

Growing Up In Medford in the 1950s

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Introduction

For three days (January 26-28, 2016) we experienced unseasonal, steady rains here in Florida. Unable to do anything outdoors, I decided to attack some old items on my to-do-list and I elected to write about my youth. One of my longtime regrets is that I didn't know very much about my mother and father's upbringing. It was probably because I either didn't ask them, or if they told me, I didn't listen. In any case, I decided to just start writing about the "olden days" when I was a young boy growing up in Medford. I made the piece personal because my expectations are that perhaps only my children, grandchildren, or a few close old friends will ever be interested in reading the material. As each day passed and the rain kept falling, I just kept right on writing. The more that I wrote, the more my mind triggered other memories of growing up in Medford in the 1950s.

Medford

For the first twenty-one years of my life (1939 to 1960) Medford, Massachusetts, located about 7 miles north of Downtown Boston, was my home. Like many cities and towns in the Boston area, the pronunciation of town names often didn't sound like what any outsider would expect. Medford was no exception and the local colloquialism for Medford was either "Mefid" or "Mefa", as in "I come from Mefa." With a Boston accent, words ending in "r" sound like "ah" (e.g., car is cah), words ending in "a" sound like "er" (e.g., tuna is tuner), words ending in "er" sound like "a" (e.g., lover is lova) and the "g" is truncated from words ending in "ing" (e.g., parking is pahkin). In addition, Bostonians talk wicked fast so that words and letters tend to run together. For example, "how are you?" is pronounced "hahwahya." Consequently, in Mefid we grew up talkin funny.



My home in Medford was about 300 yards from the Malden City line and I went to school and church in Malden. In my section of Medford and in the bordering Edgeworth section of Malden, the communities consisted of street after street of two-family homes that were occupied primarily by Irish and Italian families. In my case my father's parents came from Ireland and mother's folks were Irish by way of Newfoundland, Canada. The parents of most of my friends were immigrants, who were born in either Ireland or Italy.

The two-family homes (two deckers) and the three-deckers in our densely populated neighborhood were filled with school-age children, so there was no shortage of playmates. My grammar school years occurred before the arrival of television and there was little in our homes to amuse children. So unlike today's youth who often lay around the house playing video games or watching TV, we spent most of our leisure time after school and during vacation periods outside entertaining ourselves and making mischief.

Our parents accorded us the freedom to roam our community at a very young age without close parental oversight. My parents expected obedience, respect and courtesy, but they were trusting and not restrictive. I don't recall my mother constantly asking, "Where are you going, who are you going with?" Instead there was an understanding that we would stay close to home and we were expected to follow some simple guidelines, like – be sure to be home in time for dinner (we ate as a family at exactly 5:30 every night), or come home when the streetlights come on, or come in when I blink the porch light on and off.

As kids without constant adult supervision and guidance (today they call it hovering), we quickly learned how to improvise, organize our own games and create our own fun. This self-reliance was a learned skill that served many of us well as adults in our work environments. It is called street smarts. Everything we seemed to need could be found in our safe community and within a half-mile radius of home. While we were afforded a liberal degree of independence in our social activities, our academic and spiritual lives were much more regimented and directly influenced by the teachings and rules of the parish Catholic Church and parochial schools that we attended. Of course as young people we willfully accepted without regret this blend of social freedom and religious mandate our loving parents provided us.

Around 1951-1952 - Line of Demarcation

In thinking about my early years I am able to draw a line of demarcation, life experiences before and after the start of the decade of 1950s. For most of my grammar school years (1944-1952) everything remained compartmentalized within the confines of the local neighborhood, church and school; nothing much changed. Of course my memories from my early years are not going to be as vivid, but my recollection is that everything remains the same and simple and families were freed from the burdens of wartime.

Fortunately American society was changing as we entered the 50s. For me the transition from grammar school to high school involved more than a new academic challenge and maturing into my teenage years; two major sociological changes were making a dramatic impact on everyday living. The first was the automobile and the second was television. Some could argue that there was a third – rock and roll music. Access to telephone service remained limited,

cameras existed but taking photos was expensive, and travel on airplanes was still years away.

Automobile

My father always owned an automobile but car ownership was unusual in our neighborhood in the aftermath of World War II, especially in families where parents came from the “old country” (Ireland or Italy). To get to work and to get around everyone was dependent on the Massachusetts Transportation Authority (MTA) for transportation, or we rode our bikes. Streetcars (what some people call trolleys) ran down the center of the Fellsway into Sullivan Square in Charlestown, where you connected to an elevated train ride into Boston. Buses ran everywhere (e.g., Medford and Malen Squares), all day and on a frequent schedule.



One of the daring acts that kids would try would be jump on the back of streetcars for a thrill ride. One night my friends, Pete Wall, at the age of 14 fell off a moving streetcar and hit his head on the rail. He supposedly recovered from the head injury but many of us believe the damage to his brain resulted in a lifetime of him telling corny jokes.

For many of my friends the first car (we didn't drive autos, we drove cahs) in the family wasn't purchased until the oldest son turned 16 and became eligible to drive. So in my early years when there were only a limited number of family owned cars, few cars were parked on the streets, resulting in minimal traffic. The street was our playground.

Before 1955 when I reach the legal age of 16 and was able to get my driver's license, the presence of automobiles was already become a liberating factor. For example, when I was around 13 (1952), my friends and I would routinely hitchhike back and forth to the MDC swimming pool located 5 miles north up Rte. 28 in Stoneham. By the time I was 15 we would hitchhike to Hampton Beach, NH. Fortunately in those days hitchhiking wasn't consider dangerous.

Once we got our driver's licenses, we did what every kid did in those days. We piled into cars (some kids hiding in the trunk to avoid paying the admission fee) and we headed to either the Meadow Glen or the Twin Drive-in movie theatres, which were both located near Wellington Circle in Medford. You would pull into a parking space facing the movie screen so that a pole was next to the drive's window. On the pole was a speaker with a



connecting cable that allowed you to fit and attached the speaker to the driver's window. Unfortunately cars often pulled away forgetting about the speaker and smashing the window. I'm sure fathers weren't very happy when kids came home with a broken window.

Or we might just go "cruisin in a cah", which meant we would drive around looking to pick up girls. One destination, where high school aged kids hung out, was Brigham's Ice Cream (every city center had a Brigham's). If our quest to meet girls failed, we could always get an ice cream cone. My favorite was pistachio and with jimmies, of course. If we wanted to get something to eat, we would head to Richards Drive-in Restaurant, located at Wellington Circle. At the drive-in restaurant your food was serve to you while sat in your car. You rolled down your window so a serving platter and the attachment could be hung on the car.



In the 50s the front seat of cars was a bench seat, meaning the seats were flat across with no center console and not contoured (i.e., not bucket seats). So on dates the girl would sit right next to the boy driving, not by the window. And on dates it was common to end the evening with a visit Spot Pond in Stoneham to watch the submarine races – translated, "going pahkin and makin out in the cah." When making out (also called smooching) both the boy and girl would keep their lips closed together when kissing and there would be long embrace that would last for many minutes.

My father had 1952 Oldsmobile 98. He always wanted a Cadillac but my mother wouldn't let him buy one, so he bought the next closest thing. Mom's objection was, "We are not going to live on Emerald St. if you are driving a Cadillac." My Mom wanted to move and own a home instead of renting. She was right; it was something that my father should have done. But my Dad was fiscally



conservative, which was common for people who lived through the Great Depression. In his world a real estate mortgage was too risky. If he purchased a home, he would pay in full and in cash, the same way he bought everything else, including his car. The car was Dad's proudest possession and every evening he would put it the garage in back of our house. There was one problem; the car was too big for the garage. There was only an inch or so clearance on each side and the depth was insufficient; so he wasn't able to completely close the garage doors.

I didn't get to drive Dad's car very often and only when I made a special request, for example, when I had a date for a school dance. Because I didn't drive and

practice very often, I was very inexperienced and a poor driver. My access to the car became even more limited after I was involved in an accident that was completely my fault. The thing that I remember most from that incident was not the damage to my father's pride and joy but how my Dad reacted. When I got home that night and told him what had happened, he immediately responded, "Was anyone hurt?" After I replied, "No" he said, "Go to bed and we will worry about it in the morning." I'll never forget that simple lesson. He knew I felt awful and had disappointed him, but he was compassionate and wasn't about to pile on with a lecture or punishment. At that moment my admiration of my Dad took a big step up.

Television

When I was around 12 years old my family was one of the first in the neighborhood to purchase a television set. I recall it was an Admiral TV with a 12 inch black and white screen. The picture quality seemed to be always fuzzy with the screen rolling horizontally. So we quickly learned what the Contrast and Horizontal Control dials meant and how to reposition the rabbit-ear antenna to improve reception. Many families erected more elaborate antennas on the roof of their home in the hope of getting better reception. And a new, short-lived industry sprouted up; it was the TV repairman who made house calls and who was forever replacing vacuum tubes.



The actual cost of a TV in 1950s wasn't much different than today, so it was relatively expensive and a major investment for families. Back then fathers went to work and all mothers stayed home to tend to the household chores and to raise children. The breadwinner may have been making a salary of \$100 a week to support the family. You could purchase a new automobile for \$1000, but a new TV might cost as much as \$500. At the outset there were only 3 TV channels and viewing was limited to a 2 or 3 hours in the early evening. The rest of the time the screen was filled with what was called a Test Pattern, which allowed viewers and TV repairman to test reception when there was no programming available.



Watching TV quickly became a family activity, and one of my earliest remembrances was watching wrestling with Gorgeous George and matches featuring tag-team midget wrestling partners. On Saturday and Sunday evenings families watch variety shows such as Milton Berle Show, Colgate Comedy Hour, Jack Benny Show, and Your Show of Shows featuring Sid Caesar and Imogene Coca. Soon kids were staying in the house afternoons and watching the Howdy Doodie Show. Every Saturday night we would watch and wait for the countdown to determine the number one song of the week on Your Hit Parade.

One lasting memory of family TV viewing occurred in 1963. President Kennedy had been assassinated on Friday and I returned home to be with my family for

the weekend. After Mass on Sunday morning the family gathered around the console TV in our living room and watched Jack Ruby shoot and kill Lee Harvey Oswald live on TV. Motion pictures and TV shows are filled with depictions of people being killed, but this was a whole nation witnessing an actual murder.

Music

Television also gave us our first glimpse of a new generation of musical entertainers, climaxing with Elvis Presley's appearance on the Ed Sullivan show. In high school Friday night dances, called record hops, were weekly social activities. Record hops were held everywhere and disk jockeys were now spinning records and everyone was rocking to a culture of Rhythm and Blues (R&B) artists like Chuck Berry and Little Richard and swaying to the tunes of artists like the Platters. At home and in our cars the radio was tuned into 1510 WMEY to the local disk jockey (DJ), Arnie "Woo Woo" Ginsberg. hand we will never forget the popular musical introduction, which started with "It's Arnie Ginsberg on the Night Train Show....." and the Adventure Car Hop jingle.

By high school we were watching other kids on TV dancing to the new music



rage on Dick Clark's American Bandstand. In Boston WHDH DJ, Bob Clayton, hosted a Saturday afternoon TV dance show, Boston Ballroom, at the Totem Pole in Newton. Some friends and I danced one Saturday on the TV show and we became local celebrities for about 15 minutes.

