

“WITHOUT AO THERE WOULD BE NO ME”

While I was pondering a story for this edition, it suddenly occurred to me that I am now about the age that my Grandfather Juan Panico was while in my youth I spent most of my time with him. I always thought of him as being an old man at the time and as I reminisce about him today, somehow I perceive him older than I am now, even though we share a number. My annotation certifies my belief that life hinges on perception. I have recently joined the monthly breakfast led by Vincent Pongia, attended by many of the illustrious male alumni of “The Old Neighborhood”! The age range of this group spans sixty-two to ninety three years. What a nostalgic occasion it is and believe me the stories of yesterday fill the air. Some we can repeat and others are better forgotten. Perception becomes a vital part of these stories as they often have a different narrator bringing them to life. With the element of time’s effect on memory the stories often have some amusing difference. The following story is a recent one that was told to me by “AO” Pacifico, but with my perception of how it actually happened.

Friday after Thanksgiving circa 1950: I am standing on the porch of my family home at 2056 W. Indiana Avenue watching the paving laborers working. The entire 2000 block of Indiana Avenue is being repaired. The street has been jack hammered down to the bare dirt. The sidewalk on both sides of the street has also been removed and the forms laid for concrete filling. “Airona! Comea hava u breakfast!” “Okay Grandpop!” I open the front door slowly, but once I smell the food I dash into the kitchen. You would think that after having the huge Thanksgiving dinner prepared by my Aunt Anna that food would be the last thing on my mind. I have barely digested the turkey and raviolis but who could resist my Grandfathers pasta fagioli especially the beans in olive oil before it is mixed with the

pasta. Grandpop sets down four large pieces of Italian bread that has been dipped in the bean juice, with the beans and an ample portion of salt and pepper. Grandpop has his usual coffee royal and I quickly devour my piece of bread and ask if I can be excused. He grants me permission with. “Ua watch a u selfa!”

I return to the porch and become immediately engrossed in the cement workers and the various so-called sidewalk supervisors. Anthony Calvanese is sitting on his porch listening to a conversation between “Boston” Alferi, Elsie and Harry Cappa, as they point to the street. Pat Scoles’ Grandfather is diligently inspecting every move by the truck pouring gravel in the sidewalk forms. Ernie Pisacano comes out of his house and walks across the dirt street to talk with “Goggy” on the corner of Lambert Street. My Aunt Helen Marcino gingerly walks from Lambert Street across the dirt street to our house. In her usual kind manner she greets me. “Aron did you eat?” “Thanks Aunt Helen, but I already ate!” The number of sidewalk inspectors increased to about thirty people now. On the corner of 21st Street outside of Mingnion’s Taylor Shop is Artenzio Brucetta talking with Alphonse Parisi and Lou Grosso. Bill Basile pulls up on his motorcycle and looks very impressive in his leather Police jacket and his highway patrol joffer pants. He parks his motorcycle and walks down Indiana to his house, as he passes me he gives me a smile and a salute. I hear Martha Falco calling to her sister Rose. Rosie Scarneri is chatting with Joanne Cossa about the mess and how they can’t wait till it is finished. Leaning over the porch I can see my cousin Johnny McPeak sitting on his grandparents Bounviso’s steps. I run down and sit with him. Rocky Gabriella walks over from Woodstock Street with a small ball

and we all have a catch until they both had to go. I was left alone, but Rocky let me use his ball. I look up the street and it is deserted. I wonder what happened to all the sidewalk inspectors! There are also only a few workers up near Lambert Street. I begin to toss the little ball into the air and eventually throw it haywire and it hits the point of the step and flies into the street. I know I was told not to go into the street, but without anyone around and it not being my ball I decide to go after it. I dash into the street and begin to reach for the ball and suddenly there is a huge cement truck backing down the street. I look up at the truck and swear that the cement was dripping on my head. I figure I am going to be crushed by the truck when out of nowhere an arm is under my crotch and lifts me to safety. My heart is beating rapidly and when I settle down, I realize that I am laying on top of “AO” Pacifico my savior who dove to the gravel payment with me!!!

If it wasn’t for “AO” coming along when he did I probably would not be here today. When “AO” and I were discussing this story he believed that there was snow on the ground and that he put his arm under my crotch and threw me on to a snow bank on the pavement. It may have happened the way that he believes, but how ever it happened he literally saved my life. I have finally publicly thanked him for being my hero and also for not telling my family that I ventured into the street. When “AO” and I were discussing the incident, as Mike Citro, Hector Pisacano and Ziggy Cappa listened intently, I could not wonder even though I was only six years old at the time how little “AO” managed it. Ziggy with his usual wit responded “Too bad “AO” came along at the right time!”

If you are interested in meeting the old gang, send your name to the JJ and it will forwarded to Vincent Pongia. The last time we met there were sixty-two men in attendance.