OBSESSION

Troy Fuller was a fanatic for everything related to America in the 1960s.

He was born in Pasadena, California in 1950. As a result, his formative teenaged years were solidly from 1964-1969. This was a golden era for the young, with exciting new music, surfing, cruising cars, tanning at the beaches, dancing, drinking parties, and casual sex. Such joys, however, were somewhat overshadowed by rampant drug abuse by some, the continuing struggle for Civil Rights, and by the increasingly unpopular war in Vietnam.

Now, at age 72, Fuller was a retired real estate agent who had done quite well over the years in the lucrative Southern California housing market. He had met his wife, Majorie, at the legendary 3-day Woodstock Music Festival in Bethel, New York, in mid-August, 1969. After living together in a hippie commune in the Adirondacks for several months, the couple eventually got married and moved back to the west coast. Both gave up their mild LSD experimentations and hashish-smoking and settled into more typical adult life. They both remained, however, fringe rebels and counter-culturalists in their private lives. They had skipped going to college and instead went right into the work force. A congenital defect in his right eye had kept Troy from being drafted by the military and sent to fight in Southeast Asia. The couple had a fine daughter -- whom they named Sunshine -- but their only child was tragically killed in a car accident on the 101 Freeway outside of Ventura when she was just twenty-one. Much later, Marjorie had succumbed to uterine cancer at the age of sixty-one, some eight years ago -- so Troy was on his own since then, and he decided to never re-marry.

The Fuller house in Pasadena looked normal from the outside, and was situated on a quiet cul-de-sac. The wild home interior, however, was another story: lime green shag carpeting, Andy Warhol pop art, incense sticks and healing crystals, psychedelic 'black light' posters of 60s concerts at the Fillmore in San Francisco, beaded curtains, lava lamps, beanbag chairs and colorful pillows, LP and 45 rpm vinyl records, peace signs, framed photos of Bob Dylan, Jim Morrison, Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, the Beatles and others, and still more orange and purple hippie regalia. Upstairs in the master bedroom was a king-sized water bed. It was like a living time capsule from the past, lovingly collected and assembled by Troy and Marjorie over decades of perusing various garage sales and antique stores. The couple's pride and joy, though, was a mint-condition and very pampered 1966 hunter green Ford Mustang convertible. Troy enjoyed regularly applying hard-shell Turtle Wax and buffing the rich car finish to a gleaming shine on weekends.

Since retirement, Troy grew what was left of his hair out and swept it back into a thinning, gray and white pony tail -- mockingly referred to by the public as the 'boney-tail' of an ancient, devoted hippie. He also grew (as best he could) a drooping walrus moustache.

With plenty of time on his hands, Fuller became fascinated with researching true news stories of people who had shut themselves off from the rest of the world and had hence refused to live in the modern era.

He read about two brothers -- Homer and Langley Collyer -- who had barricaded themselves in their owned Harlem brownstone in New York City for decades, until a neighbor notified the police in 1947 about a terrible odor coming from the building. What the shocked authorities discovered inside will be detailed in a moment.

The brothers' parents had both been successful professionals: their father was a medical doctor and their mother was an opera singer. Both brothers had attended Columbia University, with Homer earning a law degree and Langley studying engineering and chemistry (as well as being an accomplished concert pianist, who even performed in Carnegie Hall). Neither brother ever married, and they took care of their ailing mother after their father died, until she passed away.

One day, Homer suffered hemorrhages behind both eyes and was rendered blind. Langley quit his job to take full-time care of him. That was when the bizarre behavior of extreme hoarding and isolation began.

Langley started to collect newspapers, tin cans, books, magazines, old furniture, musical instruments, and other junk retrieved from city trash piles when he ventured out in the middle of the night to buy food for himself and Homer. Blackout drapes shielded the pair from natural sunshine and from the curious gazes of any outsiders. After many months of unpaid utility bills, the electricity, telephone, heat and water to the house was finally shut off -- yet the brothers remained in the building and figured out how to survive over many years. Langley quietly fetched water in buckets for their needs from a nearby public park spigot, and he purchased kerosene for both a small space heater and a lantern for some evening light.

So what did the police discover when they entered the Collyer haven? 149 TONS of rotting refuse and filth -- stacked floor to ceiling in every room -- with the corpse of Langley, age 61, buried under a massive pile of accumulated trash, dead from suffocation. Twelve days later, the body of blind Homer, age 65, was also finally unearthed. He had died from starvation and heart disease.

