

## “MEMORIAL DAY AT THE POOL”

**Monday, May 30, Circa 1960.** If this morning is any indication of what the weather is going to be like this summer, it should be hot and sunny. Ah, the summer, and the freedom it will bring to us teenagers is about to be launched a few days earlier this year. This is a perfect day to be at the pool, especially on opening day. Since none of us guys who hang out at J&I belong to a country club, we will be heading to the “Boulevard Pool” in Northeast Philly. I get my instructions from Aunt Martha and out the door I go. Barbell is already on the corner patiently waiting with his cut off dungarees and his bathing suit wrapped in his towel. As I’m walking across Indiana Avenue, John Deodatti pulls up in this fantastic little Alfa Romeo convertible sports car, with Pat Nicastro sitting shotgun. They both get out of the car and I stop to admire the car. They begin to talk to Donald Bove who pulled over in his Chevy Impala. Horn taps me on the shoulder and says, “It must be nice to be rich”, as he lights up a cigarette. Petchie shouts to me “Stop dreaming!” Balloons and Liven arrive with their towels in hand, as Lavanga asks, “Does anybody know how to get to the pool?” We all look at each other with these blank stares and begin to laugh. Liven retorts humorously with; “We have to take the bus.” Just as Balloons is about to say something he is interrupted by Vinnie Chang, “There’s Sam, The PTC Man, why don’t one of you ask him how to get to the pool.” We all shout simultaneously, “Hey Sam!” Sam stops in his tracks and turns around looking a bit confused. We all run over to him and he obliges us with explicit instructions, including how to get a special transfer so we won’t have to pay two fares. Ferere shows up with his towel so now the only one who is missing is Beans.

Balloons walks over to his father’s candy store that he recently took over from Lena Tacony. The older guys all get in their cars and head out somewhere together. Squid and Jimmy Himes come walking up Judson street with their fishing rods and tackle boxes in hand on they’re way to the Wissahickon creek. Beans arrives to a multitude of comments including one about how St. Mary Margery would always tell us we would be late for our own funeral. At last we’re off! Waiting for the R Bus at 22<sup>nd</sup> and Huntingpark we notice that the older guys who left the corner before us are in Linton’s having breakfast. The bus ride is unusually entertaining due to Mike Vassallo who was already on the bus with Joey Giangrecco, Paul Blassetti and Frank Sciarra. All of them have their towels under their arms. Mike was singing an opera to these two chicks that had the guts to sit in the back of the bus where we were sitting. The girls, to our disappointment, get off the bus at 5<sup>th</sup> St. No matter because when we get to the Bridge & Pratt Sts. terminal the number of teenage chicks waiting for the bus going to the pool has us all impetuously pushing at each other to get off the bus. We walk over to get in line behind the girls. Before long Mike Vassallo begins to sing his humorous opera to some of the girls in the line and we begin to talk to a few of them. By the time the bus comes, this one chick Aurora who lives near 66<sup>th</sup> and Stenton Avenue seems almost permanently attached to Petchies arm. When we arrive at the pool and we emerge from the men’s locker room we are forced to go under this very cold shower and through an iron gate-like turnstile. I bump into Terry and Lucille Grasso, as well as Vickie and Lois Vitale. All of them looking fine in their bathing suits. BG tells me that he

saw some of the guys from 21<sup>st</sup> & Indiana. The day at the pool was fantastic. The bus ride home is like we chartered the bus to drive only the teenagers from our neighborhood. Arriving back at 22<sup>nd</sup> & Clearfield a group of us guys from J& I head over to Curcios for a steak sandwich and milkshake. When Charlie Curcio sees us entering his shop, he immediately turns from pan cooking his knuckles steak and remarks, “What is this a wild herd of animals?” Barbell says, “We want to eat!” Charlie says to the waitress Dell, “Take their order and if they get out of hand I’ll throw them out.” We all sit down and act like perfect gentlemen talking about sports and some of the chicks we met today. The only guy who actually got a girls phone number is Petchie. The sandwiches come with fried onions and cherry peppers on them and the milkshakes, made with Harbison ice cream, are delicious. The walk down Judson Street is kind of bittersweet. You know that summer is almost here, because a number of people are sitting on their steps as the sun begins to set. Marion and her sister Loretta are talking to Connie Ciocari. Theresa Chiodetti is talking to Chester the roofer. Conchetta Salvatore is sitting with her mother waving to Nancy Serpico, as she sets up a folding chair on her pavement. Dominic the carpenter and his son “Mike Camera” are checking out the tire on Al Porto’s car. John Boschetti is talking to Olivia Parrise. The corner of J & I is deserted. Balloons reminds us that it’s back to school tomorrow and we all let out a groan. I bid goodnight to everybody and walk slowly across the street and into my house and decide to set up my telescope that I have had since 8<sup>th</sup> grade. I won it for selling Christmas cards. Wow! That seems like ages ago!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

