

“THE BOOSTER BOYS”

A very interesting fact occurred to me as I prepared myself to conjure up another tale of life in the old neighborhood. Every single thought I have of those wonderful years is always filled with a beautiful day. Could it be that we never had a bad day? During a recent conversation with some of the guys, they reminded me that my stories always include the same characters that I hung around with on the corner of J&I. So I have spent the last week or so thinking about some of those earlier years and this is what I remember.

Spring circa 1955: “Mr. Rossi, you march up here to the front of the room!” “But Sister Mary Andrews it wasn’t my fault! “Mr. Rossi you stand at that blackboard and write 100 times, I will not talk in class.”

As I proceed to write on the blackboard, I get the chills as my fingernail scratches the blackboard surface. I begin to write and I can see Carol Ann Costello through the corner of my eye working diligently at her desk and diagonally behind her is Louis Bonitatibus making goofy faces at me. I stop writing and turn around and begin laughing out loud. Sister Mary Andrews comes over to me and grabs me by the short hair on my temple and escorts me to Mother Ursula’s office. She instructs me to sit at the desk outside her office and not make a sound. She has a very quiet conversation with Mother and returns to her room. “Mr. Rossi come in this office immediately! I jump up at once and enter her office. “Yes Mother! “Mr. Rossi you will stay after school today and clean all the blackboards in the school! Sit at the desk until the bell rings for lunch and say six Hail Mary’s, six Our Fathers and six Glory Be to the Fathers! The fifteen minutes to the bell seems like an eternity. When the bell rings Mother gives me a note in a sealed envelope and instructs me to have it signed by both my parents and return it in the morning before class begins.

It’s a good thing that we now have an excellent lunch program at the school or I would be doomed sooner. The classes empty and the students file in an orderly and quiet manner to lunch in the school hall. Once we are in the hall the noise level is ear piercing.

Standing in line behind Frank Sciarra he reminds me that we will all be meeting outside of Sharky’s Steak Shop on Clearfield Street after school. Frank who is in the other 5th grade had no idea that I was sent to Mother’s office. I am about to explain to him when I hear Mrs. Louise Citro say, “Hello Aaron would you like some beef and rice? “Oh yes Mrs. Citro!

Sitting at the table Frank Sciarra is talking to Frank Lavanga, Nick Marcellino and Anthony Cerone about the booster drive we are having today for our Mighty Midgents Sand Lot Baseball Team. Mario Amici and Maurice Malagia walk over and ask me what happened in Mother’s office. When I explain to them Frank Sciarra becomes upset that I have to stay after school. We hear Mrs. Picarello ask if any one wants a second helping and Steve Borgioni, Walt Cannon and I get up immediately. Paul Blasetti calls me over on my way back to the table and tells me that he wants to flip baseball cards in the school yard after lunch. Walking into the schoolyard there are several jump ropes going around and around in different areas. Carmela Sullo, and Maria Torzone are turning the rope as Theresa Grosso is flawless at “Pepper”. On the other side of the school yard Sister Mary Andrews is having a catch with Jack Billardo, as Sister Mary Anita and Miss Pascuzzi talk to Rose Pitore. Albert Nanni is flipping cards with Joe Rulli and John Spencer. The bell rings and instantly everyone forms their respective class lines and after the second bell silence prevails and we precede to our class room. The afternoon was uneventful and after

class I quickly begin to clean the blackboards and run home to get changed and meet the team. I did not show the note to Uncle Al because if I did I would not be allowed out. I make it to Bonsall & Clearfield Streets just in time to get my boosters from Franky and quickly walk over to 23rd Street with Franny DeRosato and Michael Milluzo. We start with Canios’ Tavern and sell several boosters at twenty five cents each. As I make the turn, I see Oscar DiGiacomo who is more that willing to buy two from me. Franny and Michael are on the other side of the street and Lucy DiGiacomo with her husband “Wawa” reach into their pockets and buy some. I see Dot Frattini on her porch who greets me with a smile and also takes one from me. Janet Toriello, Mary Jo Cappello and her sister Roseanne are playing Jacks on their steps and they ask their parents for me and they all buy a booster. Mike and Franny go into Laurenzi’s grocery store and I go into Giufreda’s grocery store and Sammy buys two boosters from me. Victor DiCeasar signals me from inside his butcher shop that he will buy a booster. The people in this neighborhood are just fantastic. We begin to walk down Indiana Avenue and Emily Laurenzi gives me a quarter for a booster. Mike sells one to Girt Barra. Franny is across the street and sells one each to Tommy Gangi, Domenic “Rags” Ragno and Joe Vitale. Turning at Hemberger Street, we are greeted by Carmen Ricardi who flips me a quarter. When we get to Fox Street we only need to sell one more each and we have met our quota. Tony “Braciolo” Dambra and his brother Harry “Coochi” solve that issue and we head on back to Sharky’s. Franky collects the money and announces that we sold enough boosters to buy a catchers mask and chest pad and balls we need for the team. Now I have to go home and face Aunt Martha with the note from Mother Ursula. I’ll be punished for sure!