

*Memories of
The Old Neighborhood:*

“49th Street”

*The People, Places
and Things*

COMPLIMENTS OF:

Pagano's Italian Specialties, Drexel Hill, PA



LISTS COMPILED BY:

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with help from

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PREFACE

A short while ago, I had the heart sickened experience of driving through the "old neighborhood." For some peculiar reason, it just appeared much smaller than I had always remembered.

It was depressing to see some of our old homes boarded up and abandoned, not to mention the demolished store fronts, and the graffiti ridden buildings that were once a part of my life. As I drove up and down Thompson, Master and Kershaw Streets, there wasn't anyone I recognized and not a soul waved or even said hello. I can only explain it by comparing it to a battlefield after a war.

In spite of the sickness I felt deep inside my stomach, as I left the "old neighborhood," I also felt a stream of forgone but cherished memories that I was fortunate to experience during the 21 years I lived there. For those of us who were lucky enough to reside there and be a part of such a wonderful neighborhood, there will always exist a special common bond no matter what our age difference, no matter what our gender. Our life was our "neighborhood" and our "neighborhood" was our life, all combined within our own little private world that only a few were privileged to enjoy. Everything we wanted or needed was right there within our tiny triangular island. What a tragedy it is that our children and grandchildren couldn't share our experiences.

As time moves on, and, even though most of the "people, places and things" have disappeared or someone else now lives in our old house, the memories of 49th Street will live forever.

*Frank DiSantis
January 17, 2003*

*P.S. On January 7, 2003, the "old neighborhood" lost a true pioneer, humanitarian, and a great friend, **Emedio "Zeke" Forlini**. A man who always had time for everyone, he will be deeply missed by all his friends.*

MEMORIES OF THE OLD NEIGHBORHOOD

CONTENTS:

1.....Nicknames

2.....Places around the Neighborhood

3.....Games, Sports and Things

4.....Poem of Christmas at 49th Street

5.....Poem of The Old Neighborhood

6.....The Joy of Growing up Italian

7.....Map of the Old Neighborhood

49TH STREET NICK NAMES

NICK NAME	REAL NAME (IF KNOWN)	
ALBERT FATS	ALBERT DIGIACOMO	1
ALBERT FLAPPS	? (GIMMIE A DIME) MASTER STREET	2
ALFIE (ALFREDO)	ALFREDO DIMEMMO	3
AMI	FRANK DIGACOMO	4
ANNA BANANA	ANN O'NEIL (PANICHI)	5
ARNOLD STANG	THOMAS D'ALESSANDRO	6
B.C.	ROBERT BALDASSARE (WARREN STREET)	7
BA BA	? FELICIONI	8
BABY JOE	JOE SCARPONE	9
BABY JOE	JOE DEFELICE	10
BABY DOLL	JOSEPHINE MCHUGH	11
BAD ANGEL	JOE MASSARO (40TH ST)	12
BALDY	FRANK DISANTIS (Ruby's Brother)	13
BASIL	RON MARTINO	14
BELLOTS	FRANK MACCARIO	15
BIG BENNIE	BENNIE BRUNO	16
BILLY DUKE	BILLY DIBERNADINO	17
BIZAH	CARMAN VIZZARI (KERSHAW ST.)	18
BLA BLA	ALBERT MARIANI	19
BLACK BIRD	JOEY GRILLO	20
BLACKIE	THOMAS ROSSINI	21
BLAIR	JOHN HART	22
BLAZE	BLAIZE AMABLE (Chi Chi son)	23
BLOCK	JOEY IRVELLO	24
BOBBY MOLE	BOB PARTECHELLI	25
BOGUS	JIMMY MCINANNY	26
BOMBO	JOE D'ANTONIO (MASTER ST)	27
BOO BOO	JOE RONDELONI	28
BOO BOO	BERT BACHETTI	29
BOOGIE	FRANK D'ALESSANDRONI	30
BOOZIE	? POLLIO	31
BOZO	PAMANTE	32
BOZO	DOMENIC MONTAGNO	33
BRACHI	LEO BRACHELLI (LANDSCAPER)	34
BREEZY	MARIO BONADUCE	35

