

# **Still Searching the Sixties: Past and Future Conversations**

A few reflections by Peter J. Longo

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No doubt the reflective baby boomers have fascinating memories from the 1960s. The baby boomers in the aggregate have much to offer as humankind lurches through 2008 and beyond. It is not just the survivors of the sixties who might use the past as a guide. Pundits have and will continue to make reference to the good and not so good days. Pundits compare Barack Obama to Robert Kennedy. Pundits suggest that John McCain stirs memories of Viet Nam. The people, events, and places of the 1960s are not the exclusive domain of those who lived through the 1960s or the so-called pundits. Rather, an appreciation of the people, events and places of the 1960s should be on-going. As a citizenry, we have not arrived at describing, interpreting, or appreciating the 1960s. Some may wish to interpret the decade with a “revisionist” memory while others might interpret the events with a fuzzy normative twist, and, still others may choose to draw analogies to the present. The lessons will be many and a catalyst for robust analysis of the 1960s is found in The NET project *1968: The Year Nebraska Mattered*.

We are so fortunate to have excellent footage and well crafted pages to jolt our memories and forge new memories as well. The NET project *1968: The Year Nebraska Mattered* provides a deeply profound memory refresher and creator. Such a work should move us. A perfect movement would be to have as many citizens either refresh their memories or for those born after the 1970, inject moments into their very being. Regardless, if you lived through the sixties, or were born post 1960s, there is a highly effective way to restore vitality to the lessons form the sixties. And, that is; in some form visit with those who made it through the sixties or invoke the spirit of those who served as inspirational forces in the sixties.

For starters, visit the NET cast of citizens. Check out the link and get involved in conversation. <http://www.netnebraska.org/extras/campaign08/68.htm>  
Introduce or reacquaint yourself to the 1960s.

Or, one could read the cogent work from a Nebraska treasure, Ted Sorensen. Mr. Sorensen has much to offer and if you cannot catch him in person, read his work. Moments with the Ted Sorensen, either in person or with his written work will provide rich insights into the sixties as well as today. There are many treasures to extract.

Or, visit or reacquaint yourself with the lessons provided by a family member. My late mother, a mother of nine children (and I was the “baby”) left me so many important and enduring lessons. She allowed my father to care for so many in his medical practice and at home she created political order in the best sense. My oldest brother--- a newly minted physician sent off Viet Nam as the sixties passed into the seventies--- was in the midst of many issues from the sixties and seventies. My mom was an astute citizen of many

eras—WWI, the Great Depression, World War II, Viet Nam. It was my mother's worldview that got us through the sixties and her lessons guide me today. She taught us that good action was essential to happiness. And she guided all nine of us accordingly. During my brother's action in Viet Nam my mother assigned us with letter writing, news monitoring, praying, map reading but most importantly my mother taught us how to connect to the human condition. I miss her. Rekindle the memories and establish new memories as well. *1968: The Year Nebraska Mattered* should prompt our memories and perhaps leads us to conversations with citizens like my mother.

Or, delve into the punctuated Nebraska 1968 moments. Such moments include but are not limited to:

- Governor Norbert Tiemann's sales tax generated many public projects and a political price
- Demonstration against George Wallace at the Omaha Civic Auditorium
- Civil rights leaders in Omaha maintain calm following the death of Dr. King
- Citizens push for fluoridation of Omaha's water
- Alvin Plucker of Trenton is among the crew of the U.S.S. Pueblo
- Future Nebraska leaders Chuck Hagel and Bob Kerry serving in Vietnam.
- The death penalty for Duane Pope, a man who killed three in Big Springs
- Omaha University merges with the NU system
- The Nebraska Supreme Court in *Cavitt*, upheld legislation allowing involuntary sterilization against a citizen
- Sporting events include missing a bowl game, being drubbed by Oklahoma and watching in awe the mastery of Bob Gibson, and more
- Robert Kennedy, Eugene McCarthy, and Richard Nixon in Nebraska

Of course the above represents just a fraction of history. The more history the public discusses the better our collective endeavor becomes. A comprehensive list would be voluminous. Yet, all of us should take advantage of visiting or reading or reminding ourselves of the people and events of the 1960s. An informed citizenry is essential for good government. Please immerse yourself with conversations from the sixties. The history should not be lost and the lessons not forgotten. We still have much to learn.