

# THE RAMBLINGS OF CHUCK WEISS

## “An Old Guy with a Memory”

### Ramble 2

### Growing up as a Baby Boomer

I was born in 1947, two years after the end of World War II. I came of age in the 1960s, and matured in the '70s. It was a time of great political and cultural change, so this ramble will be something of a history lesson mixed with my personal memories of those bygone days.

#### TELEVISION

We were the first in our neighborhood to buy a television set, when there were only two hours of programming per night, but that didn't last long. Soon programs were being developed for children and broadcast during the day, with old radio scripts dusted off and rewritten for television. Much of the advertising was aimed at kids, since they were the only ones watching, with dad at work and mom in the kitchen. Sales of TV sets skyrocketed, as parents learned they had a free baby sitter in their living room.



New TV Sets for Sale

But be careful to whom you entrust your children. Soon boys and girls everywhere were singing the commercial jingles they heard on TV, and pestering their mothers to buy sugared cereal instead of the oatmeal they ate every morning. Home cooked dinners served at the kitchen table (where the family actually talked with one other), gave way to eating frozen TV dinners in the living room, where no one said a word until the commercial break. We've been glued to the “boob tube” ever since.

#### THE RED SCARE

I was ten years old in 1957, when the Russians launched the first man-made satellite.

Suddenly everything changed. Bombs could be put in orbit and dropped on any city with little warning.

Nuclear war seemed much more likely than it did before, and many prefabricated bomb shelters were sold and buried in the backyards of homes across America.



A Cozy Bomb Shelter



Duck and Cover

Children were taught in the classroom to “duck and cover,” if they heard the air raid siren. “Duck under your desk and cover the back of your neck with your hands,” we were told. The “cover” part was meant to protect our brains from the blast. I had a mental image of my body reduced to

a block of black carbon, but the back of my neck was still a rosy pink. It was stupid, I thought. It seemed the whole world had gone crazy.

### THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

We came the closest we've ever been to nuclear annihilation five years later with The Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. On October 16, the CIA briefed President Kennedy that Russia was placing medium and intermediate range ballistic missiles in Cuba, which meant that most of the United States would be vulnerable to a nuclear first strike.

Six days later, President Kennedy went on national television to inform the world what Russia had done, and that he was ordering a quarantine of Cuba to prevent more "offensive weapons" from reaching that island nation. Any ship that approached the quarantine line after 10 o'clock the next morning, he said, would be boarded and inspected.

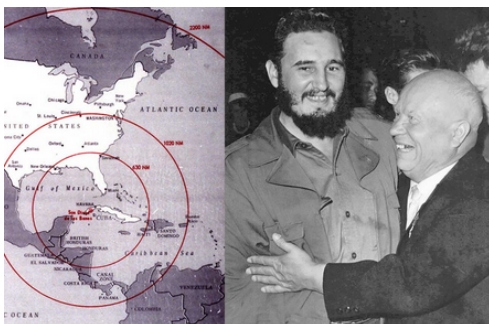


President Kennedy

At first, Russia denied they had installed missiles in Cuba. It was only when US Ambassador Stevenson confronted Russian Ambassador Zorin at the United Nations with arial photographs of the missiles already in place that Premier Khrushchev respond. They were only defensive in nature, he said, necessary to protect a Communist ally against further American aggression after the failed "Bay of Pigs" invasion the previous year.

Everyone felt that World War III might be close at hand. That night, as several Soviet freighters continued to steam towards Cuba, houses of worship across the country held special services for their anxious congregations.

I was 15 at the time, and like most teenagers I didn't think much about my mortality. I remember, though, what scared me the most was that all the adults were scared.



Map of Missile Ranges and Khrushchev with Castro

Fortunately, at the last minute Khrushchev ordered the ships carrying weapons to turn around, and the others to allow themselves to be boarded for inspection. But the crisis wasn't over. There were still the missiles already in Cuba, and they were days away from becoming operational. Kennedy had made it clear that they had to be removed one way or the other, which meant that the US would take them out by force if Russia didn't.

