

Strike!

By Paul Fessenden
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The Vietnam War was raging, and President Nixon had announced that Cambodia had been bombed by America. I was a high school junior. The local college was on strike to protest what they perceived as "crimes against humanity" by their government. It was beautiful Spring day in May of 1970. The college campus, a quarter mile from my school, teemed with striking students, sitting around singing folk songs, catching some sun, and throwing Frisbees... all much more appealing than my high school classes.

I wish I could say that a deep-seated moral conviction drove me to skip school that day, but I have to admit that it had much more to do with college girls and the "free love" ethic that infected our generation.

The students had hung a sheet from a brick wall in the courtyard. On it was painted a bloody fist and the word **STRIKE!** in two foot high letters. Some students sang, some drank beer, a few smoked pot, but mostly we just sat around feeling good about ourselves because we were doing our part to end the war. (How naive that sounds today!)

As I sat flirting with a very cute girl, a school bus pulled up. To my dismay, it was my mother's bus (she had driven bus for several years) and down the steps she came, as mad as I've ever seen her. My first thought was, "How could she have seen me in this big crowd?" But it was apparent that she hadn't seen me; she was headed into the crowd.

My mother is a no-nonsense woman. Five feet tall, she raised sixboys and didn't put up with actions and attitudes that she considered foolish. This occasionally embarrassed her boys because she was more outspoken than other moms -- but on reflection she was usually right in her thinking.

Up to the wall she marched with hundreds of students watching. A deafening silence fell when she reached up, pulled the sheet from the wall, wadded it up, and tossed it into a trash can. She wheeled around and shouted, "If you're striking for peace, you do not need to use a bloody fist as your symbol!"

She calmly climbed back in her bus and drove off. The crowd was silent for a full three seconds before a faculty member started applauding. Before I knew it, the entire crowd was cheering this little woman who had dared to confront an angry mob.

I'm not sure that my dad or any of my brothers ever knew about this incident. I couldn't tell them -- I wasn't supposed to be there. My mom acted on her convictions and went on with her life. I'm not sure if this event had any long-term effect on the other people who witnessed it, but it made an indelible mark on me.