



The Fight *I'll settle this!*

My wife and I were sitting in our living room enduring our self-imposed pandemic isolation when she asked me, “*How do we even begin to think about all of this?*” We are, for now, safe from everything going in the world around us and wondering as is everyone what the future might hold for us.

Her question triggered a long-buried memory of an experience from my past. The year was 1967, and I was working as an industrial engineer at Erie Technological Products in State College Pa. The company at that location manufactured ceramic electronic components for other industries. There were maybe 150 assembly workers and eight management types, me included. The Executive Director was former football player with an MBA, tall, aggressive and formidable.

The director was intent on keeping union organizers at bay and to that end would generously sponsor annual picnics, in house celebrations for various holiday, birthdays in October, that sort of thing. But the event of note was a holiday dinner and dance to be held the weekend between Christmas and New Years in a rented roller-skating rink that was otherwise closed for the holidays.

It started out well enough. Managers and spouses were required to attend, and a special table was set up in the center of the rink for us in order to separate us from the workers. Circular tables were setup all around us for workers to sort themselves out among friends. Color tablecloths were used, and place settings were of the finest decorative disposable plastic. A short welcome speech by the director was followed by music provided by a local cover band, and food was served. During dessert, a dance floor was cleared, and management couples were encouraged to seed the dancing.

But then as it were, a virile young dandy, suffering from testosterone poisoning no doubt, and primed by alcohol, made an aggressive move on a hot young assembly-line worker he had been lusting after for some time. Her husband objected, and punches were thrown. The husband was no match for the young man, but others at the table jumped to his defense. People from adjoining tables chose sides and like a careless match dropped in a field of dry grass, the fight

spread from table to table until it completely surrounded us. Old grudges surfaced and scores were to be settled.

The director admonished managers to stay seated no matter what, and he would settle things. In no time at all he was caught up in the melee and throwing punches with authority. It ended as suddenly as it started when a woman sprawled on the floor knocked unconscious. Then followed a collective sobering of the rowdy crowd.

That's what this pandemic quarantine feels like. We sit here in the center and the world is crumbling all around us. And people are getting hurt.

Gene Ziegler, Chandler Arizona April 2020