

"That Was A Time"

**Tales of O'Hara Public School and
the Strip District in Pittsburgh, PA
in the 1920's & 1930's**

**By
Jack Shore**

PREFACE

O'hara was an eight grade public school, built in 1895. It was named for General O'Hara who served in the Continental Army during the American Revolution. It had eight grades and was located at the corner of 25th Street and Smallman Street. D. J. Broderick was the principal and he was the youngest principal in the school system when he was appointed. His sister taught the sixth grade. Kindergarten and first and second grades were self contained. After that we changed classes. Discipline was very strict. We were not permitted to talk after the bell rang for classes to begin. No talking without permission, no chewing gum, and "Pay attention".

The building had three stories, basement and bell tower. The bell was rung ten minutes before school began and ten minutes before the lunch break was over. The bell could be heard all over the community. In the morning we would come early for a chance to pull the bell rope. The rope came down through a hole in the ceiling, and it took all your strength to make the first pull. After that it speeded up and the momentum in the bell would lift you off the floor as you hung onto the rope. It was fun.

The basement was used for storage and also was used for voting at election time. The whole school was electrified one election when the principal D. J. Broderick was arrested for some altercation during the voting. We did not know whether he was protesting the placement of the booths, or was electioneering. He was a small forceful man that I never saw smiling. I know that he was active in his community as he was the sponsor of a basketball team on the North Side.

Our eighth grade teacher was Miss Casey, who drilled us in mathematics. By the time you graduated you knew all of the tables up to twelve. Miss Mooney taught art. Miss Herron taught literature. She impressed the students by always wearing a splash of color, either in a dress, or belt, or scarf. All of the other teachers wore black dresses and white collars.

For eighth grade we had a morning each week of manual training. For this we had to walk to Springfield School at 31st Street and Smallman Street. Miss Clouse was the teacher and we were impressed with her ability in carpentry. Putting a chamfer on a piece of wood, I still cannot do: but hers always came out perfectly even. We made a door stop, a broom holder, and a taboret. I found the hand sanding too laborious. Each step had to be approved by her, before you could move on. She was a tough taskmaster, but we really learned from her.

The student body had a large number of first generation students who were children of immigrants. They were Irish, Jewish, Italians, Slavs, Blacks and other groups. Besides the employment opportunities in the yards for fruit and vegetable handlers, there were many small plants located in the Strip. It was a heavy industrial district. There were carpenter shops, steel forging shops, and manufacturing plants that could use skilled and unskilled workers. There was bridge access to the North Side to take advantage of job opportunities there. There was much to be learned in the Strip.

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Father Cox

There were Hooverville's all across the country in the early 1930's. The one I used to wander through was between Penn and Liberty Avenues between 17th and 18th Streets. The property had an old one room office on it which contained a desk and an old leather sofa. I was in it only once and Father Cox was standing as they all were and having a serious discussion about something. Outside the property was dotted with little shelters which I thought would be a great way to live. The homes were large packing crates made of wood and trimmed on the outside with latticework made from the dunnage that came from the freight cars in the adjacent yards. These are the laths used in shipments to keep the stacks of fruit and vegetable boxes from shifting. All the box homes were trimmed, some of the trimming was painted and with the snow, it gave the property a fairy land look. Some of them had a little low entry tunnel that you would have to crawl through to get to the big box that you couldn't stand up in. The crawl space looked like the entrance to an igloo. St. Patrick Church was adjacent to the property, and I suspect that the men could eat and bathe at St. Patrick's.

I knew Father Cox because my dad owned a grocery store and meat market occasionally he got a call from him saying "Max, what do you have for me?" and then "I'll send somebody up". My direct connection with Father Cox came in 1931 when he made his march on Washington. Liberty Avenue around St. Patrick's was so tied up that the street cars that took us to Schenley High School could not get through. I was about an hour and a half late in getting to school and as I waited at the car stop I watched the parade of cars and trucks heading east on Liberty Avenue. All the cars were full and the backs of the trucks were loaded with men. When we got to school, the teacher at the door didn't even bother to take our names. He would just wave us in and said go to the class in session now. Our neighbor Regis who lived over Miller's Shoe Store got fired from his job for joining the march. His boss said that if he could take three days off the job to march he didn't need a job. Rege didn't see it that way.

Strawberries

Each time that I spent in the store was not a positive experience. I ran into a few misjudgments that haunted me all of my life. In strawberry season, the strawberries were kept on the counter so that the customers could see them and a final pitch could be made. As mother was finishing up with one of the customers she casually mentioned that strawberries were in season, they were very sweet, and her children might enjoy them with cream. The suggestion overtook me, and I pleaded with mother to take some home. I loved strawberries and would certainly enjoy them no matter how they were prepared. And I asked why we never had strawberries. The customer coldly looked at mother and said "Why don't you give them to your own kids", and she walked out. Well, the cause celebre was never to be forgotten. I suffered a two hour lecture and had the whole lecture recalled every time strawberries were even mentioned. Truly, I didn't deserve this.

A similar incident occurred with Dad and he yelled at me but promptly forgot it. We had two barrels of herring in the store, and they smelled awful. I hated to walk by them. I don't remember anyone ever purchasing any of them. At least when I was there. I remember when they were brought in. One day two women got out of a fancy car and asked Dad if he had herring. They may have thought of us as an ethnic market. Dad promptly hauled out the herring and had them on the scale, when one of the women asked if they were old or new stock. Dad assured them that this was new stock. I said "Oh no they've been here for years". On my advice they decided not to buy. When they left, Dad said when I am talking to a customer you keep your mouth shut or I'll warm your bottom. But then he forgot it. He never raised it again and I certainly was not going to.

