

“IT WAS A SPRING TO REMEMBER”

“Hey Aron are you ready for some half-ball?” These words are a cherished memory that will forever live in my mind especially when spring is in the air. There was never a time in my life back in the “old neighborhood” that was more delightful than a spring day on the corner of Judson & Indiana. If I let myself ponder into a trance like daydream sometimes I can even sense the smell of the air. I wonder, if this is a good or bad thing, because I am always a bit melancholy when I return to reality. I have in this trance-like-state-of-being, created many stories about yesterday when we were young. I just can’t seem to resist it, so take a trip with me down memory lane!

Saturday, Spring circa 1960:

The corner life is very active this warm spring morning. Jules Capriotti and his brother Wimpy are preparing their vegetables for sale. Lena Tacony is washing the front step to her candy store; Uncle Al is loading clothes into his car from his dry cleaning shop. Edith Campolei is talking to her neighbor Carmenucce. Things are very quiet for now, but as I gaze at all of them through the kitchen window of our house, I’m hoping that one of the guys will show soon.

Within minutes my wish is granted and I see Barbells with a half-ball and a stick in his hands. I run outside and cross Indiana Avenue. Barbells spots me and say’s, “Aron are you ready for some half-ball?” “All right, but we need a team!” We wait for a few minutes and Barbells looks at me and says, “Let’s have a short game!” We begin to play across Indiana Avenue in front of Dr. Madona’s office. With one pitch the game ends, as barbells hits our only half-ball onto DiPiro’s roof. Uncle Al calls me to let me know it was time to deliver the clothes since I now have my license. After some instruction from him I’m on my way down Indiana Avenue. Passing by 23rd Street I see Carpy Laurenzi

outside his grocery store unloading produce from his station wagon. Sammy Giuffrida is talking to Frank Menno, as he hands him a bag of fruit from his grocery store. I can see Victor the butcher cutting a side of beef through the window of his butcher shop. I have to stop at the red light at 22nd Street. While I am waiting for the light to change to green Vince Tarrabio waves to me from his Pharmacy. Through the rear view mirror I can see Al Donato opening his Furniture Store. Anthony Autori is getting instructions from his wife Rae on how to arrange the shirts in the window of Santanello’s Men’s Shop.

The light changes and passing by Van Pelt Street my cousin Mike Citro is sitting on his porch and talking to his brother Louis. On the corner of 21st Street Nails Mangini with his little brother Bobby are going into Vito’s Candy Store. After making my first delivery to my Aunt Anna and Uncle Jack’s house I run over to Ziggy the barber and pick up my jar of Pomatum Hair Cream and quickly return to the car and get going again.

I turn onto Lambert Street making my next stop at my Aunt Helen and Si Cosimo’s house. Of course, that ride made me hungry so I get a few biscotti and an iced coffee. Getting back into the car Boom Boom Walt Cannon pulls up behind my car that is double parked and honks his horn several times. After we both pretend that we are going to fist fight, we get in our cars and pull away laughing. Driving up Toronto Street, I see a space outside Cats Club. I park and go up the steps. Entering the club it is jammed with everybody around the large center pool table. I say to myself “Why did I come in here!” They were playing my favorite game HA double R I GAN at a dollar a game spells disaster for me. I kid myself by thinking that I’ll get into one maybe two games. About two hours later I’m stuck ten dollars and I know I should go, but I have this

feeling that things will turn around for me. Needless to say things do not go in my favor and they never do when I gamble. I lost the twenty dollars that I needed to take my chick Patty to the Mastbaum Theater in town and dinner at the China Castle in China Town tonight.

Luckily for me I made the twenty dollars, partially by tips for delivering the clothes and washing Tony Perna, Fred Chiarlanza, Dooner Ricciutti, and Willy “Muscles” Salino’s cars.

My reward for doing the deliveries was to have the car to use for the date. I would always stop along the East River Drive and park at a spot that the crowd called the Rendezvous. We would listen to great rock & roll songs on the car radio and switch stations from Hy Lit to Blavitt then Georgy Woods. Invariably, we would see Bony, Frank Lavanga, No-Neck, Umberto Nanni, My Son My Son, Able, Pidgeon Head, Leo Flynn, George Davis and many others. They would be with the girls that hung out at the Hot Shoppe.

It was a great time to be in Philadelphia. There was very little crime and walking the streets at night was virtually harmless.

Oh! The joys of youth: with the only problem to discuss was usually what dance we would be able to go to next Friday night. I’m sure that we had a great time that night probably double dating with BG & Peggy, Walt and Carmella or Yock and Maria. We always had a great time; in fact Patti and I still enjoy each other and have been going out to dinner together on Saturday night for over forty-four years.

We may not always double date each Saturday night these days, but we do still get together with our friends from the old neighborhood. We try to get together as often as we can; perhaps, the next time we get together we will meet at the Rendezvous and make it another Spring to remember!!!