

The Fifties

The 50's Spirit Song:

These were fun times
that we lived in back then;
And now my memories
often go back to when.

Jean Dament

This memoir was inspired by my classmates at Molloy College, Class of 1959, the pioneer graduating class of this newly established Dominican place of learning. During that chaotic period called The Fifties, we went from teenagers to young women and share a bond that is indeed unique. Friendships were formed that have lasted to present day. Many of the thoughts and ideas expressed here come from those classmates.

There have been many books written to explain the social, economic and cultural history of the 50's Decade. The authors of these books have described those years as simple, paranoid, seminal, innocent, idealized, conflicting, and booming, to name a few. Some of these descriptions might be surprising to many, and certainly they are to me. As I sit here in the year 2016, it is difficult to relight the dim corners of those days gone by, but to me the 50's Decade might have been the best ever to grow up in. My favorite memories include my Parents, who loved me and loved each other, the house I grew up in, and the neighbors who were friends of my parents, and their children who were my playmates. We had one phone and one TV with only 3 channels to choose from. We went to church every Sunday and Mass was always crowded. Pius XII was Pope from 1939 to his death in 1958. When he died, it was as if a Grand-parent or other beloved relative passed away.

The presidents during the period were Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower. Truman, best known for ending World War II, by making the decision to use a nuclear weapon, and Eisenhower for the Eisenhower Doctrine, which provided for a balanced national budget.

My schooling spanned the entire 50's Decade. From Grammar School through College, the 50's informed my thinking. Those of us fortunate enough to have a Catholic education, were kept on track by the nuns. Those years spent in the classroom were productive and happy.

Of course an important ingredient in the life of any student is the music of the times. At the beginning of the decade, popular music was a continuation of the crooner sounds of Bing Crosby and Perry Como. Soon these were replaced by Rock and Roll and later by Doo Wop. R&R proved to be a difficult phenomenon for older Americans to accept, including my Dad who would shake his head in consternation whenever I played an Elvis record on my 45 RPM record player. He was convinced that R&R would never last.

It is easy to say that life was simpler then and in many cases that would be right, but perhaps the idea of a simple time with a languid pace is somewhat of an exaggeration.

I have to admit that even though social ferment was beginning to show itself, I was quite unaware that the cultural changes that ensued, would have a significant impact on how future decades would develop. Such things as the Cold War, and the Korean War, Polio, the Civil Rights Movement, School Integration laws, the H Bomb, even TV which, while bringing light entertainment, also brought controversial Congressional hearings into our living rooms.

Being far enough away now to have a wider view of the terrain, I can see that the 50's, to those of us who lived through them, were "the best of times and the worst of times."

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Leone Helm Perez '59