



GROWING UP IN BROOKLYN

Remembrances from Jackie Fiori Hartnett

During the 1940's and 1950's, 13th avenue was Brooklyn's main street. It was a mix of local businesses and homes. Many of the store owners were neighbors or relatives. It was common to run into an uncle, an aunt, or cousin at any time. Most people didn't lock their doors at night. Most moms were home during the day. Most everyone knew everybody and I'm thinking we were watched pretty closely. Growing up in

Brooklyn felt like being in a very safe place.

13th Avenue seemed to have everything. There was Chris DeMillo's Shoe Repair shop in a building he built himself after WWII. On the same block we had our own Avon Theater. The movies weren't as current as the State or Lybba Theaters, but we could walk to ours. If you had a few cents, you were in. If you vacuumed, you got a free pass. It seemed like the Avon was packed with kids. Many a grade school romance flourished in the Avon.

Walt's Tavern was next to the Avon. Sometimes a happy fellow would throw us pennies or nickels. That meant we could run across the street to Chucky Hill's grocery store for candy. We'd sometimes be in Chucky Hill's 2-3 times a day running errands for our moms. It seemed that a lot of moms had charge accounts with Chucky Hill.

The Brooklyn Fire Station was on 13th avenue. It didn't have much business, but when the trucks came out and roared down the street, the firemen waved to us and we waved back. It was great when my uncle "Sis" Fiori was on the truck. There was talk of closing the station but it could never be closed while the trains were so active. The main entrance to most of Brooklyn could be blocked by a train, not allowing access by other fire trucks.

13th avenue had Gambucci's Hardware store where my uncle Johnny Fiori worked and Bar 13, which, for a time was owned by my uncles Red Fiori & Joe Bianconi. They served great porketta sandwiches. Sometimes the featured band was that of my dad, Quent, who played the Accordion, and Uncle Johnny who played the Saxophone. Fraboni's grocery store was on the corner. Fraboni's is still well known for its porketta. Sabin's Grocery Store was in the middle of the block.

On the next block on the corner was the Trocadero Bar and down the block was Mitzi's Sweet Shop, owned by the Giombettis. It had a juke box, an ice cream counter, a pool table, booths and a little space for dancing. Yep, it looked just like the 50's version we see in the movies.



Off the main drag, east one block, we had Urbia's grocery store. Brooklyn had grocery stores and bars and a school but no churches. To kids growing up in Brooklyn, it seemed, however, to have everything.

The Brooklyn school was several blocks off 13th avenue. It was a great brick building. Most of the teachers were great also. Here is where the Brooklyn kids converged with those from Kitzville, Mitchell, and Pool locations, as well as some from other parts of Hibbing. This is where we made new friends. Some of us went to school together from kindergarten through high school.

Weren't we content with our recreational facilities? The public golf course was across from 12th Avenue. We had our special trees to climb and we played "Five Bucks" on the course. The only danger from golfers was the occasional ball landing in our yards. In those years, the private country club was restricted. When Joe Lewis, the famous boxer, came to Hibbing, he wanted to play golf and asked for a good golfer to play with. My dad, Quent, with me as the caddy, played with Joe on the public course. Joe Lewis won.

There was a ravine on about 14th avenue with pine trees in the middle so we could walk or run through those. The hills were great for sliding in the winters. Close by was the skating rink. We played Captain-May I, hopscotch, and Ante Ante I over. There never was a shortage of kids to play with.

While Brooklyn was a predominately Italian community, there were many nationalities living there. I never heard one unkind word about a neighbor or a friend because they weren't Italian nor even any mention that they weren't Italian. People were friends with their neighbors, regardless of nationality...at least in my experience. Hibbing was often referred to as "The Melting Pot".

We can't leave Brooklyn without describing the railroad tracks and trains. They were events unto themselves. We saw many, many freight trains with many, many iron ore cars. We'd count the cars. The engineers would wave and toot their horns for us, just like in the picture books. Those living near the tracks could feel the houses shaking when they rolled by. The shaking and the noise just blended into the background of our lives. Passenger trains were less frequent but one, in 1948, carried President Harry Truman during his campaign tour.

Sometimes we walked the tracks collecting iron spikes. Putting pennies on the tracks was a scary thing. While we knew the pennies would be flattened, we never knew if our penny would be the one that would tip the train over.

We used to roller skate starting at the railroad tracks, skating down the sidewalk incline by DeMillo's Shoe Repair. Remember those skates with the necessary key, those skates that never stayed on? I remember my skating turn came and I was at the railroad tracks. I noticed cars were stopped on 13th Avenue. I wondered why. People were coming out of houses, waving and they appeared to be saying something. I couldn't hear for the noise of the train and the tooting of the horn. The noise sounded quite close, but nothing registered with me. I skated down to see why everyone was waving. That's when I looked back—the train had stopped, but it was past where I had been standing.



Brooklyn School kids went to the old Lincoln School in North Hibbing for 7th and 8th grade, the last year that school was open. It was to be torn down with the rest of North Hibbing for the mine expansion. At the time we went to that old Lincoln School, a lot of buildings had already been demolished.

We were the first students in the new Lincoln Junior High (3 blocks southeast of Hibbing High School) and we went there for 9th grade. It was a wonderful school with really great teachers. We were the top dogs in this new school.

We blended into the Hibbing High School in 10th grade....and the rest is history

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