One summer at the beginning of vacation, Sid and I asked Dad for a paying job. We would stay in the store all day and work and asked what he would give us at the end of the week. He said fifty cents and we agreed to work. The first day he put us to work cleaning the greens. If the greens didn't sell, the next day they had to be cleaned to remove the slimy spinach leaves and the yellow leaves from the kale and collard greens. We also carried mustard greens on occasion. After an hour of removing slimy leaves from the spinach, I couldn't sit any longer and I decided it was much more important to play than to earn money. Since then my priorities have untwisted. But Sidney stuck with it for a whole week. Cleaning shelves, sweeping the floor, stocking shelves, filling the bag holders, the paper holders, the twine holders, these are the random jobs we had to do whenever Dad caught us. But to do it for the whole time the store was open was too much for me. By the way the store was open a half a day, from seven in the morning until seven at night. Sunday was seven in the morning until noon. How I envied the half dollar that Sidney earned by sticking the whole week. He only worked one week.

Moonshine And Numbers

Our neighborhood in the Strip District was dotted with moonshine joints and numbers operations. Some of them I only suspected, but in some of them I had evidence. Across the street from us on the corner of 27th street was one. As far as I know, these places had no names. They certainly didn't advertise, except by word of mouth. Every two or three months, the store across the street would get raided. There would be five or six men who would be led out by the police and into the patrol wagon. It was so expected that a crowd wouldn't even gather. The men would come out drunk and singing and greet the police and exchange ribaldries. The next day they were back in business. Once someone tried to hold up the liquor joint. The men came out firing guns into the street and mother ran out to bring in my brother Abe who was playing on the sidewalk.

My own entry into the prohibited business was as a courier. Our grocery store was on the corner of 27th street and we lived on the second floor of 2709 Penn Avenue. When Dad had a customer, I would be sent up to the house to see mother. Dad would call in the order, and a flat bottle would be placed in the pocket of my overcoat. I was never asked to carry more than one. I would trot down to the store and Dad would take me into the back room where he removed the delivery and handed it to the customer. I was completely innocent. In any case, the detectives came one day to raid us. Sidney and I were seated on chairs near the door and told not to move. Dad continued to wait on his grocery customers while the detectives searched. While reaching for a can over my shoulder, Dad casually mentioned to me to run home and tell mother that the police were in the store. I didn't hear him properly and yelled out, "What did you say". He shushed me and Sidney said "I will Dad". He ran home and told Mother and she immediately flushed the evidence down the toilet. In the meantime the detectives were standing in front of me and one said "Weren't there two kids here". And the second one said "Nah, only one". I started to protest that there were two, when I got the high sign from Dad to shut up. They found a glass in the back room that they thought might have smelled from alcohol, but they found no evidence. They left disappointed, and Sidney had snatched my chance to be a hero.

I found eight brown flat whisky bottles and immediately hurried with them to a joint in the 2600 block of Penn Avenue. At two cents apiece, I expected to get sixteen cents.

When I showed the bottles to the man, he said, "No kid, these are the full sixteen ounce pints. We only buy the fourteen ounce pints. If you find any bring them here."

The numbers operation for the city was run from an apartment over my Dad's store on Penn Avenue. Dad would send me up stairs occasionally for change for a twenty. I would knock on the door, a man would look through the peephole and say "Whatdoyouwantkid?". I said my father sent me up for change. He would direct me to one of the ten or fifteen card tables that were set up with hand adding machines and money and number slips. The man at the table would give me the change and down I would go. They worked very fast up there, but it was all hand labor. Later when it could be computerized the state took it over. Every Friday, a motorcycle cop would pull up and park at the corner in front of the fireplug. He went up to the numbers joint and came down with a big manila envelope. He casually threw it into the motorcycle sidecar and drove off.

Everyone played numbers. You could buy a dream book for ten cents. It had about six or seven hundred numbers in it recommended for that weeks play. In that weeks play, if one of the numbers recommended did not hit, you brought the book back to the store that you bought it and they gave you a new book for the following week free. Which was a fair deal. Of course there are only 999 possible numbers, so by cutting it down to a selection of six or seven hundred they were offering you a fair advantage for only a dime. I don't recall their ever having to give out any free books. So the buyers must have liked the system.

Dad played the numbers without the book. I remember one day a man came in with a system that forecasted the next days number from the previous days number. Think of the advantage. The problem with the system is that once a zero got into the system it never came out. This limited its usefulness. When Dad was in the store, he played the numbers and gave the numbers man his ten cents. When Dad had to go to the market he had to leave his number with Mother to play for him. She hated the numbers. She told Dad that she had played them and she hadn't. One day Dad came back from the market thinking he had hit for a dime. That would have given him a payoff of sixty dollars. He came home singing until Mother told him that she didn't play it. He got very angry and swore off playing the numbers ever again. He couldn't beat both the numbers and Mother.

O'Hara Park

Alongside O'Hara School's playground was a strip of land that was overgrown with weeds, bottles, cans etc. I don't think that the property belonged to the school. I would estimate it at about 15 feet wide and 75 feet long. Principal Broderick announced at an assembly that this strip of wasteland was to be turned into O'Hara Park with grass and everything like park benches. Mothers would bring their little children down here to play. This was exciting, because in the Strip District there was no grass. There were no trees, and I don't remember any bushes. Mother always had some house plants going, especially ivy.

The eighth grade was excused from class, and we were rushed into the project with no preparation. Our planting experience was minimal. Each year during the clean-up, plant-up, paint-up campaign, we ordered seeds from the school. Usually they were exotic plants like watermelons, cantaloupes, and maybe a flower. My first planting experience was in planting some Bing Cherry Seeds in about an inch of soil up against the wall on the side of a brick building on 27th street. The building faced Penn Avenue and I never saw the sidewalk at the side of the building swept, so I thought that this would be a good place where no one would disturb my cherry trees. I devoured six cherries and planted the seeds about six inches apart. I didn't want the trees to grow too close together. For the first hour, I must have dug up the seeds every fifteen minutes. No growth was observed. I waited until the next day and dug them up again. Still no growth. After the second day there was still no growth and I forgot about them.

