

Positively Haight Street • 1968



1968 was the year Eldridge Cleaver published *Soul on Ice*. He and his wife Kathleen, who had the most immense head of hair I'd ever laid eyes on, banked at my teller window. It was the year of the Yippies, Black Panthers, and the SDS, the year Martin Luther King was shot in Memphis—sparking riots across the nation. The day after his murder, hundreds of black kids from Poly High rolled down Haight in a tidal wave, smashing storefront windows and overturning cars.

1968 was the year of the sweeping anti-war protests, the Tet Offensive and the My Lai Massacre, the year the Viet Nam war ripped our country inside out. It was the year of the Democratic National Convention and the Chicago riots. Sirhan Sirhan assassinated Bobby Kennedy at the Los Angeles Ambassador Hotel, women were branded as bra-burning feminists, and 32 African nations boycotted the Summer Olympics in Mexico City. Richard Nixon was elected president, and Apollo 7 and 8 were launched.

I existed in the eye of this turbidity—not oblivious—but not overly concerned or connected to the world's chaos. Dressed in my starched white button-down collared blouse, navy A-line skirt, pantyhose, white flats, Coral Sea lipstick and a helmet-head Summer-Blonde flip, I watched with detached interest the swirl of humanity through the plate glass windows of my dad's five-and-dime and the corner bank across the street.



In my world, 1968 was the year the neighborhood stores closed, leaving empty shells with boarded windows. Customers were fed up with grungy panhandlers constantly asking for spare change to feed their mangy bandana-necked dogs, tired of stepping over stoned fourteen-year-old runaways who looked like five miles of blank road, and had it with being hustled by dreadlocked junkies, spaced-out punks, and blissed-out barefoot bums. The regulars hailed streetcars to Irving or took the bus over to Market, then eventually moved out of the Haight altogether.

1968 was the year Daddy's store closed. The Summer of Love, the riots, and the changing times did my father's business in. I find it worthwhile to note that his history echoed the same song from fifteen years earlier, the times again cracking my Dad's foundation and walls. Once again he sold his stock, boarded his windows, locked his glass front doors, and—once again—left town.



1968 was also the final straw for my mother. That was the year she ended her life in a small hotel on Whittier Boulevard, closing a chapter on mine.