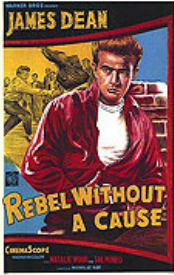
On occasion Malden Catholic boys and girls would have a mixer in St. Mary's Hall at Girls Catholic. The dance was called a mixer because boys and girls came stag, meaning no couples. At mixers the boys would usually stand on one side of the hall, girls on the other. To get the boys and girls dancing with each other, the DJ would start a "snowball" dance. In a snowball dance one couple starts dancing and when the music stops, the partners split and ask another boy or girl to dance until the music stops again, at which time the dancers find new partners. The snowballing effect concludes with everyone out on the floor dancing. I don't know how it happened but my friend, Pete Wall, ended up being the DJ. Pete had a lot fun at the microphone; such as the time that Pete asked Ed Gaffey and Nancy Boyle to lead off the snowball dance. Nancy had a well-known crush on Ed and Ed, who was not much of a dancer, had no interest in Nancy.

The arrival of rock and roll music signaled the end of the big band era and the end of formal dance steps, like the fox trot and waltz. When I was in the 7th and 8th grades boys and girls in Medford would go to Miss Putnam's dance school on Governors Ave. on Friday night. We learned to dress properly (jackets and ties for boys) and we were taught dance steps to the music of Tommy Dorsey and other big bands. But teenagers didn't want the formality of classic ballroom



dancing; they wanted to rock and roll. I remember going into Boston with my friend, Joe McDonald, to a Washington St. theatre to see the movie, Rock around the Clock, featuring Bill Haley and the Comets, and loving it. Soon teenagers were rocking and rolling and inventing their own new dance steps, including group dance routines like the Stroll and the Bunny Hop.

Movies and the new music also had an influence on fashion. The seminal movie of the day, and one of my all-time favorites, was Rebel Without A Cause, starring James Dean. Dean's character struck a chord with American teenagers who were growing restless, and had become less and less interested in formality and conforming. Dean's demeanor and attire quickly became the look of the rebellious youth.



Based on the way we dressed and our haircuts, we either fell into the category of "preppy" or "greaser", much like Richie (preppy) and the Fonz (greaser) in the TV show, Happy Days. The standard look for the preppy was white buck shoes, a flattop crew cut, chino pants and school sweater. For the greasers it was suede shoes, duck's ass haircut (known as a DA), pegged-pants with saddle sticking down the leg, a pink rolled-collar shirt with a black string tie, and black motorcycle jacket. For my Irish friends the greaser look never worked as well as it did for the Italian guys, who were very cool – "wicked pissa".

The decision, which group to join, greaser or preppy, was made for us by our high school (Malden Catholic), even if we disapproved. DA hairstyles and pegged pants were banned at MC. Our high school dress code required us to wear a tie and sport jacket while in school, but not going to and from school. So like many other students I left a tie and jacket in my school locker and turned formality into a joke. I ended up wearing the same tie and beat-up sport jacket everyday, often with an ugly print tie over a plaid shirt. The girls at Girls Catholic had much stricter dress code. They were required to wear a uniform that was a one-piece maroon smock that buttoned all the way up to the neck. I suspect most girls only had one uniform, so they wore the same dress every day.

Telephone

In the late 1940s our home had a single telephone, which was black (all phones were black). I was only permitted limited access mainly because it was party line, meaning we shared the same phone line with other families. When you made a call, you picked up the receiver (there was no dial on the phone), and you spoke directly to a telephone operator (sort of like the Ernestine character made famous by Lily Tomlin) and she (it was always a



woman) would make a manual connection. Our original home phone number was Mystic 7526. Later it became Export 7526 and finally 396-7526 once rotary dials and the universal numeric scheme was implemented. Today that telephone number my family had for over 60 years would be 617-396-7526. I wonder who has that number today?

There were pay phones and public phone booths everywhere. It cost 10 cents to make a local 3-minute phone call, which was relatively expensive in those days. So the regular routine was for the party at the pay phone to hang up and have the caller from home call the person back in the telephone booth and then have a long conversation. Unlike today, where we routinely call anywhere in the United States, it was cost prohibitive to make long distance (LD) calls outside the Boston area and charges on monthly bills for LD calls were closely scrutinized.

Cameras and Photos

To add more of a sense of reality to these memories, I tried to insert as many photos as possible into the text. Most images in this paper were found with simple Google searches, but unfortunately searches often didn't yield photos that were relevant. For example, I couldn't find any photos of the old red brick IC church or the old red brick IC school. Unlike today, back then we weren't able to constantly take photos with our smart phones, simply upload photos, and then routinely discard unwanted or duplicate pictures. Taking digital photos today costs nothing; taking pictures with a camera and getting photos developed was expensive.

Back then the inexpensive camera of choice was the Kodak Instamatic, which took either 12 or 20 pictures. Once a roll was exhausted, you would take it to the drugstore to be developed, a process that took 3 or 4 days. Every picture on a roll got developed, so you were very conscious that every click cost money. In addition you would need to buy a new roll of film and possibly flash bulbs in order to take more shots. Video recordings were never an option and consequently I have very little archived videos and a limited number of old personal photographs. However, the problem with these old printed photos is they are still stored in boxes and disintegrating; they need to be scanned and digitized.



Airlines

I was 21 years old and I had graduated from college before I took my first airline flight. The flight from Boston to Atlanta and then to Columbus, GA; I was reporting for U.S. Army Officer's Training at Fort Benning, Georgia. The flight was out of Boston on a Saturday morning in September 1960 was an Eastern Airlines Electra. The flight was both an exciting and scary experience; I was leaving home for the first time and I was apprehensive about flying. That

apprehension about flying grew even more when exactly one week later an Eastern Airlines flight crashed during takeoff into Boston Harbor, killing 62 of the 72 on board. The cause of the accident was determined to be birds (starlings) getting sucked into the propjets and shutting down the engines during take off. Because of this tragedy I developed a fear of flying and it was 5 more years before I took my second flight and at least 15 years before I finally felt at ease taking off and landing.

No Place Like Home

Through my childhood and into my college years my family never strayed far from home. The extent of our travel was up to Lake Winnepesaukee in New Hampshire or down to Popponesett Beach on Cape Cod for a summer vacation. The most southerly and westerly that I traveled was to New York City. As a result like my boyhood friends, we became very provincial - all that we knew was Greater Boston area and there was no place like Boston (home). I can remember going off the army post into Columbus, GA and thinking, "Why would anyone want to live here?" Little did I know years later that I would meet and marry my wife, who grew up about 15 miles from Ft. Benning. And years later I went to live in Alabama and discovered a wonderful place and a lot of wonderful new friends. I came to appreciate that everywhere in this great country is wonderful and we are fortunate to be here.

Even today when I travel back to Boston area from my home in Florida and run into old friends, usually the first question that I am asked starts with "Don't you miss..." as thou there is no place like Boston. When I answer that I don't miss anything and have no desire to live here again, they seem astonished.

When I was younger, my friends and I always shared a common interest in continuing to live in the Boston area. But we also had an unspoken desire to get away permanently from the neighborhood, from what my childhood friend, Pete Wall, jokingly liked to call the "Irish ghetto." So staying and living in the old neighborhood was never option and over the years I rarely visited, and when I did, it was usually just to drive down the street to view my old home.

Neighborhood

My Medford neighborhood was the center of my personal universe. My daily life revolved around the parish church and schools (Immaculate Conception and Malden Catholic), neighborhood ballpark (Morrison Park), makeshift playground (Emerald St.), local pond (Rez), the neighborhood movie theatre (Bug House), and later in my teens the pool hall (Stag's). The venues were unique to my community but I feel certain that the lifestyle I experienced wasn't too different from other Catholic working classes neighborhoods around Boston.

Haines Square

Each section of Medford has a distinction name (e.g., West Medford, Wellington, Fulton Heights). My home section, which is close to the Malden city line, was called Haines Square. Even though the official name was Stevens Square, all the local residents called it Haines Square. Because of the name confusion when we were asked where we lived, the simple answer often became, “Behind the Car Barns” because everyone knew the location of the Massachusetts Transit Authority (MTA) trolley car storage facility. For about 30 years my father and mother rented a two bedroom flat in a two-family house at 47 Emerald St., which was a street off the backside of the “car barns.” All day long and into the evening there was steady sound of streetcars squealing around tight turns in the train yard, and visitors wouldn’t often ask, “What is that noise?” Of course residents had become conditioned and just treated it as ambient noise.

In those days public transportation (MTA) went everywhere on a regular schedule and the cost was minimal and free for children. Parents used the MTA to get to and from work and as young children we regularly travelled on streetcars, buses and trains unaccompanied. When I was 7 or 8 years old, it was not unusual for me to go with my friends on the MTA to Medford or Malden Square, both of which are about a mile from Haines Square. When I was 9 or 10 I was taking the streetcar and train into Downtown Boston by myself. By the time I was 12 my friends and I would go off to Fenway Park, Braves Field or the old Boston Garden on our own.

Haines Square had everything. There were dozens of small shops: Valentine’s Bakery, Maloney’s Fish Market, Blair’s for fresh fruit and vegetables, Kennedy’s for butter, eggs and cheese, Mrs. Ginsburg’s Hardware Store, Little Market for Italian food and the Town Line Donut Shop. On Sunday mornings my mother would give me money to buy donuts at the Town Line on the way home from Mass. By the time that I got home I would have eaten half the donuts.

In Haines Square there were also multiple banks, multiple barbershops and beauty parlors, multiple shoe repair shops (referred to as the cobbler), a Chinese laundry, several dry cleaners, several package stores and several convenience stores. There were at least four pharmacies (we called drugstores); I worked as a soda jerk at the Lambert Pharmacy. There were a couple of sandwich shops, the Sweet Shop for frappes and sundaes, and several restaurants, including Mueller’s. For a special family dinner we would go to the Blue Jay Restaurant, which was located on the corner of Salem St. and Farragut Ave. The two anchor stores were the A&P and the First National, and the centerpiece was the movie house, Fellsway Theatre (aka Bug House). There was one thing that the square did not have – a tavern or restaurant that served alcoholic beverages.

The character of Haines Square as a place with little specialty shops began to change when Witty Brothers opened the first supermarket in the location of the

First National Store. Within a short time Star Market opened a full-sized supermarket in Medford Square and the Stop & Shop store opened down the Fellsway near Wellington Circle.

Immaculate Conception Parish

The name of this piece probably should have been, “Growing up Catholic in Medford” because the local church, Immaculate Conception (also referred to as either the Immaculate or IC), played a significant role in my family’s daily life. In those days (1950s) the pastor of the parish catholic church was a highly influential force in the community, and the Cardinal (in my case Cardinal Cushing) was one of the most powerful men in the state. The laws of the church were imbedded in daily lives – e.g., no meat of Friday, fasting from midnight, Sunday Mass obligation, etc.), and families religiously followed all the rules.

At that time the Immaculate parish one was one of the biggest in the Boston Archdiocese in terms of numbers of families and parishioners. There were reportedly 15,000 parishioners that were regular weekly communicants. The church property is located on the Malden-Medford city line with the official address listed as Pleasant St. Malden. The boundaries of the parish stretched from the Melrose line in north and east in the Oak Grove section of Malden to the Medford line and Wellington on the south, and over to Park St. on the west in Medford not far from Medford Square. This area was densely populated with primarily two-family houses containing lots of young families.

