

Prologue

I had never been to a viewing and funeral before. In fact I had never even seen a dead person though I had a sense of morbid curiosity about it all. My cousin Blake had been killed, not in that war on the other side of the globe, but in an automobile accident. Speeding is what the authorities said and it always amazed me how they could figure out how fast a mangled up car that hit a tree was actually going.

My mother thought that it would be a good idea for me to attend Blake's viewing and the subsequent funeral. Maybe she thought that since Blake was only three years older than me it would have some kind of impact on me such

that when I turned sixteen and started to drive, maybe I would slow down.

I really can't convey the feelings I had seeing Blake lying there in that opened casket. I mean here was a guy, just three years older than me and his life was done. In the blink of an eye, here one minute and gone the next.

I know I often thought about the things he would never experience. And shamefully I wondered if he ever got laid. But I guess being sixteen and having a drivers license, I suppose somewhere along the way he did. And looking at him lying in that casket, I really hoped he did. Not that I had any experience with that sort of thing but it seemed a shame to die a virgin.

But it did get me to thinking that even as a kid I had no guarantees that I would ever see tomorrow and maybe I needed to try and experience life but maybe not be as reckless as my cousin Blake.

I really can't say how long that thought stayed with me after the funeral because despite what we see, read, and hear, a kid at the age of thirteen is really indestructible. Aren't they? And while deep down inside I knew it wasn't really true, I forced myself into some cautionary belief that it was. And didn't all that stuff

happen to someone else and yet to that someone else, I'm their someone else as well.

I forced myself out of that line of thinking because it was giving me a headache. I was thirteen. It was summer vacation and I was concerned with just one thing right now and that was having fun.

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Chapter 1

Growing up as a thirteen year old in 1965 was indeed a very cool experience. Of course the world wasn't the best of places what with race riots in the south and the never ending war in Vietnam. I knew of the war but being only thirteen I figured it would be over by the time I turned eighteen and graduated from high school. But the events taking place over there never failed to escape my consciousness thanks to television and the newspaper.

In March of 1965 President Johnson authorized the use of Napalm, a petroleum based anti-personal bomb that would shower hundreds of explosive pellets upon impact. One could only imagine that it wasn't a pretty sight to behold.

In April, shortly after a thousand tons of bombs were dropped on Viet Cong positions by U.S. and South Vietnamese fighter-bombers, 15,000 students gathered in Washington to protest the U.S. bombing campaign. Three days later Johnson's top aides recommended he authorize sending another 40,000 combat soldiers to Vietnam. One of those 40,000 lived two blocks from my house. He never came home.

In May, several pauses in bombing were announced by the U.S. in hopes that Hanoi would be willing to negotiate an end. Having fallen on deaf ears, less than a week later, the bombings continued.

So here it was, a glorious sunny and hot summer afternoon, July 28, 1965, when the presence of U.S. military personnel would increase to 125,000 after Johnson announced he would send 44 more combat battalions to Vietnam. The monthly draft calls were doubled to 35,000 and the town grew more nervous as more and more draft eligible kids would have their lives dramatically changed. I suppose in my own selfish way, I was glad I was only thirteen.

Race riots were commonplace and one would start during August 1965 in the Watts section of Los Angeles and last five days and become the most destructive race riot in

years. Los Angeles wasn't alone. New York City, Rochester, Jersey City, Paterson City, Elizabeth, Chicago, and Philadelphia all suffered from race riots. Just in New York City and Rochester alone, five people died and nearly five hundred were injured.

So with a war that nobody wanted and blacks and whites beating each other senseless in the streets of cities throughout the country, how could living in this time be such a cool experience? Man, it was the music and the innocence of youth and the sheltered existence I lived in my little nook of the world.

The music of the 1960's, especially 1965, was the best ever and what a great time to be a teenager. The Beatles, Hermans Hermits, The Beach Boys, The Mamas and Papas, The Byrds, The Rolling Stones and so many others made listening to the radio time well spent.

Of course I didn't know how screwed up a lot of these artists lives got putting out this great music and travelling all over the world playing concerts. The pictures in magazines seemed to paint a picture that they were having a great time and we all envied them to the point of wanting to form our own bands and maybe one day get lucky and have the same success. But in our little

sheltered world naivety was king and only later would we learn the real truth. I think glorified insanity would describe it well.