By the time that I bought seeds from the school I knew that the soil alongside the building wouldn't grow anything. I asked my friend Moses, if I could plant seeds in his yard. He let me put the watermelon seeds in his yard and in about a week, I had nice inch high watermelon plants. They then disappeared. I think that the local rodent population got to them.

After preparing the soil at O'Hara Park, we took a field trip to a farm where we filled a dozen jute bags (sugar sacks) with grass cuttings which had gone to seed in the field. These were spread all over the park, and we prayed for rain. I don't remember the weather, we may have gotten some rain, but we sure didn't get grass. No more than 10% of the property was grass covered and the program faltered. I was not close enough to management to get the assessment on the failure. I was too busy trying to hold on to a rake or shovel, because if you didn't have a tool in your hand, you were sent back to class.

Sibling Rivalry

Brother Sidney and I had a few conflicts but it never developed into sibling rivalry. He was twenty one months older than I, and we got along reasonably well. He loved to read and I was the outdoor type so we didn't compete in those areas. Sometimes the anger peaked, and I remember throwing a knife at him, it went wide of the mark. I was always warned not to throw anything at anyone.

I do remember one altercation whose details escape me but the sequelae remained with us for a long time. I was running away from him and ran into our hallway to escape him. The hallway led to a set of stairs that went up to our apartment on the second floor. The hallway also had two doors. One into the street and one to the bottom of the stairs. Both doors had glass panels. I sailed past the outer door, and past the inner door, slammed the inner door shut and put my foot against it. Sidney thought that I was hotfooting it up the stairs, so he lunged against the inner door to throw it open. It didn't open because my foot was holding it and his arm went through the door. The glass flew every where and I was very lucky not to have gotten cut. On the other hand Sidney withdrew his arm and it was covered with blood. He was rushed to Dr. Goldstein who put in more stitches than I care to remember. Dr. Goldstein had served as an army doctor in World War I and he did a neat stitching job. However the scars looked mean for a while. They have softened with time, but the scars are still observable to this day. Permanent scarring they called it. Fortunately for Sidney, the wounds were not deep. I think that sibling rivalry must have been introduced years after we grew up, because Mother insisted that we had none in our family.

Snake Oil

Each year we would see snake oil salesmen come to 27th Street, put on a show and do their pitch. One had an Indian in full regalia who did a little circle dance. He really drew a crowd. Our experience with Indians was very limited. At Carnegie Museum there was a permanent display of Indians in breech cloths. One of the hucksters that used to hang out in Dad's store had a side kick named Tom who was a one-armed Indian. He had lost the other arm in an industrial accident. But here was a real live Indian and he was dressed like in the movies. After the Indian gathered a crowd, the boss on the side of the truck stage put on his performance. He poured out of a bottle of clear colorless moonshine that goes into your stomach, then he poured in some of the stomach juices that it would mix with internally. The mix truly looked vile. Then he poured in some of the aqua viva that he was selling and the color immediately changed to a lemon yellow color that was easily expelled. All of these salesmen were interested in public health and were selling the product at ridiculously low prices. Not only that, for every bottle you bought, you got one free. To get the free goods you had to take advantage of this offer immediately. The second pitch man had the same kind of wagon but no Indian. His crowd was much smaller.

Then there was a black pitchman who travelled with a man whom he referred to as the devil. Because he was the devil, he could handle snakes without getting bitten, and he put on a show with long snakes around his neck. After the performance the pitch came. All three of the pitchmen used the same demonstration of what goes in your stomach. Instead of free goods, this man offered a good luck charm which looked like a very small buckeye. He guaranteed that it would keep evil away and the devil confirmed it. Mr. Segars bought the juice and got the buckeye. I asked him to give me the buckeye. He said "I am not going to give my good luck away".

Sidney At The Movies

Going to the movies with my brother Sidney was always an experience. Each Saturday we were each given a nickel and we trotted across and up the street to the Palace Theater. The local people called it Smitty's. It featured cowboy movies primarily, but it also got first run movies after they had been out for two or three years. Here I saw Les Miserables and Resurrection, but I preferred Tom Mix and other western stars. On Saturday we also saw a serial, and I was always amazed when the hero was not really killed and reappeared in the next episode. One day Sid said do you want to go to the movies and I said sure. I was about five years old and Sid was seven. So we trotted off to the movies. After about a half hour, my father strolled into the movie theater. I had never seen him at the Palace before. He and mom used to go weekly to the Loew's Penn or the Stanley downtown. Grandma Kirchner came with us occasionally and we would have to translate the silent words into yiddish for her. On this occasion Dad had his butcher apron on, he grabbed us by the arms and took us home. I don't remember any conversation transpiring and I didn't feel threatened. He took us up stairs, put his foot on a chair, put us over his knee one at a time, and belted us pretty good, Sidney first. It wasn't until years later that I knew why I was being punished. Sidney had not told me that he had taken two nickels from the cash register.

The next major incident came about five years later and gave us a lesson in littering. We were chewing gum on the street car headed for a big treat at the Stanley Theater with cousin Pearl. Sidney bundled up the green Wrigley gum wrappers and threw them out the window. Bundled up with the gum wrappers were the dollar bills that were for our admission and the street car ride home. Everyone felt bad on the twenty block walk home.

Sidney Medal

My brother Sidney's grade school graduation exercises were held outdoors. Mr. Duffy, the janitor at O'Hara School hauled the benches out of Miss Allen's gymnasium classroom and lined them up on the playground. All of the graduates were there together with whatever family that could get off from work for the ten A.M. event. We were very proud when Sidney was presented with a brass medal from the American Legion for citizenship. He still has it.

As the ceremonies were winding down, an egg came hurtling out of the rear of the playground and struck my mother on the side of her head. Fortunately I was on the other side of her and did not get splattered. Mother screamed and gathered up her brood and hurried home. She called the police and they sent our beat cop named Smitty over to us to take a report. Apparently it was an isolated incident, there were no other egg attacks reported. Smitty did say that he knew how hard it must have felt because he found out that if he shot a bullet straight up into the air, it had enough force in it to kill you when it came down.

