

A CALL TO "GAMBLERS"

BY KIRK DOUGLAS

When I was a youth I made a lot of mistakes. But I was lucky. None of them was really serious and out of one minor error came a piece of advice that has helped me all my life.

It happened while I was working my way through St. Lawrence University. I came home one weekend and, very much ashamed, had to ask my hard-working, hard-pressed parents for a loan. I had lost my meager earnings as a waiter in a card game.

"Such a fool you are," my mother said, as she counted out the money. "You bet money on cards! What do the cards know about you? What do they care? You're such a rich man it doesn't matter about money?" She gave me an affectionate pat. "Everyone likes to take a chance. But are you going to build a life on a card game? Bet? Sure, bet! But always remember this: gamble on yourself."

I thought of those three magical words - "gamble on yourself" - the other day when I read a story in my newspaper. The article stated that last year more than 600,000 new businesses opened their doors. The report emphasized the obstacles to success, the high percentage of casualties in past years and left the reader with the impression that starting a company was a hazardous and foolhardy venture.

I was interested in the story for two reasons. First, I was one of the statistics. My independent motion picture company, Bryna Productions, started the hazardous, but I hope not foolhardy, business of making movies in 1955. At the moment, we are a going concern with one profitable film to our credit and plans for a minimum of two movies a year for the next three years.

Secondly, and more important, was the fact that nothing illustrated better the opportunities available to all in America. We sometimes forget that glittering generalities about "the democratic way of life" are founded on some solid facts, statistics like these. Beyond the numbers is a greater story, the story of the people involved. We know, from the numbers, that not all of these business hopefuls were rich men, or the sons of rich men. Not all were college graduates, or descendants of socially prominent families. But it didn't matter. Everyone - those with little formal education, some of recent immigrants, anyone at all - had an equal chance to shape their lives, to build their own careers, to achieve their own ends.

It is these people, willing to gamble on themselves - their education, their technical knowledge, their foresight, their capacity for work - who have made America great. The lure of most gambling is that you might get "something for nothing". My kind of bettors are different - they want something for something. Even Las Vegas couldn't cover the stakes, which include the security of a regular weekly pay check; pension, health and other 'fringe' benefits available usually only to employees; working hours limited by law; and, frequently, life savings to provide the initial

company.

I have said these "gamblers" have made America great, but it works the other way, too. America is great because it gives its citizens a chance to take those risks. In too many countries the laborer's son can aspire only to his father's tools; the shopkeeper's son can look only to running the shop. A country willing to gamble on its citizens, and citizens willing to gamble on their individual attainments, cannot be stopped. Surely "the right to try" is one of the most precious items in our heritage.

You want to know about America, "the land of opportunity"? Don't look in a textbook. Ask me - or one of those other 600,000 "gamblers".