But all that aside, I would listen to the Top 20 countdown on the radio and actually get pretty pissed when my favorite song didn't make number one. But it was short lived.

The transistor radio accompanied me pretty much everywhere I went in those days much like the cell phone does today. And it seemed like there was more music and fewer commercials back then and games galore. Countless times throughout the day, WFEC radios', Lucky Pierre, would come on with the recording "Freebie, Freebie, Freebie, call 238-5133 now." The freebie could be anything from passes to a movie to twenty five dollars cash. In those days, AM radio was where rock n' roll lived and FM, well FM was where you went for easy listening. That was my dad's domain.

One day on his favorite easy listening FM station, they were playing a muzak version of Yesterday, the famous Paul McCartney composition. He says, "Now that's good music." So I looked at my dad and said, "Do you know who wrote that song?" Of course he had no idea and when I told

him it was Beatles, not believing they were capable of anything more than yeah, yeah, yeah replied, "Well they must have had help." That was my dad, the muzak king also living in his own little sheltered world where if you had long hair, you were an idiot and if you didn't, you were AOK. Funny how outward appearances very seldom matched what a person had going on inside.

My typical summer day would start early. Unlike some of my friends who never really knew what a summer morning looked like, I was usually up by 8:00 and out of the house by 8:30. I would return for lunch if I didn't eat at my friend's house instead. In those days, moms usually stayed home and dads would do the work thing. And moms didn't have to worry like they do today. Heck it was commonplace for me to hitch hike to the city and never think anything of it. All that bad stuff happened in the big cities, not my little town of Harbor Mills.

I never quite understood the origin of the name. We were by no means near any kind of harbor but I didn't think about it too often. Those things just didn't seem all that important to me. As long as I knew where home was, that's all that really mattered. Even at thirteen, I might have thought sometimes I was some hot shit, but I still knew

which side my bread was buttered. I never would openly admit it, but I needed my parents, plain and simple.

I hated brushing my teeth, an act I would learn to regret later in life. So I would brush when I got up just to get it out of the way, THEN, go downstairs to eat breakfast. Kind of ass backwards and defeated the whole purpose of brushing, didn't it.

My breakfast consisted of a bowl of cheerios. I would cover the bottom of the bowl with a thick layer of sugar then pour the cereal in followed by the milk; one heaping pile of sugar with every spoonful of cheerios. I would learn to regret that later as well.

After gulping down my breakfast, and I mean that literally as thinking back I wondered just how often I even tasted my breakfast, I went to the phone to call my friend of the day, Tim.

Now as a kid growing up in the sixties, the friend of the day, or more likely, friend of the week, was a function of whether you were still talking to each other or not. As kids we did really dumb things like holding grudges against friends that would last for weeks and during that time you wouldn't dare look at each other. Then one day, out of the blue, one of you would break the ice and say something.

Before you knew it you were friends again and neither one could ever remember why you weren't talking in the first place.

I picked up the phone and dialed Tim's number. Now I usually never called him Tim. In fact none of us would refer to our real names but rather nicknames whose origin was sometimes understood and then other times, well, who knows.

Tim's nickname was Snail and if you ever saw him run, you'd understand. And while we're on the subject, my closest friends called me Doc. They claim that I'm Harbor Mills' resident, junior psychologist. I wouldn't go that far. I was a good listener and because vocabulary was my best subject in school, I guess I came across older than I really was but Doc was OK and I suppose they could have come up with something worse. At least it wasn't Snail.

I suppose it would rain at times when I was growing up in the sixties, but as I think back to those times, it seemed as if it was always sunny and hot out which was fine by me. You just never wanted to be cooped up indoors as, unlike today, there was really nothing to do indoors. Television stunk unless you liked soap operas and stupid game shows like Let's Make a Deal which was a classic

example of the great lengths supposedly intelligent people would go to be on television.

As a kid growing up in the sixties, we only got three channels on our television unlike the ten gazillion clogging the airways today. In fact I was a might jealous that my friend across the street, Andy James, would get one more channel than we did. Why that irritated me was because that channel showed the Three Stooges which I thought was good television viewing. No accounting for taste in those days, nyuk, nyuk, nyuk.

So my friend of the week was Tim the Snail and that's who I would hang out with this day that started out uneventful but would end in a way that would forever alter my life.