

Chapter Three: The High School Years

It was some time in May of the year 1935 that we moved to 1451 Blake Ave. It was located in the East section of Brooklyn very close to the border of Queens County. The area was un-developed and there were no restrictions as to the size of the buildings that could be built on the land. There were no paved roads or sidewalks. To make sure the cars and trucks would not get too close to the houses the landowners protected their property by creating a fence of old obsolete gas water heaters. They installed them vertically, spaced approximately five feet apart. These old heaters did the job and all the property owners in the neighborhood had them installed. During our growing up years we spent a lot of time sitting on these old heaters discussing the world problems and solving them for the adults. Stop here

One of the biggest topics of the day was if Mr. Bruno Hauptmann was guilty or innocent of the kidnaping of the Lindbergh baby. The majority of us thought that he was innocent. All the evidence presented was circumstantial. The jury found him guilty. Most of us disagreed with the jury's verdict and were under the impression that the state of New Jersey railroaded a innocent man to satisfy a hero's revenge.

In addition to the water heaters the landowners also enclosed their property with a picket fence. So it wasn't strange that one of the nicknames of this area was "Hollywood Sticks". Most of the landowners had large plots of land surrounding their homes on which they raised nanny goats, rabbits, and chickens. It was hard for me to believe that the people were allowed to raise these animals within the city limits. In addition to raising these animals they also farmed the land. The main crop was tomatoes and corn. There were all kinds of fruit trees such as apple, peach, apricot, grapes and of course the figs.

The people in our community were mostly Italian so therefore our community was also referred to as "Little Italy". Because many of our people had goats (they sold goat milk) our community was also referred as "Nanny Goat Alley". During my tour of duty with the US Army Air Force I was stationed in Fresno, California. When I advised the people in Fresno that we harvested figs in Brooklyn they were shocked and amazed. They advised me that the figs could not with stand the cold winters of the northeast. They were right for it took a lot of preparation in the fall after the fruit was picked to protect the tree from the winter that followed. To protect the tree from the winter frost it was completely enclosed. First the branches would be tied together and then hay would be placed between and over the branches including the trunk of the tree down to the ground. After this procedure was completed, the whole tree was wrapped all around with tarpaper. If you ever pass through Brooklyn in the winter and see this strange sight you will now know what it is. You generally find them only in the Italian Neighborhoods. There is nothing better than a tree-ripened fig, so the extra work required to protect the tree from the winter frost was well worth it at harvest time.

The area we lived in was located three blocks west of the borough of Queens and was sandwiched between Sunrise Blvd. to the North and Linden Blvd. to the South. The streets and sidewalks north of Sunrise Blvd. were paved and well kept. South of Linden Blvd. there was nothing but undeveloped marshland full of tall grass and insects. The area we lived in was unpaved and the ground level was at least fifteen to twenty feet lower than the elevation of Sunrise and Linden Blvd. Our area was a mess whenever it rained or whenever the snow was melting. When this occurred our streets were full of mud and potholes. It was a great challenge to try to miss the potholes. When we walked the streets after a rainstorm we followed the high ground and tried to



Fig 8. Newspaper on Lindbergh Kidnapping (1935)

avoid the potholes. It was never a straight course to our destination. To avoid the potholes we would Zig-zag around them similar to a sail boat tacking into the wind.

In the winter when the snows came and the weather stayed cold it was great. We had hilly streets in the neighborhood and had lots of fun sliding down these hills with our sleighs. In the spring and summer when the sun was shining you couldn't find a better place to live. We had many fruit trees that would start to bloom. Everyone had a vegetable garden. Even though we did not own the property. The Landlord would be kind enough to allow Pop to farm the land. Tomatoes were the favorite crop. I may not have always helped with the gardening, however, you could be sure to find me in the garden when the tomatoes were ripe for the picking. Armed with a saltshaker, I would enter the garden and pick a big juicy ripe tomato, bite into it spread the salt, take another bite and repeat this procedure again and again. Pop worked hard on the garden.

One day I approached Pop and told him I would like to help him with the garden. At this particular time he was turning over the soil for spring planting. He handed me the pitchfork and I started to turn the soil. Boy was that tough. I turned to look at Pop and he was smiling, watching me struggling with the pitchfork. He came over, took the pitchfork from me and told me that this was no work for a small boy. He sent me out to play while he continued to work. Pop was a laborer and he was big and strong. He was slim but he had broad shoulders and big muscles.