In those days Masses were held only on Sunday mornings and every Catholic was obligated to attend Mass under the penalty of sin. The old red brick church, which was torn down and replaced in the 1960s, was challenged to support the demand. There were Masses in both the lower and upper portions of the church from 7 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., and in many cases parishioners had to stand in the aisles or outside the church. The parish even had a satellite church (St. Peters) in the Italian neighborhood on Pearl St. to relieve the overflow with Fr. Donovan serving as the pastor.

To service the large parish population there were about 8 priests assigned to the Immaculate and residing in the priest house. In addition to Masses on Sunday Saturday Confessions was regular practice and they were always lines. Priests were always assigned to the same confessional booth and didn’t take long for us to figure out which priest was the fastest and easiest. My personal favorite was Fr. Murray. No matter what sins you told him, there were no questions, no lectures and always the same penance – “Say 5 Our Fathers and 5 Hail Marys.”

Parents strongly encouraged their children to get deeply involved with the church and almost all of my close friends were altar boys. I’m sure my parents encouraged me and I don’t know how I resisted, but I did. Many families dreamt that some day that one of their sons would become a priest. There was no room

for decent or questioning of church doctrine, instead we were expected to accept everything based on blind faith. So while I have always believed in Christianity, I passively ignored some of the church rules and customs, and I did what many others kids did and I just went along so as not to offend my parents.

It was common for families to have daily prayer rituals. For example, the family of my friend Ed Gaffey, who lived across the street on Dunbar Ave., would kneel in the living room every night at 7 p.m. and say the Rosary along with Cardinal Cushing on the radio. Ed's older brothers were milkmen, who were up early every morning, and it was not unusual to see one them still kneeling sound asleep long after the Rosary had concluded.

In addition to the priests in the parish, there a large convent that probably housed 40 or more School Sisters of Notre Dame nuns who taught at the Immaculate Conception Grammar School and Girls Catholic High School. There was also a home for the Xavierian Brothers who taught at Boys Catholic High School. Since then both the convent and the Brother's residence have been razed.

Of course this high attendance at Mass translated into a positive impact on the collection box and in parish revenue. The contributed services of the Sisters and Brothers coupled with revenue from Mass collections allowed the parish to charge school fees that were affordable for all families. When I attended the Immaculate Conception Grammar School and later Malden Catholic High School, tuitions were next to nothing; something like \$15 or \$25 a year.

Immaculate Conception School



The Immaculate Conception Grammar School, which was located at the corner of Charles St. and Highland Ave. in Malden, was founded in 1881 and consisted of two buildings. Around 1943 just prior to the time that I was about to start school, one of the buildings was completely destroyed by fire. The new replacement was modern and all brick but it is likely that the building fund ran short of money. The new building had doors to nowhere on the back exterior. Actually the doors were supposed to be entryways into a proposed gymnasium that was never built. The second building, where I had most of my grammar school classes, was referred to as the "old red brick building."

Each day our mothers sent us off to school, girls in uniform dresses and the boys in a white shirt and a light blue tie. The Immaculate was about .6 of a mile from my home and starting when I was 5 years old in the first grade, I walked unaccompanied everyday to and from school and home and back for lunch through all types of weather (rain, cold, snow). There were no school buses and no mothers driving the children. We walked 2 ½ miles every day carrying and swinging our green book bags. Halfway between my home and school was a very busy road called the Fellsway (Rte 28). At the corner of Charles St. and the

Fellsway the MDC policeman Bill Dunphy, father of Jack, Kate and Margaret, was there to escort the students. We learned early to respect the rules (where to cross the highway) and to respect the friendly cop who was always there to protect and help us.

The Immaculate Conception Grammar School had a huge enrollment. The school was comprised of grades 1 thru 8 with 3 classes at each grade level; one all boys, one all girls, and one mixed boys and girls. Each class at the Immaculate had between 40 and 50 students, so each grade had at least 120 students and the total enrollment for grades 1 thru 8 must have been at least 1000 pupils. Immaculate Conception, which at during my youth was one of the largest grammar schools in the Archdiocese of Boston, closed its door for good in 1996. Today the old Immaculate school building is now a regional charter school.

School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND)

The School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND) taught all the classes at the Immaculate. So if you take that total of 24 (8 grades x 3 classes each) and add in other staff (e.g., Principal, music teacher), there were probably 30 nuns at the grammar school alone. In addition, SSND nuns also taught about half the classes at Girls Catholic High School. That probably calculates to over 40 SSND nuns assigned to the Immaculate Conception Parish. Today I wonder if there are 50 nuns in the whole Archdiocese of Boston, or for that matter even in the State of Massachusetts?

I was always in the mixed class (girls and boys). When I attended my 50th high school reunion in 2006, one of the highlights was gathering with some guys and girls that started with me in 1944 in the first grade and we matriculated together for 8 years. One of the memory games we played at the reunion was trying to recall the names of the nuns that taught us in each grade.

First	Sr. Brigittine
Second	Sr. Constantine
Third	Sr. Louis
Fourth	Sr. Edith
Fifth	Sr. Consolata
Sixth	Sr. Xavierius
Seventh	Sr. Evelyn
Eighth	Sr. DeLourdes

Note: Thanks to Pete Wall and Carroll Beegan Follas for providing names of nuns that I couldn't remember

Among the school specialists were an Elocution (not sure how many kids knew that meant) teacher and a Music teacher, Sr. Alexia, who had a music studio on the ground floor of the old red brick school. The room was filled with plants and we were constantly reminded not to touch the fawns. Of course you can guess what happened when she turned her back. My last remembrance of Sr. Alexia

was her instructing me not to sing, just move my lips during my 8th grade graduation ceremony. I couldn't carry a tune then and I still can't today.

My personal favorite was my first grade teacher, Sr. Brigittine. I did some search and found that she passed away on November 20, 2007 at the SSND Motherhouse in Wilton, CT. Her full name was Sr. Mary Brigittine Cronin and she took her religious vows in 1942. So when I entered the first grade in 1944, she



must have been in her early or mid-twenties. Because the nuns were always dressed in their habits, all we could see were their faces, not even their hair. As a result, it was hard to determine the age of nuns. All that I remember was that Sr. Brigittine was tiny and sweet, and she made attending school a joy.

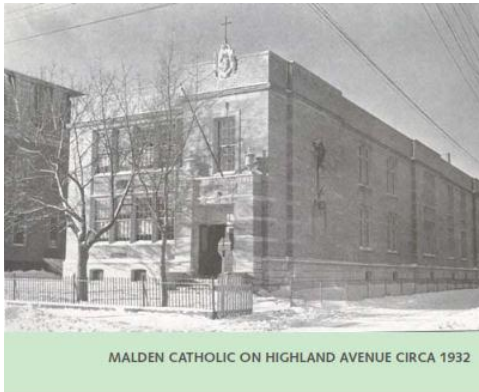
At every grade level in grammar school one of the main subjects was called Catechism, which was Catholic theology. We were obligated to attend Mass on Sunday but it seemed the whole grammar school always going to the church for one reason or another. The classes would be seated in ascending order front-to-back with the first grade in the front and eighth grade in the back, and girls on the left side of the center aisle and boys on the right. In those days the Mass was said in Latin and the Mass always followed a prescribed format. I accepted and believed the basic Catholic theology but the sameness left me uninterested. I'd repeat as direct a bunch of Latin words but I had no idea what they meant, and I'd stand, sit and kneel along with everyone else. I was so indifferent that if I was on my own, I'm sure I wouldn't know when to stand, sit and kneel despite thousands of repetitions.

In school the nuns very accomplished in the methodology of drill and learn. The techniques were particularly effective in teaching Math and Sciences. We learned English skills, such as grammar, sentence structure and vocabulary, but the extent of our writing was book reports. History and Geography was taught with an emphasis on the Catholic viewpoint, and we became adept at memorizing historical dates and reciting things such as the capitals of the 48 states. In retrospect, or at least in my case, we were never challenged to use our imaginations and we were never given any latitude to question concepts. At times it seemed like the most important thing was our penmanship, i.e., how accomplished we became in perfecting the Palmer Method.

Years later when I got to college, I came to realize that I had difficulty writing a simple composition, and that I needed to practice and to compose beyond the boundaries of conformity. For me writing has now become a leisure-time hobby. Some people like to read; I like to write. When friends attempt to compliment me by saying they wish that they could write as well as me. I usually respond – I don't think I am a very good writer and I don't think I am very good dancer. But writing like dancing; it is something that anyone can do. You just need to be willing to give it a try and then practice to get better. It is totally up to you.

I have one sister, Ann, and she is 6 years younger than me and was 7 years behind me in school. When I was in the 8th grade at the Immaculate, she was in the 1st. My father graduated from Charlestown High School and my mother went to school in East Boston, and I'm not sure that she finished high school. In any case, my mother spent every day working with us on our homework and in the process I think she was self-educating herself. It is a credit to her that Ann (especially) and I were both good students.

Malden Catholic



While Malden Catholic (MC) was always the well-known, unofficial name, the real name of the high school was Boys Catholic High School. Boys Catholic was started in 1932 as the Immaculate Conception parish high school for boys. As the name implies, Girls Catholic, which was founded in 1908 and ceased operation in 1991, was the parish high school for girls. My sister, Ann, went to Girls Catholic. The high schools were located across the street from each other but operated separately. SSND nuns ran the girl's high school; Xavierian Brothers (Order of St. Francis Xavier) taught the boys; and there was no comingling of the boys and girls. In fact to maintain the separation the boys were released from school earlier than the girls so they would not converge in the neighborhood at the same time.

When I was a student at MC (1952-1956), there were between 100 and 120 boys in each grade with over 50% of the students coming from the parish. It wasn't unusual for students to last just their freshman year before deciding that MC was not for them. The academic standards were high but unfortunately the boys' high school building on Highland Court was totally inadequate. Some freshman class met in the newer grammar school; there was no library; lab facilities were limited; and there was no gym and no cafeteria. There was lunchroom (using the term loosely) that was run by a guy from the parish named Johnny Mallon and located in the basement boiler room. The room consisted of a couple serving tables and featured the same hot meal of boiled hot dogs everyday (except on Friday of course). There was no place to sit, so you were required to take your purchased milk or chips and find a place in a stairwell or out in the schoolyard to eat.

The MC curriculum was strictly college preparatory. Most of our parents never had the opportunity to go to college and in fact many weren't able to finish high school. Instead they went to work young to help support their families. The dreams of our parents were to provide their children with a Catholic education that would hopefully lead to a college degree and a better life. Those dreams

were realize when as products of an MC education we joined a generation of students who were the first in their family to get a college degree.

Xavierian Brothers

Xavierian Brothers were wonderful teachers but they were also strictly disciplinarians who employed some unique teaching techniques and classroom methods. For example, in my freshman year Brother Firmin intimidated students to the point that they work hard to learn Algebra after they witnessed other students getting their head banged against the blackboard. Brother Marshall had a daily routine called the Hit Parade, a takeoff on name of the top-10 music radio show. In Brother Marshall's version students who he discovered not paying



attention or fooling around in class had their names place on blackboard on his hit parade list. And at the end of each class everyone on the hit parade list had to come up to the front of the class and, you guessed it, would get hit - slap across the face.