BRUITS	RICHIE BRUNO	36
BUBBLES	ISABELLE MARTINO	37
BUDDY MAC	BUDDY MCELROY	38
BUG EYE MURPHY	JOHN MURPHY	39
BULLETS	ANTHONY CANALE	40
BUNNY	? POLLILO	41
BURGLES	LEON MERCURIO	42
CHAMP	OTTAVIO PIRROCCHI	43
CHARLIE FURY	CHARLIE ? (KERSHAW ST)	44
CHAULKY	BLACK GUY (OLA FOOTBALL)	45
CHEECH CHEECH (THE JUNK MAN)	FRANK AMABELI	46
CHEEZY	CHARLES DESTEFANO	47
CHI CHI DOLL	UMBERTO D'ANDREA	48
CHIPPY	JOE CUGINI	49
CHIRPY	?	50
CHOP EM' UP	CORY VALENTI	51
CINDER BLOCK or CINDERFELLA	JOEY IRVEILO	52
CLIPPER	FRANK SACCOMANDI	53
COMMISH	TOM DIMEO	54
COONIE	JOHN D'OTTAVIO	55
COWBOY	GABE DEFELICE	56
CRAZY WALT	WALT VERTICELLI	57
CRAZY HARRY	? (MASTER STREET)	58
CURTY	CURT D'ASCENZIO	59
D.A.	RONALD FRANCIONE	60
DADDY NAR	ANTHONY NARCISE	61
DADDY	? CAPPECCHIO	62
DAVE STUMPS aka (3 FINGER DAVE)	DAVE ?	63
DEGO PETE	GABE D'ANNUNZIO	64
DEWEY	JOE AND BOB DILUZIO	65
DIN DIN	JOHN DIBERNADINO	66
DIPPY	GUIDO CAROSI	67
DOM THE EGG MAN	DOM TRIMERELLI	68
DOM THE CLUTCH	DOM FELICHETTI (aka Chifalo)	69
DOMENIC THE JEEP	DOMENIC NATALINI	70
DONNIE DUKE	DONNIE DIBERNADINO	71
DUKE	LOUIS ANGELINI	72
EGG HEAD	FRANNY BONNER	73

EVIL ED	ED LONG	74
F & R	FRANKIE MASAGATTI	75
FACHI	JOE FACCHIANO (KERSHAW ST)	76
FALCO	ALBERT FALCO	77
FANCY FRUIT	LOU TAVANI SR.	78
FAT ALBERT	ALBERT DEMEO	79
FISH MAN (FISH TRUCK)	MARIO (51 st & Kershaw)	80
FLEA	RICKEY LEAS (GIRARD AVE.)	81
FLEA	LARRY WHITE	82
FLUBBY	FLAVIANO LELLI	83
FLUTES	GABE D'BATTISTA	84
FRANKIE BEANS	FRANK SALADINO	85
FRANKIE KAY KAY	FRANK D'OTTAVIO (COONIE'S FATHER)	86
FREDDIE THE ROCK	FREDDIE DIROCCO	87
FRITZEE	FRED VENTURA	88
FUNZIE	ALFONSE SPINELLI	89
FURIE	FIORONDO VAGNOZZI	90
G.I. JOE	EDDIE FALLA	91
GABE THE WHISTLER	GABRIEL D'ALLESANDRO	92
GELMI	ALBERT GUIELMI	93
GENZI	FRANK & CAMILLE GINZENELLI	94
GERONIMO	JOE & CARMEN DIGERLILOMO	95
GIPPY	GABRIEL ROSSI	96
GIVO	JOE GIAVANNICCI	97
GOBI	JOHN GENOBELLI	98
GYPSY JOE	JOE SABATINO	99
HARRY THE JEW	HARRY BORENSTEIN (LOAN SHARK)	100
HERMAN THE FLEE	HERMAN DIGREGORIO	101
HERMAN THE MAIL MAN	HERMAN D'ADORO	102
HOAGIE JOE	WILLIAM RUGGIERO	103
HOPPY	FRANCIS HOPKINS	104
HUMP	CALLAGHAN HUMPHERY	105
INKY	RICHARD TASSONE	106
ITCHY	LOUIS LEMME	107
JAY THE MILKMAN	JAY LAMBERTO	108
JEEP	ANTHONY TASSONE	109
JIMMY THE MISER	JIMMY NARCISE	110
JIMMY PONDALOU	JIMMY PANTELEONE	111

