

# Too Good To Be Forgotten

CHANGING AMERICA IN  
THE '60s AND '70s

DAVID OBST



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IN THE '60s AND '70s

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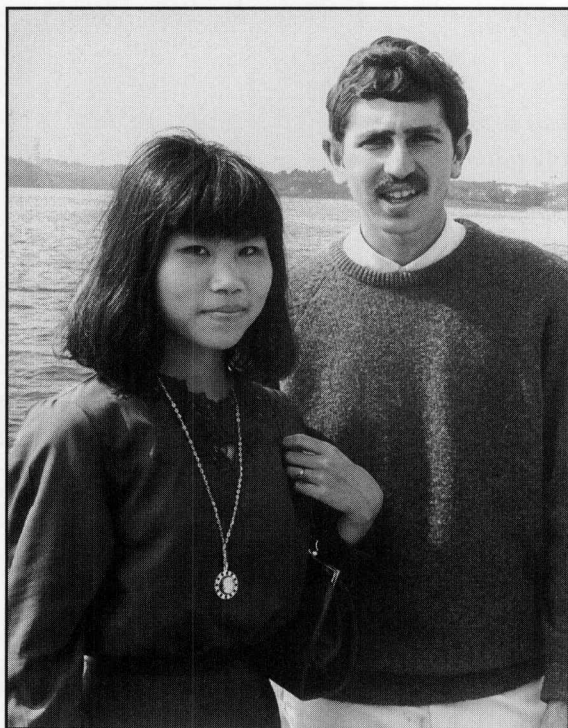
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*To Jane Gottlieb*  
*My Dream Come True*



*First love.  
Yu Lin and I before  
we were tragically  
torn apart.*

*Every baby boomer's nightmare.  
The A-1 classification meant  
you could be called  
for action in Vietnam.*

**SELECTIVE SERVICE SYSTEM  
NOTICE OF CLASSIFICATION**

David NMN OBST  
(First name) (Middle initial) (Last name)

Selective Service No.

4	118	46	7
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is classified in Class 1-A  
until \_\_\_\_\_

by Local Board,  
 by Appeal Board  
vote of \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

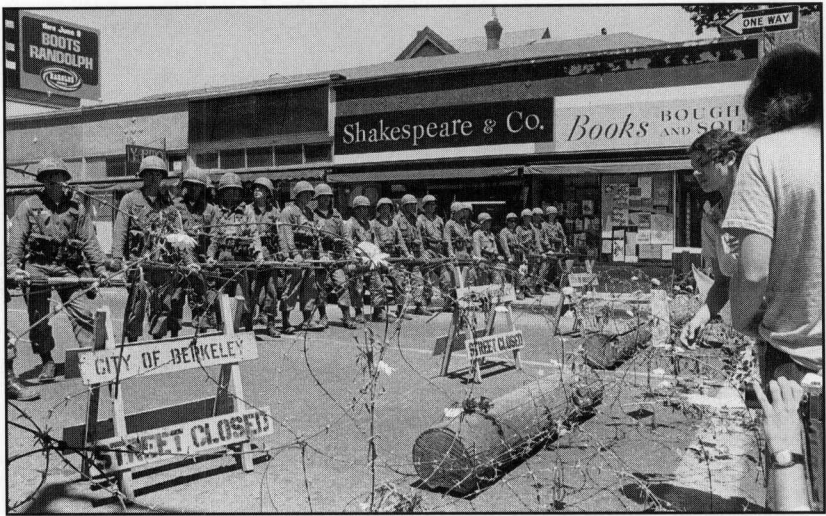
by President

**NOV 5 1965**  
(Date of mailing)

*Mary L Almond*  
(Member or clerk of local board)

*David Obst*  
(Registrant's signature)

SSS Form No. 110 (Revised 5-7-63)  
(Approval not required)



