



“Pops, I need your help on a school project,” Isabel, my high schooler, announced. “Since you’re ancient, may I interview you for my American history class?”

I’ve always been a sucker for history. I muted the football game. “Of course, Honey. Ask me anything you want. Halftime is about ten minutes away. Can we do it then?”

“Sure, Pops. I’ll get my notebook and recorder. Sally’s dad got invited to the White House one time. I can’t wait to hear what you’ve done.”

“No problem, Isabel. History is very important, you know.”

I could hardly focus on the game as I thought about the topic and about Sally’s dad—*invited to the White House...woo, woo*. At halftime I turned the TV completely off.

“Test, test,” Isabel spoke into the recorder before setting it atop my belly. “Don’t knock it off.”

“You don’t knock over my beer.”

She opened her notebook. “Okay, Pops, what is the one event or incident you witnessed which will most impact American history?”

“*Umm*, let’s see, so many choices. There’s that time I ate dinner at the Watergate Hotel the same night Bill Clinton got caught breaking into Republican headquarters. Then there is the time I was in Memphis when President Kennedy was assassinated. Have I ever told you that story?”

“No, Pops, you never told me that.”

“That was an awfully sad time in the history of our country.”

“Why were you in Memphis, and when did this happen?”

“It happened on the day President Kennedy was shot, for Pete’s sake, sometime in the sixties. You can Google it. I was a young fellow then, back when I was selling life insurance. I had a couple of hot leads in Memphis. The traffic was fouled up that day because the president was in town. The garbage workers were on strike and he came to tell ‘em to knock it off and start picking up the trash piling up everywhere. The whole city stunk to high heaven.

“Anyway, I’m in my motel room working up my prospect cards and I get hungry so I walk a few blocks to find something to eat. That’s when I see the president’s motorcade parked at another motel. Suits are milling about everywhere. I eat a couple of chilidogs at this little dive then head back to my room.

“I’m smoking a cig and walking on the sidewalk in front of some book suppository building opposite the president’s motel. I hear commotion, stop, look and dang if it’s not President Kennedy standing on the second floor balcony, that ‘grassy knoll’ as some people call it. Other men are with him. I recognize Jesse Jackson. Cigarette smoke is pouring out the open sliding glass door and they’re all carrying on, having a big time.

“I notice a man wearing a Cuban army cap standing beneath the president’s balcony. This Cuban dude nods to someone a few stories above my head in the book suppository. I twist and look up and see a rifle barrel extending from a window. Just as I start to shout a warning, *boom*. All hell breaks loose, and the president’s men on the balcony are pointing at the window above my head. What happened after that is a blur. Of course, the rest is history.”

“That’s so scary, Pops. You must have been shook up pretty good. Did the police talk to you?”

“Oh, did they ever. I bet I told the story a hundred times. Even had to drive up to Washington and testify before Congress. They didn’t even pay me enough to cover my gas. They eventually caught the assassin, John Wilkes Booth, I think. They put him in jail and threw away the key. I don’t know if he’s still alive or not. You could Google it.”

“Wow, wait until Sally hears about this.”

“Honey, could you hand me my beer so I don’t dump this tape recorder sitting on my belly?”

“Sure, Pops. Why do you always drink Bud Light anyway?”

“They did a double-blind taste test and proved most people prefer Bud Light. That’s good enough for me.”

“What’s a double-blind taste test?”

“That’s where they put a blindfold on the person doing the tasting then they put another blindfold on top of the first one. ‘Double-blind,’ you get it?”

“Yeah, I get it Pops.”

“They call that the scientific method.”

“I remember studying that in science class. I have some more questions.” Isabel studied her notebook. “Okay, let’s see...Is there another event or incident you witnessed which significantly impacted American history?”

“Let me think...There was that time I was in the bleachers when President Jimmy Carter lit the fuse on the Sputnik, which made Albert Einstein the first man on the moon. I’ve still got a baseball cap from that.”

“Awesome, Pops. I didn’t know that, either.”

“And there was that time I saw that strange flying object.”

“Tell me again what happened.”

“I was on the back porch grilling some hot dogs and pretzels. Suddenly I hear a *bang* in the sky. I look up and see this strange white light slowly

approaching from the treetops. It sways left and right like the wind is blowing it, but it's a calm night. The light blinks red and zooms toward me, growing larger, making no sound whatsoever. It hovers right over me for a second then, in a blur, it zips upward and is gone."

"Wow, Pops. Mind if I ask how much you had to drink before this happened?"

"I'll admit it was late but that doesn't mean it didn't happen, does it? Anyway, that ain't got nothing to do with the price of groceries. What's your next question?"

"Next is show and tell. Do you have one item I can show the class which relates to a significant person or event in American history?"

"*Umm*. You could take that Sputnik baseball cap, but I have no idea where it is. We used to have one of the original Magna Carters in the attic, but I think we lost it in the last move. You do know Jimmy Carter was named after the Magna Carter, don't you?" I pointed to the throw pillow with an embroidered Presidential seal. "Here, take the Presidential pillow."

"Where did we get it?" Isabel picked up the pillow and examined it.

"President Hoover gave it to my grandfather. When Mr. Hoover started his little vacuum cleaner company, Grandpa bought one of his first models. President Hoover gave Grandpa that pillow to thank him."

"Cool, Pops. I'm learning all kinds of history."

"You can take it to school, but guard it with your life."

"Okay. Last question."

"Good. The second half of the game is about to start."

"What would you say is the greatest invention of the last one hundred years?"

"Oh, golly. That's a toughie. There are so many. The computer, penicillin, the internet, television, processed foods—"

"Processed foods?"

"Oh, yeah. It's the preservatives. Use some logic. If monosodium-this and nitrate-that preserve the hot dogs I ate for lunch, what do you think they'll do inside my body?"

"Preserve it?"

"By thunder! Now you're catching on."

"Okay, but the question says you have to pick the *one* greatest invention of the last one hundred years."

"I see. That's a brain twister...*Umm*...Could be the bikini. Yes, I'll go with bikini, final answer."