Note: I am on the far right next Chemistry teacher, Brother Quentin. On the left are Kevin Duff and Fred Ryan

Some of the other Brothers I recall were: Brothers Michael, Nelson, Servanus, Earl, Evangelus (aka Click), Valens and Quentin. Brother Michael had a favorite expression when he heard something he liked, "Such are the ecstasies of life, a yah, a yah!" I never really knew what it meant but I never forgot it. Brother Click got his name because he was a camera buff.

At MC there was a daily after-school program called JUG. I never discovered what JUG stood for or if was an acronym. In practice it was a detention period for students who were judged to have been either a discipline problem that day, or failed to pay attention in class, or do class assignments as instructed. The period lasted about an hour and students usually did some penal tasks. One thing was certain students never went home and told their parents that they got whacked around in class or sent to JUG. Parents would always come down on the side of the Brothers.

Despite the physical plant shortcoming, MC was a special place in many other ways. Most notably, the student body spirit was exceptionally high. Football games and hockey games were universally attended and ruckus pep rallies in Columbus Hall in the old red brick grammar school were a common occurrence. Despite being much smaller in enrollment than our opponents, the MC baseball team led by Brother Firmin, the hockey team under tutelage of Bert Kenty, and football team coached by Ted Galligan were very successful. During my time at MC the baseball was atop the Catholic League every year. The hockey team was consistently the best team in the state, including winning the New England Championship. And the football team won the Class B State Championship. The

final football game in my senior year at Brother Gilbert Stadium was particular memorable when Joe Mahoney kicked the winning extra point to beat undefeated Lawrence Central Catholic.

Then there was the basketball team. Because MC did not have a gym, the team was forced to practice and play games at the National Guard Armory up on Mountain Ave. in Malden. The building was not only old but the playing area was not suitable for playing games. The floor was dead and low hanging beams obstructed outside shots with balls routinely bouncing off the rafters. The basketball team usually didn't fare well but there was always a good crowd as many students in attendance came to enjoy the dance after the game.

West Side AA

The spirit of MC did not belong solely to the students, but also was embraced by the parents and parishioners of Immaculate Conception. MC was located in the Edgeworth section of Malden, which is geographically the west side of the city. Consequently in 1934 the booster club adopted the name, West Side Athletic Association (West Side AA). While the high school building and basketball court in the Armory were totally inadequate, the football stadium, Brother Gilbert, was a jewel. The stadium, which was located on the banks of the Malden River at the corner of Medford St. and Commercial St. contained a football field, a practice field, quarter mile cinder track and a clubhouse that included the football and track locker room and the West Side club room.

My Dad (also Bernard Gleason) served as President of the West Side AA for a couple of years back in the 1950s and remained a dedicated West Sider long after I graduated from MC. He and his fellow West Siders dedicated their spare time to maintaining Brother Gilbert by painting bleachers, cutting grass, lining the field, selling game tickets and programs, or whatever else it took to make MC football successful. Catholic League football games were usually played on Sunday afternoon and the football field, which was only used for games, was always pristine.

The West Side AA not only contributed volunteer services to the school, they were a booster club that help raise funds to support all of MC's sports teams. Unfortunately when the Xavierian Brothers made a deal with the city of Malden to build a new school and residence on the other side of the city, the West Siders felt disenfranchised, especially when Brother Gilbert Stadium was handed over to the City of Malden as part of the deal.

I remember my Dad explaining an alternative plan that was proposed by a prominent group of Immaculate parishioners and was supported by the West Side AA. The proposal was to construct the new school building, Xavierian Brother residence, and playing fields on the site of the old MTA trolley car barns near Haines Square that were no longer in use. The property was ideally located

in the parish across Fellsway West from the Immaculate Conception Church property, central to the traditional families that had formed the core of the MC spirit and growth, and met the land requirements. The “car barns” proposal seem to make much more sense than building the new school in a less desirable part of town, away from its roots and only a quarter of mile away from another Catholic high school, Pope John in Everett. The “car barns” proposal never had a chance of acceptance because of the Xavierian Brothers insistence on complete disassociation from The Immaculate Conception Parish, in particular Monsignor Fletcher, pastor of IC.

For many of us that went to the “Old School” we were disappointed that the school was relocated across to east side of Malden. But when you read websites, such as Wikipedia, the official position is that Boys Catholic closed in 1968 and Malden Catholic opened the same year. Gone were the Bluejackets and the sports teams became known as the Lancers. Unfortunately in the transition the support provided by the West Sider AA sadly disappeared. First club membership disbanded and finally in 1984 the club was formally dissolved.

Bug House

The Fellsway Theatre in Haines Square, which opened in 1943, was



affectionately called the “Bug House.” I have no idea where the name came from but the Bug House was at the bottom of the movie distribution food chain. Back in the late 40s and early 50s first-run movies would play initially at the theatres on Washington St. in Boston, and after a while the movie would move to be shown at one of the five theatres in Malden Square, with the Granada Theatre offering the top movies. After a movie ran

its course in Malden, it would come to either the Medford or Square Theatre in Medford. Then finally the movie would make its way to the Bug House.

Before the arrival of television in the early 50s, parents would ship kids off to the Bug House on Saturday and Sunday afternoons for an admission price of 18 cents. The Bug House would usually show two movies plus a cartoon, coming attractions, newsreel, and a serial. Kids were amused for at least four hours. The serial at the end of each Saturday matinee was a 15-minute episode of a series that would continue from week to week. For example, some of the serials were Flash Gordon, Captain Marvel, Dick Tracy, and Tom Mix. At the end of each serial segment the hero or heroine would be put in precarious situation and viewers were left in suspense until the following Saturday, at which time the central character always escaped danger.

Almost as famous as the Bug House was “Charlie” the usher. I don’t know if Charlie was involved in the ownership but he was certainly a one-man show,

often collecting tickets and working the snack bar. But his main challenge (job) was trying to keep hordes of unsupervised kids in line. For the older boys tricking or torturing poor Charlie became a game. Shenanigans included scaling popcorn boxes at the movie screen or throwing juicing all-day suckers to see if it would stick to the screen. Another tactic was to create a distraction for Charlie so that kids could sneak in a side door. Poor Charlie had enough on his hands to maintain order that he chose to ignore the boys and girls necking in the back rows and the balcony. I'm pretty sure that I experienced my first kiss at the Bug House.

Once television became more readily available, movie theatres became challenged to attract customers. To counteract the drop in attendance the Bug House used to run a promotion where moviegoers would earn points for tickets bought toward a set of china (dishes and cups). The tactic worked for a while and it seemed like every family in the neighborhood had the same plates and cups.

The Bug House was one of the first theatres to close, but after a while all movie theatres in Malden and Medford Squares were shuttered. For many years the Bug House stood as an empty building with the marquee displaying the name of the last picture shown, appropriately titled, "Abandon Ship." Eventually the theatre was razed and Tony Giglio constructed a new building that housed a Sunnyhurst convenience store and Anthony's Liquor Store.

Hangin Out at the Corner

When neighborhood kids weren't at the park, groups would claim ownership to a street corner as a place to informally gather, what we called "hangin out at the cona." At each location there was usually a small variety store or a drug store and a gang's identity was defined by the name of the store. So when kids went out of the house there was no prearranged plan other than to go down to the corner to hang out. For example, kids from Charles St. area hung out at O'Neill's Pharmacy. Stores on Central Ave. near the Fellsway belonged to another gang. Another location was at the corner of Central Ave. and Spring St. The proprietor (I can't remember his or the store's name) liked to bellow out a unique pronunciation of "Sacramento, California" with a special voice inflection. For a while my friends hung out outside the Lambert Pharmacy in Haines Square. For kids "hangin out" there was usually a continuous battle with the proprietor. We never had a lot of money, so we didn't spend much and owners were concerned that we were blocking the doorway and discouraging customers from entering. On occasion the proprietor would call the cops to shoo us away, but we would be right back the next day.

There were many small variety stores throughout the community. These stores were usually located on the first floor or in the basement of a residential dwelling. Mothers were constantly sending kids down to the local store to pick up something, and the storeowners knew the family and everyone by name. As a result, it was common practice for kids to simply charge purchases to the family

account. That meant that these small businesses accepted IOUs and were constantly in the collection business without any sophisticated accounting. Credit cards didn't exist; it was strictly a cash business. This financial burden was an early reason why these types of stores began to disappear.

One store in our area, Beverly's, was located at the corner of Wicklow St. and Malden St.; it epitomized the neighborhood variety store. The store was in the basement of the house and the Beverly family lived upstairs. As kids we would go to Beverly's to get a tonic (in Mefid soda was called tonic) like a Royal Crown (RC), Canada Dry ginger ale, Moxie, and Coca Cola in a bottle. Tonic only came in a bottle (there were no cans) with a 2-cent deposit. In order to avoid the 2 cent deposit fee we would sit on the steps leading down into the store and drink our tonic. Variety stores also sold large dill pickles and we would reach down into the jar to select the one we wanted. No one washed their hands beforehand and no one seemed concerned about the hygienic issues.

Morrison Park

"Going over to pahk" meant I was headed to Morrison Park, which is located on Central Ave. If I jumped the back fence and cut through one backyard, the backside of the pahk was only about 200 feet away. On every non-school day at the pahk from spring through the fall there would likely be multiple football or baseball games. The games were totally organized by the kids and there was pecking order based on age that determined what portion of the field each group got. For example, the older kids had the main baseball diamond while the younger boys congregated off to the side.



Along the backside of Morrison Park there was a 4-foot fence with 2- family homes on the other side. As kids instead of using the fence as backstop, we used the fence as the outfield wall. We set up the diamond back from the fence so that a good hit over the fence was a home run. As kids got older and stronger, the diamond was moved further from the fence. This arrangement was exciting for the kids but no fun for the homeowners who live behind the fence and who were constantly having windows broken.

The situation became so bad that the city decided to erect 30-foot high chain-link fence in front of the existing 4-foot fence. What the city planners saw and what the kids saw were two different things. For the kids we now had our own "green monster" like Fenway Park and to be able to hit one out of the park, we simply moved the diamond closer to the fence and the broken window problem got worse, not better.

We also converted two fenced-in clay tennis courts into a small baseball park by removing the nets and placing home plate in the corner. The fences provided a

backstop for balls that were missed by the batter or were out of the strike zone. At the other end of the diamond shaped playing area the fences were the outfield walls.

In the summer there was city-supplied male and a female park instructors, who were typically college students or seniors in high school, were assigned to organize children's activities. The park instructors I remember were Pete Ferry (boys) and Rosemary Nicholson (girls). The park also had an attendant who was an older guy, or at least he seemed old to me. The attendant would do tasks like lining the foul lines on the baseball field, putting up and taking down the swing sets everyday, and turning the sprinkler system on and off. There was no pool; just sprinklers on a cement pad.

The male park instructor organized informal baseball games and formed a team to play other parks in Medford. So we would walk or take the bus to play teams from Harris Park in Wellington, Hickey Park up Fellsway West, Playstead Park in West Medford, Barry Park near Medford Square and Tufts Park in South Medford. Some Morrison Park baseball friends were Buddy Kelly, Gene Moll, Ernie Ardolino, and Ronnie Kelley, all of whom went on to be outstanding players at either Malden Catholic or Medford High School.

