

Chapter 18

History Lessons

"We are shaped by the times we live in," Old Man Enright said to us during history class. "So tell me about the year 1967."

"Old Man Enright asked that same question of his sixth graders in 1867," Speed Miller said to the back row of students.

But Old Man Enright wasn't really that old. We sixth graders had seen him play basketball during recess and our jaws dropped when he out rebounded Tank Arbuster and easily swiped the ball from Speed. "Hey, basketball is not my game, anyways," Speed said. Mr. Enright's hearing was pretty good, too.

"Mr. Miller just might get to experience me ask that question to my sixth graders in 1968," he said.

What were the times we lived in?

In 1967 there were a half million American troops in Vietnam. The United States Air Force increased its bombing of North Vietnam and anti-war protests were held in cities across our country. Draft cards were burned, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. led a march to the United Nations opposing the war, and the heavyweight boxing champ, Muhammad Ali, lost his title because he wouldn't join the army. "I ain't got no quarrel with them Viet Congs," Ali proclaimed. Crazy Arm Dunn's brother Darrel was drafted and did join the army. Darrel Dunn was serving a tour in Saigon. Crazy Arm told us that his brother got a purple heart for crashing his jeep into a water buffalo.

Mickey Mouse watches were a big fad. Some boys started to wear their hair long and some girls like Paula O'Connor, began to wear their skirts short. They were called mini-skirts. I wouldn't have been caught dead in a mini-skirt.

"You know the difference between you and Paula O'Connor?" Speed Miller asked me. "You've got a groovy curve but Paula O'Connor has got groovy curves." Even my mom used the word "groovy" in 1967.

A gallon of gas cost 33 cents, a gallon of milk \$1.03, a postage stamp and a candy bar were each a nickel. Groovy prices. In 1967 the waterbed was invented, the Frisbee was first sold and microwave ovens hit the market, forever changing

the landscape of leftovers. Judy Garland, who was Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, died of a drug overdose. The Rolling Stones sang "Ruby Tuesday"; the Beatles traveled down Penny Lane and all Aretha Franklin wanted was a little "Respect". The Andy Griffith Show was American's number one TV program but my brother and I liked *The Flying Nun*, a show about, believe it or not, a flying nun. China exploded its first hydrogen bomb, the Green Bay Packers beat the Kansas City Chiefs in the very first Super Bowl, and Dr. Christian Barnard performed the first successful heart transplant. The guy who got the new heart lived for eighteen whole days and then died of pneumonia. Lyndon Johnson was our president. Girls wanted to be Twiggy, a British model who looked like she was starving to death and boys wanted to be any Beatle – John, Paul, George or Ringo. A fire killed three U.S. astronauts on board Apollo I while it sat on the launch pad. Race riots broke out in 130 cities across our country. Mr. Enright called the United States, "the great melting pot", like it was a big stew with all races and types of people as happy ingredients. The pot seemed to be boiling over. "The Graduate" was the movie of the year and in it Simon and Garfunkel sang, "Where have you gone, Joe DiMaggio? A nation lifts its lonely eyes to you." That summer in 1967, the people of New England lifted their eyes to the Boston Red Sox, a team that would capture the hearts of millions of fans from Rhode Island to Maine.

"I think we live in a time with a great future," Paula O'Connor proudly announced to the class. "A time of great promise."

"Especially if Paula promises to keep wearing her mini-skirts to class," Speed said to Ray Flanagan.

Those were the times we lived in.

Even in 1967 at the age of twelve I knew that I was shaped by other times as well. In my earliest memory I am just four year old, my eyes are shut tight and I squeeze a bed pillow to my ears as if I can silence all sounds in the house and block out what had happened. Perhaps I was successful too for even today I cannot remember anything Mom or Dad said. I can't even remember what my little brother, Stanley, Jr. looked like. I can only remember Grandpa's words to me.

"Your mom and dad are going to be okay, kiddo," he said to me when I opened my eyes and put down the pillow. "You and Pat are going to be okay." What he didn't say was that our three month old brother, Stanley, Jr. was not going to be okay, that little Stanley had died of something called scarlet fever.

"You need to be strong, honey. You need to be strong for Mommy and Daddy. You need to be a good girl. Can you be strong, kiddo?"

I could be strong for Mommy and Daddy. I could be strong for Grandpa.

I would be strong.