

Sinister Age of the Draft

by Meg Tuite

When I turned six I became victim to one of the many human abuses of dumping a child out of the back of a station wagon into the snot-filled clutches of a pack of anonymous kids. It was an enforced group dynamics that came with all its paranoids, masochists and victims for no other reason than that we had turned the same sinister age of the draft, and as it was a Catholic school in the 70's, abuse was not only condoned, but expected at any and all levels.

The teacher was a myopic, old woman with a pink barrette and brown teeth who spent a large portion of her day trying to figure out what her pension would be if she quit that afternoon, punching numbers into an adding machine, picking it up and sneering at it as reality spread bitterness over her face, while we were left to ourselves—a sort of Lord of the Flies meets Mickey Mouse—in which the forces of evil press in on the good like white bread on peanut butter. The so-called good, a weak but whiny lot, who actually clung to that abstract of "justice for all," would tattle to Mrs. Pufry...Mzzz Puffy, she hit me...Mzzz Puffy he said the bad word...Mzzz Puffy, I gotta go...Mzzz Puffy, Thomas is hanging in the cloakroom again..." and Mrs. Pufry's hand would absently lash out at the sniveling chorus and shoo them back to their seats without looking up, including the one who had to go, who was now shamed into retreat with the rest of them, finding out early in life that time was never to be on his side as he fought a losing battle with the vicious stream that laughed its way down his pant legs.

After lunch and regulated nap, Mrs. Pufry would suddenly lurch up out of her chair and stumble toward the supply cabinets, like some hideous, reanimated corpse, and hurl herself around the room throwing out instructions, crayons, construction paper and panic, forcing an art deadline on all of us.

The class experienced its first creative block, staring at the paper, a pile of broken crayons, the clock that rushed around in a circle none of us could decipher, and Mrs. Pufry, now looming over us, pacing the aisles, staring down at the feeble slashes and stick men with disgust, cuffing a few heads yelling, "hurry up, fill that page, nobody asked for Picasso!"

When the final bell rang at three o'clock and our parents lined up outside for their wards, each shaky child clutched a lopsided monkey, tortured landscapes, family portraits with a member of two missing, heads without bodies, bodies without heads, in what could have been a fair rendition of the birth, or at the very least, the first mass movement toward minimalism. School turned out to be a daily workshop in human dynamics.