It took months for the authorities to empty out the house, under the eyes of shocked and disbelieving onlookers. The empty brownstone was eventually demolished, and a small public park (with commemorative plaque) was erected on the site.

Troy Fuller was aghast at learning of this grisly true tale, but then he found another one -- fortunately, much less gruesome.

Two Southern Confederate women in Georgia -- upon learning that both their husbands had been killed fighting, and that the Union Forces had ultimately won the awful Civil War -- barricaded themselves in their ruined mansion and refused to ever come out again and live in a 'Yankee'-ruled world. They made arrangements to have food regularly delivered under cover of darkness by sympathetic neighbors, having written notes with their needs, and adding money to pay for their requests. No one saw them or stepped inside their home until one day in 1909 when the notes and money ceased being left. The completely unaware authorities were duly notified. Upon breaking in, they found both widows long dead and decomposing in the stifling Georgian summer heat. Reports noted, however, a remarkable scene -- a rather tidy 'time capsule' home interior, it having been totally unchanged since 1865!

These two unusual tales gave Troy Fuller an peculiar yet challenging idea: what if I shut myself off from the outside world -- say, for a full year, as an experiment -- and try to immerse myself back into the 1960s, my favorite era? I could keep a daily journal perhaps, or even sell my saga to a national magazine for cash, or maybe write it all up as a best-selling book? I might even be invited on radio or television as a famous and unique celebrity, he mused. He would skip the crazy eccentricities of the Collyer brothers, but he could use some of the ideas that the two Confederate widows had put into practice.

First, Troy went to his physician for his annual check-up. He slyly lied and told Dr. Kline that he was going abroad to travel across Europe for an entire year. Thus, he scored a supply of his three prescription medicines (for controlling cholesterol and high blood pressure, and a standard blood thinner) for the next twelve months.

Next, he told his neighbors that he was going into isolation inside his home for a full year, to write his first novel. He was not to be disturbed for any reason whatsoever, he made it very clear. Everyone agreed.

Then he went to the main Pasadena post office to have all of his mail transferred a special P.O. box for twelve months. (He earlier paid off all of his credit card balances, so he would not be disturbed by any such bills and notices.)

He went next to his local Raley's supermarket -- which conveniently offered a 24-hour food delivery service -- and paid in advance for a year's supply of specifically-ordered foods from a list; Fuller further specified that deliveries had to be delivered every Saturday at midnight and must be left outside his back door.

Troy then paid in advance for his land-line telephone, and his electric and water and garbage pick-up (at his back door now, until further notice) services, for the next 12 months. He told his Mexican lawn care and landscaping crew that they were to come every other week as usual, but that they had to refrain from using their noisy leaf blowers, and that they had to use an old-fashioned push lawn mower (for extra quiet) rather than their typical loud gas-powered mower. Troy likewise paid them in advance for a year.

Finally, Fuller told his tax attorney, Nick Arronax, to pay his state and federal income taxes, and his property taxes, without disturbing him for the coming year. "I'm writing my first novel, and cannot ruin my concentration for any reason," he explained. "You have Power of Attorney and can legally sign my name." Nick thought these dictates were rather strange, but because he was paid in advance, he let his doubts dissolve.

Convinced that all of his plans were covered, Troy Fuller settled in for twelve months of total experimental isolation. "Back to the 1960s!" he said aloud, rubbing his hands with glee. He would begin on January 2, the calm day after Pasadena's famous annual televised Rose Bowl Parade.

Troy put in a last supply of original 1960s newspapers (including the historic July 20, 1969 Apollo 11 moon landing), and suitable copies of Look and Life magazines, as well as a decade's worth of the National Geographic. His stockpile of vintage music, books, TV shows, and movies were all ready to go too. In his basement, Fuller had previously put in a treadmill and a basic weight-lifting set for daily exercise. He also had bought dozens of plastic 1960s Revell car models, which he enjoyed gluing together and painting as a youth. Lastly, Troy had always wanted to craft his own eight-foot wooden surfboard, so he had gathered detailed instructions, the large heart redwood panel he would shape, the required planing and sanding tools, and the special varnish to complete the lengthy but hopefully satisfying job.

