

THE FIRST MOMENT OF...THE SIXTIES

BY: JOSEPH DUFFY

I was sure when The Fifties would come to an end. They would end on December 31, 1959, at the stroke of midnight. I was a young boy of eleven at that moment, and my twin brother Jim and I were helping my Mom baby-sit for my sister Betty, who lived across tiny Agate Street from us. It was a big deal, as the decade would be changing, something I had never experienced, as I was too young the last time this happened. I couldn't wait to see what it felt like; the end of The Fifties!

Midnight came, and Jim and I ran up and down Agate Street banging pots and pans together to celebrate the new decade. I awoke the next morning, looked out my window, and...nothing was changed. I was a bit surprised. Life just went on as if nothing had happened. I began to suspect that "decades" were not real; they were an invention, and that one was just like every other. Is that all there is to a decade? Banging Pots and Pans?

So, even though it was now 1960, The Fifties just...continued. I began High School a couple of years later, and we had a new President, John F. Kennedy, an Irish Catholic like me, whom I had (sort of) met when he was campaigning for President. Freshman year at Northeast Catholic High went pretty smooth for me, and, for Sophomore year, 1963, I was assigned to the top section. I had Geometry, Latin II, Spanish II, Biology, World History, Religion, English Composition, and Gym, three days a week. I also had the 11:30 lunch, which was considered the best lunch.

After lunch came Religion class, with Father Godley (his real name). The trick in Father Godley's class was to stay awake, especially after lunch. That went until 1:00, and then Spanish II, with Father Cleary. 1:45 was English Comp, with Mr. Thaddeus Pianka. That class was held in Room 114, on the corner of the first floor.

I remember a particularly warm Friday, late that Fall. It was 66 degrees and sunny; unseasonably warm for so late in November. The windows in our classroom were open, and we were doing a quiz, or deskwork, for Mr. Pianka. It was very quiet. I sat in the first desk, second row. Then there was a loud voice, coming from outside our window.

"Hey, that's my buddy Mike Dugan out there," I remember thinking. He was yelling to another student, who must have been standing a hundred yards away.

"Somebody just shot Kennedy."

"What?", said the other kid.

"I said, somebody... just... shot... Kennedy!"

There was a muffled response from the other kid.

Then Mike said "They don't know yet."

I thought, Wow. What if somebody HAD just shot Kennedy? I didn't believe it. It just didn't seem like a possibility. Why would Mike say such a thing?

A few moments later our Principal, Father Corcoran, announced over the loudspeaker, May I have your attention, please? The President has just been shot in Dallas, Texas, while riding in a motorcade. His condition is not yet known, but reports are that it may be very serious. We didn't know what to think about this. It was a physical blow.

And nothing was ever the same, from that moment. Something had ended. We were somewhere completely new and foreign to us. It took only... a moment. We were, briefly, suspended, in mid-air, between decades; silent, breathless, and peering down into the unknown; but only for a moment.

And, in that moment, the nation, and the world, leapt the abyss between the decades. It was the very last moment of The Fifties. The beginning of "The Sixties".. was not about banging pots and pans together, after all.