**AN "OLD NEIGHBORHOOD"  
TALE by Peter A. Martosella, Jr.  
Unedited**

One of the legendary tales from the "old neighborhood" involved the famous brawl with invaders from South Philly after a Wednesday night dance at St. Mary's hall in the steamy summer of 1954. Before describing the actual event, a little background is useful in understanding the environment in which the brawl occurred. The Wednesday night teenage dance essentially was a neighborhood affair, although teenagers from neighboring parishes and areas also attended. However, during 1954, a group of neighborhood girls had met and became friendly with guys from South Philly. As a result, large numbers of South Philly guys began routinely attending the dance. In the process, they began to monopolize dances with some of the neighborhood girls. While not dancing with the neighborhood girls was not a big issue in itself, (the girls always contended that they looked elsewhere for dances because the neighborhood guys never asked them to dance), it nonetheless had a tendency to grate on the nerves --- as if someone were constantly scratching on a chalkboard. With this brief background in mind, I will describe that memorable event some 46 years ago, as I remember it. The dance that Wednesday night had an unusually large number of guys from South Philly in attendance. That, in itself, created a tense atmosphere. Nearing the end of the dance, one of the South Philly guys was seen dancing a dance called the "dirty dig" with one of the neighborhood girls. At that point, Al Carsella walked up to the couple, and "explained" to the South Philly guy that we didn't dance that way at

St. Mary's, effectively causing him to leave the dance. What we didn't know at the time was that when the South Philly guy left the dance, he headed straight for a phone and made an immediate contact in South Philly. From that call, the word of a crisis in North Philly spread by phone to a number of South Philly neighborhoods. As the dance ended, everyone began filing out of the Clearfield street exit from the hall. I happened to be walking out with Al Carsella. As we exited through the doors and began walking down the steps to the Clearfield street pavement, I noticed what seemed to be hundreds of unfamiliar faces -- all with white handkerchiefs tied around their necks, (since they were not all from the same neighborhood, the handkerchiefs identified them to each other as South Philly brethren). As we reached the pavement, someone shouted "There he is" and in that instant a white handkerchief smashed his fist into the side of the head of an unsuspecting Al Carsella-- a real sucker punch. Before going on, it is important to mention that when the white handkerchiefs were pulling up in numerous cars and congregating outside the dance, the word spread through the neighborhood and it seemed later as if the entire neighborhood had gathered around St. Mary's, closing in on the white handkerchiefs from the rear and on the flanks while the numerous neighborhood guys in the dance were pouring out into a frontal position. Getting back to the action... the punch knocked Al Carsella back into the church steps, but what followed was worthy of Rocky I. Al got off the steps and tore into his assailant with a machine gun like series of punches that pummelled him into the ground as the crowd mulled, watched and

waited, completely blocking off all traffic movement on Clearfield and 22<sup>nd</sup> streets. With Al scoring a stunning and inspiring victory, after the sucker punch, the defeated white handkerchief yelled for help and a huge man stepped in to take on Al, who at this point was fairly exhausted. Upon seeing this, Sharkey, who was either at the dance or arrived upon seeing the commotion, stepped in to take on the huge white handkerchief. This fight could only be described as a massacre. Sharkey began punching the giant on the pavement outside St. Mary's, holding him up as he continued to punch him across Clearfield street until he reached the Nicasto Funeral Home wall. The giant was beaten to a pulp and as he slid to the ground all hell broke loose and the brawl was on. It was like a scene from a movie - a major urban riot. Fists flying everywhere, shoving, yelling, wrestling, those knocked down being trampled and non-combatants trying to find a way out of the chaos. In the midst of all this, Fr. Walker came out to try to stop the brawl, but it was too late -- somebody slugged the beloved Fr. Walker. It was not clear whether the punch was deliberate or inadvertent but it was perpetrated by a white handkerchief. The battle raged for what seemed to be an interminable time. When it was over, there were white handkerchief bodies strewn all over 22<sup>nd</sup> and Clearfield streets. When it was clear that total victory was ours, certain South Philly guys were picked up and thrown into their cars with a sufficient number still standing to drive them back to South Philly. The arrogance of the invaders, of course, is what did them in. they thought they could come into our neighborhood and win a battle on our turf. But they didn't

