

# Eyewitness to History

## Contest Winners

**H**istory is more than facts trapped in dusty old books. It is a flood of human stories bubbling with emotion. Just ask someone who was there. That's what the winners of this year's Eyewitness to History contest did. Read on to learn how it felt to watch Japanese planes attacking Pearl Harbor, hear protesters chanting outside the Democratic National Convention, and be stranded in space on Apollo 13.

## Attack on Pearl Harbor

BY RACHEL PFAFF, South Park Middle School, South Park, Pa.

**O**n Dec. 7, 1941, Japanese war planes swept out of the sky over Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. The U.S. Pacific Fleet, unaware of the approaching danger, was a row of sitting ducks. Sailors scrambled to fight off the bombers, but they were too late. By the time the attack was over, more than 2,400 Americans were dead and the United States had been dragged into World War II. Mike Ostanoski, a friend of Rachel Pfaff's grandfather, was there when the bombing began.

**Q: How old were you when you went into the Army?**

**A:** I was 17. My parents had to sign permission for me to join since I wasn't 18 years old, and the principal of my school had to say that I was "of good character." ... I joined in 1939 and chose to serve in Hawaii.

**Q: What happened after you went into the service?**

**A:** On September 1, 1939, newspapers read "Extra! Extra!" because Germany had invaded Poland and World War II was beginning.

**Q: What happened while you were in Hawaii?**

**A:** I was there for two years, and I was due to go home on December 13, 1941. I had written a letter home to my parents and told them they didn't need to respond since I was leaving in six days. But on December 7, 1941, we were bombed.

I had just got done eating breakfast when I heard the bombs exploding. I thought it was just some type of practice drill. We ran outside and saw the planes coming towards us. I was still unsure of what was going on, and then I saw flames shooting out of a [Japanese] airplane. They destroyed the planes at our base, and I heard the sirens blaring. We jumped into a jeep and were going past Battleship Row. Ship after ship was on fire. Everything was on fire. Thick, black smoke was everywhere. Men were in the water trying to get away from the flames; it was terrible.

**Q: What went through your mind?**

**A:** Just get out of there and make it out alive. ... I watched in horror as many of my friends were killed beside me. I couldn't believe all of the black smoke coming from the ships and gasoline that was on fire.

**Q: Where did you go after that?**

**A:** We went to Barber's Point [a naval air station in Hawaii], and four months later, we went to Guadalcanal. There, I was

wounded in the leg. ... I was sent to the hospital for three months. They cut open my leg, cleaned it out, and sewed me back up. ... Unfortunately, many of my friends were injured as well. One of my friends' leg had to be cut off. Others were killed.

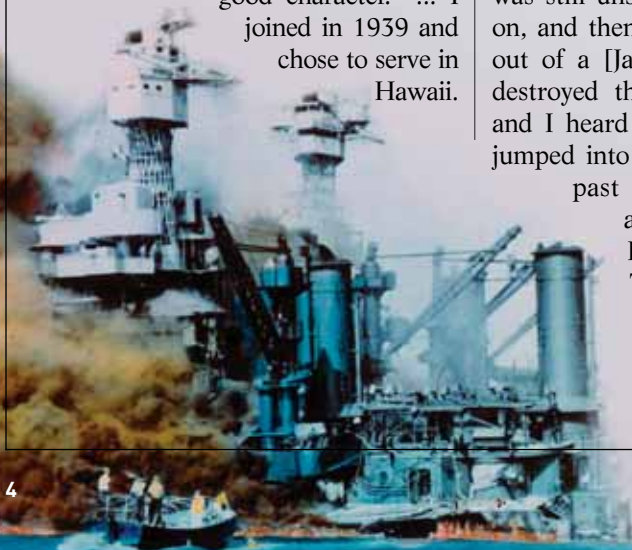
**Q: You were sent to the Philippines next. What happened there?**

**A:** The only thing I remember was I lost one of my best friends. His name was Sergeant Valentine, and he was from Kentucky. We were very close during the whole experience in the service. He died right next to me.

*Rachel: I learned that many people died tragically that day. The ones lucky enough to survive are sometimes still haunted by horrific memories. They were forced into World War II and proudly defended their country. But they continued their lives knowing the world would never be the same.*



Courtesy of Rachel Pfaff



# Speaking Truth To Power

BY JOEY DWYER, Nichols Middle School, Evanston, Ill.