JITTERS	GUIDO DIEGIDIO	112
JO JO BEANS	JOEY SALADINO (Mary Beans Brother)	113
JOE BOND BREAD	JOE BONFINI	114
JOE BLACK	JOE TURNER	115
JOE BLACK	JOE LUCINETTI	116
JOE THE HAT	JOE DELOGGIO	117
JOE THE PRIEST	JOE CALABRO	118
JOE THE PRIEST	JOE DEGREGORIO	119
JOE THE BUS DRIVER	JOE FANELLI	120
JOE READ THE PAPER	JOE STAFFERI	121
JOE DUKE	JOSEPHINE DIBERNADINO	122
JOHN THE BARBER	JOHNNY MARINELLI	123
JOHNNY TAB	JOHNNY TABBORELLI (40TH ST)	124
JOHNNY MAC	JOHN MCINANNY	125
JOHNNY BOSS	JOHNNY DIFEDERICO	126
JU JU	? DEFELICE GIRL	127
JUMBO	NORMAN DENNIS	128
JUMBO	NORMAN RYAN	129
JUNGLE JIM	JIM ?	130
JUNIE BASS	EDWARD WAYNE JR. (MERION AVENUE)	131
JUNIOR	DANTE PANCHI	132
KEM	CARLO ANDRIONI	133
KITES	GUY DIGACOMO	134
KITES	DAN SORGE	135
KNOWIE	JOEY D'ALLESANDRO (51ST STILES)	136
KO JO	JOE CAVALLI	137
LAMIE	VINCENT CIRILO	138
LIGHTS	?	139
LILLO	JIMMY FORLINI	140
LIPS	BILLY CULUCCI (40TH ST)	141
LITTLE TANK	GLEN DISANTIS	142
LITTLE RUBY	FRANK DISANTIS	143
LITTLE LOUIE	LOUIE TAVANI	144
LITTLE DICKIE	DICKIE DI EMELIO	145
LITTLE DICKEY	ANTHONY D'ANDREA	146
LIZZIE	BILL DEFELICE	147

LOU THE COP	LOU FIORELLI	148
LUMPS	JERRY LOMBARDO (40TH ST)	149
MACKEY	CLEM DEGORGE	150
MAISE	MARY JUOCOLO	151
MAMO	CARL RUGGIERO	152
MAMO	BILL RUGGIERO	153
MARY BEANS	MARY SALADINO	154
MARY JUMBO	?	155
MASHER	? MASSIMO	156
MEATBALLS	NICKY SPINOZA	157
MICK	ALEX MICHELLETTI	158
MILKY	DOM FANELLI	159
MILKY	BILL CAPONE	160
MOBS	VINCE AMABALE	161
MONK	JOHN MONTAGNO (40TH ST)	162
MOON	ROMOLO BALESTRA	163
MOOSE	MICHAEL KANE	164
MOUSE	MIKE VITUCCI	165
MOUSE	LOUIE MARIANI	166
NAILS	GEORGE AGOSTINI	167
NEEKS	VINCE LAMBERTO (father & son)	168
NICK THE CHICKEN MAN	NICK ETTORE	169
NORMAN THE JEW	NORMAN SHAPIRO (THE BIG COP)	170
NOSE	VINCE CARUSO	171
NYA NYA	PHIL CANTARINI	172
OAKIE	JOE DIFEDERICO	173
ONION HEAD	MICHAEL DUPALE	174
OVERSEAS	PAT DEFELICE	175
PAT MAHOFF	PAT DIANDREA	176
PATTY PONDO	PAT VAGNONI	177
PEABODY	JACKIE CHESTER	178
PEAR HEAD	EDDIE POLILLO JR.	179
PEECH	JOE MALICHI	180

PEPPERS	DIDOMENICO (WARREN ST.)	181
PETE BABONE	PETE CARPANI	182
PICKLES	JOHN DEVLIN	183
PINCH	VINCE BACHETTI	184
PLUGGIE	JOHN DEZZI	185
PONDO	FERNANDO FALA	186
POOTERS	CARL TASSONE	187
POPUS	JOE NARCISE	188
PORKY	PETER MASAGATTI	189
PRETZELS	JOEY DIFEDERICO	190
PRINCIE	JOHN DEPRINCE	191
QUASI MOTO	(Pig Shit Alley fame)	192
RABBIT	JAKE O'BRIEN (ONE LEG)	193
RAILROAD LOUIE	LOU	194
RASH	VINCE URSONE	195
REDS	JOHN LONG	196
RITTIE	RAYMOND RANALLI	197
ROME	ROMOLO GALLI	198
ROW BOAT	? FALASCO	199
RUBBER HEAD	JOE SCELZA (STILES ST.)	200
RUBY	JOHN DISANTIS	201
RUG HEAD	? (52ST AND KERSHAW)	202
RUGGIE	JOHNNY DIBATTISTA (VITTESE)	203
SABU	JOE SABATINO	204
SCARP	JOHNNY SCARPONE	205
SCORPY	JOE CIRILLO	206
SCOTTY	RAYMOND SCOTTELINI	207
SCREW	DOMENIC CAPPELLIO	208
SENATOR	JOHN PHILLIPS	209
SHA VA	VICTOR DIGIOVACCHINI	210
SHEETS	D'ASCENCIO	211
SHINE	ALBERT PRUDENTE	212
SHORT CIRCUIT	TOM DIMEO	213