His days would be organized into reading, hobby-crafting, meditation, exercising, listening to music, watching movies and television, writing, and of course cooking, keeping the house clean, doing laundry, eating, and sleeping. He would turn off his cell phone and laptop computer and place them out-of-sight. He had a Royal manual typewriter now for his daily journal writing and other uses, such as his specific memories of the 1960s. He would unplug his land-line telephone, which he wisely kept in case of any emergency that might arise. He then closed the thick drapes in every room of the house to shut out the modern world. Skylights in the upstairs room ceilings, however, would let in natural light when required. Lastly, an all-house huge attic fan system would bring in fresh outdoor air whenever Fuller wanted it.

Troy dressed in one of his authentic hippie outfits -- a tie-dyed T-shirt, fringed vest, 'love bead' necklace, colorful headband, and sandals. If only Majorie was with me now! he wished, when he saw his reflection in their full-length master bedroom mirror. But when it came time to put on an old pair of denim bell-bottom pants, he had to admit that he just couldn't fit into them anymore. So the disappointed but not really surprised poor senior hippie was forced to wear a baggy pair of navy sweatpants instead.

A bright 55 degree F. dawn met Fuller on January 2. He would now seal himself inside of his home until January 1 the following year -- going out only briefly under cover of darkness to collect his weekly food delivery on his back porch and put out the trash in the blue bins by his back door. Every stressful modern anxiety would try to be forgotten, starting today: the endless U.S. political upheavals; threats from China; fears about Russia and Iran; rising crime and culture wars; rampant price inflation; climate change concerns, worries over new COVID variants, etc. "Enough of this crap! I've had it!" Troy uttered aloud. "I'm going back to a better, happier time!"

Although marijuana was now legal in his state, Fuller decided against risking it (or dropping any acid/LSD for that matter) at his advanced age. He had smoked enough grass as a teen to know of its mellow but also potentially harmful effects.

His only concession to modernity was a DVD player hooked up (with the help of an adapter) to an old 26" Zenith television console with its huge picture tube. He had to play his 1960's movies and TV programs this way, there being no real alternative. His music record collection, however, could still be played on his vintage RCA turntable Hi-Fi stereo system with its upgraded Muntz speakers. As for 1960s radio programs, Troy had already recorded digital computer downloads of vintage shows (from YouTube, Sirius-XM, and MixCloud) to reel-to-reel magnetic tapes, so those could be enjoyed for many hours at a time.

Troy's bathroom was stocked with Safeguard soap, Right Guard deodorant, Bayer aspirin, Head & Shoulders shampoo, Gillette 'Blue Blade' razor blades, Barbasol shaving cream, Gleem toothpaste, Scope mouthwash, One-a-Day multivitamins, Bactine antiseptic, Kleenex tissues, and Charmin toilet paper.

His kitchen would be regularly supplied with such staples as: orange Tang instant breakfast drink; Kellogg's Corn Flakes and Rice Krispies; General Mills Cheerios; Nabisco Shredded Wheat; Kellogg's Pop-Tarts; Spam; Hostess Cupcakes; Kraft Macaroni and Cheese Dinner; Chef Boyardee Beefaroni and SpagettiOs; Campbell's Tomato, Chicken Noodle, and Cream of Mushroom soups; French's French Onion Mix (for making dips); Ruffles potato chips; StarKist tuna; Van de Camps Pork and Beans; Oscar Meyer hot dogs and bologna; Wonder Bread; Ritz Crackers, Underwood Deviled Ham; Skippy Peanut Butter; Smuckers fruit jams; various flavors of Jell-O; Velveeta and Cheez Wiz processed cheese, Heinz Ketchup, French's Mustard, Kraft Mayonnaise, Royal Crown Cola, and more. Troy wished that Swanson frozen dinners were still around -- in their aluminum trays, covered with tin foil -- but they were no more. Naturally, he had fresh fruits & vegetables, milk, eggs, meat, and poultry delivered weekly to keep his health well-balanced.

Fuller started his attempted journey back in time by listening to nothing but 1960s radio programs. His favorite station as a teenager was KHJ @ 93 on the AM dial -- The Boss 30. ("Live from 'Boss' Angeles!") He reveled in the peppy DJ banter from the likes of The Real Don Steele, Humble Harve, Charlie Tuna, Sam Riddle, and Robert W. Morgan. All the 1960s music he loved, plus the weather, news and sports, the call-in contests for cash and prizes, the song request line, and those wonderful, tuneful commercials -- for tanning products (Tanya, Sea and Ski, Johnson's Baby Oil), hair lighteners (Summer Blonde), colognes (Numero Uno) and perfumes (Heaven Scent), Olympia and Burgermeister (a.k.a. Burgie) beer, Thrifty Drug Stores, Wrigley's chewing gum, acne creams, shoe and clothing stores, STP oil treatment, drag racing events, movie promos, upcoming rock concerts at the Hollywood Bowl, and more. Just a few hours of pleasant listening propelled a delighted Fuller immediately back to the past...