**I**n the summer of 1968, frustration over the Vietnam War erupted in the streets of Chicago. The Democratic Party held its national convention there in August to choose a candidate for president. While the politicians met indoors, antiwar protesters swarmed the streets outside, often clashing with police armed with tear gas and clubs. David Dwyer was a 16-year-old living in the suburb of Oak Park at the time. His son Joey Dwyer interviewed him about the protests and how his feelings toward the government changed.

**Q: What was the attitude toward the Vietnam War before the 1968 convention?**

**A:** I was going to school at Oak Park High School. The general attitude was prowar. The kids I went to school with had parents who felt that the purpose of the war was to stop communism. The kids pretty much reflected their parents' views on this without further examination.

**Q: How did you get involved in the antiwar movement?**

**A:** One of my closest friends, who was about four years older than I was, got in trouble and wound up



... serving [in the military]. He had gotten in trouble with the Oak Park police and was given a choice to join the infantry or go to a detention home. He chose the Army. This kind of process was not unusual then. Many times, if kids got in trouble in school or around town, they were given that choice. So he went into the Army when I was 14 and returned when I was almost 16 and stayed at our house. He spent a lot of time explaining to me just what seemed to be going on over there. ... He convinced me that the [antiwar] movement was the right thing to do.

**Q: During the convention, where were you? What was the attitude?**

**A:** I went with classmates from the underground antiwar movement.

... It was our goal to bring the antiwar movement out of the underground and into the open. ... We took the el [elevated train] downtown and just kind of walked all over the downtown area. ... It was very energetic and generally very aggressive on the part of the protesters and the police and the National

Guard. The general feeling was that there was going to be a confrontation or maybe a hundred confrontations.

**Q: What do you think people who were watching on TV thought?**

**A:** Most of the TV cameras that I saw were in front of the Conrad Hilton

hotel and the crowd of protesters, of which there were hundreds at any given time, repeatedly chanting, "The whole world is watching!" They also chanted, "Hey, hey, LBJ [President Lyndon B. Johnson], how many kids did you kill today?" And the other prevailing chant was "Dump the Hump!" This was about Hubert Humphrey, who was campaigning to be the Democratic candidate for president, and he was generally in support of the war.

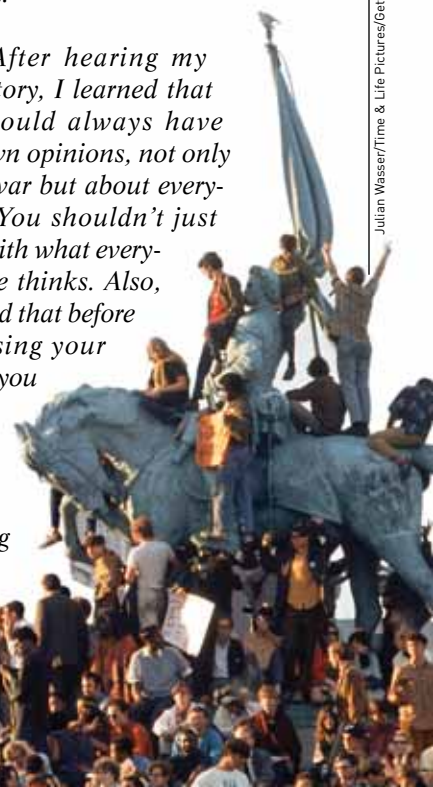
**Q: Did anyone's opinion change after seeing the riots?**

**A:** Public opinion in our community and my school began to change dramatically after those events. While the majority still supported the war, an increasing minority began to question the government's position and the reality of the communist threat.

**Q: What did you learn?**

**A:** I learned that a committed minority can prevail over a weak majority. I learned that the media has a tremendous effect on public opinion. ... My generation gave up before the revolution was even started. It needs to be started over again. Now. Otherwise, we will certainly lose our country and most everything good about it.

*Joey: After hearing my dad's story, I learned that you should always have your own opinions, not only about war but about everything. You shouldn't just agree with what everyone else thinks. Also, I learned that before expressing your beliefs, you should know what you are talking about.*





valve, which gave a large bang. It scared Jack [Swigert] and me into thinking we had been hit by a meteor. Of course, when the explosion occurred, we thought Fred was playing his game again.

**Q: How did you stay calm and then lead and encourage your crew?**

**A:** When you are in trouble like the crew of *Apollo 13*, the commander has to be a leader to encourage the crew by example. He has to be optimistic and use everything in his command to solve each crisis as it occurs.

