

The Olivetti, the Bomb, and Why I Got My Degree in Economics

by Deborah Jiang-Stein

1960s Seattle thrived from Boeing, “The World’s First Family of Jets” a sure target for Soviet or Cuban submarines splitting through the Pacific Ocean or their missiles searing the air into our backyard.

Underground, those who could afford to build bomb shelter dugouts stocked cans of food in what looked like pantry-size graves lined with shelves.

We’ll never have families, my older brother and I and the other kids in my school vowed, *Why bother? We might never grow up anyway.*

If we try hard enough, we usually find our own revolution.

Us kids, we feared an empty future of ashes and who wants to survive anyway, deformed like we saw in class films, deformed from the bomb and us kids, the hope scared out of us while we crouched in the school basement for daily bomb drills, squatting with our arms crossed behind our heads.

Why bother? We’ll all get nuked anyway.

At home after school, nothing. Nothing about the bomb. Nothing about nuclear war. Nothing about disfigured faces the way I imagined, my little girl spindle legs dragging in shreds behind me, bone shards poking out of my skin, half my head open, my parents, brother, friends, neighbors, teachers, my cat, all blown to bits and I’m the only one left in the pile of ash, brick chips and concrete

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rubble.

At home, nothing but the click click tippity tap from my father's Olivetti, this one I'm typing on which I found stored with other boxes waiting for my grief to find its now-you-can-unpack-his-things stage.

At home, my father's Olivetti with poems and essays, literary critiques about his Paradise Lost but who the hell cares about Donne or Milton or 17th century literature when we're about to get bombed?

At home, nothing but my parent's friends who painted abstract landscapes and wrote poems and voted for Dick Gregory for President and sat around with dry Vermouth straight up in shot glasses or clinking Compari on the rocks, comparing stories about their Sabbaticals in Italy.

That's when I vowed to myself, *Do something in the world if I survived and for god's sake, not in the arts because how does art help the world?*

My what-to-do-and-who-to-be-when-I-grow-up included, 1) Fly airplanes and 2) Go to circus school and be a professional clown like the ones I saw in the campground size tent circus in Brittany when my father took us on his Sabbatical, and 3) Crane operator or other heavy equipment.

After high school and four college attempts later — drop out after drop out in several colleges and universities in three states because that's what a professor's daughter has to do if you're going to stay loyal to the revolution — I finally got my degree. In economics.

I stuck with my pledge, nothing in the arts, no literature or creative writing. Instead, John Keynes, Adam Smith, and Karl Marx on my palette.

At night I wrote poetry and hid my notebooks from my Black Panther and SDS and ex-con friends and later, other drug addict thugs like me until one day I dared myself to enter a poetry contest.

I won. Forced out of the closet, forced into the revolution where words fire on paper and language splits the air.

The revolution. It found me, and I didn't even get blown by the bomb.