First days, then weeks, then months went by. Soon, it was May. Troy remained in good spirits and was thriving. His sleep was deep and satisfying each night. He was healthy and content. His isolation experiment of trying to live exclusively in the 1960s for a full year was working very well. His daily routine offered plenty of variety and diversity.

For his reading two hours a day, he alternated between newspapers and magazines with books. He was very pleased with his choice of novels: three by James A. Michener (Hawaii, The Source, Caravans); two by Arthur Hailey (Hotel, Airport); The Agony and the Ecstasy by Irving Stone; Portnoy's Complaint by Philip Roth; The Godfather by Mario Puzo; The Andromeda Strain by Michael Crichton; Tai-Pan by James Clavell; two by Ian Fleming (You Only Live Twice, The Man With the Golden Gun); The Sand Pebbles by Richard McKenna; Ship of Fools by Katherine Anne Porter; and The Shoes of the Fisherman by Morris West. Several of these 1960s best-sellers were massive historical fiction entries, which was Troy's favorite genre. He had many other books to enjoy too.

Fuller exercised, meditated, and worked on his surfboard and car models. If he wanted to use his voice, he sang aloud along with his chosen records -- seeing as there was no one to talk to. His favorite groups were The Beach Boys, Jan & Dean, Paul Revere & The Raiders, The Four Seasons, The Temptations, Simon & Garfunkel, The Righteous Brothers, The Beatles, and The Mamas & The Papas. He was also a big fan of Gene Pitney, Glen Campbell, and Eric Burton. His top summer songs were Ode to Billie Joe by Bobbie Gentry, Hot Fun in the Summertime by Sly & The Family Stone, and It's Not Unusual by Tom Jones.

Troy typed away on his Royal typewriter, both daily journal entries and separate pages devoted to his 1960s teenaged memories. He felt that these latter offerings might be of use to future generations, who could benefit from knowing exactly what it was like living the wonder of free-wheeling and easy-going Southern California in the 1960s. A cooler and groovier era never existed! he proudly proclaimed.

The aging hippie watched two hours of television in the mornings, and treated himself to a movie every evening. He grouped his TV shows: Leave It to Beaver, The Andy Griffith Show, Dobie Gillis, Father Knows Best, Make Room for Daddy, and The Dick Van Dyke Show were in one 'family' group. Another group, for light comedy, was: Green Acres, The Beverly Hillbillies, Hogan's Heroes, F-Troop, Gomer Pyle, and Get Smart. For westerns, it was Gunsmoke and Bonanza. For science fiction, the group was: The Outer Limits, One Step Beyond, The Twilight Zone, Star Trek, and The Time Tunnel. Spies and secret agents were grouped with The Man From U.N.C.L.E., Mission: Impossible, and The Avengers. Lastly, for suspense, it was Perry Mason and Alfred Hitchcock Presents. Because he had collected the entire seasons of most of these classic television series, Fuller had more than enough to watch!

Similar groupings were done with Troy's 1960s favorite movie choices: James Bond agent 007 films -- Dr. No, Thunderball, Goldfinger, and From Russia With Love; Westerns -- Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, Once Upon a Time in the West, The Magnificent Seven, The Wild Bunch, The Good the Bad and the Ugly, and The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance; Science Fiction films -- 2001: A Space Odyssey, Planet of the Apes, and The Time Machine; Warfare -- The Dirty Dozen, The Great Escape, and Dr. Strangelove; Crime -- Bonnie and Clyde, In Cold Blood, Easy Rider, and Cool Hand Luke; Hitchcock -- The Birds, and Psycho; Historical epics -- Lawrence of Arabia, Dr. Zhivago, Spartacus, Becket, and A Man For All Seasons. He had many others not grouped (such as The Graduate, The Apartment, and Midnight Cowboy) -- even several foreign films (e.g. A Man and a Woman, Georgy Girl, and The Virgin Spring) -- which would be enough to last him all twelve months of seclusion and isolation. He would never be bored for visual entertainment.