The world held its breath as intense negotiations between Washington and the Kremlin continued behind the scenes, while the US prepared to launch air strikes against the Cuban missile bases, to be followed immediately with an invasion. At the last minute on October 29th, thirteen days after the crisis began, Khrushchev announced that to preserve world peace the Soviet Union would dismantle its missiles and return them to Russia. The world could breathe easy again. Nuclear war had been averted.

Two movies have been made about the Cuban Missiles Crisis. *The Missiles of October* (1974) and *Thirteen Days* (2000). The first film shows its age and is overacted by some

of its cast, but worth watching if only for a young Martin Sheen's performance as Bobby Kennedy. The second is not only a good movie, but it accurately depicts key moments in the crisis. Spoiler Alert: The confrontation between Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and Admiral George Anderson Jr. was legendary in 1968, when I was in the navy and stationed at its Tactical Command Center in the Pentagon where it happened.

## VIETNAM

After the assassination of President Kennedy, Johnson took America to war in Vietnam.<sup>1</sup> While war is generally something to be avoided, many patriotic young men see it as a way to prove their worth, a personal test of their courage. This has been true throughout history, and all governments have used the ignorance of their youth to fill the ranks of their military. I was no exception.

The last thing I wanted to do after high school, was to go to college. I didn't like school and did as little as possible, graduating with just a C average. At the time, I lived in San Francisco with my mother. (My parents were divorced when I was five or six.) My father was a professor at a prestigious university back east, and he was expecting that I would apply to attend school there. It was the only college to which I did apply, but I had no expectation of being accepted with the mediocre grades I had.



Waging War in Viet Nam

Instead, I wanted to jump out of airplanes (a test of courage that seemed like it would be fun), and I stood in line to enlist in the Army Airborne. During the physical, a doctor took me aside and said that he could exempt me from the draft because of the knee surgery I had as a boy. I told him I was enlisting, and didn't want a deferment. He shook his head sadly, and approved me fit enough to be cannon fodder. I was all set to raise my hand and take the oath, when I received an acceptance letter from my father's university. He had pulled some strings, and gotten me accepted as a freshman. I had to go to college; I was so disappointed.

But I wasn't prepared for college, and at the end of my first semester I was placed on "academic probation," meaning that if my grades didn't improve I would have to leave. I told Dad that I wanted to drop out of school and join the army. After a long pause he said, "Join the navy instead. At least you'll come home in one piece." It was the best advice he ever gave me, and it probably saved my life.



"Flower Power" at the Pentagon

My concerns about the war started to grow when I was in the navy. In 1967, a "March on the Pentagon" was announced that was expected to draw tens of thousands of protesters. I happened to be stationed there and decided to "get out of Dodge," so I requested a week's leave to visit my father in upstate New York.

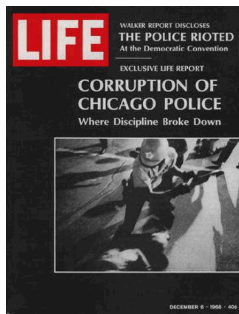
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<sup>1</sup> Read my article, "*10 Grand Deceptions throughout History*" on this website (posted under "Interesting Stuff") to learn how it was proven that he intentionally deceived Congress and the American people to do it.

When I went back to work on Monday, I was unnerved to see a crew sandblasting blood off the steps.

By early the next year, President Johnson's approval rating was at an all time low, and it was doubtful he could win reelection in November. In late March of 1968, he announced that he would not seek another term in office. Vice President Humphrey became the presumptive nominee instead. My friends and I were jubilant.

The Democratic Party held its nominating convention in Chicago that August, and an estimated ten thousand protesters gathered to urge Humphrey to end the war if elected.



Life Mag. Dec 6, 1968  
(Enlarge to read)

During the evening of August 28, Chicago's finest started bashing the heads of all who had gathered outside the Conrad Hilton hotel (where the convention was being held), including members of the press and TV cameras crews. It was all broadcast live, as the protesters shouted the now iconic chant, "The whole world is watching!" That night of violence came to be known as "The Chicago Police Riot of 1968."

The attack on protesters at the Democratic convention cemented my opposition to the war. I started attending anti-war rallies in uniform after that, and was later reprimanded by my Lieutenant for doing so.

