

1968 was an incredibly eventful year. President Lyndon Johnson said he was not going to run for re-election. My father died. Bobby Kennedy was assassinated. I fell in love. The Democratic convention turned into a police riot. I graduated from MIT. I worked at a draft counseling center in Newton. Russian tanks rolled into Czechoslovakia. My mother visited me in August and commented that the year was comparable to 1848 in Europe, when there were numerous uprisings and revolutions in different countries.

But most relevant to me (and many of my generation), the immoral and illegal war in Vietnam was raging, and I was about to graduate from college. By the skin of my teeth, I should add. I was a math major, but didn't even take a math class my last semester – I was spending so much of my time on antiwar and other political activities. Had I been a year behind, I would most likely have dropped out and not graduated.

Earlier that school year, in late 1967, some of my friends started talking about joining "The Resistance", arguing that antiwar activists should return their draft card and risk jail rather than cooperate in any way with the Selective Service System (a lovely name for the draft). I disagreed, thinking this was not the way to build a mass movement, and that it was an individualist approach to fighting against the war.

But as 1967 turned into 1968 I got convinced. More and more people were returning or publicly burning their draft cards that it started feeling like a movement with real potential. I think back to 2 buttons of the time. I started wearing a white one with just a big black Greek letter Omega on it – the electrical symbol for resistance – how appropriate for someone at MIT. The other one was worn by some women – "girls say yes to boys who say no". I didn't see so much evidence of that, but it did make resistance a bit more attractive.

So on April 3, 1968, at a large rally on the Boston Common, I walked up to the podium – after speeches by Howard Zinn, Noam Chomsky and others – and handed over my draft card. Presumably it was then somehow delivered to the Pentagon or somewhere equally relevant. It felt great! It felt like I was making not just a rational but also an emotional commitment. I was renouncing class privilege and putting my body on the line. And lo and behold, that same week a woman I really liked did say yes to me.

My draft card had a "2-S" classification printed on it. That meant I had a student deferment – which was to end two months later when I graduated. At this point, I would be reclassified 1-A, or draft eligible. I was not planning on going to graduate school which could conceivably have extended my 2-S, but anyway, I wanted to resist.

There was another way out – one could apply for Conscientious Objector status (1-O). There were a lot of hoops to jump through, and it involved demonstrating to the government's

satisfaction that you had religious or deep-seated moral objections to fighting and to all wars. You had to write convincingly; you had to be interviewed at length; you had to be prepared to do alternative service (e.g. in a hospital). You had to be a pacifist, and I was not: I believed that the war against the Nazis was justified.

But I [applied for CO status](#) nonetheless. I think it was because I didn't *really* want to go to jail (and I rejected fleeing to Canada as cowardly), and obtaining CO status was still a poke in the eye of militarism and the war in Vietnam. The process took some time and I slowly got to know the clerk of my draft board in New York City. I remember my mother coming along with me to my hearing where I walked a thin line between moral righteousness and militant anti-imperialism. I thought that I might prevail but more likely that my application would be rejected.

The result was neither. Just as I compromised by applying for CO status, Selective Service compromised and classified me 1-A-O which meant I would still be drafted into the military, but I would not be given a gun or made to fight. I might be assigned to be a medic or some other non-combatant position. A partial conscientious objector. What to do? My principles got the better of me and I rejected the offer. Participating in the military would be supporting the war in Vietnam, and my whole point was to not do that.

I had no alternative but to prepare to be drafted, to refuse induction, to be tried, and to be sent to jail. I remember a difficult conversation with my mother about all this, and in particular instructing her what to do if/when the FBI called her.

Before you were actually drafted, you were called for a "pre-induction physical." In those days, people did all sorts of things to try to fail the physical – drugs, faked injuries, pretending to be gay, acting crazy. I was not going to do any of those, but had a tiny hint of what might happen when the friendly clerk at the draft board said "We're going to call you for a physical – maybe you'll flunk." I saw no reason why that would legitimately be so, but I had, a few years earlier, had a mild pneumothorax (collapsed lung). It had healed by itself, but I brought the evidence. Lo and behold, I was reclassified 4-F, physically ineligible to be drafted.

I never knew whether the pneumothorax legitimately disqualified me or whether they just really wanted to be rid of a troublemaker like me. I'd like to think the latter.