

BY MARSHALL FINE

I was talking to a millennial, who told me she'd recently seen the film "The Graduate" for the first time. I told her that movie made a huge impact on me because it came out my senior year of high school. And the millennial said, with a look of wonder on her face, "You went to high school in the '60s? What was THAT like?"

I told her that not only had I gone to high school in the 60s — but the spring that I graduated, both Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy were assassinated — Kennedy on graduation day itself. The riots in Chicago, the election of Richard Nixon — you could say it was an eventful year. Those were just the national headlines. And only a few of them.

This past spring, CNN ran a four-hour series calling 1968 the year that changed America. There have been several books on the subject — and it's always the same cast of faces that we see highlighted. Martin Luther King Jr. Bobby Kennedy. Lyndon Johnson. Eugene McCarthy. Richard Nixon. Hubert Humphrey. Abbie Hoffman. Jerry Rubin.

We baby-boomers may not have invented nostalgia, but I do think we figured out how to commercialize it. Still, nostalgia — and memory, which is a different thing — are what reunions are for: to see old friends, who remind us of the time when we were all young together.

The late Robin Williams once noted, “If you can remember the 60s, you probably weren’t there.” Even if you were, there is an endless supply of movies, books, TV shows and other media devoted to exactly that topic. But reaching this moment — the 50th anniversary of our release from captivity into the wild — and celebrating the number of us still alive and well enough to gather for its remembrance, is also a cause for reflection.

Think about what we’ve been through since then — not personally, but globally. Think about the world we’ve been part of in the 50 years since we left high school’s cocoon.

They talk about what a historic year 1968 was — how it felt as though the world was breaking apart in ways that felt like they could never be repaired. But, as it turns out, almost every year since then has felt like that, at some point. Look at the very next year: In 1969 alone, you had Woodstock, Altamont, the Manson killings and, oh yeah - first man on the moon.

And the rest of the 1970s? The Munich Olympics, the end of the Vietnam war, Watergate, Patty Hearst, Jonestown and Jimmy Carter — that was just the decade up to our 10th reunion in 1978. We also experienced the premature deaths of cultural icons like Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Jim Morrison and Elvis Presley. I’m not going to give a lecture on the TV and movies that defined that era, but here’s a fact that did de-

fine it for some of us: In the 1970s, the Minnesota Vikings lost the Super Bowl four times.

We chuckle now at how strait-laced we look in our senior photos, posing in the summer of 1967 just on the cusp of the long-hair explosion. Still, be honest: Would you rather see photos of yourself from the 60s — or from the 1980s? Admittedly, we all made serious errors in hair styling at some point in that decade.

But the hair had to be big because the news of the 80s also made you believe the world was coming to an end: Three Mile Island in '79, then Bhopal, Chernobyl, the Challenger explosion. Rock Hudson died of AIDS and the world could no longer ignore the health crisis it presented. Fortunately, AZT was also released in the '80s — and Prozac. And “We Are the World.” An actor was elected president and we had our first female Supreme Court Justice and candidate for vice president. Still, we lost heroes to tragic circumstance: John Lennon, John Belushi. “Funky Town” and “Purple Rain” were hits, the Twins won their first World Series and Prince won an Oscar.

The 90s were the last time a Minnesota professional sports team won a championship. And it was the first time that people from our generation really started to come to power. Also, perhaps not coincidentally, it was the decade that introduced Viagra. Even as there was a generational shift in our country, we were seeing ripples of it elsewhere in the world: with the release of Nelson Mandela and the fall of the Berlin Wall. But

we also began to see the many ways our legacy of race was playing out in the post-Civil Rights era: in the OJ Simpson case, in the confirmation hearings of Clarence Thomas, in the riots after police acquittals in the Rodney King case. We also saw the beginning of the way the 24-hour news cycle could drive the news once Fox News started competing with CNN for stories about everything from the Clinton scandals to, eventually, the nature of facts themselves. The heroes of our youth and adolescence took a hit when Jerry Garcia and Mickey Mantle died within a week of each other. It was a decade of everything from “Seinfeld” to “Twin Peaks,” from “Fargo” to “The Big Lebowski” — as well as a best-seller from a local boy made good (“Rush Limbaugh Is A Big Fat Liar”).