Who's the Toughest?

One of the downsides of our unsupervised hanging out at the park were fights. For some reason or another, kids felt it was important to establish who was the toughest. Individual battles sometimes involved fisticuffs but usually were just wrestling matches ending with one kid exclaiming, "I give up."

The most dangerous situations pitted gangs of kids against each other. At times these gangs went out looking for a fight and you had to be on the alert to avoid precarious situations. Every August the Italian neighborhood around Pearl St. in Malden would celebrate the Feast of St. Rocco with refreshments and games, along with a procession of the Madonna. When I was about 17, the Gagliardi brothers, a notorious family from Medford, and other gang members decided to pick on a group of my friends attending St. Rocco's Feast. One my friends, John Coleman, took a severe beating from Carmen Gagliardi. About 4 or 5 months later John was in his bathroom getting ready for school when dropped dead from a brain hemorrhage. There was no way to prove it, but everyone was sure that beating was the cause of his death.

Carmen Gagliardi and his brothers all graduated into a life of crime. Carmen became a Mafia hitman who murdered a North End bartender and police informant. The cops stopped Gagliardi's car with the warm body still in it, but he manage to escape and he hid out long enough to be placed on the FBI's 10 Most Wanted List. Carmen was apprehended a year later when he returned to his family home on Spring St. on Christmas morning wearing a disguise of glasses

and a phony mustache. He was subsequently convicted of second-degree murder and imprisoned at MCI-Walpole, where he was the prime suspect in the murder of another inmate, Albert DeSalvo, the Boston Strangler. Gagliardi died of a drug overdose at MCI-Walpole.

Boys Meet Girls - Adolescence

In the 7th and 8th grade going through adolescence was a time that boys and girls began to discover each other. Classmates would organize boy-girl parties on Friday nights. After the chaperons disappeared into the kitchen, it was time to play games such as Post Office and Spin-the-Bottle. The net result of each game was that a boy and a girl got to kiss each other.

Another place where boys met girls was the Bal-A-Roue Roller Skating Rink on Mystic Ave. near the Somerville city line. Part of the admission to the rink was the rental of skates. Everyone would skate counter-clockwise to music played on an organ until a voice over the loudspeaker would announce, "Skate in the other direction" (skate clockwise) and after a while we would get instructions to reverse back to the normal direction. As they skated around the rink boys and girls would eye each other until the voice over the loudspeaker would announce, "Couples Only" at which time a boy would promenade with a girl holding her left hand and with his right arm around her back. Eventually the voice over the loudspeaker would announce, "All Skate" and it was back to normal skate-around.



The top theatre in the area was the Granada Theatre in Malden Square on Pleasant across from the Jordan Marsh (aka Jordan's) department store. The Granada was a magnificent old playhouse that was converted to a movie house. In the early 1950s there were five movie theatres in Malden Square: Granada, Strand, Auditorium, Mystic and Orpheum.

Teenage boys and girls would usually congregate in the balcony where boys would extend an invitation, "Can I sit with you?" After the couples were together the boy would usually struggle awkwardly to put his arm around the back of the girls seat and then his hand on her shoulder. Eventually the embrace might end up in a smooch.



Boston-area amusement parks were a destination for teenagers. You could take the streetcar into Boston and then a ferry from Rowes Wharf to Paragon Park at Nantasket Beach. For teenagers from the Medford/Malden area Revere Beach was much closer, just a short trip on MTA buses. The Revere Beach Amusement Park was about two mile stretch of rides, games and stands where you could buy food such hot

dogs, cotton candy and sea taffy. It was popular date destination and a place to meet other kids. Rides included the Virginia Reel, Wild Mouse, Dodgems, and Tunnel of Love, where a boy and a girl would ride in a small boat through a dark tunnel. The main attraction at amusement parks was the roller coaster; at Revere Beach it was a wooden structure called the Cyclone. In 1969 the Cyclone was torn down and by that time the amusement park was on its way to extinction.

In the summer between my junior and senior years in high school my parents rented a house at Hampton Beach for two weeks. I had such a good time and had met so many new friends, I decided with my parents consent to stay and work at the beach for the remainder of the summer. So at 16 I got a job as a busboy at restaurant named, Lamies Tavern, and rented a room in a private house. My wages were minimal, barely enough money to pay for my room and to buy food.



At Hampton Beach there was a boardwalk that ran the length of the beach, and located at the mid-point of the boardwalk was the Casino. The Casino contained a dance hall and every possible type of food stand (e.g., fries, ice cream, cotton candy, taffy). Across the street from the Casino was the bandstand that hosted public concerts every evening. Everyone, including entire families, would gather

near the Casino to listen to the concert.

In those days Hampton Beach was very family-oriented and was a dry community; there were no liquor stores and restaurants did not serve alcoholic beverages. From a personal perspective Hampton Beach was the “in place” for teenage boys and girls, and for the next couple of summers I worked around Boston and head to Hampton Beach for the weekend.

My friend, Pete Wall, and I would head to Hampton without a place to stay and very little money in our pockets. No one was allowed on the beach at night and the Hampton police were very vigilant in enforcing the ban on people sleeping on

the beach. So Peter and I would go to the town cemetery, spread out our army blankets, and sleep in the cemetery. My mother use to say to us, "I wish those blankets could talk."

Our whole gang would go to Hampton Beach and one of my neighborhood buddies, Bobby Smith, met a girl who years later became his wife. Bobby (his real name is George Robert Smith) lived around the corner from me on Linwood Ave. When Bobby was about 14 years old, he and I were at a high school basketball game when he suddenly fell flat on his face. It was his first epileptic seizure. I was present with him on other occasions when he had seizures and his concerned parents liked the idea that he was out with me because I knew how to treat him. When my daughter was 13 years old, Pat McCarthy was driving us to the airport for a trip to California. Nora was in the back seat and when I heard the commotion in back and turned around, I immediately recognized she was having a seizure. Fortunately today's medications make it possible to live a normal life.

My Best Girl Friend



When I went to grammar school to start the first grade, the first classmate with whom I became friendly was Maureen Ford. We remained good friends all the way through our high school and college years. People in the neighborhood would see us together frequently and assume that we were sweethearts; we never dated. Most of our time together was spent sitting and talking on her front stairs on Hurlcroft Ave., or I would go babysitting with her to her regular job at the Riverside Ave. projects. On occasion we would take a walk over to Highland Ave. in Malden and share a submarine sandwich from Charlie Marino's Sub Shop. Maureen was the oldest of eight children and always a bright student. I use to kid with her that I would marry her after she became a successful engineer. She was one of the first women to graduate from Northeastern with an engineering degree.

During our high school years Maureen would call on me to take one of her friends to a high school dance, and on a couple of occasions I was paired with her best friend, Jean Herlihy. At my MC 50th Reunion in 2006 I was hoping to see Maureen. I had not seen her in 30 years or so and I knew she was living with her family in Northern California. When I inquired about Maureen, Jean simply told me that Maureen was in poor health, no other details, and gave me her address. I then wrote a very long letter to Maureen that was filled with our memories together and how I wished her well. A week or so later Maureen's husband John called me and told me that Maureen had advanced Alzheimer's and thanked me for the letter. He then went on to tell me that he read the letter to her many times hoping that she might react to old times. I was in tears listening. Remembering old times is common with Alzheimer's patients, but she didn't. Three years later John called to inform me of Maureen's death. I appreciated the personal call, but I was very sad that I lost my best girl friend.

Going Steady

One of the customs in high school was for boys to ask girls if they would like to go steady. "Going Steady" essentially meant that both parties wouldn't date anyone else. And to symbolize this union, the boy would give the girl his high school ring so she could wear around her it on a chain around her neck.

That all sounds pretty innocent but parents in general were opposed to kids going steady. No one explained the objection to us but later I came to understand that parents were afraid that by going steady kids would be more willing to experiment sexually. Interestingly, my parents never talked to me about sex and it certainly wasn't talked about in the parochial schools. Everything I learned was from the street corner. That may sound dangerous but we were so inculcated with Catholic values that there was no chance that I, or any of my friends, would do the wrong thing.

I never went steady and, in fact, I never had a real girlfriend through high school and college. On the other hand my best friend, Peter Wall, always wanted to have a girl friend and his buddies always gave him a hard time. I remember one girl named Jane Hermitage and the guys came up with adaptation of Sam Cooke's hit song, Chain Gang, and we serenaded him constantly. The verse went something like this:

*(Hoh! Ah!)(Well don't you know)
That's the sound of the man,
Working on the Jane, ga-ang
That's the sound of the man,
Working on the Jane, gang*

Italian Influence

Our Irish parents rarely interacted with the Italian families in the neighborhood. Both ethnic groups tended to socialize with others of their heritage. That was not the case with the children that we met at school or at the park and with whom played together. It seemed as though the typical Italian boy matured physically faster than the Irish kids. When we younger the Italian boys seemed to be bigger and stronger. Then mid-way through high school the Irish guys tended to catch up and in some cases pass the Italian boys. The same was true with Italian girls who seemed to be more developed at any earlier age, if you know what I mean.

In high school and college I dated Italian girls and many of my friends eventually ended up in "mixed marriages." In classic terms a mixed marriage is defined as nuptials between a woman and a man of different races. In Medford it meant Irish marrying an Italian. My friends Jim McSweeney (Mixie), Billy Campbell (Camge) and Billy Foley all married Italian girls. Later in life two of my longtime best friends, John Kane and Leo Sullivan, are married to Italian women. My closest neighborhood Italian friend, Richie Clemente, married an Irish girl.

One of the early ways that we introduced to Italian culture was by way of food. Located next to the Immaculate grammar school on Highland Ave. in Malden was Charlie Marino's Submarine Shop (today it is called the Big A Sub Shop). The proprietor, Tony Marino, claimed that he invented the Italian submarine sandwich in his tiny shop. I don't know if that is true, but the sandwiches were delicious and Charlie Marino's was a favorite eating spot for all Immaculate and MC students. Across the street (Highland Ave.) was DiPietro's bakery, where the specialty was Italian bread but you could also indulge in Italian pastries.

About the same time that Americans were being introduced to sub sandwiches, the country was also discovering pizza. Unlike today in the early 1950s pizza restaurants were a rarity and the best local pizza could be found at Jenny's Pizza in Malden Square near the Strand Theatre. But to get the absolutely best pizza my friends and I would travel into the North End of Boston to the original Regina's Pizza, where Joe DeMatteo's father was the chef. Once we reached 21 and we were able to drink alcoholic beverages, the Highland Café on Highland Ave. in Malden became the go-to place to have beer with delicious pizza.

On holidays such as Easter, Thanksgiving and Christmas my family would celebrate with a traditional meat and vegetables dinner. Later in the day I would visit one of my Italian friends, usually Richie Clemente. While the Irish would have a holiday dinner, the Italians would indulge in a daylong feast that included most of favorites - raviolis, lasagna, meatballs, sausages and cannolis. Every Sunday when I went to an Italian household, you could smell the aroma of Moma making her "gravy" for the week (Italians call tomato sauce, gravy).