The perpetrator was never identified or found. But I had my suspicions. A group of kids would stone the teachers as they left the last day of school. These were kids that did not expect to return the next year. At sixteen you didn't have to go to school. Our school had corporal punishment. You were taken down to the basement and Mr. Duffy would hold the student while our principal D.J. Broderick would pound his bottom with a special paddle. It had two long lath like rulers held about an inch apart by a plug. The plug was attached to a handle. When the paddle struck, the second paddle above was supposed to add an unbearable sting. The paddle was exhibited more than it was used. The toughest kids in our class were held in line with the threat of it. I remember one incident when the principal returned one crying student to the classroom and walked over to another and said "Watch you step or you are going to be next". The whole class froze.

Westview Park

Westview Park is where our school held its annual picnic. Since time immemorial the Shore family looked forward to the school picnic at the amusement park. We could buy tickets in advance through the school at two for a nickel, while at the park you had to pay a nickel each. Most rides were one ticket, but some required two tickets and the newest rides might require three tickets. The principal used to get books of special free tickets and these used only one ticket for whatever ride it was. So when I said hello to our principal Mr. Broderick and he handed me a book of twenty special tickets, I was in seventh heaven. This was to be a day that I would always remember. Brother Sidney and I travelled in tandem knocking off the airplane ride, the whip, the fun house and all the other rides. In the middle of the afternoon Sid had to use the bathroom and I waited for him at the bottom of the wooden steps to the rest room facility. Coming down the steps, he climbed onto the wooden railing and slid part way. In the process his bottom absorbed more than one large splinter which he ignored. When we got home he could no longer ignore them and mother had to work him over. It was too much for her and the next day we called Dr. Goldstein to finish the job. He did some cutting to remove all the splinters and had to give Sidney a tetanus shot to prevent lock jaw. From the tetanus shot he developed rheumatic fever and was sick for about two weeks. In the middle of the cure the Doctor told mother that he would need a urine sample. Mother put a large pan on the hall floor and Sid and I and brother Abe proceeded to fill it up. We thought we were helping Sidney. When the Doctor came for the sample, there must have been a three gallon sample available! The doctor insisted on a fresh sample so all of our effort went for naught. Sid recovered anyway.

Our problem is that we told our folks that the splinter came from the toilet seat and not from the rail. This lie caused us no end of pain. Dad hired attorney Harry Appelstein, our landlord's son and he proceeded to sue Westview. Somehow when it came time to view the crime scene, Sidney was away at Emma Farm and I was at home because I had an ear infection and was refused admission to the camp. The attorney and I and Dad rode out to Westview in the attorney's car and met the manager of Westview at his office. They then asked me to show them where the splintering occurred and I took them to the appropriate facility. They asked me which stall he had used and I pointed to the only free stall. There are about ten more stalls, but they required a nickel for entrance and I knew that Sidney had no cash on him and would certainly not have paid five cents for the use of a stall. The attendant opened the free stall, and there was a white polished toilet bowl with no seat at all. To use it sitting down you would have to sit on the

ceramic. He opened a few of the pay stalls and they all had toilet seats that were shiny and certainly would not give splinters. The attorney brushed the whole thing off with "You know how kids remember" and we got in the car and drove home. The viewing occurred almost a year after the event. It was a great ride to and from Westview. Dad pursued the subject with Sid and me, but got nowhere and finally dropped it. Truly its a day that I don't care to remember, But I can't help it.

Sold Into Slavery

One day when I was about four and a half a huckster came to Dad's store to loaf for a while. He came frequently and I knew him well for about four years. Out of the blue he points to me and says to Dad "Say that's a nice little boy. I would like to have a nice little boy like that. Would you sell him to me"? Dad said sure. The man said what about selling him for a quarter and Dad agreed. I was frightened, ran out of the store and stayed hidden until the huckster had gone. I knew that a quarter was a lot of money and Dad might have been attracted to the deal because of the sum involved, but I did not think that it was right. Somehow I thought that if he wanted to buy me, I should have gotten the quarter. I was very careful after that to avoid being in the store when this huckster came in.

Each summer, about five of us would get together to accumulate iron to sell to the junk man. We scoured the railroads and byways looking for any piece of metal we could find. The junkman came through every week and when we had acquired a collection that took two weeks of concentrated work to accumulate, we called to the junk man. He stopped his horse and wagon and came over and looked over the pile. He said I'll give you a dime for everything that you got there. We were sure that we were being robbed but the dime looked big and we made the deal. The next time we accumulated for a month and two bushels full instead of one. The junkman said I'll give you a dime for all that you have got. When we protested, he said the price of junk was down and he had trouble selling it. Now if we could collect rags he could give us much more money. This was our first introduction to the commodities market and the influence of national trends on local prices. We felt that we had learned a lesson and the following year we decided to accumulate all summer and offer it to two or three junk men. All three told us that prices were down and they could only give us a dime.

Dad had a great big sponge that must have been a foot in diameter. I liked to throw it up in the air and catch it like a big mushball. I was around the corner from the store playing with it when I was approached by a man who said he would give me a nickel for the sponge. I knew that it was old and dirty so I sold it. I ran into the store and told dad that I had sold the old dirty sponge for a nickel. He yelled at me to give the nickel back and get the sponge for he needed it to clean the big windows of the store. I ran outside but the sponge man was gone. I was despondent as I had to tell Dad that I couldn't reverse the trade and I got a big lecture on selling things that don't belong to you.

Brother Abe

As my younger Abe approached school age, Mother wanted to Americanize his name, so she got everyone to call him Allen. We would catch him and say to him, "Abe, what is your name". And he would respond Allen. There were several weeks of training and then came the big day when Mother took him to kindergarten. The teacher said to him, "What is your name"? And he responded Allen. And then she said "What is your second name"? and he responded Abe. That was the end of the name change. Also the first day of kindergarten Abe left school and followed Mother all the way home, but at a safe distance and hiding so that she wouldn't see him.

