The other thought is for the longer run. The one experience in my own life that resembled what we have all been going through over the past few days was when President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. I was about 16. We had the same experience of everyone being collectively and publicly stunned, silent, disbelieving; people wandered around outside with blank stares. We felt that our national security and personal safety were suddenly at serious risk, in a way that had been unthinkable.... And yet there was no smoke in the air in Boston, classes and homework assignments and traffic jams and weather forecasts all were going on as normal.

Terrible as that event was, I think something good came of it for my generation. The political bickering about Kennedy’s policies...ceased abruptly, and people talked mainly about the ideals for which he stood. Many members of my generation were inspired to achievement, not just in public service but in industry as well, because we were forced by that tragedy to think of our responsibility to pass civilization on to the next generation....

I've witnessed the greatest technological progress of any generation in human history. But Tuesday's events have shaken the confidence of many members of my generation that we will have done as good a job passing humane ideals and a civilized society on to our children as our parents did for us. The jury will be out on that for a long time....

But I hope you will take these terrible events, occurring at the beginning of the academic year, as an opportunity to think about why you want an education, and what you hope to accomplish by getting it.... It's hard to find an occasion to think through these big issues; perhaps these terrible days will turn out to be good ones for you if they help you think about why you are here and what you want to do with your lives.

Okay, let's get down to work.


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James P. Sullivan

Harvard university police department (HUPD) radio dispatchers refer to officers by their badge numbers. Patrolman James P. Sullivan's badge is 01, but no dispatcher reads it "oh-one"—instead, he is known as "old one." The badge traditionally belongs to the longest-serving HUPD officer—now Sullivan, who joined in 1966. A life-long Cantabrigian, he began working at Harvard in 1964 as a mailroom clerk. Two years later, in an era when HUPD had one patrol car and no radios, Chief Robert Tonis hired him as a patrolman. Since then, he's seen four University presidents, six chiefs, four uniform styles, and countless improvements in training and equipment. He says that since he began patrolling, he's gotten himself a Harvard education person by person, building by building. He has witnessed most major events at Harvard in the last 35 years, from riots to visits by royalty and rock stars. (The avid sports fan, who has been going to Fenway Park since he was a "little kid," cites meeting Jackie Robinson as one of the best moments.) Now, under Chief Francis D. "Bud" Riley, HUPD has instituted community policing—a move Sullivan welcomes: he's been using wry humor and sage advice to do just that for almost four decades, making friends across the University. "Part of being a good police officer is being a human first," he explains. The Longwood substation, his base for the past four years, is a three-room suite dominated by a fish tank belonging to the station commander. It's peaceful in the tank now, but a tiny shark once ate a couple of other fish. When the shark got "belligerent," Sullivan says, officers removed him: "We don't want a hostile environment anywhere here—even if it's in a fish tank."