**Q: Was the 1995 movie *Apollo 13* accurate?**

**A:** It was very authentic.

**Q: Do you ever look up at the moon and wonder how your life would have been different if you had walked on the moon?**

**A:** Never look back.

*Jasmine: I feel honored to have interviewed such an important man. I learned a lot from him. He managed to be a leader and keep his cool even though there was a significant possibility that he and his crew could have been lost in space.*



# Moon Shot That Missed

**BY JASMINE STEIN**, Timothy Christian Middle School, Elmhurst, Ill.

**“H**ouston, we’ve had a problem.” Those five words spoken by Apollo 13 Commander James Lovell on April 13, 1970, marked the beginning of one of history’s greatest adventures. What started as a mission to the moon turned into a fight to bring the Apollo 13 crew back to Earth alive. An explosion stranded the spacecraft 200,000 miles from home with dwindling power. Jasmine Stein interviewed Lovell about the Apollo 13 crisis and how the crew and scientists at NASA’s Mission Control in Houston found a solution.



**Q: How did Earth look from space?**

**A:** Earth from the moon looks like a bright blue Christmas tree ornament hung in an absolutely black sky. You can hide it completely behind your thumb. You can see the blue of the oceans, the white cloud masses, and the ice caps. ... From the moon, Earth looks a little bigger than the moon looks from Earth.

**Q: Did you feel adequately prepared when your mission was moved up?**

**A:** Since I had flown to the moon on *Apollo 8*, and was backup to Neil Armstrong on *Apollo 11*, I thought

being assigned *Apollo 13* instead of the later mission, *Apollo 14*, was not a problem. We were prepared.

**Q: What was the first thing that went through your mind when you heard the explosion?**

**A:** The *Apollo 13* crew thought a meteor hit the spacecraft.

**Q: What were your last thoughts as you were reentering Earth’s atmosphere? Were you afraid?**

**A:** Although the chance of survival seemed slight just after the explosion—about a 10 percent chance—we never thought about dying. We were all optimistic, and as the flight progressed, our chances of survival kept increasing. ... When we entered the atmosphere, I thought our chances of a successful landing were good. I was not afraid.

**Q: If you could describe the mission in one word, what would it be?**

**A:** Lucky!

**Q: How did your experience on *Apollo 13* affect your view of life after you returned safely to Earth?**

**A:** I do not worry about crises now. I live one day at a time.

**Q: The crew played jokes on each other. What was the funniest joke any of you played?**

**A:** Before the explosion, Fred Haise used to turn the repress



Karim Kadim/AP Images

# Iraq Votes

BY ALYSSA MENDES, Leonard Middle School, Fort Worth, Texas

**I**n December 2005, Iraqi citizens went to the polls to vote for a new government. It was the first election under a constitution that had been approved only a few months earlier. Alyssa Mendes interviewed Lt. Col. Phil Colborn, her uncle, who advised the Iraqis on how to run a safe and fair election.



Courtesy Alyssa Mendes

**Q: What role did you play?**

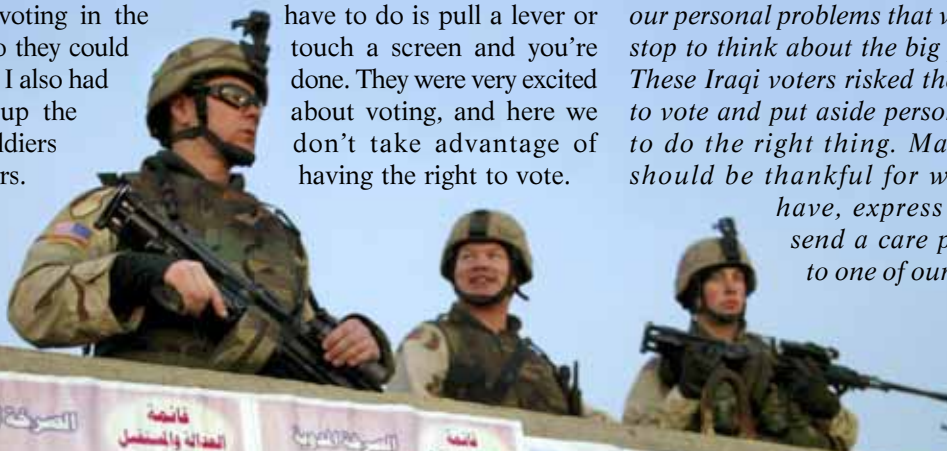
**A:** I was an adviser to an Iraqi unit on how to conduct the voting in the area for the soldiers so they could help with the civilians. I also had to help with setting up the voting areas for the soldiers and guarding the voters.