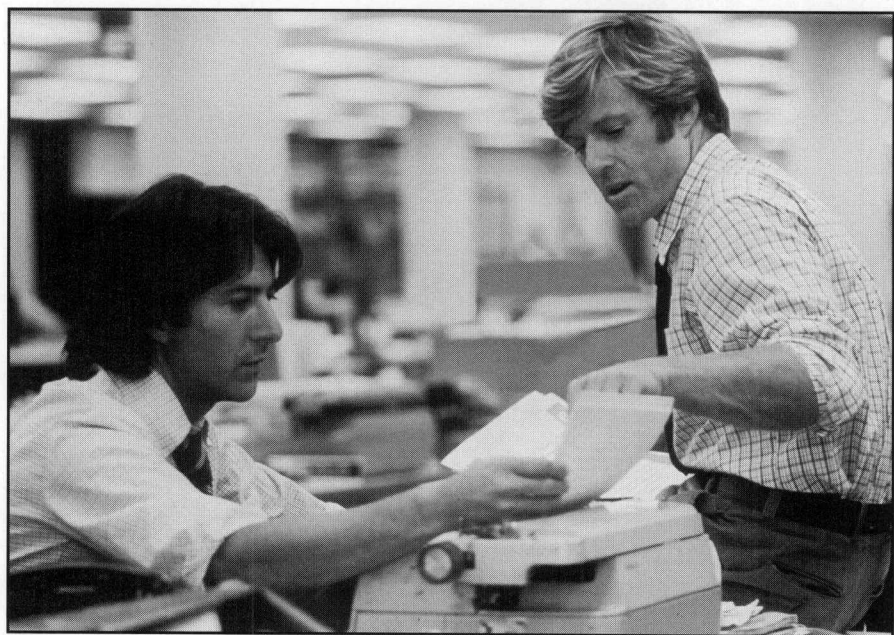
*Protesting the closure of People's Park in Berkeley, 1969. This was not a good time for business at Shakespeare & Co. (AP/Wide World)*



*Black Panthers demonstrate for the freedom of their leader, Huey P. Newton. Many of us became honkies for Huey. (AP/Wide World)*



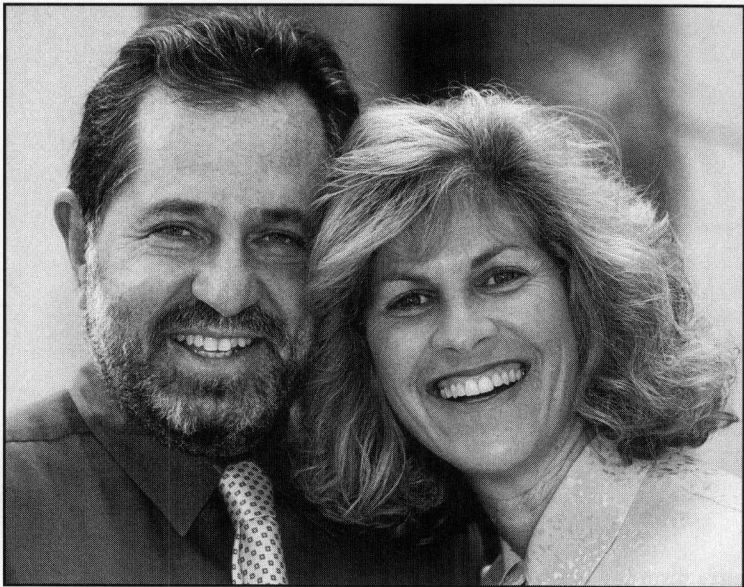
*Carl Bernstein, Bob Woodward, and Deep Throat. (AP/Wide World)*



