

Dancers: Summer '69

by Gary V. Powell

Once a week, we dodged deer and possum, Bloomington to Nashville, left road kill on the shoulder driving home. Between the dodging and the killing we drank beer, listened to a bluegrass band, and mingled with the locals.

The girl I lived with, Suze, held tight to an admin job at Healthcare Services, saving up for grad school. My friend Marty cut lawns and dodged the draft. I wrote stories on yellow legal pads, thinking I had a line on something no one else could see. The locals cut stone in quarries, built elevators at the Cummins plant in Columbus, or brewed shine back in the hills between Bean Blossom and Gnaw Bone.

The band played the standards, “Foggy Mountain Breakdown,” “Footprints in the Snow,” and “Man of Constant Sorrow.” After the band's first break, after the first few rounds put wind in their sails, folks took to the dance floor. They clogged and shuffled, the men straight-backed and stiff, the women loose and laughing. Marty and I took turns with Suze, spinning her out then reeling her in.

Along about closing time, the band in its final throes, the dance floor mostly cleared and the bar emptied of those who had to work for a living. Remaining were the shiners and the geezers. No women left to dance with, but with dancing left in their hearts, some swayed with a mop or a broom. Others danced with chairs, pushing them across the floor, eyes closed, elbows knocking.

Now and then, late at night, I think of Suze, a Facebook mother of three, Marty dead in a rice paddy at twenty-one. If no one else is around, I listen to bluegrass, drink a beer or two, and push a chair across the room.