

Artful Thinking

Part One of Three

June 2022

What's not to like about the month of June, especially if you were a kid like me who was counting the days till summer vacation since last fall. December, with the promise of the Christmas respite, was a welcomed month. A scattering of snow days was always a pleasant surprise but unfortunately the snow eventually stopped which made having to go to school the next day even more painful. The month of March, though it brought with it the early signs of spring, was a throw away month. The weather was miserable and there were no days off unless you were sick and no kid wanted that to happen. No matter how much I disliked school I would rather be in the classroom than to be bed sick.

The only thing good about March was that April followed. There was always a sigh of relief when I saw the month of April appear on the calendar. The days were longer, the weather was getting nicer and you were able to go outdoors and play with your friends. Even school was more tolerable since on Fridays Mr. Dell, our gym teacher, took us outside and let us frolic around for a while in our sneakers. All of that and a day off on Good Friday. Not hard to take! Come the merry month of May, I began to sense that the school year was definitely drawing to a close. The birds were chirping, the flowers were in bloom, TV commercials were about Palisades Amusement Park {swings all day and after dark}, Oscar Mayer hot dogs, garden supplies and of course baseball was in full swing {no pun intended}. Also you could go to school in a light jacket instead of a cumbersome winter mackinaw. Top it all off with the Memorial Day weekend and before you know it you've made it into the month of June. We called out during winters hush, "June, what keepeth thee?"

Shadows of Time
By Artie Maglionico

Those mid-June mornings
The Saturday rush
Awakened by angels
From winters hush.

Celestial music,
A childhood serenade
Beating the drums of life
as we played.
They're playing box ball
Neath a Westervelt sky
Chasing our runaway dreams
on the fly.
We were the poetry.
Each separate rhyme
Recited forever
In the shadows of time.
Fini

Come that first morning of summer vacation, I was out of bed at first light and ready to conquer the world as I knew it. It seemed like only the day before when my mother needed a bugle and a fork lift to get me out of bed in time for school. In fact it was the day before. To me, however, the very thought of school was like a dark cloud threatening the marshmallow roast that was forever going on in my mind. By the time I finished my Corn Flakes, it was as if school never existed. I mean it hardly existed while I was there. Now it was completely erased from my memory. Can anyone out there relate to this? By the way, speaking of Corn Flakes what was your favorite cereal? It wasn't Shredded Wheat was it? My mother insisted that it was a healthy breakfast but after I'd bury it in sugar and drown it in milk she thought it healthier to go back to the tried and true...Corn Flakes! Oatmeal was another short lived staple. There wasn't enough sugar or cinnamon in Bergen County to make that paste go down. Anyway...darn it where was I? Oh yea...school.

Now don't get me wrong folks I didn't actually mind going to school, it was getting there that bothered the heck out of me. On the way I'd meet my friends John Leto, Irwin Stolz, Johnny Rannou and a few other kids from the Lodi hill. Of course we'd laugh and clown around as if we had not a care in the world; meanwhile I was dying inside, especially if there was a math test in the offing. Whoever made up that saying "half the fun is getting there" could not have been on the way to school. For me if half the fun was getting there then the other half was on my way home. What made the school room tolerable were my classmates both boys and girls. If there was

even a modicum of pleasantry it was sharing my childhood with these marvelous kids. I was happy just being around them. They were, in so many ways, an extension of my family. As much as I hemmed and hawed over having to go to school, when I didn't go I missed them. I miss them even now though it was a lifetime ago.

But this was the first day of summer and there was no time for getting sentimental. I'd wolf down my Corn Flakes, lace up my brand new sneakers {they had to be Keds or you weren't cool} and walk briskly down to the corner store to meet up with those Pepsi sipping, potato chip smuggling, ball bouncing kids from Westervelt Place. We never saw that much of one another during the school year since the daylight hours were short and homework stifled any prospect of socializing. At least it did for my mother and older brother who spent many an arduous night studying for my math test. Forgive me folks, I'm laughing even as I write this. Again, can any of you relate to this? I think it's funny now but there were times I thought my mom and brother weren't going to make it to the next grade. It was cause for many a sleepless night. They kept me awake yelling at one another as to who had the correct answer. I'd shout from my bedroom "you mind keeping it down? I've got school tomorrow."

But anyway...where was I? Oh yea! The first day of summer on the street of dreams: Westervelt Place. It was all ahead of us and we were going to make the most of it. There was so many ways to entertain ourselves. Even if we chose to do nothing, it was still fun. There were no computers, no video games, no cell phones and no Email or texting the kid who is standing three feet from you. We had none of that. What we lacked in technology we more than made up for in raw imagination. We had to be resourceful and we were good at it. We were good at making something out of nothing. If one of us had just finished inhaling a Popsicle, we'd lay down the Popsicle stick in the middle of the sidewalk, break out a rubber ball {there was always a rubber ball handy} and play a game called Hit the Stick. It was like a tennis match only different. Before you knew it there were kids crowded around the sidewalk wanting to play the winner. We would spend an entire afternoon hitting a Popsicle stick with a rubber ball. Later that same ball was used for a heated game of Single, Double, Triple which I'll tell you more about in Part Two. Yes folks the dreaded Part Two. Hey, it's a long summer .See you next month.