*Robert Redford, Dustin Hoffman, and Deep Throat. (AP/Wide World)*



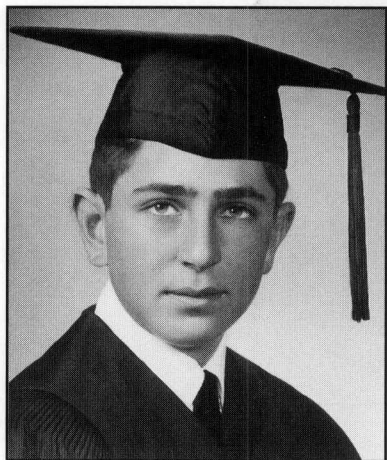
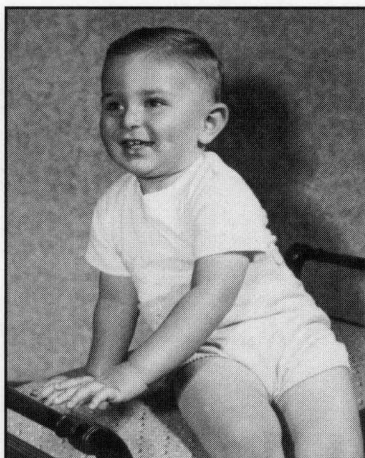
*I became friends with Clinton through Derek. Once I happened to be jogging at the same time as the president on the beach at Santa Monica. "Hey, David! Do you want to run with me?" Clinton shouted. "Sure, Bill," I said. "But what about Gore?"*



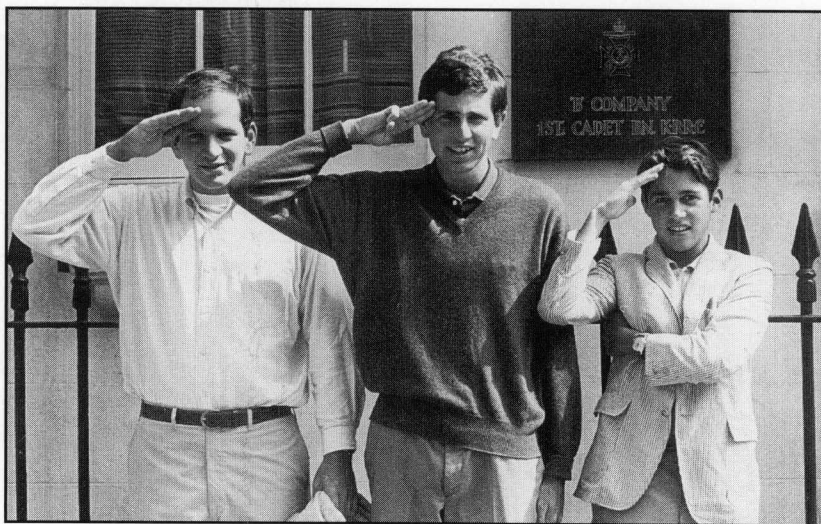
*Jane and I. My reason for getting up in the morning.*



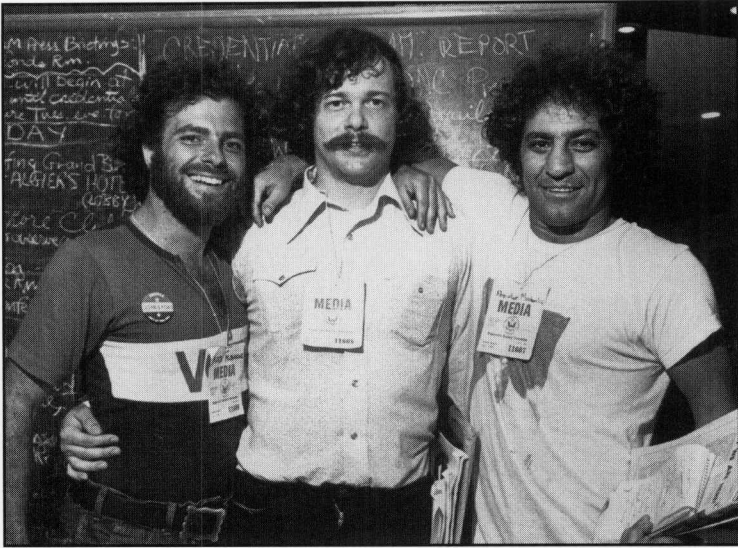
*Baby David. This kid was to see more changes in his generation than all previous generations combined.*



*High school graduation. I enjoyed the pomp, but the only circumstance I cared about was that I was still a virgin.*