SHORTY CAVALLI	JOE CAVALLI	214
SHORTY	? LUCANETTI	215
SKANKY	FRANK LOLLI	216
SKEETS		217
SKINNY JOHN	JOHN QUARTAPELLA	218
SLASHER	JOHN ETTORE (KERSHAW STREET)	219
SLOW JOE	JOE THE BARBER	220
SNAZZY	EDDIE MILLER	221
SNOOKEY	SONNY ZINGANI	222
SNOOKIE	SAMMY DEPRINCE	223
SONNY THE HAWK	SONNY DEFELICE	224
SPEED	GUIDO RECCHIA	225
SQUIRELL	ALBERT DEGREGORIO	226
STACKEY	ROBERT DEDOMENICO	227
STEM	DAN (THE UPHOLSTERER) 51 ST ST	228
STEVIE WONDER	STEVE POLLILO	229
STEVIE RAGS	STEVE DIPRINZIO	230
STOOCKIE	MIKE GALLI	231
STRAG	ANGELO SPINELLI	232
STUMPS	DAVE ?	233
STUMPS	CARL BRANDIMARTE	234
TANK	FRANK DISANTIS	235
TEX	FRUIT	236
TOMMO	TOM DEGREGORIO	237
TONY BOM	ANTHONY CAGNETTI	238
TONY FEATHERS	TONY DI FEDERICO	239
TONY FATS	TONY RECCHIA	240
TOUGH TONY	TONY MEYERS	241
TUBBY	VICTOR DEFELICE	242
TWINNY	JOHN & RICHIE ETTORE	243
UNCLE BOB	BOB RANALLI	244
VALLIE (THE PRETZEL MAN)	VAL FELICETTI	245
WEASEL	DOM D'ALESSANDRO	246

WEASEL	JOHN DIGACOMO	247
WESLEY	JOHN VERMILLION	248
WHISKEY	CHARLIE, ERNIE, DOMENIC FRANKS	249
WHITEY	TONY CAVALLI	250
WILBER	BILLY MEEHAN	251
WORMS	ANTHONY CRISTOFALO	252
YAMMA	RALPH DEFELICE	253
YO YO	VICTOR ROSSINI	254
YUM YUM	?	255
ZEKE	EMEDIO FORLINI	256
ZEMEMO	DOMINIC DIMENNO (Farson St)	257
ZOMBIE	CHARLIE EZZI	258
ZUTTI	JOHN SALADINO	259

49TH STREET, PLACES AND THINGS

NAME OF PLACE	LOCATION
44th Ward Club	51st & Master
Aberdeens (Field)	Parkside Avenue (Fair mount Park)
Abruzzi's Cafe	50th & Thompson
Acceto's Gas Station	49th and Lancaster
Action Steaks	51st and Master
Action Concrete	49th & Merion Avenue
Adelphia Movie Theater	52nd and Lancaster
Andrioni's Tailor Shop	50th and Thompson
Alex's Meat Market	50th and Master
Al's Barber Shop	50th and Lancaster
Apollo Movies (later the Capitol)	52nd and Stiles St.
Bachetti's Market	49th and Lancaster
Beajoocha's Italian Food Store	Corner of 51st & Thompson (across from Kite's)
Belmont	Belmont Plateau (Fair mount Park) football/baseball
Bill's and Jim's	candy store (52nd & Harlan near St. Gregory's)
Boccie Club	50 th & Thompson Street
Bompadre's Luncheonette	52nd & Master Streets
Bonfini's Typewriter	49th and Kershaw
Campagna's Market	50th & Thompson (St. Bernard)
Carl's Luncheonette	49th and Lancaster
Cavalli's Bar	50 th & Thompson
Cellini's Restaurant (Formerly Jack O' Hearts)	52nd and Girard
Cemetery, Old Cathedral	Old Cathedral (Girard Avenue)
Chambers Machine Works	52nd and Warren
Chicken Store (Ettore's)	50th & Thompson (Farson)
Chico's Water Ice Cart	all of 49th St
Chiffilo's	51st and Master
Chucks Lunch	49th and Lancaster