In fifth grade my teacher Lulu B. Laughlin told me that I should stop using the name Jack, because it is a diminutive for the name John. Henceforth, I was to use only the name John since I was now a big boy. When I got home I told my Mother of the name change and she blew up at the teacher. She said "Who is she to be naming my children. We call you Jack because your name is Jacob and not John. I want you to continue using the name Jack. It's none of her business and tell her that I said so"! Well, no way was I going to tell Miss Laughlin what Mother said. I quaked as I went to school not knowing what to do. Not knowing what to do, I did nothing. Lulu never raised the subject again and neither did I. The name Jack fit me perfectly.

Firing Briley

All the students at O'Hara knew that Miss Briley was the newest teacher. She was always well prepared with her lesson plans, and made excellent presentations but control of the class was always being tested. When Tom acted up for the third time, in desperation Miss Briley called him up to the front of the class and told him to hold out his hands. The ruler was not going to be used flat, but on edge and with a metal edge yet. Furiously she raised the ruler above her head and come down toward his hand. But the metal edge of the rule struck his forehead and opened a one inch gash. The blood flowed. Tom never uttered a word. She immediately hustled him up to the office and returned alone in about a half hour in a severely agitated condition. When I reported what went on at home, my Mother said that she would probably be fired for that. I thought that the punishment was extreme, but what did I know. I was wondering where they would fire her and figured that the best spot for an auto-de-fe was in an empty lot two doors up from the school. There was an old clothes line post on the property and I figured they could tie her to the post. I wondered if they would blindfold her. In my minds eye, I could see the flames dancing around her. I wondered if I would be permitted to watch. Maybe the whole class could watch. I liked Miss Briley and was sorry to be losing her this way, but I knew that it was out of my hands once sentence is rendered. I must have been seven years old, because when I was eight this property was having a warehouse built on it. She must have had a good lawyer, because Miss Briley was at O'Hara long after I was gone.

Miss Mooney's Art Class

Each year the seventh and eighth grades of O'Hara Public School in the Strip District made a field trip to the Carnegie Museum under the tutelage of Miss Mooney, the art teacher. We would sally forth from the school, board the 77/54 street car, known as the flying fraction, on Liberty Avenue and be at the museum in twenty minutes.

While yet at school, Miss Mooney gave each of us a car check, and carefully instructed us to put the check away safely as we would use it for the return fare. In that way we could leave the museum at our leisure and not return in a body. With Miss Mooney at the rear of the line of about 28 well scrubbed and well dressed students, we began boarding the street car. As the first student got on, the conductor asked the student to put his fare in the box. The student dutifully put his check in the box and the twenty seven students behind him did the same. When Miss Mooney boarded, she was several steps behind the last student because of a little difficulty in mounting the three steps up. She did not see the last student put his check in the box. She dumped in 29 checks to pay for the students and herself and sat down. Only when we alighted and were seated in the museum, did Miss Mooney find out that we had paid double.

While we were being lectured by the museum staff, Miss Mooney sent Josephine out to the car stop to buy 30 checks from a street car conductor. We only needed 29 car checks, but they were ten cents each or three for a quarter. Josephine was the oldest girl in our class, almost 14 years old. She also had the nicest handwriting of anyone in our class. She was always selected to write things on the board and allowed to clean the blackboard with a big wet sponge and a pail of water.

While she was out we were shown a real hollowed out leg of an elephant. Then there was a large model of a seed. It looked like an orange, but was a foot tall, and opened to show the different parts of the seed. One little part in there was to serve as food for the seed when it began to grow. It was very interesting. After the lecture, Miss Mooney lined us up and made the second distribution of car checks. She reminded us that we had been told to save the car check for the return trip, and we all had a hang dog look on our faces because we knew that she was right. But the conductor was an adult and he said "Put the fare in the box", and we did. The field trip to the museum was great fun and very educational.

Kindergarten

Kindergarten was great, although there were a few incidents. Once one of the two teachers called me over and said that she heard that I had used a dirty word and was going to get my mouth taped up. I never used dirty words even though I knew them all by the time I was in kindergarten. The customers, the drivers, the butchers all used dirty words and it was accepted by all. But we knew that we were not to repeat them and we didn't. I was partial to the word "heck" and that may have been my downfall. I understand that it was a little girl that reported me. In her lexicon it may have been considered dirty. The teacher refused to tell me what the word was; she wouldn't repeat it. The situation had a Kafkaesque quality with no recourse to justice. I had book repair tape fastened across my mouth and could not speak the rest of the morning. The incident still galls me.

We always went home for lunch and returned for the afternoon session. With us kindergarten was an all day affair. One afternoon, I was enjoying a session with a couple of boys who didn't go to school and I decided to forego the pleasure. After what seemed like an eternity, I decided that it was time to go back to the store. I must have gotten there about an hour and a half before school let out. Mother wanted to know what I was doing home so early. I told her that the teacher heard me cough twice and thought that I might have a cold so she sent me home. I was trying to think fast. Dad said that if I was lying, the salesman for Jesse C. Stewart who was in the store was a constable and he would run me right to jail. The salesman smiled and said he would be happy to oblige. I felt like a butterfly pinned and just made myself as small as possible. Fortunately, they got busy with customers and forgot about me. The issue was never revisited and I certainly was not going to raise it.