I had just turned 21 and the Presidential election of 1968 was my first time at the polls.<sup>2</sup> Although I voted for Humphrey, Nixon easily won in November, with 301 electoral votes against Humphrey's 191. (Alabama governor and segregationist, George Wallace, ran as a third party candidate, receiving 46 electoral votes.)

Shortly after I was discharged in 1970, four students were shot dead (and another nine wounded) by the Ohio National Guard at Kent State University while they protested against the war. I wore a black armband of mourning for two weeks after that.



One of the Dead at Kent State

Our conflict with North Vietnam lasted almost 9 years, from the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in 1964 to the withdrawal of the last US combat troops from Southeast Asia in 1973. It cost the lives of 58,000 American servicemen, and was the first war we ever lost.

## THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

In 1954 the Supreme Court ruled, in "Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education," that segregation of public schools was unconstitutional, a violation of the 14th amendment. That ruling was put to the test in 1957 in a confrontation between the state of Arkansas and the federal government.

Governor Orval Faubus had dispatched the state's National Guard to Little Rock and ordered it to



Federal Troops Escort the "Little Rock Nine" to School

<sup>2</sup> It wasn't until later that the voting age was lowered to 18, and then only after children old enough to be drafted complained they had no say in the matter because they weren't adults and couldn't vote.

prevent nine African American students from attending high school there. Although initially reluctant to do so, President Eisenhower responded by nationalizing the Arkansas National Guard and sending the 101 Airborne to integrate the school. Violence insured when white protesters attacked African American bystanders and reporters for northern newspapers as “outside agitators.”

As far back as 1946, the Supreme Court had struck down a Virginia law that required racial segregation on interstate buses, because it violated the Interstate Commerce clause of the Constitution.<sup>3</sup> Integration of interstate travel had been the law-of-the-land for 14 years, but nothing had been done to enforce it. In 1961, students from all across the country were assembling to spend their summer vacation riding “Freedom Buses” into the South to force the integration of interstate transportation. I was 14 at the time and filled with indignation at the injustices I was beginning to see. I told Mother that I wanted to join the



Hopeful Freedom Riders

Freedom Riders and help integrate the South. She was horrified and absolutely refused to hear of it, for fear I'd get hurt. She was right, of course.

The first Freedom Bus left Washington DC on May 4, 1961, and although Freedom Riders were taunted and jeered as they road through Virginia, the Carolinas and Georgia, they met little in the way of physical resistance . . . until Alabama.

On may 14th, a mob of Klansmen attacked a Greyhound freedom bus outside Anniston, Alabama, after slashing its tires. They threw a firebomb in an open window, setting the bus ablaze. The mob initially held the doors shut, hoping to burn them alive when the Freedom Riders tried to flee, but were forced back when the gas tank exploded. The people inside managed to escape the flames, but were badly beaten when they exited the burning bus.



A Freedom Bus in Flames

Their lynching was prevented, only when some highway patrol men fired warning shots into the air. A Trailways Bus of Freedom Riders pulled into the Anniston terminal shortly after the Greyhound Bus had been firebombed. Eight Klansmen forced their way onto the bus, and severely beat the passengers.

At the Montgomery Greyhound station, a white mob waited. They beat the Freedom Riders with baseball bats and iron pipes, while the local police stood by and allowed the beatings to continue uninterrupted.

A Freedom Riders Coordinating Committee was formed to keep the rides going through June, July, August, and September. It is estimated that almost 450 people participated in one or more of the 60 Freedom Rides. About 75% were male, and the same percentage were under the age of 30, with about equal numbers of white and black riders.

In September of 1962, James Meredith attempted to register at the University of Mississippi two times with the help of Federal Marshals. Both times he was denied. During the second attempt, they were met by a mob of over 2,000 people who had

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<sup>3</sup> In 1960, the Supreme Court ruled laws that segregated the facilities for interstate travelers (bus terminals, restaurants, rest rooms, etc) violated the 14th Amendment, and were also unconstitutional.

invaded the campus determined to stop them. Under pressure from civil rights leaders to act, President Kennedy federalized the Mississippi National Guard, and sent Federal troops to reestablish order on campus.