**Q: What was the atmosphere?**

**A:** People were excited and proud. They even held up ink-stained fingers that they used to identify themselves so they could vote and chanted their candidate's number because instead of using names, they used numbers. So they were chanting "555," for example, instead of their candidate's name. They had posters too.

**Q: Was it anything like the voting in the United States?**

**A:** No. They had to be fingerprinted, and [there was] lots of security because of the threat of violence. Whereas here in America, all you have to do is pull a lever or touch a screen and you're done. They were very excited about voting, and here we don't take advantage of having the right to vote.



John Moore/AP Images

**Q: Was there any violence or guards?**

**A:** There was not any violence in my area, but there were lots of guards. They had guards at all the voting areas, and some violence occurred.

**Q: What did you think would happen?**

**A:** I thought that not as many people would vote as they did there because of the threat of violence. I thought there would be more violence than there was in my area.

**Q: Do you think the voting made a difference?**

**A:** Yes. I believe it helped get the Iraqis started toward the democratic process.

**Q: Was it as bad as the newspapers said it was?**

**A:** They didn't report all the good things that happened; mostly the bad things.

**Q: What was your biggest concern about leaving your family?**

**A:** Obviously, not coming back.

**Q: Were the care packages distractions?**

**A:** Care packages aren't really distractions, because soldiers like them. It helped morale.

*Alyssa: I learned that sometimes we Americans take things for granted. We take so much time to focus on our personal problems that we don't stop to think about the big picture. These Iraqi voters risked their lives to vote and put aside personal fear to do the right thing. Maybe we should be thankful for what we have, express it, and send a care package to one of our troops.*

# Can You Hear Me Now?

BY JAMIE STEIN, South Park Middle School, South Park, Pa.

**W**e have become accustomed to living with the luxury of being able to call someone whenever we need to. Have you ever contemplated life without cell phones—not being able to call your friends or even call for emergency help? Back in 1984, when cell phones first came out, they were unbelievably remarkable. Now, they have become a necessity. I interviewed my father, James Stein, on this topic. He experienced life without cell phones. He also presold the first cell phone in the state of Pennsylvania.

**Q: What was life without cell phones like?**

**A:** Cell phones gave people the ability to communicate while they were on the road. So, before cell phones, people were tied to their offices, to their homes, or to their desks because they weren't able to communicate while they were traveling. Cell phones gave them the ability to stay in touch while they were mobile.

**Q: When and where were you when you sold your first phone?**

**A:** I was at Facinto Construction Company. The appointment was at their construction facility. It was in March of 1984. They bought two phones from me, one for each brother in the company.



Wayne Mans/East Liverpool Review/AP Images

**Q: Can you give me some details about the cell phones in 1984?**

**A:** Back then, the phones were installed in the vehicle. They didn't have portable phones yet, like they have today. They didn't have phones that could do text messaging. They didn't have games either. There was a big box installed in the back of the vehicle. It was hooked up to the battery of the car itself. And the phone was actually installed in the front seat. The phone was essentially as big as what you would see in a landline phone today. It was big with a hang-up cup that the phone would fit into.

**Q: How popular were cell phones?**

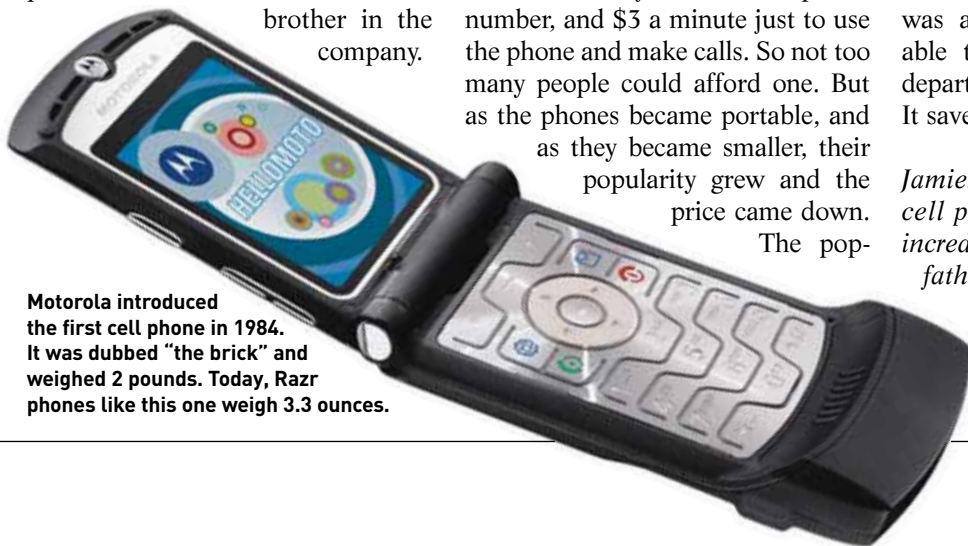
**A:** Well, cell phones weren't as popular back then as they are now. They were much, much more expensive. Back in 1984–1985, cell phones were \$4,000 each. It was \$100 a month just to have a phone number, and \$3 a minute just to use the phone and make calls. So not too many people could afford one. But as the phones became portable, and as they became smaller, their popularity grew and the price came down. The pop-

ularity continued to grow so that today, 80 percent of the population has a cellular phone.

