

## “SURPRISE PARTY AT GLORIA’S”

After the Mass for the Fallen Soldiers from the old neighborhood in November at the coffee clutch I did as I always do each year, meet with old neighborhood friends. This social is like a mini reunion and many of us reminisce about the good times we had yesterday in the old neighborhood. A few of us younger “old heads” Pat Nicastro, Eddy Trignani, Gloria DiTanno Domino and my wife Pat Gallagher Domenico were talking together and Gloria focused on a story that at first I did not recall. As she talked however her recollection began to jog my memory and with her help and a lot of embellishment this story was developed.

### **January, Saturday Night circa 1960:**

I am happy that I am allowed to go out tonight even if I have to walk to the Hot Shoppe in eight inches of snow. Crossing the street at 24<sup>th</sup> and Clearfield and to my delight I see Boni, No-Neck and Frank Lavanga just ahead of me. I pick up some of the wet snow and heave it at the three of them. This gets their attention. They begin to throw snow at me and for a few minutes we are engaged in a vicious snowball fight. Although I am sixteen years old and believe as most other teenagers of this era that we are invincible, the cold wet snow proves to be too much for my bare hands. At least I’ll have some company walking to the Hot Shoppe.

Crossing Allegheny Avenue we meet Yoc, Maria Torzone, Joe Commentucci, Mike Piccione and Donnie Pacifico and of course another snow ball fight starts. This one continues as we run up Fox Street and all the way down Westmoreland Street until we reach our Oasis in the middle of North Philly the “Hot Shoppe.” The beige and blue sign with the blue flood lights is our signal that we have reached the melting pot for teenagers from Swampoodle, Nicetown, East Falls, and Roxborough. The first

thing that is on our minds is a warm cup of hot chocolate, a mighty-moe and French fries with brown gravy. We enter the restaurant and the usual loud chatter of our fellow teenagers is absent. When I shout hello to Frank Sciarra who is sitting in a booth with Ginny Lepp, Paul Blasetti and Umberto Nanni I am quickly accosted by Mr. Anderson who identifies himself as the new Manager. He recites the new rules of which I only heard the first one. I can’t believe that we are only allowed twenty minutes to eat and then we must leave. So much for being invincible!

Twenty minutes later there were about sixty of us teenagers standing outside in the cold. The outside car ports were closed and we have not even the hope for someone we know with a warm car driving into one of the stalls. Johnny Able begins to sing “One Summer Night” we all laugh, but we join in and harmonize several songs to get our minds off of the cold. Believe it or not Judy Golbeski, Mary Kohler, and Peachie are huddled inside the telephone booth. The wind is howling and just like that three meat wagons pull up and the Cops get out and tell us, “Leave the premises immediately or we will escort you to the 39<sup>th</sup> precinct.” Livin says “At least it will be warm in there!” We all laugh as we begin to walk to nowhere. Before we get to Hunting Park Avenue Yoc is standing outside the telephone booth and Maria is on the phone. We all become very quiet and huddle around the telephone booth. We hear Maria’s conversation, “Gloria your mother won’t let you come out in the snow?” We can not hear what Gloria is saying, but then we hear, Maria say, “Gloria your mother said to have us come up to your house!” The word spreads like a wild fire, “There’s a party at Gloria DiTanno’s house on Ridge Avenue near Ade’s Water Ice Stand.”

We all make a rush for an A Bus that just pulled up to the curb, Not all of

us could get but off they went The rest of us will have to wait for the next bus. It only takes a few minutes before the next bus arrives and we fill this one up and off we go. Within seconds of each other both busses arrive outside of Gloria’s house. We quickly nominate Maria to go and knock on the door as we all line up behind her. Gloria answers the door and screams “Oh my God!” We hear Gloria’s mother Viola Viola from inside say, “Gloria let them in!” “Are you sure Mom?” “Gloria let your friends in.” While we are entering, Walt Cannon pulls over in his 59 Olds and Carmella Sullo, BG, Yardout and Billy Walters get out and file in line. Before all of us are inside, a cab pulls up with George Davis, Leo Flynn, and Pidgeon Head. As we pile into the house Viola Viola says to her husband Mario, “I can’t throw them out. After all I know their parents!” We all piled into the basement and start dancing to the 45 records. Even though Gloria’s Mom did not expect sixty kids tonight at her house she serves us soda and snacks. Gloria’s younger brother Mario is sitting on the steps watching us dance and the room becomes quickly filled with smoke, as Gloria gets panicky and opens a window. “Don’t smoke anymore!” We were having a good old time. We were warm and out of harms way. This is just how our parents wanted us to be.

A few hours pass and we all kind of slow down and get a bit mellow. Joe Balloons suggests that we play some cards. Eddie Trignani goes up stairs and asks Gloria’s father for a deck of cards. He responds, “It’s getting late, so I think you better get home before your parents will be worried about you!” With that said we all depart thanking them for their hospitality!!! This story is another example of the life back in the old neighborhood. These stories truly exemplify the unprecedented friendship, concern and yes love that we had and I believe we still have for each other.