

## POLITICS

It was a very hot political time, 1965 - 1970. Upheaval was the norm. Washington, D.C. was the place to be, or not be, that was always the question: how could we be there when our friends were dying in Viet Nam?

Viet Nam stank. We all knew it, we all wanted something done about it. Right then. Stop the WAR! War - what was it good for? Absolutely nothin'. One, two, three, what were we fighting for? Don't ask me, I don't give a damn; next stop was Viet Nam. Etcetera,etc., etc.

We were the kids our parents warned us against. Nick Van Hoffman said it in the Post. If the newspaper said it - it must be right, right? Wrong. Paul Simon said they were just out to capture my dime, and sometimes that's the only truth I can find in a newspaper.

Media-blitzed, we struggled daily to make up our minds about all the issues, all the alternatives, all the hype. What could we do about this country? Did we want to do anything? Should we all move to Canada?

Henri was safe - he'd already been in the Army. The other guys had various outs: law school, high lottery numbers, medical excuses.

What we did, in the fall of 1969, was to join the large protest marches of October and November. Remember the bumper stickers printed with a white dove, posters, buttons announcing the marches?

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We were marching. We opened our house to out-of-town people (not Communist agitators as some would have you believe), other concerned Americans, who slept on our floor, ate our food and shared our views. Our view was clear - we were pro-love, against death, anti-war. Nixon was not our hero.

Our heroes had been shot in '63 and '68. But we still had a dream. We just didn't have the political power to make it happen as fast as we wanted it to happen. "Too many deaths to calculate; isn't it true Lord, tragedies happen when You're bored?"- to quote Joan Baez out of context.

No - we didn't blame God, we blamed LBJ and Nixon after him. Perhaps we should have blamed Ike and Kennedy if we had really studied our history. But LBJ and Nixon were good enough scapegoats for the madness that humans made of the world at that time.

The October march around the White House was powerful. It was silent; it was candlelit; it was serious. It was a spiritual experience. I felt as if we made a clear, mature statement of our desire as United States citizens to end the war. There were people walking from all generations, from all parts of the country. All races, all creeds. Americans exercising their precious right to assemble, to take a stand.

We heard that Nixon was inside the White House, but refused to come out to talk with us, his constituents. We didn't really expect him to, but we would have been more tolerant of him if he had shown the political courage to do so. As it was, we thought he was scum.

Then November 15's protest roared into town. It was as noisy as October's was silent. It was bigger; it was during the daytime, and it was on the Mall. Singers, Frisbees, kites, dope, food, children, dogs, "liberal" politicians, picnic blankets, and tear gas. The police freaked. Even I got gassed and I was in no way instigating treason, insurrection, or even blocking traffic. They just gassed us all, indiscriminately.

Again, this only served to turn us more furiously against our president and against the entire administration at that time.

Six months previous to this, Saul Alinsky spoke at the Washington town campus while the students were staging a hunger strike. We camped in tents on Nathan Hale Lawn and were a great embarrassment to the academics. He addressed us in a practical, fiery style expressing little tolerance for dilettantes (which most of us were – sure we wanted social change, but how many of us were willing to go on the line for it?) and teaching us a great deal of activist history from his own experiences in Chicago. Mr. Alinsky spoke to us a good fighting speech and he inspired me greatly.

Alinsky's influence on the Washington town undergraduates didn't last too long, however. After all, it was spring and it was a rich and politically conservative student body. His ideology of radical social change was not one most at the school could agree with, nor something they would even choose to think about seriously.

That fall, during the two protests, I thought of what Saul Alinsky had said to us. I thought about his life as a social activist. What else was I willing to do to fight this crazy war? With virtually no power base, there was not a great deal of change I alone could effect. Nor did I want to live my life for "the cause." So I protested, voted for those I thought represented my views and kept a sense of humor.

We at 5046, kept on keeping on, after November.