

Uncle Sam Wants Me. Chapter Two. Mr. Mueller Teaches About U.S. Selective Service

When I entered Mr. Steve Mueller's tenth grade History class I had already started to lean toward the anti-Viet Nam-war movement. It was made up of thoughtful, hip, anti-establishment types that I admired and hoped to emulate. By that point I was a news junkie and read and watched everything about politics and the war. But Steve introduced a piece of information that I had not been very aware of. The Selective Service System, i.e. the draft.

Mr. Mueller had just graduated from college and was only a few years our senior. From him we learned how the system functioned to supply troops to our growing contingent in Viet Nam. He stated that each county in America had a draft board that was responsible for supplying a set number of draftees to the U.S. military (mostly the army) every month based on the number of residents of said county. He went on to inform us that the draft boards were taking the oldest in each county first, who did not have a deferment which would keep them from being drafted. He stated that our county of Linn was currently drafting un-deferred twenty-year-olds. He also stated that school teachers, such as himself, were deferred from serving. Even though I was starting to align with the anti-war crowd, I did not feel personally threatened. No way

that war would still be going on in five years when I turned twenty. Right?

I was normally not a fan of school nor did I usually participate in class discussions, but I liked Mr. Mueller and was interested in his approach to history, so I started to sound off. I asked pointed questions about rationale for US participation in the Viet Nam war and the ethics of conscripting young men to go fight it against their will. As I was the only one in the class questioning U.S. policy, he soon started to call me “Rebel Without A Cause” a reference to the James Dean movie of the same name. I embraced the rebel part but felt a little put off by the “without a cause” label.

Then I began to take the “rebel” part home and also to my grandfather’s house. Grandad Carnal reacted thoughtfully and calmly discussed each point that I was trying to make. He did not buy into the domino theory and in fact believed that citizens of a democratic country should be free to vote in Communist or any other party of leaders to pursue whatever policies they represented. That was very radical for small town Iowa in the early 60s. Matter of fact, persons espousing such beliefs had been hauled in front of the U.S. congress’ House Un-American Activities Committee just a few years previous. But he always said what he believed and let the chips fall where they might. Even though he freely expressed

such unconventional positions, he was respected by most of his fellow townspeople and elected to thirteen terms as mayor of Tama, Iowa.

But he did believe that the Chinese were trying to impose their will on a much militarily weaker country similar to the what the Germans and Japanese had done in WWII and needed to be stopped. My folks, who had both volunteered to serve in the military shortly after Pearl Harbor, had a much more emotional response. That resulted in a lot of yelling and name calling, mostly between my mom, Arlette, and myself. We had had many differences of opinion previously, but that was the start of a decades long deep political and social schism in the Carnal household.

In my junior year of high school, I also began my first steady romantic relationship with a very cute and bright gal named Sue T. We had instant magnetism. She was a born again Christian and an ardent follower of the rules. I was a confirmed atheist and delighted in breaking rules that I believed were unnecessary. She was determined to take this bad boy to Jesus and I was determined to take that good girl to bed.

At the onset of our relationship Sue revealed to me that she suffered from a severe and chronic genetic disease called Cystic Fibrosis. Two of the most damaging symptoms were that her lungs produced way too much mucus and that her immune system was significantly compromised. She explained how this would result in her frequently being seriously ill and eventually lead to an early death.

I had never encountered a person that I cared about, who was suffering from such a horrendous condition. But I was an idealistic caring guy and not to be put off from the attraction and affection that I felt for her.