

Reflections on Seven Decades of Life and Life Only

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*And if my thought-dreams could be seen
They'd probably put my head in a guillotine
But it's alright, Ma, it's life, and life only*

--It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding) By Bob Dylan

There is sweet irony in the fact that the LPGA, which has played such a large role in my life, and I were both born in 1950. The Tampa Open, the first tournament of the oldest women's professional sports organization, ended Jan. 22, 1950, and I began on Aug. 24. Seven decades later, we both trundle on.

In my lifetime, the Korean War began and ended. So did the Vietnam War and the Cold War. One conflict in the Persian Gulf came to a quick conclusion while another is in its second decade. When I was a child, a vaccine was found for polio while now my grandchildren wait for COVID-19 to be conquered.

The space race began when the Soviet Union launched Sputnik in 1957. At night, we stood in our backyard and peered upward to catch a glimpse of the satellite passing above; during the day, we did duck-and-cover air raid drills under our desks in grade school, a futile preparation for a nuclear war that seemed inevitable.

In the summer after my freshman year at Franklin & Marshall College, on July 20, 1969, Neil Armstrong walked on the moon. I was working on the news desk at The Associated Press on Jan. 28, 1986, when the Space Shuttle Challenger exploded 73 seconds after launch, killing seven, including Christa McAuliffe, a 37-year-old teacher whose students watched in horror.

In my lifetime, it was legal to have segregated public schools – the U.S. Supreme Court not ruling on Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka, Kan., until 1954. The PGA of America had a Caucasian Only clause until 1961. The

Civil Rights Act was not passed until 1964 and the Voting Rights Act in 1965. George Floyd changed a 400-year-old conversation in 2020.

The 1960s were a blur of bloodshed in which John Kennedy, Malcolm X, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Bobby Kennedy were assassinated. Many American cities erupted in violence over race relations while millions marched, mostly peacefully, against the War in Vietnam, where 58,000 Americans and more than a million Vietnamese died.

In the 1970s, President Richard M. Nixon said, “I am not a crook,” then was found to be one. Cities and towns not only had newspapers, most had competing newspapers and some had independent, alternative papers. In 1980, I worked on a project at The AP called Viewdata – an electronic newspaper.

And journalism was never the same.

The movement for LGBTQ rights began on June 28, 1969, when patrons of the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in New York City, fought back against a police raid, beginning five days of street protests.

And the Gay Rights movement was never the same.

On June 26, 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the 14th Amendment to the Constitution requires all states to grant same-sex marriages.

The environmental movement kicked into high gear on April 22, 1970, when 20 million people participated in the first Earth Day at schools and colleges, community centers and in the streets of the United States.

And the environmental movement was never the same.

On Aug. 26, 1970, the 50th anniversary of when women got the right to vote in the United States, 50,000 people marched in New York and another 100,000 in demonstrations and rallies in 90 cities around the country in what was the rebirth of the women’s rights movement.

And the women’s movement was never the same.

In 1972, Title IX was established, ensuring that male and female students in publicly funded schools receive equitable sports opportunities. In 1974, colleges started giving scholarships to female athletes and now there are about 1,000 colleges in this country with women's golf teams.

Marilynn Smith, one of the 13 women who founded the LPGA, liked to tell the story about when she wanted to play in a national college tournament and her father asked the University of Kansas Athletic Director, the legendary Phog Allen, for help with travel expenses.

Allen replied: "Mr. Smith, it's too bad your daughter is not a boy."

And Marilyn Smith was never the same.

When she died on April 9, 2019, less than a week before her 90th birthday, she had completed the tenth Marilyn Smith LPGA Charity Pro-Am, which raises money to help female golfers with college expenses. Marilyn never let the Phog obscure her vision.

When I was born in 1950, fewer than 20 percent of American homes had a TV. A decade later, it was 90 percent. And now the COVID crisis has made it painfully clear how important it is to get computers and broadband access into every home.

Perhaps someday we will look back at the Coronavirus pandemic and say: And the world was never the same again, reciting the endless ways in which we emerged better, stronger, smarter. That's my hope.

Meanwhile, images of the past clutter my mind, from those that flickered across a black and white TV screen, pulled in by an aluminum foil-covered rabbit-ear antenna, to the digitally altered version of reality we have today.

While ultimately history will judge, we can say this of the time in which we live: For better or worse, things will never be the same. And that's the way it's supposed to be. Time remains undefeated, untied and unscored upon. It's life and life only.

*From the fool's gold mouthpiece
The hollow horn plays wasted words*

*Proves to warn
That he not busy being born
Is busy dying.*

--It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding) By Bob Dylan