Two days of violence erupted after James Meredith was finally admitted on October 1st, leaving over 200 US Marshals and soldiers injured, and two civilians dead in the melee. For the next two months, approximately 31,000 US troops occupied Oxford, Mississippi, to ensure the peace.



US Army Arrives at Oxford, MS

When I was a teenager, Jet Magazine republished a photo of the open casket funeral of Emmett Till, a black teenager who was savagely beaten and then shot to death in 1955.



Emmett Till (age 14)  
8 Months Before His Murder

He was from Chicago and had been visiting relatives in rural Mississippi, when he was abducted from his uncle's home by two men at gunpoint, Roy Bryant and his half-brother, John Milam. Emmett had evidently "wolf-whistled" at Roy's wife earlier that day, and for that offense, the young teenager was brutally murdered and thrown into the Tallahatchie River. His mutilated and swollen body was recovered three days later. Emmett's mother insisted on an open casket, so that the world could see what had been done to her son.

The young boy's murder was a galvanizing moment in the civil right struggle. Jet Magazine also published photos of the lynchings of black men in the South that were still ongoing<sup>4</sup> and, together with the photo of Emmett's body in his casket, they deeply moved me.

Growing up as a Jew also gave me a feeling of kinship with black people. Jews have always been natural allies of African Americans in their struggle for civil rights. We, too, had been slaves and celebrate our delivery from bondage every year with the "Seder" dinner-ritual during Passover. We, too, were beaten and killed for who were (in Nazi Germany), and continued to be treated with suspicion in a Christian society.

One day in the second grade, I was confronted by some of my classmates in the bathroom who were going to beat me up for killing Jesus. It was only the timely entrance of one of the teachers that saved me. It wasn't until 1965 that the Vatican officially repudiated the idea that Jews were collectively guilty for the death of Jesus.

After my mother remarried in 1964, I decided I wanted to know if my father was as I remembered him when I was four year old, so I asked if I could go and live with him. He lived in Kentucky, where he taught at the University in Lexington, and I attended a high school there. Because I was from San Francisco and outspoken about my liberal politics, I was taken aside by some of the school's jocks, and threatened with a beating if I brought a "n\*gger to the Junior Prom." After that incident, I decided to return to San Francisco for my senior year.

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<sup>4</sup> Although history records the last lynching of an African American to have happened in 1981, according to the Washington Post, lynchings continued for at least another 20 years. Their article dated August 8, 2001, titled "Lynchings in Mississippi Never Stopped," begins with "Since 2000, there have been at least eight suspected lynchings of Black men and teenagers in Mississippi, according to court records and police reports."

The '60s and '70s were about cultural changes, too.

## SEX

When I was a young man, sex was a confusing landscape that both men and women my age were unsure as how to navigate. Men didn't know how to appeal to the new, modern women. The old tried and true approach of being a jock wasn't working anymore. But men are traditionally taught to hide their feelings, and it was hard to become "emotionally available." We tried to say the right things, but it never was too convincing.

I suspect that young women had conflicting emotions as to what they wanted in a personal relationship. They deserved and were demanding to be equal with men in the workplace, but felt an emotional need to surrender to their mate behind closed doors in the bedroom.

In 1960, the FDA approved Enovid as a first oral contraceptive. Up until then, it was usually the man who decided if he wanted to risk siring an unwanted child by not wearing a condom, and too often it was a decision made in the heat of passion. Now women could choose themselves when to become pregnant. As a man I can't image what a relief it must have been, not to have to worry each time you had sex that you might become a mother.

Thirteen years later in 1973, women gained complete control over their bodies when the Roe vs. Wade supreme court decision made abortion on demand legal. 49 years later that decision was overturned in 2022 by a right wing, corrupt majority of the today's Supreme Court. After 49 years of freedom, women have been made physical slaves once again to a male dominated society. (Gloria Steinem, where are you when we need you?)

Something I've learned about men and women. Guys, face it, what we need most from a women's body is not sex, but the tactile sensation of their softness. None will deny, rightly or not, that it's a man's world. But it's "Game of Thrones" out there! Boys are trained early on to compete, instead of negotiate. It's winners and losers, both in play and in business. When a man comes home to a woman's touch, the physical release of the day's tension is revitalizing. Sometimes cuddling can be better than sex. It's a time when the rough edges of a man can be smoothed, and his spirit healed.

