

Never Forgive – Never Forget

I started school in Virginia, 1950 or '51. My mom walked me to and from. One day, on the way home, a black man stepped into the street to let us pass. I thought it weird, asked my mom what was going on. In my 4 yr-old mind, something about it seemed wrong. She grabbed my arm and dragged me on – not a word of explanation.

I was in 6th grade when the 101st Airborne had to protect 9 black kids trying to attend high school in Little Rock, Arkansas. Another thing I didn't get, but I was plenty frightened by it all. I mean, the mightiest army in the world, having to stand guard in the door of a school?

Three years later, in high school some folks chose to sit down at lunch counters in places they were told they didn't belong. Before high school was over, Freedom Riders were assaulted, some beaten and burned. Some voting rights workers were kidnapped and killed. JFK murdered. Seemed as a nation we were screwed.

Bomb shelters for fear of nuclear annihilation. A chunk of our population set on with dogs. Hooded fools blowing up schools. Someone had to publish a Green Book so black folks would know where it was safe to go, to eat, sleep, to just drive down the road.

All men, created equal – hmm - that word 'men' – not an oversite. And what they didn't say but meant was 'white'.

While in college, marchers were attacked peacefully crossing a bridge. A month later, four young girls were murdered at their church. Federal troops had to stand guard so students of color could do the same as me – strive for an education.

I was a full-time student and a FT night police clerk when Dr. King was killed. At shift change, the duty sergeant spread the word. First, silence, then cheers. That same year, Bobby was killed. The senseless string of bigoted nightmares went on.

One year later, a degree in hand, I was drafted. Viet Nam. 55,000 of us dead, countless more wounded. Some yet to be found.

This and more defined my youth. Violence and hate - and good things, too. The Peace Corps, Civil Rights, Voting Rights and poverty, on an all too slow but steady decline. November, '69, 500,000 of us gathered on that mall - a powerful, frightening - and glorious sight.

Imagine then, why I cried. 2 million came to see Barack Obama be sworn in. I believed it was the end of bigotry and hate - that the constitution I'd sworn to defend and protect had come to mean something, concrete. Was I naïve and wrong!

I mean, look around! They're back, sporting swatikas and MAGA caps. Make America great again? What a shameless sham. Trump and me - the same age. But, while he was claiming bone spurs, living high on daddy's dough, I was working psych wards, Walter Reed and more.

No, I'll never forgive or forget. Ban all the books you want – dumb as down as best you can. Declare it illegal to teach all I've seen. But I'll never buy into your scam. No, never, ever, again. We gotta be great a first time for us to ever be great again.