Roly Coaster

Being young and naive, we innocently presented ourselves with danger that was avoided through no effort on our part. One of these was building a roly coaster in Herb's back yard. Our fortunes were going to be made when we built it and charged all of the neighborhood kids a penny each for a ride. We faced some engineering problems that we could not solve and that's why the coaster was never finished. But we spent much time working on it. Herb's back yard, shared with two other families, had a shed with a roof about eight feet high. We started putting the track together on boards about six feet long and one foot wide and about an inch thick. I don't remember where we got them but they seemed to be readily available. Down the center of the track we had a wooden strip, half an inch thick, which represented our rail and was fastened to the shed roof. A support was built from the ground to the rail, and a second rail was attached to this at about six foot high. The next rail came down to four feet. Beyond this there had to be a turn as we were approaching a wall. We never figured out how to make a track with a turn on it. We took a soap box and fastened two skates to it that would ride on the rail. That worked out fine. For a test run on the unfinished track we tried to talk brother Abe into riding down the eighteen feet in place. He refused. Herb and I were too scared to do it. The job foundered for lack of engineering skill and guts. I think we got away lucky.

I decided one day that I could skate very fast and all I needed was someone to pull me. I went up to the 31st street bridge which crossed the Allegheny River to observe the traffic patterns to see if I could hitch onto a car. I saw that some cars turned onto the bridge, stopped to discharge a passenger and then proceeded across the bridge. I didn't have to wait long for a candidate. A car stopped, discharged a passenger and took off. I took off with him holding onto the bumper. He started up to about twenty to twenty five miles an hour and I was getting more and more scared. I was afraid to let go since I would have nothing to hold onto. And I was afraid to hold on because I was bouncing pretty good. After two minutes, I decided this is it and I let go. We were about a third the way across the bridge. I decelerated rapidly, and remained erect. I climbed onto the sidewalk and slowly skated home shaking like a leaf the whole time. I knew that I had an experience that could have had dire consequences.

I went back to climbing box cars in the yards which was reasonably safe. The cars were scattered all over Smallman Street and as long as you didn't see a locomotive there was no one to bother you . And a locomotive couldn't sneak up on you. The bells and whistles gave ample warning. We pushed everything that we could push on the box cars and got splashed with the residual water from the ice chamber. Icing cars used to be a big business. That's what the big ice house was for where Wholey's Fish Market is now. Special trucks with special gear would load the big blocks of ice into both ends of the refrigerator cars to keep the fruits and vegetables from spoiling in transit. These trucks were dedicated to that one mission and they spent all day and probably all night doing just that. Before the auction platform was built in the strip, there were team tracks all over the place. A team track is where a car is placed so that a team of horses can pull a wagon over to it or a truck back into it for unloading the car. There are still many businesses that get carloads of merchandise and they have no siding. The car is spotted on a team track and the buyer sends his trucks over to unload the merchandise. You only get so much time to unload the car. After that you had to pay demurrage, like rental for the car. I remember that a salvage house named Arndt got a carload of apples which he couldn't sell. To release the car so that he would not have to pay demurrage on it, he gave the apples away free to anyone that came for them. It was in the papers, and we passed the car spotted on Smallman Street when we went to school.

Cheder

After school, we regularly went to Hebrew School. It was held at a synagogue on Liberty Avenue and we had to wait for the Rabbi to come to open the door to let us in. In the winter time it got too cold in the Synagogue and all of the students would gather in our dining room for the sessions. When we were at the Synagogue we were chased regularly on the way home by kids who were intent on beating us up. Half way home there was a little Italian delicatessen who knew us and we would duck in there until the miscreants left. Sometimes they would wait and stalk us, but the store owner would come out and chase them. These same kids would never bother us in the neighborhood, but only on the way home from cheder.

Herb's mother owned the store next door to hers, and since it was so rarely rented, she had room in the display windows to advertise the circuses that came to town. The signs would go up for Ringling Brothers, and all the other circuses. For this she got free passes. Herb took me to see Ringling Brothers. I must have been ten years old. Everything fascinated me. Something different was always going on in each of the three rings. But that's a circus. In downtown, on Liberty Avenue there was a traveling flea circus, with a few sideshows. The barker at the flea circus announced that detectives has told him that there were pickpockets in the theater and he wanted everyone there to check their wallets to make sure they weren't missing. I saw all of the hands go for the jackets and pants pockets, and at my tender age I knew it was a scam to reveal where the crown jewels were. I kept my hand on my wallet in my pocket the whole time I was in there.

Sunday afternoons in the fall there would be a football game at Marshall field. Marshall field was off limits to me because it was along the Allegheny River. The Lawrenceville team would play here against other sandlot teams. About every fourth game, the police would come and say that the Blue Laws of Pennsylvania didn't permit sports on Sunday. When the police came there was no game. I remember one team called the Collegiates who were disappointed because the cops showed up. In the summer there was swimming just off Marshall field in the Allegheny River. There was a dock, a diving board and a lifeguard. We had no swim suits and mother wouldn't let us swim in the river if we had. One summer the local alderman passed out free swim suits to the kids in the neighborhood and they turned on a sprinkler on 27th Street. The big kids pushed me out of the way during distribution and when I got up to the counter all the suits were gone. Mother was not displeased. She said if you want to cool off get into the tub. We were not permitted to go barefoot as many of the kids did. She was afraid of broken glass.

Strip Events

Things happened in the Strip District that were just unaccountable. One day Sid and I were playing in the 2600 block up the street from the store. Across the street was a stable where work horses were stabled. One day Luddy was unhitching a pair of work horses and they got spooked. They ran as fast as they could up the sidewalk across the street with Luddy holding the traces screaming "Whoa, Whoa". He had to run as fast as the horses to keep up with them. They ran down 25th Street in front of the police station, crossed the street and doubled back to where Sid and I were standing. A passing man grabbed Sidney and stuck him in a doorway. Me, he put in the street between two cars. The horses came pounding down the sidewalk and ran up Penn Avenue before Luddy could bring them to a halt. I felt as though a train was passing me by, but I didn't feel scared. I didn't know the danger. Since then I have always steered clear of runaway horses.

I was standing in front of the store one day, when all of the glass around me started shattering. I looked up the street and a big Mack truck looked as though it had jumped a foot in the air. Mother came running out of the store and asked what happened. I explained to Mother that somehow the truck had jumped into the air and when it landed it broke all the windows. I don't know whether she bought it or not, but the next day, the newspaper headlined a big explosion at the refinery at 57th and Butler Streets.