**Q: How have cell phones changed, and how have they changed the lives of others?**

**A:** There have been so many changes in cell phones over the course of the years. One of the most important is that they have gone to portable phones, or handheld devices. ... They do text messaging, they have cameras, they have e-mail capability, they can download files, and they can send files. The phone has become more of a personal communications device. ... Initially, they were business tools that allowed people to spend time away from their office. People were mobile, so they could make driving time productive time. In addition, it allowed people to spend more time with their families. ... It was also a safety feature. They're able to contact the police or fire department when there's an accident. It saves many, many people's lives.

*Jamie: As you can see, life without cell phones was quite tough. It's incredible to be able to say that my father helped in the establishment of such a wonderful invention, that he helped make them possible. For this, I thank him.*



Motorola introduced the first cell phone in 1984. It was dubbed "the brick" and weighed 2 pounds. Today, Razzr phones like this one weigh 3.3 ounces.

Motorola Inc./AP Images

# Alaska Eruption

BY JOSIE JONES, Kenai Middle School, Kenai, Alaska

**I**n 1989, Mt. Redoubt, one of Alaska's Cook Inlet volcanoes, erupted. It had been a calm spring day when people on Alaska's Kenai Peninsula heard a loud *crack*. Outside, thick gray clouds of ash were rising over the horizon. Soon, everything went from light to dark. Al Jones was working in his mother's fur sewing business between Kenai and Soldotna. He described what he saw to his daughter, Josie Jones.

**Q: What were you doing before the volcano erupted?**

**A:** We were working on a line of fur products that we wholesale to other businesses.

**Q: What was it like outside?**

**A:** I remember it was a clear sunny day. Not a cloud in the sky. The eruption, I think, started midday. You could see the ash cloud start to rise high in the sky. The winds were blowing towards Kenai from where the mountain erupted on the west side of Cook Inlet.

**Q: Was anyone with you during the eruption?**

**A:** I was working with my mother, Violet. After we saw and heard the eruption, it immediately came on the local news. My brother showed up ... and we drove to Kenai

to the ocean so we could get a better view of the eruption.

**Q: How did you feel during the eruption?**

**A:** At first, I was apprehensive. I recall I wasn't afraid; I was just worried how much damage the ash could do to our car and the furnace at our house. The intakes on cars and house furnaces could suck in the ash and ruin the engine and the furnace.

**Q: Were you caught in the ash?**

**A:** As my brother and I made it to the ocean, we could see the ash cloud moving toward Kenai. The ash cloud was so massive; it was yellow, black, and gray in color. As the cloud reached Kenai, it blocked the sun and midday became dark as night. I remember thinking that was the weirdest thing I had ever seen.

**Q: Did anyone get hurt?**

**A:** I don't recall anyone getting hurt, but later, after the ash fell on the city, people began having respiratory [breathing] problems. Many people began wearing dust masks to prevent them from getting negative health effects.

**Q: Did you have to clean up after the eruption?**

**A:** After the eruption, the ash cloud created about two to three inches of volcano dust. It took months of sweeping and shoveling before Mother Nature helped settle things back to normal.

**Q: If you had to go through that again, how would you feel? What would you do?**

**A:** I hope it doesn't happen again, but that's highly likely, as they are all live volcanoes. They do create quite a mess. As we know, Mother Nature can be harsh! As far as feelings, we have to respect Mother Nature and what she does. ... She has a mind of her own. I don't believe I would do anything differently. You just have to take cover and keep out of the storm.

*Josie: I learned that volcanoes could cause many things to go bad. For example: The ash can ruin car engines and furnaces, it can have negative effects on people's health, and it can turn morning to night. As a historian, it takes a lot of time to make a topic of interest into a powerful paper. It took me a week to find all I needed to know about the eruption, like going to libraries and the Internet, and then finding someone to tell me what the event was like. It was fun and a great way to find out what happened before I was born.*

