Born right after WWII, I grew up with the constant ebb and flow of Cold War tensions, all the way through to adulthood. I was aware and followed the Cold War from a very young age. It affected my life. I have very many unpleasant memories of those years, and they do still resonate today, long after the Cold War ended.

- Although not aware at the time, I soon learned of the *Berlin Blockade* and airlift; who were the “good guys” and who were the “bad guys”... guys to be feared.
- Recovering from WWII, the new dangerous threat (real or imagined) was the Soviet Union and especially Communism, taking over the world and enslaving we Americans. Although I didn’t quite understand it as a child, I learned that Communists were taking over Korea in 1952 in a new war. My mother had a cousin who was killed there. I attended the funeral. I remember the jets flyover, the bugle playing Taps, and the loud report of the rifles. I jumped. It was real.
- I also became aware that Communists had taken over China. Now both the USSR and the Chinese were under Communist rule. Who would be next, I wondered and feared?
- Again I didn’t quite understand it all, but I was aware of *McCarthyism*; that there were allegedly many Communists hiding among us, and out to destroy us. I watched the Senate hearings at the time, but did not fully understand Joe McCarthy and what it all meant. Nevertheless it added to my childhood’s fears.
- I remember watching on TV, the Soviets driving tanks into Budapest, during the *Hungarian Revolution of 1956* to quell an uprising. I learned what a Molotov cocktail was. I didn’t’ quite understand it all, but I worried Soviet tanks might soon be in my neighborhood too.
- As a child I watched on an early black-and-white television a Saturday program by the US Army showing hydrogen bombs exploding, and our US troops training for the next World War that would involve nuclear weapons.
Of course we did “duck and cover” drills in grade school, as others here have indicated. But these only heightened our fear of Communists, the USSR, and nuclear weapons. I remember as a kid in our small farming town and not really a target, people building their own personal nuclear fall-out shelters. They kept this quiet, since space was limited if ever needed.

As a youth once I watched an Orwellian TV program (indeed it may have been a presentation of Orwell's “1984”) that really scared me. It was about a totalitarian government spying on their citizens in their homes. My parents had to assure me that this would not happen, but it always worried me.

At age 10 in 1956 I heard Soviet Premier, Nikita Khrushchev state, “We will bury you!” Along with many, my already established fear of Communism and the Soviet Union abruptly increased by a large magnitude.
In 1957 the *Space Race* started with the Soviets launching Sputnik. Not only did they beat the US in space, but also more disturbingly it showed they had intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capabilities. Their nuclear missiles could now reach us.

The Soviets shot down a U.S. U-2 reconnaissance aircraft in their airspace in the 1960 *U-2 incident*. They captured pilot Gary Powers, putting him on trial as a spy. The incident stopped the Four-Power Summit to be held within weeks, and seriously heightened Cold War tensions. I felt sorry for the pilot, and worried about his imprisonment.

Car radios had the two *CONELRAD* emergency broadcast stations marked on their radio dial in case of attack. Also we had air raid sirens in my small hometown warning of an enemy air attack. These were often tested, every time adding to my fears.
• It also seemed that there was always one crisis after another, each one increasing tensions and the prospect of a real war: Berlin Crisis of 1961, Congo Crisis, and destabilization as the Soviets supported revolutions and communism in newly de-colonized countries.

• Sometimes I imagined Soviet troops coming across our family farm’s fields. I foolishly wondered if I would and should shoot at them with my little .22 caliber rifle, or just run and hide.

• We worried about the Nevada Nuclear Test Site and fallout drifting over our farm. We learned that cows quickly absorbed one type of radioactive fallout,
leading us to wonder if our milk was contaminated with cancer causing radiation.

I remember my freshman high school history teacher's comments during the Cuban revolution, when Castro ousted the dictator Batista. While most initially applauded in the US, she feared he was a Communist. And right she was, adding to my fear. The Communists were getting close.

Of course the absolute pinnacle of fear and foreboding was the Cuban missile crisis. We as a nation looked into the abyss and saw Armageddon coming during these few tense days of the U.S. Soviet standoff and blockade, with many fingers on the nuclear triggers. Along with most all Americans during those unimaginably tense days, I was really scared! As also were my parents! All drew a huge sigh of relief when both sides backed off.
Then in 1961, Cold War tensions were heightened again with the Berlin Crisis of 1961. After watching people being shot as they escaped from East Berlin, soon 33 Soviet tanks positioned at the Brandenburg gate, to be met with a number of US Army tanks in a tense standoff.

The shocking assassination of John F. Kennedy obviously heightened everyone’s fears of war as it was initially thought that the Soviets were behind the assassination, and indeed an act of war.

The most chilling political attack ad ever shown was the 1964 anti-Goldwater ad, “Daisy.” It only ran only one time officially but was repeated in news cycles. It was forever burned into my memory and heightened my Cold War nuclear holocaust fears.

In 1968 once again I witnessed 500,000 Soviet and Warsaw Pact troops along with tanks invading Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia just as I had as a child in 1956 regarding Hungary.