Communist Club	52 nd and Master
Campagna's Food market	50 th & Thompson (St. Bernard)
Campagna's Bakery	next to Pat Mahaf's - 49th & Lancaster
Cotton Candy Truck	Genzinelli's Family Truck
Crystal Pool	Woodside Park
Darrell's Drug Store	52nd and Girard
DeMarco's Photography Studio	52nd and Thompson
Dietro's Hotel (Ron Dietro)	'48 Mercury parked in front of Jo-dukes (He lived in it)
Dentals Labs	49th & Lancaster
DiFilipo's Beer Distributors	49th and Lancaster
DiFilipo's Beer Distributors (storage garage)	51 st and Stiles
Doc's Pharmacy	52nd and Thompson
Doughnut Manufacturer, retail store	next to White Horse Tavern
Dukies Gas Station	50th and Lancaster
Elsa's Hair Salon	51st and Thompson
F.B.I. Forlini Brickwork Inc.	49th and Thompson
Fish Truck, Ice Truck, Milk Truck, Produce Truck	all over the neighborhood
Franklin Research	51st and Warren St.
Franklin Grill	54th and Lancaster
Gennies Pool Room	49th & Lancaster
George's (Paretti) Luncheonette	49th and Lancaster
Genzianelli's Cotton Candy Truck	All Around the neighborhood
George's Hill	52nd and Parkside
Goodman's Woman's Clothes	52nd and Stiles (Girard)
Hacienda	Between 50 th and 51 st & Master
Hall	OLA School hall (Basketball league)
Hartman Bindry	51 st and Lancaster
High Steps	52nd and Thompson
Horse Shit Stadium (old softball field)	Woodside Park
Jack B. Hoy's	50th and Lancaster

Jo- Duke's Hoagie Shop	51st and Thompson
Joe the Hat's Record Store	between 49 th & 50 th & Lancaster
Johnny's Barber Shop (Marinelli)	51st and Kershaw
Johnny's Luncheonette (Zingani's)	52nd and Stiles St
Josephine's Luncheonette (Vanni')	50th and Lancaster
Kate's (Family Store)	50th & Thompson (Farson)
Kite's Garage	51st and Thompson
Mancini's Cleaners	50th and Lancaster
Manlio's Pharmacy	50th and Thompson
Marchejon Club	50th and Lancaster
Marinelli's Food Market	51st and Stiles Street
Mary Globett's (Women's Clothing Store)	49th & Lancaster
Mazzagatti's Appliance Store	49th and Kershaw (Corner)
Minter's Candies (Manufacturer)	49th and Wyalusing
Monti Rossi Jeweler's	52nd and Master
Moses Statue	Fair mount Park
Mr. Softee Truck	Ice Cream Truck
Narcise's Store (Pinball and variety store)	51 st and Thompson
Nick the Blacksmith (DiGregorio)	51 st & Thompson (later occupied by Stems Upholstry)
OLA School & Church	50 th & Lancaster/Master Sts. Fr. Lazarro & Fr. Carbo
OLA Carnival	49 th and 50 th & Lancaster/Master
Old Police Station	50th & Lancaster/ Master
Ornamental Iron Works	50th and Lancaster Ave
Pawn Shop	52 nd and Girard
Pagans	Motorcycle Gang
Pat Mahoff's Luncheonette	49th and Lancaster
Pig Shit Alley	49th-50th St (Kershaw & Thompson) "Sharp Street"
Pondo'a Army	Fernando Falla's marching army
Pondo's Gym	49th & Kershaw (back of Mazzagatti's Store)
Princies Junk Shop	50th and Lancaster

Princie's Bar	50th and Lancaster
Ranalli's Food Market	51st and Kershaw
Salvo's Market	51st and Master
Scaramuzzi's Pasta (original Store)	52nd and Girard
Scotolini's Music Store	52nd and Thompson
Shakey Joe's Barber Shop	51st and Thompson
Shannahan Pool	49th & Wyaulsing
Singer's Wholesale Candy	52nd on Thompson
Slow Joe's Barber shop	51st and Master (Father McCafferty's Barber)
Smellow's Clothing Store	52nd and Stiles Street
Spinelli's Shoemaker	51st and Kershaw
St. Gregory's School	52 nd and Warren
Stem's Upholstery Shop	Across Jo Dukes (later occupied by Pizzi's automotive)
St. Tommie More	49th and Wyalusing
Stile Grill	52nd and Stiles Street
Sun Ray Drugs	52nd and Girard
Teccho's Bar	50th and Thompson
The Lot (the Old Police Station)	51st and Lancaster
Tony Pizzi's Automotive	51st and Thompson
Turchie's Junk Yard	Lancaster Ave
Tustin Field	59th and Lancaster (Across from Girard Chevy)
Vagnoni's Market	50th & Thompson (St. Bernard)
Val's Water Ice Cart	all of 49th St.
Vincent's Cafe	50th and Master
Vitamix	51st and Lancaster & 51st & Stiles
Walter M. Wood Real Estate	52nd and Thompson
White Horse Cafe	49th and Lancaster
Winter Brothers	Lancaster Avenue
Woodside Park	Amusement park
Wrienracks 5 & 10	52nd and Girard