As the millennium approached, we worried that the Y2K bug was coming to get us. And that decade did seem to start like a three-car collision — first with the three-ring-circus of Bush-v-Gore, then with the shock of 9/11, followed by war in Afghanistan and Iraq. Still, we bounced back — until shortly after our 40th reunion in 2008, when the Great Recession crashed the party. In between were things like Abu Ghraib, the introduction of the iPod and iPhone, Jesse Ventura being elected governor of Minnesota and Arnold Schwarzenegger being elected governor of California. Oh, and also Hurricane Katrina, the election of the first African-American president and the death of icons like George Harrison, Ted Williams, Johnny Unitas — and Paul Wellstone.

Then we started hitting our 60s — and this decade, too, has been one damn thing after another. All of these mass shootings — the Batman premiere, the Orlando night club — and so many of them aimed at schools: Columbine, Sandy Hook, Parkland. On the other hand, we did get Bin Laden and made a movie about it. There was the scandal at Penn State and they made a movie about that — and a scandal in the Catholic Church, and they made a movie about that which won the Oscar. There was Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter and gay marriage and Brexit and Hurricane Sandy. And Donald Trump. Is it any wonder I'm playing this particular song on the soundtrack? (“Happy” by Pharrell)

By this point in our lives, we've all experienced birth, death, sadness, joy and the constant stress of everyday life. And it's easy to get so caught up in that — and the barrage of the 24-hour news universe — that you sometimes forget to notice how the world has changed and how we changed it.

Consider this: We are the first generation that grew up with television. It was something that was always there for us from the earliest age and we've seen it grow from a fuzzy black-and-white image broadcast on small, rounded screens to an everyday expectation of images that are crystal clear and larger-than-life-size. It has brought the world into our living rooms, taken us to the moon and back, and changed the nature of reality itself. We started out with four channels and a broadcast day that ended with the Star Spangled Banner and a test pattern. Now you can

watch any TV show you can think of at any time — and do it on your telephone.

Your telephone — is this some futuristic Dick Tracy shit or what? (You know you're getting old when you understand a Dick Tracy reference — or when you realize you got your first cell phone 20 years ago.)

Your phone is now your personal portal to virtually any fact in the universe. It can be a still camera or a movie camera or a movie theater — or even what we used to quaintly refer to as a stereo system, all in that pocket-sized device. And to think that, when we were in high school, most of us would have killed just for our own personal landline — at our parents' homes.

The advent of the internet and its complete takeover of the world is the kind of thing a handful of science-fiction writers may have anticipated by the late 1960s. But the rest of us? Forget it. We are the generation that created the Internet, but it's our children and grandchildren who are explaining it to us and showing us what it can be.

Want to get a sense of our age? Here's a little mental exercise:

Start thinking about the presidents whose histories we've lived through. When we were born, Harry Truman was president. Our childhood was Eisenhower; our adolescence was Kennedy and Johnson and Nixon. And all the rest who have come since.

Or think how many TV anchormen have come and gone, how many late-night hosts. Think how many actors have played James Bond. Or Batman.

Our parents and grandparents had Pearl Harbor, an event that shook the whole country — and did it via telegraph, radio and newspaper.

Our generation had the JFK assassination and its aftermath, played out on television.

Our children's had the terror attacks of 9/11. And that was covered by a mass-media machine so sprawling that it blanketed the television airwaves and internet with coverage for months afterward.

Our class was, for the most part, born in 1950, a fact we share with, among others, Bill Murray, Cybill Shepherd, Judge Lance Ito, Julius Erving, Debbie Allen and Rick Perry. And we all use the culture to mark the passage of time in different ways. Think about the sports heroes of our era — Killebrew, Tarkenton, the Purple People Eaters — who eventually gave way to a new generation of stars, and then another. Our generation of movie stars — Hoffman, Pacino, DeNiro — has been replaced by a younger generation.

And music? Forget it. They refer to our music as “classic rock” — and yet certain songs have the ability to instantly make me feel 16.

I occasionally run into people our age who seem surprised, given our generation's reputation for a rebellious adolescence and our conviction that we would change the world, that the Baby Boom generation has produced as many Republicans as Democrats, as many conservatives as progressives.

But I always assume that, statistically, just because there were more of us than the generation before didn't mean we'd break down any differently than them in our beliefs. Not everyone born in 1950 was a hippie or wanted to be. And that's still the case.

We are all different, yet we all share that bond of growing up and being exposed to the world in much the same way through the first 18 years of our lives. It is a very large world once you get out of high school, but there are a couple of specific groupings that you wind up being associated with through no choice of your own, which last you the rest of your life: the family you were born into, and the people you went to school with. And tonight we celebrate that history and friendship.

So welcome back, Class of 1968.

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