I never really considered how much my upbringing was an immersion in everything Italian, especially the food. As I got older, I would hear a song sung in Italian by singers, such as Louie Prima or Dean Martin, and I would know all the words. And when someone would utter an Italian phrase, surprisingly I knew what it meant. Of course I also got to know and understand all the Italian curse words, but never said them. An Irish kid cursing in Italian wasn't going to make it.

One of our neighbors was Gennaro "Jerry" Angiulo who lived about two blocks from my family on Spring St. Angiulo had a daughter the same age as my sister, Ann, and they were playmates as young girls. One of my neighborhood friends, Carroll Beegan, lived a few doors away and served as their babysitter. It wasn't until years later that it became known that Angiulo was the head of the Boston Mafia. One day when I was around 14 I was waiting at the streetcar stop by Tommy Dalton's Shell on the Fells and as Angiulo was pulling out of Emerald St., he recognized me and asked me where I was going and if I wanted a ride. He was going to the North End so I accepted the ride. When I told him I was going to downtown to Bromfield St. for an eye examination, I'll always remember his response; "You should tell your father to give you a C-Note (\$100) so you can go see a specialist."

47 Emerald Street



Today 47 Emerald St. in Medford is painted yellow, but back in the 1950s every house on the street, including ours, was painted brown and the trim a cream color.

I seem to recall my father telling me that in 1939 when he and my mother starting renting the flat at 47 Emerald St., he paid \$40 a month in rent and that it didn't increased substantially over time. I suspect that 20 years later (1960) that he wasn't paying more than \$80 a month. Around 2005 I took a ride with my wife down Emerald St. to check out the old neighborhood, and I discovered my old home had just been renovated into a condominium and was listed for sale for \$499,000. There wasn't a realtor on duty but I could stand on the porch and look through the windows to see walls remove and the layout completely changed.

The landlord was a widow, Mrs. Gately, who owned two adjacent two-family homes – 43/45 Emerald St. and 47/49 Emerald St. The houses were separated by common driveway that lead to a backyard that contained 4 garages, one for each unit. The Callahans rented #43, Mrs. Gately lived upstairs in #45, we (Gleasons) rented #47 and the Kelleys were above us in #49. Those same four families occupied the apartments for about 25 years. There was no turnover due in large part because the landlord liked the tenants and monthly rental fees were so reasonable. Around 1972 after Mrs. Gately passed away and the new owner jacked my father's rent up to \$120 a month and he was outraged by the 50% increase. Of course it was still an incredible bargain. In any case the action prompted my father at the age 66 to buy his first home, a condo near Medford Square.

One of the other reasons that rents were so low is that the owners didn't invest much money into upgrading units, and tenants, like my father, paid for improvements as though they owned the property. Our unit had a coal furnace and a coal bin in the basement that was filled from a slot on the side of the house. The basement was always dirty because of the coal soot. One of my jobs in the winter was to stoke the furnace, add more coal to the fire, and clean out ashes. Ashes from the furnace were shoveled into solid steel barrels, appropriately called "ash barrels." Once the barrel was filled with ashes, it was extremely heavy and it took two people, usually my father and me, to lift and carry a barrel out to the street. What was truly amazing to me was the ability of the city workers to lift those barrels up into trucks all daylong.

In addition to coal deliveries, the Gaffey's, who lived up the street, delivered milk on a regular basis. The Cushman's Bakery truck called on my mother a couple of times a week. Before we got our first refrigerator we needed to put an ICE sign in the window to indicate that we needed a block of ice for the icebox.

The layout of our flat at 47 Emerald St. was typical of the two-family homes that were built in our neighborhood in the 1920s. There were 2 bedrooms, living room, dining room, kitchen with a pantry, and a single bathroom with a tub that had a shower curtain. It was tight quarters and by the time that I reached my teen years my bed was a cot in the dining room.

There was barely enough room for a family of four but my mother always seemed to be willing to share the space with others. During World War II, before my sister was born, a girl my age named Ronnie Tobin lived with us for two years. Her father was a sailor that had been killed in the war and her mother was forced to work evenings. In 1948 my uncle, mother's brother, and his wife both died from tuberculosis that they contracted while they both served in the US Army during the war. Without parents their four children were divided amongst family members; Johnny Dooley came to live with us for about 6 months. Fortunately there was an uncle on the wife's side of the family living in Maryland that had no children of his own and was able to reunite the siblings. For my mother it was sad because she had begun to accept Johnny like a son. When I was high school age my widowed grandmother became senile (today it would be called Alzheimer's) and the family would pass her from one home to another. She would stay for a month or so at a time but I can't remember the sleeping arrangements.

My father's parents died when he was a child. My mother's Dad was a fisherman who perished in a mishap at sea before my mother was born. My grandmother remarried another fisherman from the ship and I got to know him, Pat Dooley, as my grandfather. In their later years my mother's parents lived in the Old Colony Housing Project in South Boston, which was built following World War II. When I read the book, *Black Mass*, that detailed the life of crime of Whitey Bulger, it mentioned that his family lived on O'Callaghan Way in the project; the same street as my grandparents. It was customary for our family to go to my grandparent's on Sunday afternoons and it made me think about who were the kids I play with out on the street on those Sunday visits?

An overcrowded family condition was not unique to us. My friend, Ed Gaffey, had three brothers (Hugh, Jim and Frank) and a sister living in their two-family, and the four boys shared one bedroom. The bedroom contained two double beds pushed together so that room was practically wall-to-wall bed. There was one bureau for their clothes and it was common for the boys to share clothes, which probably included socks and underwear. As kids we loved the beds slammed together. We often would sit on the beds and play board games such as Monopoly and Parcheesi.

Streets and sidewalks on Emerald St. were my playground in the summer and winter. Unlike today, there were very few cars parked on the street and we played an assortment of games, such as:

- Relievo - team version of hide-and-seek where one team captured other team members who could be freed from jail by other members of team and exclaiming "Relievo!".
- Buck Buck - team game where one team jumped on the backs of the other team members linked together and team on the bottom had to guess "buck buck how many fingers do I have up?"
- Olly Olly In Free – another team version of hide-and-seek where the phrase "olly olly in free" was used to call everyone back to the goal.
- Dodgeball – team game where players try to throw balls at members of the other team in the middle who try to avoid getting hit.
- Tag – game can be play individually in teams where a person chases and tags another person with his hand and says, "Tag, you're it."
- Red Rover – game where teams faced each other and lined up and locked arms, and one team would say, Red Rover, Red Rover send (name of one member of the other team) over." The selected would try to run through the arms of the opponent. If he didn't, he was captured.

There were many more games that we played but the important aspect was that these were team games involving many kids and all of the organization and the administration of the rules were done by the kids on their own. One of my hobbies was to collect baseball cards and war cards for use in pitching cards against a wall or the base of stairs. We would melt paraffin wax and dip the cards into the solution, then let the wax dry and harden. The wax made it easier for the cards to slide along the pavement in competition with other kids.

In the summer stickball was very popular. The rules were essentially the same as baseball except the bat was a broomstick and the ball was usually a pink high-bounce or a tennis ball. On occasions the ball would go down into the sewer but we fashioned a ball retriever using a coat hanger. When the ball split, we just changed the game to "half ball." We also played a two-boy game where one player would throw the high-bouncer against street curb and we created our base hits and outs rules. For example, if the fielder caught the ball, it was an out. If the ball went by the fielder on the ground, it was a single. A ball over the defender's head was a home run.



In the winter when it snowed the streets got plowed but not salted. So the streets were often snow-packed and some kids (not me) would grab the back bumper of a passing car and sort of ski on their booths. And of course we played street hockey. We set up goals with a couple of cans and everything was the same as ice hockey except that there were no skates.

One day when I was about 13 we had a freak ice storm that left everything with a sheet of ice and we were able to ice skate in the streets, A photographer came along took a picture of my cousins, Jack and Ginger Sullivan, Virginia Lee and me with hockey gear skating on Emerald St. The next day there was a complete

thaw and warm temperatures, and the same photographer came back and took another picture with the same participants in the same pose except we had roller skates and baseball equipment. The next day the contrasting photos appeared side-by-side in the Boston Post newspaper.



During the winter months we would build snow forts out of snow piles and create our team snowball fights. One night when I was around 9 or 10 Ed Gaffey and I were playing in a snow fort in front of his house and we were both wearing the customary attire of the day – i.e. dungarees (never called jeans), navy surplus blue pea coat and blue stocking cap. Ed's father blinked the front porch light, the signal to come in the house, but Ed kept playing. After not responding to multiple blinks of the light, Ed heard his father thundering down the stairs from the second floor and made a mad dash around the house to the back door. Enraged his Dad came out into the snow, mistaking me for Ed because of our similar attire and began administering a whooping. Of course when he realized that I wasn't Ed, he felt terrible and apologized to my parents. Soon everyone, including me, laughed because it was such a great story.

My next door neighbor was Dickie Davis. Dickie always ended up at goalie mainly because he was heavy and couldn't skate very well. Dickie and I created goalie pads by cutting off two pant-legs, stuffing them with rags and attaching them to Dickie's legs using pant belts. One day when it was very cold we dumped water over the asphalt in my backyard creating an ice surface and using 4-foot high fence for the goal and backstop. I was taking shots at Dickie in goal and slid a shot along the ice that he played casually. Unfortunately the puck ran up his goalie stick and hitting him in mouth and breaking his two front teeth. His first reaction was, "My mother is going to kill me." So he insisted that I break the bad news to his mother. I knocked and when Mrs. Davis answered the door, I stuck out my hand with the teeth and said, "These are Dickie's two front teeth."

The neighbors on Emerald St. organized street parties and an annual neighborhood picnic at places like Whalom Park in Leominster, Salem Willows, Canobie Lake and Sheepfold in the Fells Reservation. My oldest and fondest memories of a neighborhood party was the celebration on V-E Day (Victory in Europe Day) on May 8, 1945, the day Nazi Germany unconditionally surrendered to the Allies. Folks were singing and dancing in the streets when a group of men decided to go up to second floor flat of Old Man Higgins and carry his upright piano down the stairs so he could play in the street.

When I was about 12 years old, I announced to my parents that I was going to get after-school paper route. My father objected and I came remember him saying, "I use to be down at Sullivan Square every morning selling newspapers and I swore my son would never sell papers." He relented once he understood that most of my friends had routes. When I was 15, I got a job as a soda jerk at the Lambert Pharmacy in Haines Square with a wage of 50 cents an hour. In the

winter our landlord paid me to shovel snow and to care for the outside of our house and the house next door. If it was a big storm and school was canceled, my friends and I would walk the neighborhood looking for other shoveling jobs.

The Rez



Fellsmere Pond, known to everyone as the Rez, is located about 200 yards up Fellsway East from the Immaculate Conception Church. The name, Rez, is likely an abbreviation for reservoir, as reportedly many years ago the pond was used to store possible drinking water. Fellsmere Pond is the centerpiece of Fellsmere Park, which was designed and developed by the famous landscape architect, Frederick Law

Olmsted. Olmsted is the same person who designed the Emerald Necklace park system that circles Boston and Central Park in New York City. In our day (1950s) this was a beautiful piece of property, including a half-mile walking/jogging path with benches that circled the Rez. Besides a place to relax, the benches were used by us kids to put and take off our ice skates in the winter.

We went to the Rez for three primary purposes: ice skating, sledding and fishing.