GAMES, SPORTS, AND THINGS WE USE TO DO IN THE OLD NEIGHBORHOOD:

arm wrestling,
 baseball card flipping,
 baseball cards on your bicycle spokes
 (sounded like a muffler)
 Balloons on spokes (also sounded like a muffler)
 basketball at the "Lot" and the "Hall"
 bocce ball,
 bottle caps,
 box ball,
 half ball,
 hand ball,
 wall ball,
 chink,
 wire ball,
 hose ball,
 palm ball,
 Indian Ball,
 dodge ball
 Boxing (in front of Narcise's on Saturday)
 Boxing (at the old PAL underneath the
 Old Police Station on Saturday)
 Buck buck, (Fat Albert always liked to
 be the "Pillow")
 Clams at the White Horse
 egg fights
 Fresh donuts next to the White Horse
 Friday night Pizza at Vincents, White Horse,
 hide the belt,
 Ice Boxes and the Red Ice Truck
 Dressing up on Easter Sunday
 kick the can,
 knuckles (card game),
 lame duck,
 making out at George's Hill
 marching around 49th Street with Pondo
 mora'
 OLA and St. Gregory rival games
 Tomato Pie at Chiffalo's
 roast pork sandwiches at Abruzzi's
 getting cooled off under the fire plug
 pig, (basketball game)
 dog, (basketball game)
 half court, (basketball game)

pin ball machines at Jennie's & Carl's
 pinochle,
 pool at Jennies,
 money for returning soda bottles (2¢ for the small
 bottles, and 5¢ for the quarts)
 roller skating,
 scooters & scooter fights (with wooden soda crates),
 snow sliding (hanging on the backs of
 cars and trucks when it snowed)
 Sunday "Gravy"
 Sunday dinner at Grandmom's house
 swimming at Shannahan Pool
 The Fish Man's distinctive yell on Friday's
 The Huckster truck selling fruit and produce
 The Milkman and glass bottled milk and eggs
 The Egg Man
 throwing your old sneekers over the telephone wires
 two hand touch football,
 rough touch football,
 tackle (in the street),
 water balloon fights
 wringing the old red fire alarm box
 in front of Jo-Dukes
 chasing the moolinyans all over 49th Street
 pulling up pimple balls from the sewer (holding on of
 the little guy's by his feet)

SPECIAL DAYS & EVENTS:

Slop Day (Tuesday's)
 Ash Day (Wednesday's)
 Picnics at Woodside Park
 OLA Carnival
 Bingo at OLA school hall

OLD NEIGHBORHOOD TEAMS & GROUPS :

The Cardinals,
 The Hornets,
 The Rangers,
 The Black Knights,
 The Wildcats,
 The Cherokees,
 Pondo's Army

CHRISTMAS AT 49TH STREET

LINED UP OUTSIDE BACHETTI'S STORE
CHRISTMAS TREES FORMED A CORRIDOR
WHERE YOUNG AND OLD WOULD STOP TO DWELL
ON THE PINE SCENT THEY LOVED SO WELL

YULETIDE JOY WAS EVERYWHERE
AND CAROLS DRESSED CRISP OUTSIDE AIR
FROM BONFINI'S TYPEWRITER SHOPPE
CAME SWEET REFRAINS THAT NE'ER WOULD STOP

JUST AS THE SEASON WOULD ARRIVE
52ND STREET CAME ALIVE
OVERFLOWING WITH MERCHANDISE
IT WAS A SHOPPER'S PARADISE

KERSHAW STREET WOULD BE AGLOW
WITH COLORED LIGHTS AND MISTLETOE
AND HOLLY FRAMED HOMES WOULD COMPLETE
THE SPIRIT THAT FILLED THOMPSON STREET

DIFILLIPPO'S TRUCK BROUGHT THE BEER
TO HOMES WHICH SWELLED WITH CHRISTMAS CHEER
OLD FRIENDS WOULD VISIT ON EACH BLOCK
THROUGH DOORS NO ONE WOULD THINK TO LOCK

THROUGH PLASTICVILLE COMMUNITIES
ON PLATFORMS 'NEATH MOST CHRISTMAS TREES
ELECTRIC TRAINS CHUGGED ALL WHICH WAYS
CLOSE TO NATIVITY DISPLAYS