Instead of WW-III ever happening, the Soviets and the US played in a number of proxy wars. I remember my mother telling me when I was young and during a relative time of peace after Korea, that there would be another war, and that I probably would be in it. I doubted it... unless it was a nuclear war in which we all would die. Nevertheless she was right. At the time I believed in the Domino theory in Southeast Asia. As one country fell to Communism, the bordering country would follow, on and on. Thus I found myself fighting in a Cold War, proxy war against Communists, the Vietnam War.
While the Cuban missile crisis was well known at the time, few knew at the time of two other incidents that took the U.S. and the Soviets/Russia precipitously close to an all out nuclear war: *Able Archer 83* and *Norwegian rocket incident*.

Having grown up during the Cold War, and later as a combat veteran, I actually considered going to Afghanistan and helping the Mujahedeen fight the Soviets. Fortunately, I was hired by an airline in the interim and never went to assist the Afghanistan *Mujahideen* in their war against the Soviets.

The *Reagan Doctrine*, Star Wars, and Evil Empire name calling only increased tensions. It was not until Mikhail Gorbachev with perestroika and glasnost, and a reversal of Reagan’s former belligerency and his warming to Gorbachev that the Cold War, after decades of the threat of nuclear annihilation, began to thaw.

Although they were thankfully in the minority during the Cold War, there still were a serious number of aggressive hawks on both sides who advocated a nuclear 1st strike... something that would have wiped out both countries if not half the world. Had they succeeded, Quora would not exist... nor would any of us reading this. These were the circumstances I grew up with, and it was unpleasant!
Listen to Billy Joel’s *We Didn't Start the Fire* sometime. A large part of it is about the Cold War, something that permeated my generation and deeply affected us... and thank God did not end with us all into oblivion.

1

I was born in the late 70s and caught the tale end of the Cold War as a kid. I'm fairly certain I'm part of the youngest grades of kids to remember doing nuclear bomb drills in grade school. We lined up in the hallways and marched into the gymnasium, which doubled as a bomb shelter. No *Duck and cover* cartoons though.

Education and pop culture were centered around patriotism and jingoism to a certain extent. *Top Gun* and *Red Dawn* were blockbusters. Some of the movies were aimed at kids, like *The Rescue*, about a group of kids who invade North Korea to rescue their captive *United States Navy SEALs* fathers. *The Hunt for Red October* was the first book marketed for adults that I ever read.
Yakov Smirnoff was a headlining comedian and made regular guest spots on Night Court. To this day, I still do Russian reversal jokes (in Soviet Russia, jokes reverse you!)

What I remember in general was that we were taught that we should be thankful for our freedoms, although it was never really explained what that meant. There was also a mixed message of feeling sorry for the USSR citizens while simultaneously fearing them as a country. On the other hand, I was 10 years old when the USSR started to topple so the subtleties of international relations were probably lost on me. :)

2

I was not around for Yalta, or 1949 when Truman "lost" China and the Soviets tested their first A-bomb. I was also not around when Eisenhower distanced himself from GOP isolationists and began to embrace the Cold War, with the painless (for us) Mossadegh and Arbenz coups. I don't remember the Kennedy administration, either.

I do remember when the network evening news was a big deal. I asked Dad who the good guys were, the South Vietnamese or the North Vietnamese? He said "I don't know."

Mind you, Dad was in the Naval Reserve and was called up for Korea, and paid for college with the G.I. Bill. Eventually he earned a very good living in the thriving Cold War aerospace industry, in sunny Southern California.

Yes, we learned "duck and cover". My WWII generation teachers could be pretty belligerent about Communists and Russians in particular. One of them complained about having to take a loyalty oath. Racial divisions were easing up, but were still deep - I mention this because it was obvious that all our freedom talk needed some living up to.

We had air raid sirens mounted on utility poles in Pasadena, CA, and every other Friday or so we were serenaded with a deafening Civil Defense test. Civil Defense - that's a term I haven't heard in a long time. I guess it was supplanted by "Homeland Security".

You would think that tensions eased as you moved towards the end of the Cold War. They didn't. The trauma of Vietnam hung around. Carter, generally thought of as a dove, was in fact behind a pre-Reagan rearmament push. Very Serious People in the media and Washington nodded in assent as he talked of Rapid Deployment Forces and new strategic weapons programs, even as his presidency crashed and burned in Iran.

With Reagan, the nuclear doomsday thing suddenly became more real than at any time I remember. He joked about bombing on the radio. I was a somewhat precocious young adult by then, and the magazine articles I read indicated a new, scary interest in a victorious first
strike among strategy types - not the old Mutual Assured Destruction deterrent formula. Star Wars. MX. Trident II. Books came out about nuclear winter. Anti-Pershing II demonstrations were big in Europe. Popular culture items like Rocky IV, Rambo, and Red Dawn and various Olympic antics (remember the East Germans?) fanned the resentments and the rivalries. The idea of US combat troops in Central America seemed real.

Nowadays, Reagan gets credit for spending the Evil Empire into oblivion (while he scolded us about fiscal responsibility). The collapsed Soviet menace was still warm and we were already flexing our muscles with Gulf War I.

