy science requirements of the last two years. I managed to make Phi Beta Kappa and came in as runner-up for the Rhodes Scholarship from the Southeast region.

I went to the University of Virginia School of Medicine where my interests in children, endocrinology and research began to grow. I was exceedingly fortunate to obtain an internship and residency in pediatrics at the Johns Hopkins Hospital—an indescribably challenging and enhancing experience.

It was at the end of this period in July 1960 that my draft requirement came due. I entered the U.S. Air Force as a captain and was sent directly to Hill Air Force Base, Utah, where I spent the next two years as the base pediatrician. They were so desperate for help that my orders bypassed the usual two-week military orientation for young doctors. I never did learn to salute.

Am I absolutely sure that it was Mr. Jim who came to my rescue in the Birmingham draft-board office 52 years ago? I reluctantly admit that I could have been mistaken. But I am completely sure that my recent Qinq ordination, albeit “in absentia,” has conferred upon me *angel status*. My marching orders are to continue to identify young physicians in training who need support, training, encouragement and direction to reach their goal as caregivers for the next generation.▼

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issues and how these animals and animal products are moving around the globe. We need to build relationships between the environmental lobbies and the food-production lobbies. Our focus is pathogen pollution. Our goal is not to block trade, but to work with people doing these trades and make it more economical for them and, at the same time, more healthy for the environment and for the resident population.”

If the transmission of SARS and HIV and other zoonotic diseases has taught us anything, it is that we humans can no longer remain casual observers of the world around us, oblivious to the tenuous symbiosis between the Earth’s plants and animals. Instead we must accept that we are, for better or worse, intimate partners in the life-pulse of the global environment, vulnerable to the tiniest mutations and rebellions that can arise in obscure, seemingly harmless pathogens when others

intrude upon their territory. ▼

Lisa A. DuBois has been a freelance writer since 1985, and over the course of her career has penned stories for newspapers, magazines, radio and video. She has worked as a regular contributor to the now-defunct Nashville Banner daily newspaper, the weekly Nashville Scene and, most recently, the daily Tennessean, among other publications. A native of Greenville, S.C., Lisa resides in Nashville with her husband, Ray, who is on the faculty at Vanderbilt Medical Center.