As soon as the ice froze in the winter, I would head to Rez wearing my shin guards and hockey gloves and my skates hanging from my hockey stick. There were no indoor ice rinks in Medford and Malden, so we had to rely on natural ice. The cops patrolled the Rez continuously to make sure kids didn't go on the ice until it was sufficiently frozen and in the spring when the ice began to thaw. I don't know the water depth of the Rez but I do know it was deep enough for someone to drown. On more than one

occasion I saw skaters fall through and then scramble back up onto the ice surface. At other times you heard loud, frightening cracking noises as the ice expanded and contracted.

As the winter progressed and storms covered the ice surface with snow, kids would go to the Rez with shovels and scrape the ice to create miniature rinks all over the pond. There were floodlights so that it was possible to skate at the Rez in the evening. Of course the girls skated as well, so the Rez was also a place for young boys and girls to socialize.

The Rez was the incubator for many high school and college hockey players that grew up in the neighborhood. Because of the legacy left by these hockey players, hockey became my passion, my favorite sport at a very early age.

Behind the Rez there was hill that the kids called the Seven Bumps. I don't believe anyone actually counted seven bumps; it was just a catchy name. It was a perfect sledding hill and I imagine that it is still a popular winter slope for sledding. Kids had Flexible Flyer sleds but we also improvise and created our own sliding devices. One of the best was the hood of a car that we got at the junkyard. When we flipped the hood over, it became a toboggan that 5 or 6 boys or girls could use to rumble down the hill. We created a run off to the side on the steepest side of the hill away from other people sledding. It was a more thrilling ride and we didn't wipe out anyone except ourselves.



Each year in spring or early summer the Malden Kiwanis would sponsor a fishing derby at the Rez. The pond would get stocked and so many kids would line the banks that you had to wonder if the kids outnumbered the fish. The Rez is where we got our introduction to fishing and we caught sunfish, perch, hornpout, pickerel and the prize catch, large-mouth bass.



We fished with worms but we discovered the best bait to catch bass were live chubs, which we captured using minnow traps in Mystic River down by Wellington Circle. One day Tommy Angell and I rode our bikes down to the river to set our traps. The water in the river was brackish and the land, which today is MacDonald Park, was marshland of dried out sea grass. As we waited for our traps to fill, Tommy started playing with matches and he said he would stomp out any fire. However when he dropped a match, within seconds there was a raging fire. We ran, jumped on our bikes and fled the scene. That night my Dad was late coming for supper and explained there was large, wild fire down at Wellington Circle and traffic was mess. I just sat there and didn't say a word.

Stag's

Stag's Pool Hall was located in the second floor of a building next to the Bug House in Haines Square. Stag's got its name from the owner and operator, Carl Stagliano. Pool halls and bowling alleys were prevalent all around the Boston area and the popularity both types of business faded once the age of automobiles and television arrived. The interior of Stag's had about 8 tables and stool-height chairs along the wall for players to rest when it was not their turn to shoot. Stag's looked just like the poolrooms that were seen in the hit movie *The Hustler*, starring Jackie Gleason and Paul Newman.



By the time we reached high school age we began to use Stag's as a place to hang out. I know my mother didn't like the idea her 14 year-old son going to a poolroom but she didn't forbid me. We didn't have any indoor recreational facilities and Stag's was a place kids could gather inside out of the elements, especially in the winter. But Stag's was not exclusively a teen spot; it was more like teens hanging out in an adult place. And of course we learned not only how to play pool and billiards but how to play for money. Years later I was at a business conference in California and the group I was with began to play pool in the bar area. When my turn came to play, a couple guys remarked, "Wow, where did you learnt to play?" I simply replied that it was a byproduct of my miss-spent youth.

Gambling on pool was a part of our culture. As young kids we would play penny poker at the park or at night sitting on the sidewalk under the streetlight. By the time I was 16 or 17 we would go to the Wonderland Dog Track at night. You only had to be 16 to gain admission but you were required to be 21 to bet. Of course it was easy to get someone to place a wager for you.



I recall being at Wonderland and everyone was simultaneously listening on the radio to the Tony Demarco – Carmen Basillio World Welterweight Boxing Championship bout. In 1955 Tony Demarco from the North End won the title by beating champion, Johnny Saxton, but then suffered consecutive losses to Basillio in fights that are remembered as classics. My friend Richie Clemente's father, Cosmo, was a handler in Demarco's corner. Mr. Clemente owned and ran the New Garden Gym where all the local boxers trained.

Surprisingly underage alcohol consumption was not an issue. On occasion someone would get his hands on a 6-pack of beer and we would go to the woods near the Rez to drink it. But I didn't really begin to drink beer until I reached college age and even then it was limited to a small amount weekends. My friend, Peter Wall, took the Irish Pledge, which meant he didn't have his first alcoholic beverage until he was 21

Frustrated Jock

When I was in the first or second grade my mother took me to a tutor to improve my reading skills. The tutor reported back that I could read fine as long as I was interested in the subject matter. The tutor suggested to my mother that I just needed to practice reading something I liked. So I gladly accept the assignment of reading the sports page in the newspaper every day and the monthly magazine, Sport, from cover to cover.

At that same young age I would be glued to the radio at home listening to Boston Red Sox and Boston Bruins game. I would keep box scores of Sox games and I could recite batting averages, RBIs and home run totals for all the players on an

ongoing basis. This early interest in Statistics served me well in my later work years.

Listening to Red Sox away games was crazy. The radio station announcer in Boston would get pitch-by-pitch transmissions via Teletype from someone at the game in a far away city like St. Louis. You would hear “click-click-click” and then announcer might say, “Ball 1.” After 20 or 30 seconds of silence, you would hear “click-click-click” again, followed by the announcer maybe saying, “Ball 2.” That would be the procedure for the whole game. It was not very exciting but we listen anyway and imagined anyway. Listening to Boston Bruins games on the radio presented another challenge. The action is so fast that as the announcer described the action, my imagination was in over-drive visualizing what was actually happening on the ice. Again, this learned skill helped me later in life.

My passion for the Red Sox and Bruins translated to playing fields where my favorite sports to play were hockey and baseball. I grew up playing baseball in the summer at Morrison Park and hockey at the Res in the winter, and my dream was to play both sports someday for Malden Catholic. At that time Malden Catholic traditionally had the best hockey team in the state each year, so competition for making the team was stiff. In addition rosters were smaller because periods and games were shorter and teams only needed play two forward lines. Unfortunately that dream was never realized. After being failing to make the baseball team in my sophomore year, I was the last player cut from the hockey team.

Frustrated and disappointed I asked my parents to let me transfer to Medford High School after my sophomore year. I didn't want to leave MC and my father didn't want me to leave. But I disparately wanted to play and I was confident that I would easily make the Medford High hockey team.

I was a year ahead in school age-wise and I was physically late developing. In my freshman year I was probably the smallest boy in my class. Eventually through high school I grew another foot to become one of the tallest kids, growing about 7 inches between my junior and senior years. My father sensing my frustration approached Brother Lambert, MC School Principal, with the suggestion of holding me back a year in school. Brother Lambert rejected the idea, stating that I was a good student and it didn't make sense academically for me to repeat a year.

So I worked hard to improve my skills between my sophomore and junior years. I joined a spring/summer hockey program that held after school sessions and games at the Boston Arena (now Matthews Arena at Northeastern). Billy Sullivan and I packed up our hockey bags and sticks, and we took the MTA to and from the Boston Arena after school. Many nights coming home with all that gear at rush hour on the T proved to be a challenge.

In my junior year after going through off-season workouts and attending tryouts and early morning hockey practices, I was cut again. One of the problems with hockey in those days was that if you didn't make the high school team, your hockey career was over. There were a limited number of rinks (i.e., Boston Arena, Lynn Arena and Skating Club in Brighton) and no alternative leagues.

When I was 12 years old the Little League did not exist in Medford, but when I was 15 a Babe Ruth baseball league was formed. There were 8 teams, 2 from the four 4 sections of Medford. Wellington-Glenwood, our area, had two teams consisting of five 13 year-olds, five 14 year-olds and five 15 year-olds. I played for the Indians. Unfortunately this was the first year of the league and we didn't have uniforms, only a team baseball cap. Regardless it was a great experience and we had a terrific coach, Tom Tringale, who was a former minor league baseball player. I was hopeful that the experience would help me at MC, but it was not to be. Again, I didn't make the MC varsity baseball team.

Immaculate Conception CYO Basketball

Some friends encouraged me to join the Immaculate Conception CYO basketball team. Noteworthy was the fact that I was a junior in high school and the shorts and numbered shirt of the IC uniform was the first sports uniform that I had ever worn. Basketball led me to new friendships, most notably, Richie Clemente. Richie and I not only played on the IC team but also the Redskins club in the Medford City League. Our IC coach was Bill "Bo" Butler and he also got us to play with older guys in the Malden City League. I was playing a lot basketball and it was surely having a negatively impacted my schoolwork. When Ronnie Kelley joined the IC CYO program, we had a good nucleus and we went on to win league and archdiocesan championships. Ronnie Kelley was a great player and Richie Clemente wasn't far behind. I was never really a very good shooter; my job was to defend. Along the way I found another set of basketball friends that included Dick Cotter, Alex Theroux and Freddie Walsh.

Richie Clemente

For a period of time extending from high school into my early college years, Richie Clemente and I spent a lot of time together and we were good for each other. Richie had gone to Medford High School and just slid through academically. I was going to college and I think it made Richie realized he was heading in the wrong direction. So he spent two years going to night school taking pre-requisite courses just to gain admission to Wentworth Institute, where he also played on the basketball team. He then transferred to Northeastern University and earned a degree in Engineering, and after graduation Richie went to work for Digital Equipment Corporation (DEC). Eventually he split from DEC and formed his own company, which he later sold. In a matter of 10 to 15 years he had gone from nothing to being educated and very successful.

I was in my office at Boston College on June 1, 1977 when I got a call from my mother to tell me that Richie had been killed in automobile accident in Upstate, New York. It was early in morning and he was leaving the airport in a rental car when he was t-boned by another car. Losing a good friend at such a young age was hard to comprehend. I had lost touch with Richie's family (wife and 3 sons) but I often visited his grave at Oak Grove Cemetery. One day there were two boys around 18 or 19 years old at the grave. They were Richie's sons and one of them looked exactly like Richie. I was overcome with emotion. It was as though I was stepping back 30 years and here was my old friend. To this day memories of Richie still are with me. My son, Tim, lost a good friend, Dave Connolly, in the Afghanistan conflict and I can empathize with his grief that will last forever.

On July 4, 1956 a few weeks after I had graduated from high school, the local newspaper, Medford Mercury, organized a track meet called the Dutch Carr Memorial Track Meet. Neighborhood friends, Dick Carton and brothers Billy and Bob Reagan, encouraged me to compete. So without any training I entered the 880-yard event and to my amazement I finished second, barely losing to the captain of the Medford High team. After the race Al Frezza, who was the sports editor for the Medford Mercury and knew me from basketball, congratulated me and invited me run in the mile event. I had to decline; I was whipped. Over the years I have disposed of all of my sports trophies, except for the trophy from the Dutch Carr Meet; it has a special place in my memory.

