

Artful AUGUST

Part three of three

Artie Maglionico

It was always a "Lodi thing." The fabric of our community was so tightly woven that you could bounce a quarter off of it. Being a resident of Lodi was more than just having a physical presence it was indeed a state of mind that stayed with you for life. Neither distance nor time could undo that unique mind set. A common bond with the kids you grew up with that is never broken. It's even deeper than friendship. It was more of a spiritual connection. I remember my Brother Eugene {nicknamed "Soupy" } telling his friends that Lodi teens were trend setters. That was in the year 1958. By the time I entered Lodi High in 1961 I knew that my brother's observation was spot on. We dressed a certain way, acted a certain way, thought a certain way and even walked a certain way. Where we came from was unmistakable. "Hey kid you from Lodi?" We'd strike a defiant pose look you straight in the eyes and reply "Yea I'm from Lodi!" That was all we had to say. Our demeanor spoke for itself. We wore Italian knit sweaters, high roll collars, shark skin pants, thigh length black leather "Lot Boy" jackets the name of which was given by the coolest of the cool who hung out in Sorbello's parking lot on Main Street. The outfit wasn't complete unless you sported a pair of black feather weight shoes. "If a guy from another town approached us Lodi girls we would check out his shoes. Recalls Beth Manzo Maglionico." If he wasn't wearing feather weights we sent him packing." My cousin Anthony must have been wearing them at the time. The couple tied the knot a year or two later. His Buster Browns never saw daylight again.

As for the kids from Westervelt place we had come a long way from coating our hair with Wild root cream oil ,wearing our brothers hand me down clothing which were ill fitting at best, and inserting cardboard cut outs into our sneakers to cover the hole that formed in the sole from playing King, Queen, Jack. We saved a sock or two along the way. Once we were entertained by watching the guy from Staals coal and feed send coal down a steep metal chute into Lou Albano's coal bin or bursting tar bubbles in the gutter after a thunder storm. Now we were in sartorial splendor getting our hair hot combed and razor cut at a shop in Paterson called Desmond's. The wild root cream oil was traded in for hair spray. My favorite was Aqua Net. It stood up well during high humidity and 30 mile an hour wind gusts. A kid payed good money for that razor cut so why not preserve it with some heavy duty Lacquer. We made sure not to go near a lit match. Oops there went the do. My mom was forever inquiring as to who was using all of her hair spray. In a desperate and futile attempt to cast her suspicions elsewhere I'd point at my father. Unfortunately for me my dear old dad was bald. Foiled again!

I'm sure that you readers from surrounding communities like Rutherford or Pasadena California especially those of "baby boomer age" or there about, have similar memories of your own. Your friends, relationships, school days and especially the places where you "hung out." Every generation had a sacred haunt that they called their very own .A Place where everyone met on a daily basis and from which they ruled the world or at least their world. In the Borough of Lodi Main Street, from one busy end to the other, was a meeting place for the entire community young and old alike the

energy of which was felt in every neighborhood and in every household. As far as “hang outs” were concerned a Lodi kid could be found at such places as Humphreys Pizzeria, Tony’s pool room, The “Lot” which was home to that elite group Lodi teens who called themselves the “Lot Boys.” Among the original Lot Boys circa 1961,62 were My cousin Johnny “Mags” Maglionico ,Joe Lamark,Paul Catalano,Pete La Conte,Joe Masters,Bobby Gerber,Bobby Quartier, Mike Buccaro and Junior Peraino. The “lot” {Sorbello’s parking lot} was the birth place of featherweight shoes, and the now legendary Lot boy Jacket. There was also Cardy’s on Union Street where the kids from Wilson School hung out, Carvels ice cream at the corner of Main and Union Street directly across from the Modern Bakery. Further down was a popular haunt called Panama’s where a 17 year old boy could show off his new car in front of an admiring group of teenage girls. Let’s not forget, Frankie’s Market on route 17 which was destroyed by fire in 1957, Rodolfa’s Bar and Grill on what used to be Nicholson street { now the Post Office area} Goody’s, one of our earliest fast food haunts located on Route 46 east next to the Drive in movie. Further down 46 was Kingies Diner the Saturday night meeting place for many a carousing Lodi teen that needed a cup of coffee and a booth full of friends to which he could share his most recent escapades . Of course the topic was invariably about first dates and cars. Remember? We Lodi kids were truly in a world of our own and we embraced every cherished part of it.

It was a perfect world and why wouldn’t it have been? After all we were young and carefree. We enjoyed, and probably took for granted, a solid and structured family life. We came from close knit households and were part and parcel of a close knit community. Everyone, on some level, knew one another and looked out for one another. I recall my parents reminding me to never talk to strangers. That was an easy task since there were no strangers to speak of. An unfamiliar face was rare and stood out like the proverbial “sore thumb.” The neighborhoods were closely connected while the people were always conscious as to what was taking place beyond their front doors. We knew everyone who entered our safe little haven; the egg man, the milk man, the guy in the street cleaner, the Mail man The DPW workers, the lemon ice man and of course the Police Man. I know what you’re thinking.” They were all men.” Not really! The driver of the Good Humor Ice cream truck was a young woman who was working her way through college. It used to amaze me how no matter what kind of ice cream you wanted she’d open the hatch to the freezer reach in and without looking come out with the exact thing you asked for.

Life as we knew it was quickly changing. The places that we had come to know and love were disappearing and so were the people who lived and thrived there. The most dramatic change was the eradication of our beloved Main Street. How sad it made me to watch it vanish building by building, piece by piece and memory by memory. My Arnot street home was eventually wiped off the face of the earth along with our neighbors the Levi’s, Sal the Barber and the home of the Feigo family which was moved to Westminster place. Even at that Lodi kids, till this day, continue to keep in touch with one another. That bond has proven to be unbreakable. When it’s our turn to pass through those pearly gates Main Street will be in full view and that is where we shall meet again. Not soon I hope. I’m not in any hurry to get there folks. How about you? What’s the rush? We’ll have all of eternity to reminisce. Right Soupy? “Do good work Art.”

Readers from surrounding towns here’s hoping that in some sentimental way these last three columns brought to life cherished memories of you own. Thanks for understanding and a special thanks for reading,

