

Excerpt from *Duck and Cover*

It was during this same time, during grade school, that Joey's other abiding passion formed. You couldn't really escape the fear about the Russians, with the Duck and Cover drills at school, our preparation for the coming nuclear war. But for most kids the hysteria over the Russians was for adults to worry about. Not so with Joey. He believed it was his personal responsibility to fight the Communists.

What sparked his fervor? Was it something he ingested, like a tapeworm, from consuming movies like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and *The Manchurian Candidate*? Was it something Dad said, like that time we were watching a track meet on Wide World of Sports? The US team was battling the Russians, and my brother and I were yelling for each American victory, when Dad, an Army vet, surprised us with a comment.

"We shoulda kicked the Russian's ass at the Elbe when we had the chance." Joey and I stared over at him. "We could all be sleeping easy now." It was his sole remark about the war.

My kid brother's interest in the Communists took off during his participation in the Boy Scouts under Scoutmaster Nancy. Though the Boy Scouts were not my thing, I kept hearing about the charismatic leader of the troop. Ted Nancy had been an MP in the Korean War, and now he worked as a security guard for Sears. His scout uniform was really crisp. He ran his troop like a boot camp, drilling his boys on perfect pushups and leading them on epic hikes. But the main focus of Nancy's instruction was crime fighting. He schooled his charges on fingerprinting, surveillance, radio, and codes. He demanded all members earn a merit badge in Citizenship of the Nation.

The boys loved Scoutmaster Nancy and would have died for him, if asked.

Nancy's hero was J. Edgar Hoover. On overnights around the campfire, Scoutmaster would regale his wide-eyed troopers with stories of the Bureau's famous busts of bad guys like Baby Face Nelson, the Nazi Eight, and Creepy Alvin Karpis.

Scoutmaster would send his boys to their tents for the night with a warning: "Boys, we are engaged in a new and terrible struggle against Communism." Nancy's gaze was steely in the light of the campfire. "Reds could be anywhere, could be on your block, trying to harm our country. Be watchful, boys!"

—from "Propellants"