THIN GLASS ORNAMENTS WOULD ADORN
TREE BRANCHES FOR THAT SPECIAL MORN'
BUBBLE LIGHTS CHURNED BRIGHT RESERVOIRS
AND TINSEL SPARKLED LIKE THE STARS

CHURCH LIGHTS FILTERED THROUGH OLD STAINED GLASS
AS FOLKS ARRIVED FOR MIDNIGHT MASS
THE CHOIR IN FINE HARMONY
SANG SONGS OF THE NATIVITY

OUR LADY OF ANGELS SCHOOL HALL
WAS GARNISHED WITH TREES, FULL AND TALL
WHERE WOOD FLOORS LINED WITH FOLDING CHAIRS
WOULD MAKE MORE ROOM FOR CHRISTMAS PRAYER

SO LONG AGO IN DECEMBER
WE WALKED THESE STREETS, AND REMEMBER
ALL THOSE WHO LIVED THERE, WHO POSSESS
THE WARMTH THAT WAS THIS HAPPINESS

RICHARD S. D'ASCENZO
NOVEMBER 18, 1985
(REV. 12-18-00)

The Old Neighborhood

Seeing it now, no one could know,
Now it was many years ago
When people loved and understood
The spirit of this neighborhood

Grandparents spoke their native tongue
with old world charm to which they'd clung
in small groups they would reminisce
greeting their loved ones with a kiss.

Grapes were delivered in wooden crates
and stored beyond old cellar grates
where work and talent would combine
to produce classic home made wine

Each street huckster's familiar call
would beck on housewives one and all
Crammed with vegetables and fruit
trucks stopped for shoppers on their route

Upon day's end, a routine stop
would be the local baker's shoppe
where fresh warm rolls and loaves of bread
engulfed the senses in ones head

Few markets today meet with par
for imported foods from afar
commonly found on shelves galore
at the corner grocery store

At dinner time joy would entail
walking past each home to inhale
marvelous Italian cuisine
from recipes spoken, but not seen

Fine restaurants could never compare
with corner tavern's home cooked fare
baked clams and pizza were delights
brightening menus on Friday nites

Long hot summers could be made nice
by the cool taste of water ice
Bricklayers had the greatest fans
and homes were cooled by window fans

Wire ball, half ball, box ball & such
paper footballs for two hand touch
and scooters with roller skate parts
all helped to live in young boys hearts

Stopscotch called for skill and high hopes
and chants were sung while jumping ropes
each girl had a turn to perform
in her blue grade school uniform

From the church steeple came each day
invitations to come and pray
pride in this parish seemed to swell
with each melody from that bell

Toughest of times they could withstand
since friends would always lend a hand
Ne'er alone might anyone be
everyone was family

Those who live here will ever embrace
that closeness which was commonplace
Fond memories shall hold them bound
for where they've gone, this can't be found.

Richard S. D'Ascenzo,
March 23, 1984

THE JOY OF GROWING UP ITALIAN

I was well into adulthood before I realized that I was an American. Of course, I had been born in America and had lived here all of my life, but somehow it never occurred to me that just being a citizen of the United States meant I was an American. Americans were people who ate peanut butter and jelly on mushy white bread that came out of plastic packages. ME? I WAS ITALIAN!

For me, as I am sure for most second generation Italian American children who grew up in the 40's and 50's, there was a definite distinction drawn between US and THEM. We were *Italians*. Everybody else—the Irish, German, Polish, Jewish—they were the "Med-E-Gones".

There was no animosity involved in that distinction, no prejudice, no hard feeling, just - well - we were sure ours was the better way. For instance, we had a bread man, a coal and ice man, a fruit and vegetable man which we called the "Huckster", a watermelon man, a Ja-vel-a water man and a fishman; we even had a man who sharpened knives and scissors and a man who fixed umbrellas, who came right at our homes or at least right outside our homes. They were the many peddlers who piled the Italian neighborhoods. We would wait for their call, their yell, their individual distinctive sound. We knew them all and they knew us. Americans went to the stores for most of their foods. What a waste.

Truly, I pitied their loss. They never knew the pleasure of waking up every morning to find a hot, crisp loaf of Italian bread waiting behind the screen door. And instead of being able to climb up on back of the peddler's truck a couple of times a week just to hitch a ride. Most of my "MED-E-GONE" friends had to be satisfied going to the A&P.

When it came to food, it always amazed me that my American friends or classmates only ate turkey on Thanksgiving or Christmas. Or rather, that they ONLY ate turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes and cranberry sauce. Now, we Italians, we also had turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes and cranberry sauce, but only after we had finished the antipasto, soup, lasagna, meatballs, salad and whatever else Mama thought might be appropriate for that particular holiday.