*David and friends, 1966.*

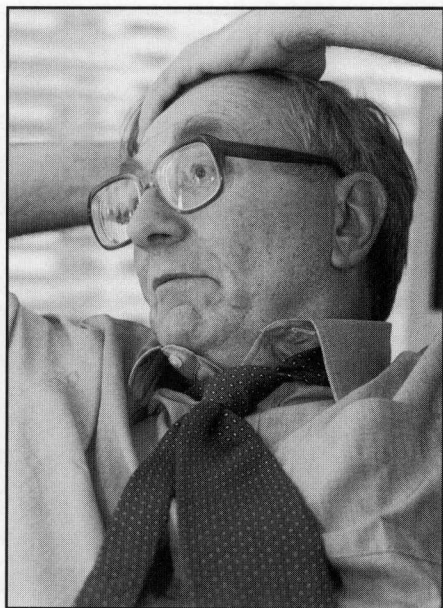


*Jerry Rubin, Ed Sanders, and Abbie Hoffman, founders of the Youth International Party. As my grandmother would've said, they were a bunch of characters. (AP/Wide World)*



*Protests during the Democratic national convention in Chicago, August 1968. Grown-ups, instead of sending us to our rooms, sent us to hospitals. (AP/Wide World)*

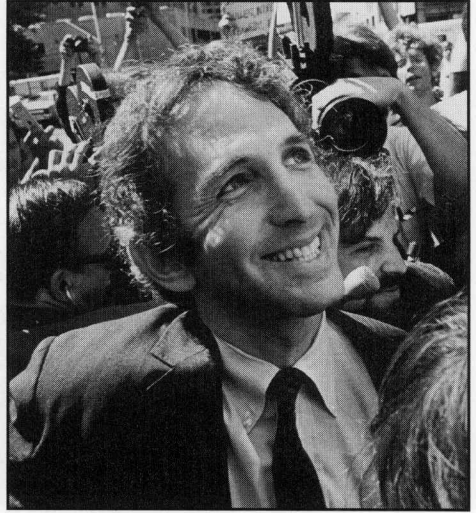
*Seymour Hersh, premier investigative journalist of his generation, did not score well in the category of “works well with others.”*  
(AP/Wide World)



*William “Rusty” Calley was convicted by the U.S. army of killing 102 women and children at My Lai. As punishment, he was sent to his room.* (AP/Wide World)



*Leni Riefenstahl, czarina of Nazi moviedom, posed for the first cheesecake cover of Time magazine. (AP/Wide World)*



*Daniel Ellsberg, leaker of the Pentagon papers. Helping Dan resulted in my having to flee the country. (AP/Wide World)*



*Why is this man smiling? Richard Nixon says good-bye after resigning the presidency. (AP/Wide World)*

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# INTRODUCTION

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*A well-written life is almost as rare as a well-spent one . . .*

THOMAS CARLYLE

Why read a book about David Obst and the events of the 60s and 70s? I guess, to paraphrase Sir Edmund Hillary, because I was there. I was at the Democratic convention in 1968 and at Berkeley in the late 60s. I helped break the My Lai massacre story that won the Pulitzer Prize. I assisted Daniel Ellsberg with the Pentagon papers, was the agent for Woodward and Bernstein's *All the President's Men* and John Dean's *Blind Ambition*, and played a role in changing journalism forever. In short, if something was happening in America during that tumultuous period, I was able—through chance, guile, and fortune—to be in the middle of it.

This is a book about being a baby boomer, about how the emergence of the youth culture, the Vietnam War, and Watergate left their imprint on our generation. It's a personal, anecdotal book in which, because I was lucky enough to have known many of the major players, I give the reader an inside look at the history of the period. The stories of these incidental heroes are fun and exciting. The results of their actions are still with us today.

This is also a book about baby boomers coming of age. It's the story of how we almost succeeded in stealing America from the grown-ups, were beaten back, and, by the inexorable process of

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aging, became those very adults that we used to make such great fun of.

To later generations, the explosive 60s and 70s are known only through star-spangled sagas such as *Easy Rider*, *Hair*, *Coming Home*, *American Graffiti*, and *The Big Chill*. The real stories, though, are even better. Our generation tried to remedy the ills of the world with a radical call to freedom—free love, free drugs, free will. We reaped marijuana, renounced the Vietnam War, rebelled against the regime, roused a media revolution. I was part of the original cast for the Chicago riots, the student protests at Berkeley, the Black Panther rallies, and the numerous anti-war demonstrations in Washington. In short, I was there for the greatest show on earth.

