

Shadows of Time

Part two of three

When last we met I was telling you how innovative we kids were when it came to entertaining ourselves. Even something as simple as hitting a pop cycle stick with a rubber ball on the sidewalk was good for at least a few hours of fun and recreation. Before you knew it there was someone running down the block yelling "I've got the winner." It grew from there until it became a Hit the stick tournament. Then we'd move on to something else like a game of Single, Double, Triple using the same ball. Let's see how can I explain this complicated game to you without confusing everyone including myself? I've got the solution. I'll refer to a poem I wrote for my yet, if ever, to be published {so what else is new?} book of poetry titled The Poetry of Westervelt Place.

Single Double Triple
By Artie Maglionico

Single double triple

A Westervelt game.

Our version of baseball

Our own hall of fame.

No bat to be had

Just a steady barrage

Of a Spalding sent darting

Off of Rocco's garage.

No pitcher was needed

No bases to find.

The ball park imagined
In the field of the mind.
“Single DoubleTriple.”
With each rhythmic beat
Counting the bounces
When the ball hit the street.
It was quite controversial,
One had to be quick
If the kid counting bounces
Was known to be slick.
The kids up at bat
Were put to the test.
Number four, when they counted,
Was a triple at best.
Single double triple home run.

Fini

By the way, a fly ball over the Feigo's 7 foot tall hedges was an “automatic” home run. Automatic meaning that there was no way you could cheat your way in or out of it. Johnny Rannou held the home run record during the summer of '59. A few of us frowned upon Rannou's hitting prowess since he was the only kid on the block who belonged to a little league baseball team and sported his own official baseball cap. The name of his team was Rotary. Anyone out there remember that name? Perhaps you or someone you knew played on that team. Rannou might have been a little leaguer on the baseball field but on Westervelt Place he was

strictly in the majors. Box ball, stick ball, King ,Queen, Jack, kick the can, flipping baseball cards or simply playing catch, Rannou was the kid to beat.

I'm sure you have your own version of single, double, triple. In our case that two car garage was perfect for what we had in mind. It was as if whoever built it made sure that it was designed specifically for the playing of that particular game. For us it was a Grand Slam. Today, of course, a street game such as that would be a futile and hazardous endeavor because of the chaotic, endless flow of traffic that has now become a way of life even on Westervelt Place. It's difficult to cross the street let alone play in it. If today the neighborhoods seem void of kids during the summer months, it's most likely because of the lack of open fields and quiet side streets. Even the school grounds seem to be off limits of late. Once upon a time those same playgrounds were teeming with kids. They were like summer day camps with no counselors just a bunch of kids having fun. Sure there might have been a minor scuffle or two but it never amounted to much. Whenever I was faced with a potential donnybrook I always made sure that someone was nearby who was certain to break it up before it started. I won more fights that way. We never took a day off from enjoying ourselves. Like that two car garage, it was as if the world was created with us in mind and we took full advantage of it .After all we owned it. We took whatever the good Lord gave us and made it work. One way or the other it always worked. There was never a time when it didn't. Nothing was discarded without it first being examined. From old roller skates and empty refrigerator boxes, WWII nap sacks and canteens, discarded bushels {we'd nail the rim of the bushel to a telephone pole and play basketball} to broken broomsticks and clothes line rope, we'd always find a use for it. If there are any of you reading this that are too young to remember ...yes that's the way it was. Not that long ago either. Well maybe it was at that! We were the products of our own ingenuity. For us it was the quintessence of necessity being the mother of invention. We enjoyed the fruits of our active and restless imaginations. Our world and everything in it was sacred and, sadly enough, slowly disappearing. So were we.

Allow me to incorporate yet another poem taken from that same unpublished book. It blends in nicely with the subject matter at hand. You might even find a piece of yourself in there somewhere.

Rainbow
By Artie Maglionico

When we were kids we'd hang on the corner
Absorbing the time on a long summer day.
We didn't mind when it started raining
It was part of the game that all little kids play.
When the storm passed we discovered a rainbow
Forever in awe of the colorful sky.
Innocent shades as soft as the pillow
That pampered our dreams like a faint lullaby.
While little girls danced on a porch in the distance
We, in worn sneakers, played ball in the street.
The old men drank wine and chewed on their stogies
Unscathed by the pulse of the midsummer heat.
Love was as real as those old men who knew us
Lessening in number as they watched us grow.
After the rain they would ask in Italian
"Dov'e finite l 'arcobaleno?"
{Where did the rainbow go?}
Secrets escaping like crows from a vineyard

Leaving behind the scattering seeds.
Over the fences and into the future
Saying goodbye to our little kid needs.
Grandma once asked me if I saw the rainbow.
“The rainbow” I answered “is there in your eyes.”
“No!” she said firmly “that’s just your reflection.
The future is really the past in disguise.”
The end.

One of our favorite “summer day trips” was a visit to the sacred shores of the Saddle River. I know that I’ve written about our riverside excursions in the past but the very nature of this three part story deems it necessary to visit those bonnie banks yet one more time. The Saddle River had been the mecca of aquatic recreation for generations. The pristine shoreline and clean, safe to swim in water was enjoyed by families from Lodi as well as neighboring communities and beyond. People joined in picnics, canoe rides, musical entertainment and romantic interludes by the light of the silvery moon. “Silvery Moon”, in case you’re wondering is the name of a song written by Gus Edwards for the Ziegfeld follies in 1909. That’s how it must have been before “progress” began messing with the landscape and those once pristine shores gave way to a thick phosphorescent sludge. It was an unhealthy environment unless you were a chemically induced crazed bullfrog or the Kids from Westervelt place.

The River
By Artie Maglionico

On the Westervelt trail we walked.

Then toward the morning sun

To where the Saddle River flowed

We ventured on by one.

We were baptized with the frogs

Who scattered frantically

When first they heard the dismal news

Of our divinity.

The factories on the northern shore

Let loose their gifts below.

What was left came floating down,

Quite useless, in a row.

Yet this was where our dreams were shared

Each to his own device

For what was hell to wayward souls

Was, to us, a paradise.

Yes folks that was the Saddle River in the mid to late '50s .For us it was an extension of Westervelt Place. We owned it, made use of it, took from it, put it back, then left it there. We couldn't take it with us except in memory.

I sincerely hope that you're enjoying these poems at least a little bit. They've been sequestered in the dark recesses of an old shoe box collecting mildew for lo these many months.

I'll tell you a little more about our river excursions in the August issue. In the meantime, continue to enjoy the summer. For those of you who are reading this prior to the 4th of the month, allow me to wish you a happy and safe 4th of July. For the rest of you, I trust that it was, indeed, happy and safe. By the way what took you so long to read this?

I've got a delicious ending to this month's column. A gastronomic delight of Sicilian origin called Caponata . The Italian pronunciation is Capanadina . My Aunt Josephine {Anthony's Mom} introduced it to my family many years ago and it remains among my favorite dishes. The recipe was handed down to my cousin Beth {Anthony's wife} and I must say that it's absolutely, positively the best on the planet. Here's my Cousin Beth's recipe. Call it Caponata or Capanadina when Beth makes it I call it Delicious. Here's how she does it. She cooks eggplant, bell peppers, olives, capers, onions, celery, garlic and basil separately. Then combines them, sautéing the ingredients {stove top}, adding a pinch or two of sugar, Balsamic vinegar and the piece de resistance tomato sauce. This fabulous dish will go great with your summer cookouts and beyond. Buon appetito.