This turkey was usually accompanied by a roast of some kind (just in case somebody walked in who didn't like turkey) and was followed by an assortment of fruits, nuts, pastries, and of course, homemade cakes. No holiday was complete without some home baking—none of that store bought stuff for us. This is where you learned to eat a seven course meal between noon and 4 P.M., how to handle hot chestnuts and put tangerine wedges in red wine. *I truly believe Italians live a romance with food.*

Speaking of food - Sunday was truly the big day of the week! That was the day you would wake up to the smell of garlic and onions frying in olive oil as it dropped into a pan. Sunday, we always had gravy (the "MED-E-GONES called it sauce) and " macaroni" (they called it pasta). Sunday would not be Sunday without going to Mass. Of course, you couldn't eat before Mass because you had to fast before receiving communion. But, the good part was we knew when we got home, we would find hot meatballs frying, and nothing tastes better than newly fried meatballs and crisp bread dipped into a pot of gravy.

There was another difference between US and THEM. We had gardens, not just flower gardens, but huge gardens where we grew tomatoes, tomatoes and more tomatoes. We ate them, cooked them, jarred them. Of course we also grew peppers, basil, lettuce, and squash. Everybody had a grapevine and a fig tree, and in the fall everybody made homemade wine, lots of it. Of course,

those gardens thrived so because we also had something else it seemed our American friends didn't seem to have. We had Grandparents!! It's not that they didn't have grandparents—it's just that they didn't live in the same house or in the same block. They visited their grandparents. We ate with ours, and God forbid we didn't see them at least once a day. I can still remember my grandfather telling us about how he came to America as a young man, "on the boat", and about how they use to do things "in the old country". And, let's not forget about Nonna, (Grandmom), never without a smile or a candy filled apron and always cooking in the kitchen sharing her "old world" recipes with her daughters. All of this, of course, spoken in their own version of Italian/English.

When they first came over from Italy, they would usually live with friends or relatives. When they saved enough money, and I could never figure out how, they bought a house. That house served as the family headquarters for the next 40 years. I remember how they hated to leave, even for an hour. They would rather sit in the backyard and watch their garden grow, and when they did leave for some special occasion, had to return as quickly as possible. After all, "nobody's watching the house". I also remember holidays when all the relatives would gather at my grandparents' house or my aunts' house, and there would be tables of food and homemade wine and music. Woman in the kitchen, men in the living room and kids everywhere. I must have a half million cousins, first and second, and some who aren't related, but what did it matter? And my grandfather, his stogie in his mouth and his fine mustache trimmed, would sit in the middle of it all grinning his mischievous smile, his dark eyes twinkling while sipping his homemade wine, surveying his domain, proud of his family and how well his children had done. All were married and had fine wives and healthy children and everyone knew RESPECT.

They had achieved their goal in coming to America and to Philadelphia. And now their children and their children were achieving the same goals that were available to them in this great country, because they were Americans. When my grandparents died years ago, things began to change. Everybody moved to the suburbs. Family gatherings were fewer, and something seemed to be missing. Although when we did get together, usually at my mother's or sister's house now, I always had the feeling they were there somehow. It was understandable of course. Everyone now has families of their own and grandchildren of their own. Today they visit once or twice a year. Today, we meet at weddings and wakes.

Lots of other things have changes, too. The last of the homemade wine has long since been drunk, and nobody covers the fig tree in the fall anymore. For a while, we would make the rounds on the holidays, visiting family. Now, we occasionally visit the cemetery. A lot of them are there, grandparents, uncles, aunts, even our parents.

The holidays have changed too. The great quantity of food we once consumed without any ill effects is no good for us anymore. Too much starch, too much cholesterol, too many calories, (even though many of our parents and grandparents lived in their 80's and 90's). And nobody bothers to bake anymore - too busy. And it's easier to buy it now and too much is no good for you. We meet at my mother's house now, at least my family does, but it's not the same.

The difference between US and THEM isn't so easily defined anymore, and I guess that's good. My grandparents were Italian Italians. My parents were Italian Americans. I'm an American Italian. And my children are American Americans. Oh, I'm an American, all right, and proud of it—just as my grandparents would want me to be. We are all called Americans now - the Irish, Germans, Poles and Jews. U.S. citizens all - but somehow I still feel a little bit Italian. Call it culture, call it tradition, call it roots. I'm really not sure what it is. All I do know is that my children missed out on a wonderful piece of their heritage.

THEN NEVER KNEW MY GRANDPARENTS

"THE OLD NEIGHBORHOOD"

