

## It Was the Summer of '68

I flew down the short set of stairs, hitting only the middle two steps and arrived with a thump on the landing in front of our back door. Quickly clearing the door, I heard Mom shout, "Be home in time for dinner!", as the screen door slammed closed behind me, and I side-stepped the aluminum milk box. Thick plastic handles hung on two hefty one-gallon glass jugs. Still cool from ice in the milkman's truck, they were already starting to perspire in the moist morning air. Seconds later, a shiny black and chrome 26" Schwinn and I were racing out of the garage and down the driveway next to the brick 3-story behemoth that our family called home. The bricks on this side of the house were beginning to warm in the morning sun, the others still held the cool evening breezes from the night before.

School had been out less than two weeks, and this was Summer in small-town middle America. Mowing lawns had once again provided me enough money and I was headed to the airport to take a half-hour flying lesson. My plan was to hang out at the airport all day, pestering those poor people that were trying to make a living at a small town (rural) airport and soaking up everything I could about airplanes and airports. A whopping 12 hours of flying time were recorded in my logbook and I had 3 years to go before I could drive.

As I pedaled past fields teeming with knee-high corn, I could smell the mineral-rich aroma of thick black midwestern soil rising into the air. Humidity already on the rise portended another intense summer afternoon, as beads of sweat ran down my face. They reminded me of the tears I had seen on my mother's face that morning.

She had just heard that Robert Kennedy was murdered the night before in Los Angeles. Less than two months earlier Robert Kennedy himself had delivered an improvised speech hours after Martin Luther King, Jr. was felled by a sniper's bullet. I remembered my Mom's tears as he and the Nation had mourned his brother's assassination just over four years before that.

I want to look back on it now as an idyllic, innocent time of youth well spent, yet nearly 17,000 American service men and women died in Vietnam that year. Draft-age men were moving to Canada. In the greatest eruption of social unrest the United States had experienced since the Civil War, major riots took place in Washington D.C., Chicago, Detroit, New York City, Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Kansas City, and Louisville. Extensive areas of these and other American cities were looted, burned and destroyed by their

citizens. More than 40 people died and over 2,600 were injured as the largest wave of urban riots in US history ultimately engulfed dozens of American cities. Television beamed images from the Democratic National Convention into Americans' living rooms of law-enforcement officers kicking and beating mostly nonviolent youth, in what was later described as a "police riot." In less than two years our own National Guard troops would shoot unarmed college students in the streets of Kent, Ohio.

Our nation was in the throes of birthing pains with civil rights and our national conscience was dealing with a war that wasn't a war. Women's rights were slowly edging into the national consciousness.

The point is that it is human nature to remember the past in a kinder, gentler light. We have struggled before. Americans are a resolute, determined lot, and we will survive this with the kind of pluck that has seen us through the Revolution, the Civil War, two major World Wars, The Great Depression, the 1960's, 9/11, and the second Great Depression. I can't even begin to speak of the determination, resolution, and grit of the "Greatest Generation" enduring the Great Depression only to then rid the world of Nazism, Fascism, and Japanese Imperialism during WW II. Difficulty, service and sacrifice make great human beings. We will survive COVID-19 and, as always, we will be a stronger, smarter, more purposeful society as a result. We are now getting to spend more time together, learning how to be quiet and introspective. Ultimately, our youth will look back on this as the "Good Old Days".

Do what you should to keep yourself and your family safe and keep the bigger picture in mind.

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