#### JOHN POTTER HERNDON

3349 Dabler Place, Bartlett, TN 38134  
(90i) 373-3167

Twenty-four years and one month since June 9, 1969, the day I joined Mory’s and graduated—both just barely! Nothing like waiting till the last minute for that lifetime membership. Some things don’t change much—I still procrastinate expertly.

I have slightly more than doubled my age since then, and another doubling is pretty unlikely, which is sobering because the last twenty-four-plus yearshave been superb all around. I have been happily married now for the last ten years to the former Terry Hodgson of Silver Spring, Maryland. I got marriage right, but it did take two tries. By choice, no kids either time, but three great nephews.

As it happens, Terry and I did go to different junior highs together, but we didn’t know it at the time even though the schools were both in the Montgomery County, Maryland, public school system and just five miles apart. It took a blind date twenty years later to close the gap. She was so devoted to that school system that she taught kindergarten and first grade there for eleven years. That turned out to be enough. She saw the kids become more undisciplined every year—a trend that coincided with the rising divorce rate and the growing tendency in unbroken families for both parents to work full-time. Terry is much happier now gardening at home and doing volunteer work, mostly for seniors. She could be a pro in the botanical field, what with her yard-of-the-month honors and constant requests for gardening advice from neighbors and friends, many of whom are natives, but who marvel at what the new Yankee on the block does with the mid-south flora. I don’t share her enthusiasm or expertise in botanical matters, but then she doesn’t share mine in culinary affairs. We do reverse roles occasionally, but she really does cook better than I prune, so she lets me attempt the latter very sparingly.

As the only member of our class, I’m pretty sure, who graduated calling himself a chemical engineer, I am pleased to report that I began practicing chemical engineering right after graduation and continue to do so today. Sure, I got an M.B.A. (at night from Rutgers) during my early working years, but 1 really never have capitalized on it. I guess I still find UNIFAC parameters more intriguing than gross margins. Having the same job title, “process engineer,” for all this time has not been boring, nor has it been stressless. To begin with, even though Yale gave me a fine education in science fundamentals and some engineering particulars, it took me quite a bit of homework on the job to become a viable engineering practitioner. My first employer, American Cyanamid, must have been very indulgent and/or oblivious! The learning continues, ever more rapidly it seems, with each new plant I design and start up and each new technology that threatens to render me obsolete. On second thought, maybe ArnCy wasn’t so oblivious—I was the only engineer the company failed to get a job deferment for in ’69/70 (my luck in the first draft lottery was good enough by just ten places). And the company did lay me off in the downturn of’82; I wonder how many of my classmates can claim that experience.

The move from huge, diversified, public Cyanamid to minute, specialized, private Velsicol Chemical was good for a low-profiler like me. Yes, I’ve maintained the low profile I cultivated at Yale (very sane in ’69 for someone aspiring to work for the likes of Dow Chemical and whose father was a Foreign Service Officer at the time?), but in this small, 500-employee firm I can’t help but be noticed. That has worked to my favor and to that of the company, I like to think.

By the way, for those who have forgotten, Velsicol is the one and only company that brought planet Earth such pesticide classics as chlordane and endrin. We still make the former, right here in Memphis, but sell it only overseas where the termites are more voracious than ours. Australia is our biggest chlor- dane customer. Take heart, those of you wearying of having Dursban (sorry, Dow and Greenpeace) termiticiae treatments on your home foundation over and over again, we may again offer chlordane in the U.S. After forty-five years it’s still the best defense against termites. By way of extremes, Velsicol also brings the world the benzoic acid used to make food preservatives found in such classics as Diet Coke and many other edibles. Hmmm, with that M.B.A. maybe I should look into the marketing field.

There have been career highs and other lows: plants that worked better than expected, a fatal explosion I survived, strike duty. I feel I’ve gotten good at my profession and would like to keep at it for another fifteen years or so. I do wish I had more time for things other than work. Our company is too spread out geographically so that I have been averaging three-and-a-half nights away from home each week for the last five years. Doesn’t leave much time for enjoying Terry’s gardening triumphs or the considerable (seriously) cultural wealth of Memphis, cooking, playing tennis, or giving back. The latter took the form of tutoring inner-city kids in my AmCy days, when the work pace was far less frenetic. Maybe my next Velsicol project will actually take place at our Memphis plant so I can commute by car instead of by plane and sleep at home instead of at Holiday Inn. Frequent flyer miles and Priority Club points are nice, but...

Although I haven’t become more outspoken since graduation, the years certainly haven’t made me more conservative on the social issues either. Maybe it’s just where I live now that makes it seem that way. But 1 contribute to ACLU, NARAL, and the Southern Poverty Law Center, put up the flag on Martin Luther King’s birthday, support gun control and drug abuse decriminalization, see nothing wrong with women and gays taking part in military combat (on those rare occasions when combat is justified), and oppose tax deductions for private school tuition. If I’m contrarian in this regard, perhaps my childlessness is to blame. Anyway, isn’t a liberal just someone whose enlightenment comes a little earlier? Society as a whole eventually sees the same light.

On the other hand, I am still fiscally conservative. Don’t blame me for the soaring national debt. I voted for John Anderson in 1980, and the fifty cent per gallon federal gasoline tax he proposed then still makes sense. I suspect a lot of our society’s shortcomings stem from the federal government’s fiscal liberalism. That’s a subject for another occasion.

Classmates? At least I exchange Christmas cards with Peter Amershadian and Mike Sabloff s father, but what’s become of Wayne Van Devender, Scott Cunningham, Scott McLanahan, Carl Pierce, Bill Alper, Jim Biltekoff, Tom Orum, Jerry Rosenbaum, and Howie Newman, to name a few? Some serious catching up to do. And it’s about time Terry and I finally made it to Mory’s— 1994 might just be the year.