I remember the time Tony and I hung from Pop's out stretched arms. He was able to support both of us. Tony on one arm and I on the other. Our yearly harvest of tomatoes, eggplants and peppers were more than we could eat, so we preserved most of our harvest. The eggplants and the peppers were pickled in clay pots for eating in the winter. The tomatoes were cooked in large pots over a wood fire in the back yard and stewed to the boiling point, cooled down and strained. Nothing was motorized at this time so all the required straining had to be done by hand. Mom did most of the straining. It was Tony's and my job to make sure there was sufficient wood on hand to cook the tomatoes. After the tomatoes were strained, a portion of the stewed tomatoes would be spread out on a large board in the sun to make tomato paste. The larger portion of the strained stewed tomatoes were put into sterilized soda bottles and capped. The capping of the bottles was done by me and Tony. After the bottles were capped they were wrapped in newspaper and

immersed into a large tub of water. The tub was then put over the wood fire. After the water came to a boil, the bottles were removed and the caps were checked for tightness. After the bottles were cooled down they were stored in the cellar with the pickled peppers and eggplants for use throughout the year.

It was just about this time when I was attending high school in downtown Brooklyn and Tony was going to the neighborhood elementary school. It was at this point that we started to part our ways. Tony was more outgoing than I was and he joined up with the local gang. I was happy with a just few friends.

I made friends with three boys in the neighborhood. There was Sal Scalice who was one year older and lived next to us on Blake Avenue. There was Cyrus Della'Speranza (Jim) who lived on the corner of Blake Ave. and Elderts Lane. Jim was one year younger than I and two years younger than Sal. There was also Anthony Greco who was my age and lived across the street from me on Blake Ave. Anthony was a loner and when we did get together it was for a short time and we never went beyond his front porch. Sal and I were palling out before I met Jim and it took a lot of persuasion to convince Sal that Jim was old enough to pal out with us. All four of us developed a friendship that endured throughout our adulthood. Jim and I would raid all the fruit trees in the neighborhood and harvest the fruit before they ripened on the trees. Sal was chicken and never joined us on these raids. It also could be that Sal did not enjoy eating the unripe fruit which was sour.

Josie was married just about the time I was graduating from elementary school June 1935. We rented a big garage in the neighborhood. It was then cleaned and decorated with balloons and wedding bells. The refreshments were provided by Pop. He made great beer and soda. Mom and all the family would help in the preparation of the food. We had a band to provide the music. Josie and Ray's plans were changed. Originally they were to rent the vacant apartment in the two family house Ray's parents owned. Instead they rented an apartment in building south of Linden Blvd. close to Forbel Street.

With the planning of Josie's wedding my graduation was sort of forgotten. I really cannot remember any party or going to the school graduation. I do remember a school picture, but only because I had a print of it. The school being so far away made it difficult for my family to attend the graduation ceremonies. It was still a great day for me since I was excited about going on to High School. Thanks to Mrs. King's help I was registered to attend "Boy Vocational High School" located on

Flatbush Avenue close to Fulton Street in downtown Brooklyn.



Fig 9. Frank at Jose & Ray Wedding (1935)

Why vocational high school? The immigrants from the old country believed that as soon as their children graduated elementary school they were expected to go to work and help with the household expenses. Pop was no different. The government was aware of this and they passed a law to try to have as many of the boys and girls attend High School through their 16th year. If you were a son of an immigrant your education was usually limited. So to make the best of my limited education I enrolled in a vocational school which would prepare me for a job when I graduated. Mom had other ideas. She believed strongly in education and she made sure that we all knew the value of an education. She fought Pop all the way when it came to the question of us being educated or going to work.

Sal attended a local high school up to the time he could get his working papers and then went to work. His first job was working as a handy man at the local Army and Navy surplus store located on Liberty Avenue. All his life, not having an education or a trade he worked at various jobs to earn a living.

I remember another job Sal had at the local live chicken market. His job was to pluck the feathers off the chickens after they were killed. It was a messy job. The chickens were dipped in a tank of boiling water and hung on hooks dripping wet and plucked.

Jim, on the other hand, went to the Textile Vocational School in Manhattan. He graduated and then went to work in the Garment Industry for a couple of years. He then later got into the building trade as a carpenter and in time became a builder.

