

September 2022

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Well folks, summer '22 has come to a screeching halt. The “screeching” is the agonizing sound of those youngsters who are realizing for the first time that school is back in session. And you thought it would never end. Ah the pain of it all. When I was a kid the early signs of impending doom came when I found myself on a bus ride with my mother on our way to Passaic destination Thom McCann and the dreaded “new shoes.” As I tried them on the entire summer flashed before my fear-stricken eyes. The end was near and my feet were the first to go. I was soon to follow! But wait folks it wasn't over. There was that surprise visit to Robert Hall's clothing store where the last vestiges of summer were giving way to the coming of autumn. Next stop Columbus School. Can any of you out there in Artful Thinking land relate to this? Summers were hard to let go of when I was growing up. The days were long and filled to overflowing with things to do. Life for us was free and easy, not having a care in the world. We were allowed to be kids. We didn't have much to think about since all that mattered was what we were doing at that moment. Go out and play till your heart's content. Just make sure you were home for supper. It's no wonder, then, why going back to school was such a shock to my system. Even with all of those early warning signs, finding myself in the classroom on that first day of school was traumatic, the remnants of which lasted until Christmas. Come the Labor Day weekend panic would begin to set in. When that Monday arrived I mourned the passing of time and all that it meant to me. I guess what saddened me the most was the passing of yet another summer of my youth. I knew the day would come when I'd be running out of summers. There was so much I was leaving behind or rather it was leaving me!

The St. Joseph Church Labor Day weekend Feast helped cushion the blow of the back-to-school punch. I didn't appreciate the true essence of that end of summer gathering until I was out of grammar school. The Feast was a rite of passage for those 13 year old kids who were about to enter those hallowed halls of Lodi High School. The precursor to the end of summer fling was the St Joseph marching band, whose traditional Italian music echoed throughout the community, stopping along the way for a donation and breakfast at the Vara residence. The song “Mama,” written by composer Cesare Andrea Pixie in 1940, was the band's signature number. Though the distant strains of the song brought a sentimental tear to those who listened, for me it meant the

end of summer and the beginning of the School year which was equally as tear-wrenching. The words that darted across my mind were destined to appear. If the band plays “Mama,” can school be far behind?

As I stated earlier, the St. Joseph feast was an event that saw a kid like me being exposed for the first time to life beyond Columbus School. In 1961, the start of my freshman year at LHS, not only did the entire community join in the festivities, but also the kids from the other grammar schools: Wilson, Washington, Lincoln, Roosevelt and of course Columbus. I knew a few of those kids from playing Little League football but, overall, I felt totally out of my element. To make matters worse, in order to get to the sausage stand – which till this day is run by the Palumbo family – I had to pass by all of those upperclassmen who were picking off wide-eyed freshmen with a barrage of heckles and promises of a first day coating of lipstick. The hazing never went beyond that. My cousin Phil Maglionico, another incoming freshman, and myself managed to side step the hazing dilemma by having our cousins Johnny Mags, a senior, and his kid brother Anthony Mags, a sophomore, run interference for us as we made our way up and down the dimly lit, panic-induced stairwells of Lodi High School.

I’m not sure if the feast has that same “back to school” tradition today. The crowds are so much larger and take in people from various parts of the tri-state area. The Feast itself has grown from a quaint “Lodi thing” to a major event, the likes of which is perhaps among the largest of its kind in the area. It is truly a carnival atmosphere with a busy mid-way, rides for all ages – including the Ferris wheel – multiple food stands and souvenir concessions, and of course the Italian Sausage and Zeppoles. There is so much going on that it is easy to get lost in the crowd. With that having been said there is still a chance, albeit a lesser chance each year, that you’re going to bump into someone from those days of yore. School mates, kids from the old neighborhood, the hangouts and the affairs of the heart. The Feast of St. Joseph was, and still is, though on a much larger scale, part and parcel of the Lodi mystique. A meeting place for generations, each with memories of their own forever wanting to return. I’ll tell you what folks... I’ll meet you at the zeppole stand.

In the meantime, have a happy and safe Labor Day weekend.

Special thanks go out to Library director Jayne St. George and her staff for their continued support. Trust me, folks, without their help and generosity there would be no

column. Thanks also are in order for my cousin, Anthony, for showing me where commas and capital letters go.