It takes a good and patient woman to civilize a man. It's a daunting task, but with love we can eventually be housebroken, and become "gentle-men."

I'd be curious to know how Generation X and Millennials feel about their personal relationships. I get the sense that things have gotten worse, with the two sexes being further from understanding one another than ever before. Leave a comment and let me know what you think.

## DRUGS

The sixties and seventies was a time when the youth of America started experimenting with drugs, specifically cannabis (aka weed, pot, grass, herb, etc.). As for me, I have a story to tell.

It was 1966 and I had enlisted in the navy, but had to wait three months before leaving for bootcamp. I got a job, earned a little money, and then set out to see the Big Apple

with my last two weeks of freedom. I stayed in a flop house for \$2.00 a night and explored the city during the day, amazed at everything I saw. I ran into Ted, an acquaintance of mine, and after a while he asked if I had ever smoked marijuana. When I answered no, he said “Do you want to get high?”

Grass (as it was called then) had always been equated with heroin, so the thought of trying it was both exciting and scary at the same time. My heart quickened when I said yes. Ted explained that we had to first go across town and buy some from a friend of his. A short subway ride later, we were knocking at the door of his dealer.

He lived in a two room apartment, with one room filled with sacks of trash piled on top of each other. It looked like what I imagined a heroin den might look like, and I was



Getting High For the First Time

beginning to have serious concerns about what I had gotten myself into. The dealer suspiciously asked who I was. When Ted explained that he was going to get me high for the first time, the guy got agitated and shouted, “I told you not to bring uncool people here!” He then turned to me and said quietly, “No offense, man.” I assured him that none was taken and, after some grumbling, he sold us the grass and we left.

Another subway ride to Greenwich Village. We found an alley where my friend taught me how to smoke a joint. At first I didn’t feel anything except that my cheeks felt warm,

but it was getting dark, and we were getting hungry.

Ted was determined to show me a good time, and led me into a small Greek restaurant where we took a table. He ordered the house speciality for both of us, sausage and onions on a hard roll, and pumped the jukebox full of quarters as we waited. “Close your eyes and listen to the music,” he said. I did, and it sounded amazing, almost like it was in stereo. When the sausages were served, I had never tasted anything so delicious! “Eat it slowly and wrestle with the onion,” Ted advised. It was the most fun I had ever had eating a meal. It had been a wonderful evening, and when it was over I headed back to my flop house and crashed.

The next morning when I woke up, I was amazed to find that I was clear-headed with no hint of a hangover! I usually don’t drink hard liquor, and I’ve always had a problem with beer. One bottle, I’m high. Two, I’m drunk, and three puts me under the table, with the worst hangover imaginable the next day. (I found out it’s because I’m allergic to hops.) Ted had introduced me to the perfect party drug, and I’ve been grateful to him ever since.

During my four years in the navy, I was occasionally able to smoke a joint, but possession of marijuana was an offense that would land you four years in Leavenworth Penitentiary, so it wasn’t until I was discharged in January of 1970 and moved back to San Francisco that I was able to smoke whenever I wanted, which as it turned out was almost every day.



Line Outside the Fillmore in San Francisco

I had missed the Summer of Love in 1967, and Woodstock in '69, but the party continued at places like Bill Graham's Fillmore Auditorium, where you could smoke grass if you were discreet. I'd get high and go to see bands like The Grateful Dead, Edgar Winter, The Elvin Bishop Group, Hot Tuna, and Santana.

I've been a stoner ever since I got out of the navy, 54 years ago, and I'm sure it's made me a better person. Right from the beginning, it mellowed me out. As a young man, I was always anxious, uptight, and judgmental of others, but smoking grass slowed me down enough so I could relax, while I stood back and observed the world around me. Others, however, were not so lucky.

Having found out that they had been lied to about the dangers of smoking cannabis, many people started experimenting with really dangerous drugs. Even John Lennon and Yoko Ono became heroin addicts at one point, at a time when it was the chic thing to do.

