

Child's Play Brings Back Memories of Busted Heads for Greying Protestor

by Con Chapman

DOWNERS GROVE, Illinois. At the age of 61, Zack Coffelt still can't believe he's a grandfather, much less a happy one. "My generation believed you couldn't trust anyone over 30, and now *I'm* an old geezer myself," he says with a laugh.

Kent State Action Figures

But Coffelt does his best not to fit the stereotype of the conventional grandparent; he insists that his grandson, five-year old Todd, call him by his first name instead of "Gramps", and he tries his best to impart the lessons of '60's counterculture to his grandson to make up for his son's rebellion.



Bus sold separately.

"My boy Jake fell in with a bad crowd when he went to college," Coffelt says, shaking his head, "a bunch of accounting majors." That wrong turn on the road of life led to a job as a C.P.A. that Coffelt

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scorns, although he made his peace with his wayward son once his grandson arrived.



"Grampa Zack is here!"

"I feel like I'm a child again," he says, but Jake quickly corrects him. "What do you mean--'Again'?" he asks rhetorically, but Zack dismisses him with a snort--"Young fart!" and shows his grandson the present he's brought with him.

"What is it?" the boy asks, but Zack wants to savor the moment. "Open it up and see," he says, and the boy rips off the paper to find a box containing a "Protestors vs. Establishment" plastic action figure set.

"Neat!" the boy exclaims, and Zack gets down on the floor to play with him. "Which side do you want to be?" he asks Todd.

"Which side has bigger guns?" the boy asks.

"Well, the establishment has the guns, but the protestors get the girls!" his grandfather says with a wistful gleam in his eye.

"Yuk," the boy says. "I wanna be the establishment!"

"Okay, have it your way," Zack says, and child and man get to work lining up their pieces for the coming battle.

"You go first, Zack," the boy says.

"O-kay," Coffelt says as he scans the floor, looking for an opening.

"I think I'm going to attack your--administration building!"



The aging hippie quickly moves his troops towards a plastic brick building and blocks the entrance. "That will stop you from turning creative young minds into tools of your corporate war machine!" he says with satisfaction.

"What do I do now?" the boy asks.

"Well, you can try to reason with me--use your Dean piece."

"Which one is that?"

"The little man with the bow tie whose wife is sleeping with an English professor," the grandfather says, pointing to a plastic figure at the boy's knee.



Riot police!

"What do I do with him?" the boy asks.

"He comes out and makes a restrained appeal to the protestors to engage in rational discourse," the grandfather says helpfully. "Then my guys get to pelt him with eggs!"

"Cool!" the boy says, and he walks his Dean piece to the steps of the administration building. "You kids are the best and brightest of your generation," the boy says, lowering his voice to the stern tone his father uses when he scolds him for finger-painting the walls.

"There's no reason why we can't agree to disagree on . . ."

Zack takes a little white plastic egg and flicks it at the Dean, hitting him in the head. "Ow!" Todd says, and trots the figure across campus to the President's house.

"That's the way!" his grandfather says. "He who turns and runs away, lives to fight another day!"



"Do I get to attack now?"

"Yep. Now the President of your college calls in the white ethnic policemen to beat up the upper-class trust fund students!"

The boy grabs a fistful of dark blue plastic police and begins to march them towards the protestors. "Youse spoiled brats!" he says, his voice a gruff imitation of the supermarket clerk who told him to take his sticky fingers off the comic books earlier in the day. "I'd give my right arm to be able to goof around for four years on my old man's nickel!"

"We win cause your men are high on dope!"

Zack is visibly moved as he sees how the youngster grasps the complicated sociological dynamics that made 60's protest a sometimes ambiguous and complicated business.

"What's that pig's name?" he asks the boy.

"I'm Sergeant Pulaski and I'm gonna bust your head open like an overripe melon!" the boy says as he brings a billy club down on the head of a plastic protestor.

"Everybody in the bus!"

Zack experiences a twinge on his skull where a member of the Chicago Police Department cracked his head open four decades earlier. "I think I'm having a flashback," he says, as he puts his hand to his head.

"What's that?" the boy asks.

"That's when you get all the benefits of drugs without having to pay for them!"