One day after getting a haircut, I came home and found two quarters in my shirt pocket. I was thrilled. I started making plans for getting new skate wheels for skates. When I showed my skates to Dad and asked him if I could get a new pair, he said go to the hardware store and see if they won't trade in the skates as you do with a car. I tried to talk the hardware man into talking business, but he refused to trade in the skates. The most he would do was to sell me new wheels to replace the ones with hot-boxes. With fifty cents I could buy four wheels which would have moved the project along. When I broached the proposition to Mother and told her I had found fifty cents, she wanted to know where I found them. When I reported that I found them right in my shirt pocket, her next question was had I paid the barber. In a flash the big picture came to me. Crestfallen, I withdrew from the project and gave the barber his due.

Sometimes Dad would borrow a horse and wagon and run to the yards about seven blocks away to pick up some fruits and vegetables for the store. Once he took me along and I had to wait in the wagon while he shopped. Being on my own, I did what I always wanted to do. I sat on the edge of the tailgate and swung my legs. I had always seen big boys doing this and I certainly wanted to be a big boy. I sat in the middle of the tailgate and had nothing to hold on. When the horse moved, the wagon moved and I moved. I fell and my lip began to bleed and I started to scream. People came running from all over. Dad came over too and everything got quieted down. I never got another ride to the market.

Games

The games we played are no longer played by later generations. The Goodwill had a playground with swings, sliding boards and teeter totters. But the competitive games were not played on playgrounds but on empty lots. One of our favorites was caddy. An old broom handle had about ten inches cut off of it and one end was whittled down as though it were put into a pencil sharpener. A sharp point was not needed however. This was the caddy. It was placed perpendicularly on top of a small piece of wood or a lead pencil so that the rear of the caddy was on the ground and the sharpened end was raised in the air. The caddy would be at about a 15 degree angle to the ground. When the end in the air was struck with the broom handle, it would fly two or three feet in the air and maybe a step forward from where it was placed. This was easy. After it was in the air the broom handle was used to give it a whack to make it go as far as possible. It would sail out twenty or thirty steps, and the wacker would go out and pick up the caddy. He counted the number of steps back to home plate and this was his score. Each kid took turns and the first one to get one hundred steps won the game. Usually three to five times at bat would bring in a winner for a good batter. It took quite a gift of skill to bring up the caddy and then be ready to send it sailing. Good players could try to hit it a second time after it rose from the initial whack, and then sail it out with a good hit. By doing this he could count double steps. Usually this was tried if you had fallen way behind in the count because it was not easy to do. Since scores were individual, new players could come in at any time or old ones leave without disrupting the game.

Another favorite was kick the stick. This was played on a corner, each corner being a base. One corner had to have a telephone pole on it. An eighteen inch long stick that was about two inches wide was perfect although variants were permissible. The stick was placed leaning against the pole and the batter kicked it with his instep into the field. One player was in the field and all the rest were batters. If the fielder caught the stick on the fly the batter was out and the batter became the fielder. The fielder then took his place in line for a time at bat. If the fielder did not catch the stick on the fly the batter ran to first base. If the fielder was able to pick up the stick and return it to the batting pole before the batter got to first, the batter was out. No score was kept. You just kept batting around replacing the fielder with the batter that was out. When you were on base you were not permitted to leave the base until the stick was kicked. If you left the base before the stick was kicked you were out. Sometimes the person running from third base to home was out instead of the batter.

Since there were no umpires there was also much bickering. If a fist fight broke out over the calls there were no referees as well. But the fighters were honor bound to agree whether they

were going to fight stand-off (Marquis of Queensbury Rules) or anyway she comes (usually mor-wrestling than fighting). Kick the stick was a great game.

We had skates and hoops which we rolled by hitting with a stick and played horse shoes in the Moses back yard. There were many hoops around which came off of broken barrels. Many things were shipped in barrels in those days. Our store always has a vinegar barrel and people brought in their containers to be filled. I remember it well, because one day I ran past the barrel and knocked the spout off it. You wouldn't believe how fast vinegar will run out of a barrel. You also wouldn't believe how fast Dad smelled the vinegar knew it's source and came running back to the vinegar barrel, picked up the spout and pounded it back into the barrel. I was careful not to get any vinegar on me since the smell adheres for a long time. By the next day you could hardly smell it in the store. I didn't get yelled at, because Dad understood that the way the spout jutted out from the barrel it was an accident waiting to happen. I didn't really do it. I was just the catalyst.

We saved milk cans like Carnation or Silver Cow. When we had saved up to two, we were ready to put them on our heels and pretend we were horses. To do this you lay down the can on its side and press the heel on your shoe into it. The harder you press, the more the flat sides of the can curl in toward your heel. You stand on the can and jump up once or twice and the can adheres firmly to the heel of your shoe. Put them both on and you are ready to trot, walk or gallop. On a concrete sidewalk you sound just like a horse. And the beauty of it is that the bond between can and heel is positively reinforced as you walk. Great fun. Can be done when alone or in tandem or with a group.

We used to make baseballs by taking a small solid rubber ball and winding string around it. We could never save enough string, so we went into the store and used the wrapping twine. Dad never objected. When the ball was the right size, we wrapped it several times with black friction tape and it was ready to go. It was better than the rocket baseballs that we bought at Becky's candy store. It lasted for weeks if we only used it for throwing and catching. You could not use it for batting practice. Two good solid swats and the stuffing started coming out of it. The beauty of it was that it was recyclable. We unwound the string, took out the solid rubber ball in the middle and started over. The only thing we had to replace was the friction tape.

