

NINA 1968 Synopsis

At midnight on January 1, 1968, Nina Tshkin, 22 years old and alone in her room upstairs while her parents host a New Year's Eve party downstairs, writes in her diary: "And so it begins. The first second of the first year of the rest of my life. I am a scientist. I make observations. I build hypotheses and test them through experiments. This experiment will last 366 days. This is a Leap Year. I hope that's not a bad sign."

And so Nina begins a journey into a new life as a high-school chemistry teacher in Marin County, California, a place far removed from the rural town that has been her world up until now. And little does she know that while her small world is changing dramatically, the larger world around her is undergoing its own cataclysmic changes.

She says goodbye to her family, including her brother Alex, a fresh soldier heading off to Vietnam, eager to prove his worth to himself, to his overachieving sister, and to his always-critical father. She also says goodbye to her boyfriend, who has been hoping to marry her since high school and thinks the world is just fine on the family farm.

She moves into a large house in San Anselmo that she shares with four other teachers: Chelsea Blake, a flighty young British woman who teaches art, McCoy Tallinger, the humanities teacher on the verge of being drafted, Bob Uesterhouse, a bear of a man who teaches P.E., and Aubrey Sinclair, the school psychologist who also dabbles in alternative consciousness.

And she meets students like Julia Mead Grayson, the homecoming queen and campus princess who thinks she walks on water until she has to take Nina's chemistry class and is brought down to earth. And Elsbeth Mondigan, the valedictorian who sees deeper into what is really happening in the world than most adults.

All together, these and other characters challenge Nina's comfortable views of the world, of politics, and of people. As does the parallel life of her brother, whose tour in Vietnam ends tragically, forcing Nina to rethink her future and return home.

But she can't return home. Because home isn't the same. Because she isn't the same. Like the chemistry she loves, the rapidly changing forces of politics, people, culture, freedom, and music have produced unexpected and sometimes explosive results.

2001: A Space Odyssey is released. Martin Luther King is assassinated. Bobby Kennedy is assassinated. Riots erupt at the Democratic Convention in Chicago, and the police turn on the protestors. Her world, our world, can never be the same again.

And then on Christmas Eve, Nina watches on television along with millions of other people as the Apollo 8 astronauts circle the moon and read from Genesis: "And God said, let there be light. And there was light." Seven days later, on December 31, 1968, Nina finishes her "experiment" and closes her diary.