The atomic bomb blazed my rite of passage to young adulthood. My generation's coming of age was paralleled by unprecedented change. We were the first to be raised with super console TVs, Ford Fairlanes, frozen foods, Hydrox cookies, Toni permanents, toy guns, Barbie dolls, ducktails, coonskin caps, Kelvinators, steady rings, worry beads, saddle shoes, Instamatics, and psychedelics.

Having barely survived high school, I spent my early undergraduate years in Taiwan, trying to become a China scholar. I became fascinated with Chinese affairs and, when I finally had one, I was unceremoniously tossed out of the country. When I returned to America in 1968, my A-1 draft card dictated an immediate return to Asia, only this time the government wanted to send me to Vietnam to fight a war I didn't believe in. My fear of violence, my respect for Asian civilization, and my refusal to kill my previous hosts elicited a prompt meeting with the draft board. The elders avoided my eyes, refused to shake my hand, but grudgingly released me to another war zone—graduate school. Berkeley in the fall of 1968 was a replay of my summer. In August I had been

to the Chicago Democratic convention/riots, where my political consciousness was raised by Abbie Hoffman and his Yippie Party and the brutality of the Chicago police who had decided to teach us kids a lesson. Graduate school was likewise an education in activism. I demonstrated at People's Park and the Third World Liberation Strike. We were the radical counterculture. Our bodies were balanced between adrenaline and narcotics. We felt it was our duty to oppose a system that seemed racist, sexist, and exploitative. We had already taken over a great deal of the culture from the grown-ups. Now we tried to take over their politics.

The weapon I chose was the media. My outlet was Dispatch News Service, an anti-war organization dedicated to the publication of articles about what was really going on in Vietnam. The media maelstrom consumed my interests and eventually swept me away from graduate school. I became part of the underground press and moved to Washington, DC.

In Washington I met Seymour Hersh and my life changed forever. We both felt strongly about the war, and when Sy was tipped off to the dark horror that was My Lai, we worked together to bring the story to light. It was an exciting adventure, and our exposé shocked the country into taking a long, hard look at the inhumanity the war had brought down on the women and children of Vietnam and its frightening effect on so many young American boys.

I continued my anti-war activities by helping Daniel Ellsberg make the Pentagon papers part of the American consciousness. I got into a heap of trouble with our government and had to flee the country. Luckily, Nixon's government was even more inept than I was and I was able to return home without being incarcerated.

On the floor of the 1972 Republican convention I stared, slack-jawed, at the forty-foot screen of Nixon's face and decided to dedicate my life to the Movement. I moved back West and became an editor of the radical left *Ramparts* magazine. Imagine my surprise



when, only a few months after I started the job, I found out that the Movement was over.

Luckily, I had also learned a new profession—the book business. Two young reporters, Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward, asked me to help them with a story they were covering: Watergate.

Suddenly I was in the big leagues. I continued to thrive in the book business as agent and publisher of a number of best-sellers. I had become part of the system. As more money and fame continued to pour in, I tried to make sense of what had happened to me and to my whole generation.

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How the grandson of a Russian immigrant could become an agent for the grandson of a president of the United States and a friend of the current president is the story of what makes America such a special and unique country. Never before in recorded history has the experiment in social mobility been so successful.

During this period the media irreparably changed the shape of American politics. When I first entered journalism, reporters were still, for the most part, blue-collar workers. Primarily male, journalists were content to cover their beats, come to bat for the paper, and occasionally get a solid hit. After *My Lai*, the Pentagon papers, and *All the President's Men*, virtually every kid who came into the field was swinging for the fences. “Gotcha” journalism was on all of their minds: the chance to hit the ball out of the park. The chance to get rich and famous. The chance to have a movie star play them on the big screen.

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For years baby boomers were defined as those kids born from the time the Second World War ended, all the way through to the middle of the 1960s. I think this is too broad a category for us.

Baby boomers, I think, fall into two distinct categories: early boomers and late boomers. Although connected by their sharp