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"A NIGHT AT THE CRYSTAL BALLROOM"

FIRST SATURDAY AFTER EASTER, 1958. This is the most exciting moment of my entire life! I can't believe I am at last walking into St. Mary's Hall to attend the Dance. Oh yes, I have entered this Hall hundreds of times, but that was for lunch, plays, bingo, and even Scout meetings, not a dance. Walking down the steep steps, as I enter the almost completely dark hall, I notice that the "Crystal Ball" on the ceiling was rotating with four spot lights shining on it. The rotating of the ball caused the reflection of many diamond shaped sparkles of colored lights to shine on the tiled walls and floor. My eyes eventually adjust to the dimly lit surroundings and I can now see at least 200 teenagers. Some are dancing, but others are sitting on the folding chairs that are against the walls. In the center of the dance floor I see a few of the Carrioca's, Nancy Gangi, Virgil Procaccino, Richie Vassallo, Joan Kelly, Peggy Stanton and Bob Bonitatibus. Santo and Vicki are slow dancing to Johnny Mathis's recording of "Chances Are". I begin to move timidly around the dance floor. Marty Coleman who is playing the records on the balcony, where the Priest usually call the Bingo numbers, announces "Lady's Choice!" Suddenly, there are loud screams being shouted by most of the girls, as they move quickly to ask the guys to dance. Barbara Menghetti is dancing with Eddy Trignani, Gloria DiTanno with Clem Martino, Angela Grosso with Maurice

Malagia, Rosie Tomei with Joe DeLarso, Luigi Rosica with Francine Lebre, Yock with Maria Torzone, Walt with Carmela, and Nancy Diciano with Joey Giangrecco. They all seem so natural dancing to "Young Love", sung by Roy Orbison. I sit down on one of the folding chairs against the wall. As I think about all the stories I was told about the dances of years ago, by my sister Mary, I can see and even hear the Big Band sound of Tommy Varone's Orchestra featuring vocalists Janet Sullivan and Dick Diautilo on the stage. I begin to imagine what it was like then when those "jitterbugs" were younger. In those days they had two dances weekly one on Wednesday and one on Sunday. Tommy announces "One O'Clock Jump" and the kids jump to their feet, Joe Jap from 23rd St. and Theresa Vitale, Jeff and Marie Bello, Maggie and Ziggy Sciarra, Gene Lucarini and Gilda Coccia, Melfi and Julie, John Vendetti with Vivian Cataldi, Joe Salvia and Edith Juliani, Bibs Pacifico and June Lacy, Moe Brascietta and Marie Vassallo and Benny Juliani with his South Philly Broad Ida Giosi. What an honor to be part of this tradition. I am quickly awoken from my daydreaming with the sound of "At The Hop", by Danny And The Juniors. I say to myself, "This is it", I practiced all week for this dance. Now its my turn to "Rock & Roll!" I grab Fidget and begin to dance. Toward the end of the night my feet are so hot and the black suede on my

Flagg Brothers swirl shoes is almost tan from the dust on the floor. Fr. Doolan announces the last dance, as everyone lets out a sigh and grabs a partner to dance to Brook Benton's, "Good Night My Love". Walking out of the dance some of the guys and chicks are heading to the "Tioga Diner" for a late night snack. Some are going to "Rosie's Steak Shop". I know some are going to Whittiers School Yard, but nobody would say who. If this was in my sister's era some of her crowd would be going to "Tip Top Bakery" for the same reason. I am going to "Emily's Pizzeria". When I arrive at "Emily's" the shop is packed. Emily, her sisters Mary and Chuck, and their Mother are working hard to fill all the orders. Emily says, "What can I get you Little Al?" She always calls me that after my Uncle Al. I give her my order and sit in the only booth with Anthony, Richard, Joey, John, Ron and Al. Sitting at the counter is Lucille "Olive Oil" DiSantes and her side kick Evelyn. I notice the clock on the wall at 11:30 and sure hope that my food comes quickly, because I have to be home before curfew at midnight. My order comes and I quickly finish my food and walk down Indiana Ave. with the crowd. Approaching the corner of J&I, I hear music coming from my cousin Al's 57 gray Pontiac convertible. He is sitting in his car talking to Pete Snyder, Muldoon, Tac, Dooner, and Denny "O'Day". I say good night to the guys and we confirm that we will all be at Mass in the morning!!!!!!