

"IN THE SHADE OF A WHITE ELEPHANT"

I guess it's a sign of age, but I don't really care what people think. Every chance I get when I'm around our young generation I somehow can almost always relate the current conversation to something from my past. For instance when the subject of the Philadelphia Eagles came up this past football season I told the story about the time in 1958 when Uncle Al took me to see the Eagles play the New York Giants at Connie Mack Stadium. We had standing room only tickets and it was a bitter cold December Sunday. To emphasize how close we lived to the stadium I mentioned that we actually left the game at half-time, walked home, had a dish of macaroni's and returned to see the end of the game. This is a "true" story; however, I don't think that my listeners believed me. It was truly a unique experience and a fond memory of the White Elephant, if I may coin a phrase that was used to describe the original tenants the Philadelphia Athletics. My fondest memories of the stadium include springtime, the Philadelphia Phillies and my Uncle Jack McDade. Uncle Jack was a fan of all sports, but baseball was his greatest love. During baseball season, as everyone who lived in our old neighborhood in North Philly understood, it brought excitement, exuberance and a sense that we lived near the walls of immortality within the shade of our beloved Connie Mack Stadium. That's correct, within walking distance of our homes we would be able to see Richie Ashburn, Robin Roberts, Curt Simmons, Jack Myers, Willie Jones, Warren Spahn, Willie Mays, Hank Aaron, etc. etc. We not only could get to see them play the game, but many times we would greet them either before the game parking their cars, or after the game at Framo's Restaurant on Allegheny Avenue. There was no better time to emphasize the tumultuous life within the shade of the White Elephant than the 1964 season. **Baseball**

Season 1964: I am lucky to get Phil

"Yock" Yaccavonne to trade nights with me delivering pizza pies for Basile's Pizzeria on 22nd Street. Uncle Jack has tickets to the Phillies home opener tonight and he invited me to go with him. It's one of those unusually warm early spring nights and many people are delighted to be outdoors enjoying an early taste of summer. I kiss my very pregnant wife Pat goodbye after dinner and walk down Toronto Street toward 21st Street. Cocky is standing near cats Club talking to Nags about tomorrow's horse racing selections at nearby Garden State Race Track in Cherry Hill, New Jersey. Walt Cannon and his wife Carmella come out of their apartment and get into their car. On 21st Street Alfonse and Hairs Parrise are talking about the lack of parking spaces during the baseball season. This is a subject that can cause a neighborhood residents temper to flare. Uncle Jack is talking to Demo Paoni at the corner of 21st and Indian Avenue as I greet them. Making our way along the short three block walk down 21st street toward the stadium we encounter several neighbors outside their homes enjoying the view of the fans parking their cars. It is early in the season, but because of the warm weather many fans are lined up at Ruggieri's lemonade stand. Hank Salvato greets us with "I think this is going to be a winning season!" Uncle Jack agrees and continues educating me about this year's roster and their stats, just like he has done for as long as I can remember. He is especially excited about three of the players who he thinks are going to make a big difference to the team this season. He mentions that with the pitching of John Bunning and the hitting and fielding of Richie Allen and Johnny Callison that the Phillies are going to be the team to beat. Uncle Jack was right about his prediction about the Phillies and by the All Star game break it was looking very good for the Phillies, but with the second half

of the season still remaining to be played, anything could happen. The more games the Phillies win the attendance at each game is increasing and the parking situation in the neighborhood becomes more desperate. People who have resident stickers for their cars are selling their spaces for as much as five dollars and double parking their cars until after the games. As the season moves on it looks as though the Phillies have a clear shot at winning the pennant and business at the local Steak Shops like Mike's on 29th Street, Curcio's on Judson Street and Sharkey's on Bonsall Street is booming. Emily's Pizzeria is packed on any game night and Dee's Bar at 23rd and Clearfield is packed with both neighbor's and visiting fans. The excitement builds and as September rolls around it seems to be inevitable that the Phillies will win the National League Pennant. I even made a novena with my wife at St. Mary's making my intention that the Phillies would go all the way this year. With only twelve games to go the Phillies are sure to clinch the Pennant. The attendance at the games is sure to reach an all time high and many of the entrepreneurs of the neighborhood are hoping to capitalize by making plans to sell food on strategic corners to offering taxi services from the Broad Street Subway to the stadium.

The guy I envy this season is Jimmy DiGiacomo who is a hot dog vendor at the ballpark and has been able to be in attendance for every game. Uncle Jack and I got to see seven more games this season, but with tickets at a premium now we will have to settle for listening to most of the games on the radio. By the end of the season the unthinkable happens and the Phillies lose ten of the last twelve games ending up in second place one game from clinching the Pennant. It was a disappointing, but exciting season until to the very last game. I know next year they'll do it.