The recent depressing stories about climate change has brought on a new pessimism that reminds me of that '80s gloom. I was just a kid then, and we responded with all kinds of terrific music and youth culture. I wonder how we’ll muddle through this time? Is all that happy talk (going back to Reagan, through various and sundry booms) about markets being the solution going to rescue us?

3

I was born in the mid-late 1970s to a conservative Jewish family in the Midwest. We had ancestors who had left the Russian Empire prior to the Bolshevik Revolution. My parents always taught me that the Russians were good people, but their government was not to be trusted.

First of all, spy movies were great. I mean really good. We had a ready-made enemy just an ocean away with all of the cosmopolitan lifestyle of the West, but with comically deranged caricatures of products. Apple II clones, substandard Soviet automobiles, and other mishaps that made them look like the geopolitical equivalent of that team that always loses to the Harlem Globetrotters.

We were scared — Nuclear annihilation was pretty much our ultimate destiny. Movies like Terminator came out, in which a future war would ultimately destroy us by provoking two dominant powers into a fire fight.

We watched a lot of news. I remember seeing long lines of people buying toilet tissue in the USSR. I remember seeing protests in Poland by the trade unionists.

Other, interesting and oddball things happened. We sold armaments to the Islamic Republic of Iran (Yeah, those guys who kidnapped our diplomats) through a secret CIA slush fund so that we could defeat a communist regime in Latin America. Communism was a cancer that we were afraid of.
We spent money. Lots of it — trillions of dollars that have never been paid back were spent on aircraft technology such as the B1 and B2 bomber programs, as well as thousands of missile silos with nuclear tipped missiles in them. (Insert Weird Science quote here)

Space exploration — we sent space shuttles up all the time. We pretty much took it for granted that we’d be watching a shuttle launch all the time.

I remember hearing stories of Jews being released from the Soviet Union and flown to Israel to start their new lives.

Magically, one day when I was in high school, right around Christmas, the Soviet Union imploded. There was no civil war. There was no impending threat of nuclear annihilation. A lot of pomp and a whole bunch of rhetoric ensued but no shots were fired, and the band aid had been ripped off. Totalitarian Communism had been replaced by something else - Totalitarian Capitalism. See also: China.

We didn't realize there was anything different. We grew up with President Kennedy getting shot, then his brother, and MLK Jr. Nightly we watched the news on one of three news channels, as they numerated the dead in Vietnam. Mom and Dad discussed the disgusting hippies and draft dodgers in hushed tones and made me and my brother promise to follow the call if we grew up and were drafted. We said yes with no idea what we agreed to. We ate free hot lunch at school and it tasted great. We had Physical education and recess every day. We played outside. We pretended. We went everywhere on our bicycles. We were grateful for 3 speeds and the cool kids got bikes with banana seats.
We argued over who was better the Beatles or the Monkees. Neil Armstrong made us swell with pride and dream of space flight. We loved to watch the Oakland Athletics baseball team and the St Louis Cardinals. We lost our innocence when our President lied to us on TV. We watched in disbelief as he was pardoned for crimes he denied ever committing. We went from shielded innocence to jaded political cynics, we were blinded by the light, and found ways to cope and "copped to it"...if you smoked you were "cool' if you didn't you were a "redneck" We were so cool. Our teachers knew it....we only had to pass 18 classes and driver's education. Senior year was a blast. Then you got your ticket to the real world. And you were officially a grown up.
I was in third grade during the Cuban Missle Crisis and it was a scary time especially for a little kid who was too young to fully understand. Teachers seemed to derive some kind of warped pleasure in scaring the hell out of us, with their Chicken Little the-sky-is-falling mentality telling us about such things as MAD (mutually assured destruction). I remember the nuclear holocaust drills where we were told to get under our desks and place our heads between our knees (I guess that was to make it easier to kiss our asses goodbye) and not look up to avoid being blinded by the nuclear flash. Yeah, like hiding under a desk would protect us from being incinerated by a nuclear blast. Newscasters of the day only made matters worse with such trusted individuals as Walter Cronkite telling us on a nightly basis about rising tensions between the US and the USSR.

I know the timeline / definition of the Cold War is not mutually agreed upon, but I'm going to speak from the broader, decades long one. I'm going to give second hand account from my many and ongoing conversations with my mom and dad who were born in 1941, and 1938 respectively. My mom attended Catholic school as a child in the Upper Peninsula, which is near the Wisconsin border.

That last fact is relevant because of the political and cultural influence of Senator Joseph McCarthy from Wisconsin, especially among Catholics.

My mom grew up checking under her bed for communists. The nuns at her school talked about communism constantly. Everything was suspect.

The selection of Pope John Paul the II helped carryover a lot of the Cold War culture into Catholicism, well after the Cold War had ended. He grew up in a communist country, and it is my parents experience/opinion that he over corrected into hyperconservatism.

Bewildering. Mostly we didn't much think about the Cold War, except during near blowups, such as the Cuban missile crisis. Going to school, there was a great deal of pressure to conform, probably more so than nowadays. If you had a skill, it was easy to get a job. Corporations mostly felt loyalty towards their employees. Women mostly weren’t uppity -- they ran things from behind the curtain.