### AND ROCK AND ROLL

In Mid-December of 1963, disc jockey Carroll James of WWDC obtained a copy of "I Want to Hold Your Hand" by The Beatles, and started playing it for his listeners. By February, the single was #1 on the charts. Barely a week later, The Beatles appeared on the Ed Sullivan TV show, and the rest (as they say) is history.

Later that summer, the Beatles were scheduled to fly to San Francisco and play a concert at Candlestick Park. My step-sister was a fan and was at our kitchen table, hard at work making a sign to welcome them when they landed at the airport. I didn't know anything about the Beatles, and couldn't have cared less. However I saw an opportunity to tease my sister, so I set to work beside her making a sign of my own, "BEAT IT BEATLES!"

The big day arrived and mother drove us to the airport. My sister quickly ditched me and took her place with the other excited fans, who had taken up a position near the tarmac where it was expected the Beatles would see them. I walked around with my sign, largely ignored, until a reporter for one of the local newspapers saw me and took a picture. That afternoon it appeared on the front page, and I was suddenly "newsworthy." I had to see if I could keep it going.



The "Fab Four"

The Beatles were staying downtown at the Hilton, so the next morning I was in front of the hotel with my sign protesting their invasion of America. Someone standing beside me said, "Hold it higher!" When I did, several girls ran at me, lifted me up and threw me into one of the concrete flower boxes that lined the hotel. A camera flashed and again my picture was in the paper. When school began again a couple of weeks later, I was surprised and gratified to find that I was something of a celebrity among my classmates.

I learned a lesson about news reporting from that experience, that it's actually easy to get your name in the paper. All you have to do is tell them something that they'll wanted to print. (Unfortunately, I don't know what happened to the copies of those newspapers my mother bought. It would have been nice to add one of the pictures to this Ramble.)

The Beatles started the "British Invasion" of popular music. The Rolling Stones, Petula

Clark, the Animals, The Yardbirds, The Who, Donovan, The Moody Blues, and Elton John are just some of the better known English performers of that era.



The Rolling Stones 1964



Downtown 1964



The Animals 1964



For Your Love 1965



My Generation 1965



Donovan 1966



Days of Future Passed 1967

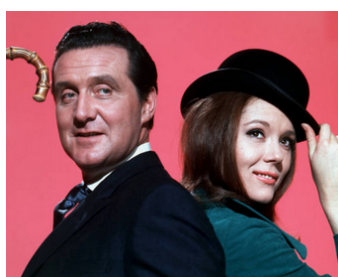


Elton John 1970

The British also invaded our TV sets, starting with "Secret Agent" in 1960, and the next year "The Avengers" made household names of Patrick Macnee and Diana Ring. "Doctor Who" came to the US in 1963 and stayed for sixteen years. In the 1970s, the BBC cemented their ratings on American television with "Upstairs, Downstairs," "Elizabeth R," "Sense and Sensibility," and "Rumpole of the Bailey." We may have won the Revolutionary War, but in the '60s and '70s the English struck back and won the Culture Wars.



Secret Agent 1960  
(Danger Man in England)



The Avengers 1961



Doctor Who 1963



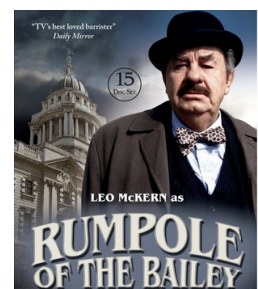
Upstairs, Downstairs 1971



Elizabeth R 1971



Sense and sensibility 1971



Rumple of the Bailey 1978

I'm proud to be a Baby Boomer.

We demanded an end to the Vietnam war when we took to the streets and shouted, "Hell no we won't go!" We conducted "teach-ins" and eventually turned public opinion against it. It was the first time in human history that the people of a nation rose up and ended a war that their leaders were determined to wage.

We forced the desegregation of all aspects of our society, finally ending American apartheid 100 years after the Emancipation Proclamation.

We began the modern feminist movement, demanding a simple justice, "equal pay for equal work" (a struggle that's still on going).

I doubt that there has been another generation in history that has initiated as much social change as us Baby Boomers!

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