Simchas Torah

Simchas Torah as any Jewish youngster can tell you is the best holiday of the year. It's even better than Purim. It celebrates the finish of the annual reading of the Torah and the beginning of the reading for the following year. Flags were passed out to the kids and decorated with an apple on top of the flag and a lit candle emerging from the apple. It was very difficult to mount the whole thing and keep it viable during the whole service. If your candle came out of the apple you had to blow it out until it could be more firmly affixed. The process of putting the apple on the flag and attaching the candle took up the whole service and used a minimum of three apples. When it was properly done though you could march around the Synagogue following the parade of Torahs. The flags were made of paper and I don't remember a flag ever catching fire. That would be unacceptable in the Synagogue on Simchas Torah. This little Synagogue was called Ohav Shalom which means house of peace. It was located on Liberty Avenue just above 28th Street. The joint must have really been chalutsadick (which means rocking) because it attracted two young men who walked in to see what was going on. They weren't there for the service because one of them was holding a pistol. They just stood there and soon the chanting died down as the word was passed that something was going on back there. My father motioned for Uncle Ike to raise the window which he did surreptitiously. Dad then slipped out of the window which was on the ground level and ran two blocks to the police station to get help. In the meantime all the women were taking off their jewels and tucking them into their bras. My Grandma Clara marched up to the intruders and said "These people are all my family. If you want to shoot someone shoot me". With that the men turned around and left. Dad and the police turned up five minutes later, but no trace was ever found. No one could figure out what they wanted, because they never said a word. Everyone thought that Grandma was very brave. It spoiled the celebration because nobody wanted to hang around after the incident.

Boys Club

The Boys Club was in the Strip District on the second floor above the Franklin Bank. Beside the bank, the local branch of Carnegie Library was there. We spent many happy hours in the library as well as the Boys Club. The club had a shower room, one big gymnasium room with a basketball court and a small side room with wrestling mats. It was fun going there. They put on a Christmas show, free to members, and when it was over, each kid got a big bag of candy, toys, coloring books and all for free. I first saw a magician perform there. He called up one of the boys from the audience and handed him a live rabbit that he had pulled out of a hat, but before the boy could take it out of his hands, he pulled it back and said "Who is going to take care of the rabbit while you are in school. Take this instead". With that he peeled off the skin of the live rabbit and handed the boy a box of cracker jack. It still amazes me. Dues were only ten cents a year, and they marked a check opposite your name when you came in. There were always tournament basketball games going on. I loved the place until the incident. One afternoon I was alone in the shower and about four bigger boys came in. One of them said look at him, and I headed for the towels. Two grabbed me and all four looked at my circumcision. I kept saying I have to get home. But they didn't hear me. The whole incident only took two minutes then they let me go. Except for holding my arms, they never touched me. I never showered there again.

I remember the torchlight parades that were held at election times. Up to fifty cars, all decorated with election posters, would drive by slowly with horns honking and red colored lit torches hanging out the window. How I envied the kids my age that I would see on parade holding torches. I remember the local constables son came running into my Dads store to get rotten eggs to throw at the passing caravan. Everyone knew that Dad did his own egg candling to grade the eggs and to throw away the rotten ones. But Dad didn't want to give them to throw. So he said to the kid. "They are thirty five cents a dozen, how many dozen do you want"? this was the regular price for fresh eggs. The kid ran out without the eggs.

The closest thing that we got to a parade was when Dad volunteered himself and his truck to the Red Cross during the 1936 flood. He and I reported to an office in Squirrel Hill and we loaded up with donated clothing. There we picked up my cousin David and we headed up the Allegheny River Boulevard to Oakmont. Traffic was very heavy, because no one could go to work, so everyone with a car wanted to see the overflowing river. We had a Red Cross sign in the front windshield and David got on the passenger side running board blowing a whistle and waving cars to get out of the way. People kept pulling to the side of the road to let us through. When we got to Oakmont a policeman told us to slow down, no one is dying here. Then he directed us to the school house at the top of the hill where we made our delivery. We felt like heroes for getting the load through so rapidly.

Rupert And Civil War

For several years, two or three that I remember, 1927-1929, O'Hara put on a pageant to celebrate Memorial Day. Back then it celebrated the Civil War and two Civil War Veterans would be brought from some veterans home. They would be placed at the front of the decorated gymnasium which was our substitute auditorium. There were recitations of Oh Captain, My Captain, and the Gettysburg Address, and we would march and sing in front of the whole school and the veterans. I always looked at these old men in their dress uniforms and wondered what their Civil War stories were. They were never introduced to the students, and we never knew where they came from, where they had fought or what they did after the war. I still remember the chorus of one of the songs we sang.

As we go marching, like soldiers true
Hail to our banner, red, white and blue
Oh may a flag forever wave
For a country free and brave
As we go marching like soldiers true

It would have been nice to get the stories of the veterans

On the other hand was our experience with the previous generation at Schenley High School. Victor M. Rupert was our home room teacher in Room 305. He was a tall thin gentleman. Every day on the blackboard would be some saying or thought for the day done in his old English style printing. He wore shirts with celluloid collars and cuffs. He taught commercial English. On his birthday, he would give us a little background of his life. He was born in the Dakota Territory the year after the Indians were put on the reservation. This was done several times which makes his birth date indeterminate between 1880 and 1890. He was the first white child born in his part of the territory. His father had a ranch and hired cowboys to help run it. Their nearest neighbor was thirteen miles away and when he was born the neighbor woman came to visit and brought his mother a rocking chair. The first time he tasted candy was when a cowboy from the ranch was in town and brought it for him for his thirteenth birthday. The cowboy carried it in his back pocket and after the long ride in the saddle, the candy was smashed. But it was the best tasting stuff he had ever had. All of the food was served on a large plate on the table, and you could take as much as you wanted. But you had to finish your plate. Anything left at the end of the meal was found on your plate at the beginning of the next meal. Everyone on the ranch ate together. He laughed at the movie version of the Cowboys and Indians. He knew them both intimately and there were rascals and good people among both. He finished the local schools went on to a small college and became a teacher. He wrote poetry with some merit one of which I remember had a haunting quality. It was about Indian maidens following the hunt to dress shot buffalo.