Around mid-July, meanwhile, Troy noticed that he was now exclusively dreaming about the 1960s when asleep. The modern era had been completely forgotten, as if it had never occurred. He had totally convinced -- or willed -- himself of his truth. His subconscious being had morphed itself back into his teenaged past. He carefully noted this deep psychological transformation in his daily typed-up journal. Fuller realized that he was now eating, reading, writing, remembering, listening, watching, meditating, and working on his surfboard and car models in a totally 1960s mindset. Yet it was effortless, natural, and pleasant! It could even be considered blissful.

Soon, however, unexpected changes took place.

In his bathroom mirror over several mornings, Troy Fuller noticed that his hair was gradually getting thicker and darker. He undid his pony tail and closely examined his scalp. What was going on?

Next, he weighed himself on his bathroom scale. He had lost seven pounds from his original 5'11", 203 pound frame. After that curious discovery, he weighed himself every other day for the next month. He found that he was losing weight at a consistent rate -- now down to 189 pounds. Yet his body seemed to be displaying more muscle tone and less fat when he examined his naked self in the master bedroom full-length mirror. Meanwhile, his hair continued to get darker and thicker. It was as if his body was aging itself, only in reverse!

Next, Troy's wrinkles and sagging skin folds were noticed to be slowly going away. He noted that the age spots on his hands, and the thin ridges on his fingernails, were likewise vanishing. When reading, he realized that he didn't need his eyeglasses any more either. This is incredible! he duly recorded in his diary. Mentally, he then discovered that he was remembering long-forgotten memories of his teenaged years, and even more detailed commune experiences with Marjorie after they had attended Woodstock -- vivid, specific events that he hadn't recalled in almost fifty years.

Four more months went by. It was now mid-November. Troy weighed in at 173 pounds -- the exact number he tallied when he was nineteen years old. He was able to wear his old denim bell-bottomed pants again, his waist size reverted, he happily discovered! He compared himself to old photos of himself from his teen youth, and was amazed. His body was toned like a young man again, and his daily exercise routine was virtually effortless, so he upped his weight-lifting regimen and speeded up on the treadmill. Fuller's appetite also increased. His hunger and energy level was like a teenager again. His hair and walrus moustache were manly and dark brown. Wrinkles and skin folds -- shockingly gone! Sexually, his now steely erection often woke him up at night, and he resumed having healthy but messy nocturnal emissions. More than occasionally, Troy had to resort to masturbation to release his natural build-up of excess sperm. To spare himself guilt, he fantasized about Marjorie during such times. If only she was with him now, and could share his vigorous virility!

Although his transformation had violated all the universal laws of known science, the former 72-year-old hippie -- through strict and total immersion into the past, over the uninterrupted span of eleven months-- had incredibly become young again.

But there was an alarming possible problem looming.

Troy suddenly remembered that back in 1968 -- just before his eighteenth birthday on December 12th -- he suffered the terrible pains and alarming fever of an inflamed appendix, and had to be rushed for emergency hospital surgery, a procedure which narrowly saved his life.

Fuller noticed one day in early December that the surgical scar on the lower right side of his abdomen was gradually disappearing. He was very worried. What if his appendix was somehow growing itself back, seeing as his biological age was apparently reversing itself? A crazy theory, yes, but...what if?

Troy found out a few days later. Sharp, agonizing pains on his lower left abdomen that migrated to his right side, accompanied with a raging fever. He remembered what had happened next, and he knew what would happen if he didn't get to a hospital within the next few hours.

Fuller realized that he needed to abort his twelve -month isolation and seclusion goal and leave his sealed house. He felt that he could carefully walk the twenty minutes or so to nearby Huntington Hospital -- three blocks away -- while he was still able. He felt strong enough to skip taking a cab, asking a neighbor, or driving himself. It was not far.

So Troy grabbed his wallet and a jacket -- having no idea what the weather was like outside -- and opened his front door for the first time since January 2. He stepped outside.

But Fuller quickly became disoriented. He felt dizzy and light-headed, and started gasping for breath. The date was now December 11th, just past noon...

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When the police and paramedics arrived ten minutes later, the neighbors were questioned while the still-warm corpse was covered with a blanket and loaded into a waiting ambulance.

What was his name? Was this his house? And why was he dressed like some kind of bizarre 1960s 'flower child' hippie?

The neighbors were mystified, however, because poor Troy Fuller had deteriorated into a crumpled and decrepit mummy of a man.

He appeared at least twenty-five years older than the formerly active seventy-two year old neighbor they had once interacted with.

In fact, they all agreed that they could hardly recognize the unfortunate Troy Fuller anymore...

THE END

by Jack Karolewski

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