understand the family bond that permeated the neighborhood. Once they invaded the neighborhood, it was no longer the issue of how somebody danced or wanting to keep South Philly guys out of the dance, it became an issue of neighborhood honor. We were not about to let outsiders win a battle in the midst of our homes and our families. In the aftermath of the great fight, there were rumors that they were coming back with guns. As a result, a plan was developed to be ready for anything. Surveillance teams were formed to monitor the area around the dance over the next few Wednesdays but nothing ever happened and we never saw them again – at the dance or otherwise. What makes this moment in the old neighborhood's history significant is not the violence, which should never make us proud, or winning the fight per se, rather it was the neighborhood coming together to defend its identity and its honor and displaying the kind of character and loyalty to each other that makes us family, even to this day.

#### WHO REMEMBERS?

Waiting in line to go for a swim at Whittier Pool. Trying to sneak in for another half-hour by throwing your wet bathing suit under a passing car to dry them off so the lifeguard would let you in again. What a treat it was to have enough money after your swim for a snowball, or a pretzel! Climbing the wall of the pool at midnight after a date was scary when the cops came around to chase us away.

Making your own scooters using an orange crate and a 2x4. Removing the rubber from in between old Chicago ball bearing skates for the wheel power and mobility of your

scooter. Two sticks for handles, a can with holes punched in front and a candle inside for night riding. And of course, your favorite number painted in front to get that racing sport look. Sometimes we would stuff our buddy inside the crate and take him for a ride. Smashing into one another's scooter proved who had the strongest scooter. Those were the days when you could have fun without having money!!  
Gene Lucarini from Fox Street.

#### THE SECOND TIME AROUND

Growing up with parents who loved each other and living in the old neighborhood, (don't get me wrong nobody lives in a "Leave It To Beaver" household), was a wonderful example. When my father died my mother was totally lost without him. After I pushed my mother Josephine Bilardo D'Ambra out the door to attend her 8<sup>th</sup> grade 50<sup>th</sup> year reunion, she met her childhood friend Joe Gulino. They dined and danced and renewed their friendship, which led to marriage. The marriage ceremony and reception were held at the Hotel Atop The Bellevue with Josephine's daughter Rachel as Maid of Honor and Joe's grandson Eric as Best Man. The bride was given away by her grandson Thomas. In attendance were the bride and groom's combined seven children, their respective spouses and ten grandchildren. They recently celebrated their fourth anniversary at their home in Cherry Hill, N. J. They enjoy reading the JJ and look forward to receiving it. The JJ is the lifeline between old friends, neighbors and former St. Mary Parishioners. They were at the last reunion and are looking forward to the next one. Enclosed is a check for

a St. Mary's plaque and expenses of the JJ. JO's daughter is the owner of Pierre & Carlo European Spa located at the Bellevue. Mention that you read it in the JJ and you will receive a free gift on your next visit.

#### LAVANGA'S DONATED CHRISTMAS TREE TO THE CITY:

Donato and Victoria Lavanga formerly of 2922 N. 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, but who have resided in the Somerton section of the city for thirty-five plus years donated 1999's Christmas tree to the city of Philadelphia. The tree had grown to a height of over 50-ft on their front lawn. Many people donate their trees to the city to be placed in various locations, but only one is chosen for the City Hall Courtyard. Those of you from the old neighborhood who had the pleasure of seeing the magnificent tree, should be pleased to know that our old neighbors were responsible for it being there. Frank Lavanga, reported this information to the JJ. Frank mentioned in his letter he was present for the tree lighting ceremony along with his Uncle and Aunt and their sons Pat, Vince, and Danny with their respective families.

#### MYSTERY REPORTER

Bobby "Horn" Pacifico has been seen walking on Ridge Avenue in the Roxborough section of the city. It was reported that he is doing fine and has made a complete recovery from a recent hip replacement. Bobby Horn is formerly from 2013 W. Indiana Avenue.