The following year I went off to college and joined the Boston College track team. I wasn't particularly gifted in a single event but I got to compete in many events, including hurdles, high jump, broad jump, 440-yard run and mile relay, and I even threw the javelin. I commuted to BC on the subway; it was an hour and a half each way. On a typical day I would practice track after school, do homework assignments on the street car and train rides home, dinner at home, and then out the door with Richie Clemente to play basketball. It was not an optimal situation academically but I was satisfying my love of sports. As I grew older my passion never subsided. I coached youth teams and I was daily runner for about 30 years, running in local road races and proudly running fast enough to earn a number to run in the Boston Marathon. Today I am still competing, playing golf 3 or 4 times a week with all the other old guys in Florida.

Old Boston Garden



It is obvious that sports probably played a too large a role in my life. It started at a young age and I was definitely influenced by my attendance at games with my Dad. My father took me to Bruins games at the old Boston Gardens and to see baseball at old Braves Field and Fenway Park. I attended my first Boston College football

game in October 1948. By the time I was 11 or 12 years old I would go with my friends to Celtic and Bruins games at the Garden. In those days there were always some cheap tickets for kids in the balcony or the bleacher seats.

At the old Boston Garden, which was located above North Station railroad terminal, opened in 1928. My father once told me that his brother, Walter "Tink" Gleason, score the first basket in the Garden while playing for Pere Marquette Club from South Boston. There was always something going on at the Garden In addition to professional basketball and hockey, the circus came to town every winter for at least a week. I can recall elephants being unloaded on Causeway St. and being guided up the ramp leading to the arena. The rodeo also made an annual winter appearance along with two ice shows, Ice Capades and Ice Follies, which filled the Garden. Each winter there were two indoor-track meets, Boston Athletic Association (BAA) and the Knights of Columbus (KofC), which featured some of the greatest runner in the world, including Olympic Champion from Ireland, Ron Delany, winning the mile. The races were on Saturday evening so Greater Boston high school track championships were able to use the assembled indoor track in the afternoon. High school kids were allowed at no charge to stay around and watch the evening events. In March the Eastern Massachusetts high school hockey and basketball tournaments games were played in the Garden. And of course there was the annual Beanpot College Hockey Championship played traditionally on the first two Monday nights in February.

The old Garden, pronounced Gahden, was demolished in 1998 and was replaced by the TD Bank Garden. Today the Celtics and Bruins dominate winter



use of the new Garden and gone are the days of track meets, circuses, rodeos, many of the ice shows, and high school tournaments. Also just a memory are some the unique features on the Garden. For example, there were two overhanging balconies so that the fans were very close to the action. The downside was that there were many obstructed seats (i.e. seats behind a pole used to support the

balconies). The second balcony, called the Heavens, had seats but in reality it was standing room only because you could not see the action below if seated. In the rear seats under the first balcony you couldn't see the overhead clock and if you attended the circus, you couldn't see the high-wire acts above. The Gahden was also infamously known for no air-conditioning.

Every March the old Garden would host the Eastern Massachusetts high school basketball tournament and then the following weekend the New England High School Basketball Championship. In the local event, which was called the Tech Tourney (named because tournament initially was held at MIT), all games in all divisions were played at the old Garden, starting with first round games all the

way through to the championships. Games would start early in the day and continue into the evening, one game after another, and all for a single student admission price (probably around 25 cents).

Back then the dominant local high school basketball power was Somerville High School and their fans would march in mass 3 or 4 miles from Somerville to the Garden back, often tying up traffic. Each fan came with a bag filled with confetti made from pieces of torn newspaper and when the Somerville team came on the floor, the confetti storm looked like a snowstorm.

In one memorable Class A Eastern Massachusetts basketball championship game Somerville was losing by a point in the last seconds of the game, and John Malvey of Somerville stole the ball at half court and drove to the basket uncontested. Unfortunately and famously John missed an easy layup just before the buzzer sounded and Somerville lost. John went on to have an outstanding college basketball career at Northeastern University. I played against John but haven't seen him in 50 years until I happened to run into him in Florida a couple of years ago. Of course the thing I mentioned was that I was in the Garden the night he missed the game-winning layup. He responded, "I never thought the Old Garden held so many people. For the past 50 years everyone that I meet claims they were there that night. Thousands and thousands of people."

The preliminary rounds of the high school hockey tournament would be played at the old Boston Arena (now Matthews Arena at Northeastern University) and then the finals would move to the Garden. In my freshman year at Malden Catholic the hockey lost in the championship game to Walpole High School. But the champion and the runner-up would move on to play in the New England High School Hockey Championship the next weekend at the Providence Arena. MC avenged their loss in the Eastern Massachusetts Finals and was crowned New England champs. Three kids from the neighborhood, kids from Surrey St. – Bobby Magner, Jimmy McKay and Phil Crawford (goalie) -- were members of that team.

When I was 18 years old and playing for the championship Immaculate CYO basketball team, we were invited to play in a preliminary game prior to the Celtics NBA Playoff game against the Philadelphia Warriors. Besides the thrill of playing on the parquet floor, we got to dress in the Celtics locker room with the team. Actually the term, locker room, is a misnomer. The room was sparse; the Celtics hung their clothes on hooks on the wall; and there were no lockers. Bill Russell was in one of his first years with the Celtics but he totally dominated the Warriors and the Celtics went on that season to win one of many NBA Championships.

Red Auerbach, Celtics Coach, took an interest in the best player on our team, Ronnie Kelley, and set him up with a bookkeeping job in the Celtic office. At times Ronnie practice with the team and Auerbach offered to help him up secure a college basketball scholarship; an option that Ronnie foolishly never pursued.

On occasion the Garden would schedule a preliminary game and would need additional players, so Ronnie, Richie Clemente or I might dress and assume an identity. One such game featured the New York Football Giants. The Giants only had about 6 players so I impersonated some obscure defensive back.

Fenway Park and Braves Field

The Boston Braves moved to Milwaukee in 1954 when I was 15 years old. So for all my early years there were two major league baseball teams in Boston. Games were scheduled so when the Red Sox were at home, the Braves were away and vice versa. That meant there were games almost every day and usually a doubleheader on Sunday. As kids we were frequent attendees because the teams played almost exclusively during the day and both teams had a program called the Knot Hole Gang where children were admitted to the park for 10 cents.



In those days Fenway was very fan-friendly and would have special admissions for different groups. For example, there was State of Maine Day, where everyone from Maine was admitted at a reduced charge. And of course there was the annual Nuns Day.

Today Fenway Park is revered as a national treasure, but back then neither park was considered to be very special. As kids we pledged allegiance to either the Red Sox or Braves. In 1948 the Braves won the National League pennant and the Red Sox finished in a tie with the Cleveland Indians in the American League, necessitating a one game playoff. That year the Red Sox had two outstanding and well-rested pitchers, Mel Parnell and Ellis Kinder, but for some unknown reason the manager, Joe McCarthy elected to pitch Denny Galehouse, a lightly regarded pitcher, and the Sox lost. In those days the winner of the pennant in each league played in the World Series, but Boston had missed its chance for a subway series.

In July 1956 I went to a Red Sox – White Sox game with Laddie Young and we sat in the bleachers. The game was delayed for an hour and a half because of rain and I remember the crowd was sparse when the game finally started. It was worth the wait. Mel Parnell threw the first no-hitter by a Red Sox hurler in over 30 years, catching the last out ground ball himself and running to first base to make the unassisted out. I still have the ticket stub from the game. In 1962 Medford's Bill Monbouquette (Monbo was a year ahead of me at Medford High School) pitched nearly a perfect game no-hitter, also against the White Sox.



Of course the main attraction and every kid's favorite player was Ted Williams. In the 1950s the Red Sox teams were not very good and a tradition emerged where fans would wait until Ted batted for the last time before they left the park. Ted was also renowned as a fly fisherman and ever February he would demonstrate his skill at the Sportsmen Show at the old

Mechanics Hall, which was located at the present site of the Hynes Convention Center. I loved the Sportsmen Show because of the emphasis on fishing, but I recall one sad moment. Jim Thorpe, a Native American who many regard as the greatest athlete of all time, looked like a destitute old man sitting next to a teepee and in full Indian headdress and signing autographs.

Downtown Boston

The epicenter of shopping in the Boston area was at the corner of Washington and Summer Streets in Downtown Boston, the location of the Jordan Marsh and Filene's Department Stores. Suburban shopping malls did not exist, so when it was time for a new Easter suit or dress it was off to Downtown to shop. Today upscale shopping is on Newbury St.; back then it was along Washington Street. One store that I use to frequent was Raymond's. It was sort of a 50s version of Marshalls or TJ Maxx, where you could buy quality goods at a discount price. Raymond's also had a sports department and it is where I bought my first set of golf clubs and most of my



fly-fishing gear.

My mother never missed the big Dollar Day sales at Filene's Basement. The Basement was a unique place with cheap prices on goods that didn't sell in the main store above. There were no dressing rooms in the Basement and it was not unusual to walk through and see women in only their underwear trying on dresses.

Behind Jordan Marsh on Arch Street was Sheehan's Religious Store, the place to buy First Communion, Confirmation and other religious gifts. Down the street behind Filene's was St. Anthony's Shrine. It was common to end a Saturday night out on the town by going to "Arch St." and making an appearance at midnight Mass, taking care of our Mass-on-Sunday obligation.

So I'll end by saying that I hope that this missive fulfills my self-imposed obligation to share my early life experiences.

Conclusion

Now as I look back to those days, I enjoy recalling some wonderful memories as well as reflecting on some disappointments and lost opportunities in my youth. And when I think back to past events, lifestyles, economic conditions and friends, I naturally begin to draw comparisons between being child then and what it is like for today's generation of children.

Someday my grandchildren might read these remarks and it might help them learn not only more about me, but also how things were different then. Of course my fondest hope is to share this piece with my childhood friends. Hopefully they will enjoy this look-back and will be able provide me with some edits and additional tales that I may have forgotten or passed over. At the very least writing this memoir has had a cathartic effect. It has allowed me to layout some past emotions and tribulations, which feels good.

Back in the early days of television there was a comic named Sam Levinson. Levinson's shtick was a stand-up act in which he would simply talk about his upbringing in Brooklyn and he would find humor in everything. And I can remember listening to him and thinking that I can identify with everything he is saying, and the best part of our past will always be the everyday fun, laughs and joys that we experienced.

Epilog

The day (January 29, 2016) after I finished the first draft of this memoir, my wife, Pat, and I went to local bar/restaurant to have something to eat and to dance to a band that played music from the 50s and 60s. It is an interesting sight to see a bunch of 60 and 70 year-olds still rocking and rolling. Of course for this senior-citizen audience the show starts early -- 5:30 P.M.

Pat and I were seated at a table with two other couples, and serendipitously it happened to be two guys from my old neighborhood with their wives. I recognized Tony Giglio's name; he was a state representative from Medford for many years. He and his buddy, Billy Linden, are about 3 years younger than me and grew up on Russell St. in Malden near the Immaculate school, so I didn't know them as kids. Of course the first thing that we did was to begin to reminisce about the old days. Every time they mentioned a person or a place, I seemed to be ready to reply, " I just wrote about that."

I wrote this memoir mainly because it was fun and I made it very personal (about me) because I suspected that the only people that would have any interest might be grandchildren, children and some old friend from my youth. My last promise before we ended our Medford rock and roll evening was that I would share these remarks with them. Enjoy!