

Preface

Telling our story – the story of two women who have shared a life-long friendship despite taking very different paths – has been a labor of love and mixed emotions.

We wrapped ourselves in the warm blanket of nostalgia as we recalled our many adventures while growing up in the 1950s. And we quietly acknowledged our challenging family dynamics: one father was an overbearing, sometimes-frightening alcoholic; the other was invisible and ineffective. One mother died too young of cancer, and the other mother was, quite simply, a saint.

We tried to understand our parents' less attractive attributes and actions through adult eyes and with adult reasoning, but we weren't always successful.

Some of our best conversations about those early days began with "What do you remember about..." We delighted when we each remembered different details about the same event, adding to our shared recollection.

The 1960s found us stretching our wings, becoming individuals, and developing opinions other than those held by our parents – and each other. We negotiated the land mines of elementary school, junior high school, high school, college, and marriage - all within a short, ten-year span.

From the 1970s until the 2010s, we learned what it meant to be grown-ups. We finished school, started careers, bought homes, got divorced, paid bills, gave birth, lost parents, remarried, sent children off to college, welcomed grandchildren, and retired.

In the 2010s, we found ourselves living only a half-day's drive from each other. We could visit and talk for hours without the interruption of husbands, children, or careers. And as we reflected on days gone by, we realized that we grew up in the best time and place – ever! “Our” time had been a special time, cast in a light all its own.

Of course, we knew every generation felt the same way about its formative years, but our generation really WAS special. We were, after all, the Baby Boomers. We set the world on its ear in the 1960s. And just as important, we two Boomers had the spectacularly good fortune to grow up in Central Florida when you could still smell orange blossoms in the air and Kissimmee's claim to fame was Brahman cattle and the Silver Spurs Rodeo, rather than its proximity to Walt Disney World.

We grew up with the manned space program and knew the names and faces of the Mercury Seven astronauts as well as we did our own. Many parents worked for Martin Marietta, the major employer in the area. We watched the launches from our backyards and the school athletic field. Sometimes we'd go over to the coast and watch from the beach or one of the causeways. We were, literally, eyewitnesses to history.

As we continued to talk and reminisce, our conversations began to focus on a concern for the future of our generation's stories. What have we lost, and what are we continuing to lose, in this age of email, tweets, and twitters? Some of us are fortunate to have family heirlooms in the form of journals and letters written decades ago. Will our descendants have similar documents from us? Will they be able to reach across the generations and touch the same sheet of writing paper that a great-great grandparent touched? In this day of instant communication, what archive are we leaving so that future generations will know how our generation's everyman lived and thought?

Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “There is properly no history; only biography.” and the story that follows is a simple telling about best friends growing up at a particular time, in a particular place. We wanted to share what it was like growing up in the idealized, post-World War II years: our role models, the television programs we watched, the games we played, what we did on our summer vacations, and how we celebrated the holidays.

We wanted to relate what it was like to come of age during the years of the early manned space program, the Cuban missile crisis, the civil rights movement, and integration. We bore witness to the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Our friends and classmates went off to Vietnam. Some died. All were changed.

We wrestled with women's liberation and the sexual revolution, and we tried to reconcile whether women should be in the workplace, stay home and raise children, or do both.

Our middle years were busy with careers and family. We were confronted with glass ceilings and equal pay for equal work. Drugs and sexually transmitted diseases were causes for concern. We worried about homework, grades, SATs, and college acceptance letters – but this time for our children.

Intertwined through all of this was our ongoing friendship. There were years when we rarely saw each other, but we kept in touch with birthday telephone calls and Christmas cards. We had an unspoken bond, formed from years of shared childhood experiences.

So, come along with us as we share our stories of what it was like to be female in the last half of the twentieth century and the first decades of the twenty-first century. It has been a wonderful ride, and it's not over yet!