To attend "Boys Vocational School" I had to get up early in the morning walk up to the elevated train located on Grant and Liberty Avenue. It was a half a mile walk. When the weather was good it was no problem, however, when it rained or snowed it was a chore to make it to the train. If I were lucky some good-hearted person would pick me up and take me to the station. The school was located in downtown Brooklyn. Getting to this destination required that I take three elevated trains. The Jamaica Line to the Lexington Line and finally the Myrtle Avenue Line. Winter or summer these lines had cars that were open at the front and rear having sliding gates operated by trainman. There were at least five cars being pulled by the lead car. I loved to ride in the open end of the cars enjoying the wind in my face. If it was raining, snowing or cold you had the option to sit in the closed portion of the cars.

The classes were scattered in various buildings throughout the area. Downtown there was a large shopping area full of department stores. The streets were always crowded with people. This drew sidewalk vendors from all around. It was at this time that I learned of the evil ways of the sidewalk vendors. They worked in pairs. One would be the salesman and the other would pretend to be the buyer. The buyer would purchase the item in hopes that the other people would follow the lead. People born with a greedy nature and thinking they were getting something for nothing would follow like sheep and purchase these items. Only to find out the next day that it was junk. It would then be too late to do anything since the vendors never stayed in one place long enough for you to find them.

I was one of those greedy persons and as I was approaching the seller to buy a watch he was selling, the buyer got to me and said "Go way boy, you don't want to buy this watch!" I like to think that he took one look at me, realized the money was for my lunch and felt sorry for me.

Just as I was getting accustomed to attending school in the downtown area I was told that the school was going to be relocated. In the fall of 1935 the school was moved into the old Sperry

Gyroscope Co. building. It was located on Flatbush Avenue adjacent to the Manhattan Bridge and across the street from the new Sperry building. It turned out to be a good move. The move resulted in me having all the classes in one building and also gave us access to a well-equipped machine shop.

I was still attending Boys Vocational High School and living on Blake Avenue when a representative of the "Empire Dog Furnishing Co." located on DeKalb and Nostrand Avenue's, Brooklyn, NY visited our home to asked us if we were interested in doing some work at home. He told us that we were highly recommended for the work he had in mind. The job was braiding dog leashes. The materials (such as the leather, oilcloth strips, snaps and paper cord inserts) needed for the leashes were to be supplied by the company. It was our responsibility to get the material from the shop and then return the finished work. We agreed on the monetary amount and the conditions of the contract and signed it. The contract specified that we were not to work for any competitors and that the company would not hire anyone else. We signed the contract sometime in September 1935. Mom, Tony and I were the only ones that initially started braiding the dog leashes.

Pop at this time was on the WPA ("Work Program Administration") started by President Franklin Delana Roosevelt. This was a method of getting cheap labor during the depression. History records that the WPA was un-constitutional. In the summer of 1936, my brother-in-law Ray (my sister Josie's husband) and I started to work at the "Empire Dog Furnishing Co." factory. It was against the law for someone under the age of 16 to work and consequently I had to hide whenever an inspector visited the factory. Ray worked on the rivet machines making dog collars and muzzles. My job was to prepare the leather for final braiding into dog leashes. The final braiding into dog leashes was done at home. It was also my job at the factory to do the final finishing of the dog leashes. It was required that the dog leashes be rolled and polished. The handles also had to be braided and the end of the handle needed to be tacked down at the ends to keep it from unraveling. After the handles were tacked the loose ends were cut and the finished handle was dipped in the polish. After the polish dried, the dog leashes were shipped out to stores all over the country. My job at the factory was to put the finishing touches on the dog leashes.

As the summer of 1936 was coming to a end and I had to go back to school, it was going to be a hardship for me to continue going to the factory.

So it was at this time that I suggested to the owner that it would be to both our advantage if I finished the dog leashes at home. It was required that they furnish us with the machine and all the required materials. The owner liked the idea, He said "It not only makes sense, but will make it easier for you!" It also helped him with the problem of having to hide me from the inspectors. It was decided that before we made a final decision we should discuss it with his associates and that I should discuss it with my parents. When Mom and Pop were told of this idea they were very supportive. The only problem was where to do the work? Mom and I discussed it and came up with the idea of asking the landlord if we could build a shack in the back of her property. We would pay all the expenses and when we moved the shack would be turned over to them. The landlord agreed.

Little did we know that my Mom and I would spend more time in the shack then we did in the apartment. From making a few dog leashes we grew to a point where we had to bring in outside help. The outside help enabled Mom and I to concentrate on the finishing of the dog leashes. The help was responsible for doing the braiding. Our friend Jim was our biggest employee. He came from a large family. I think the term "Cheaper by the dozen" originated in his family.

My friend Sal also was involved a little but Anthony having more money than all of us never became involved with the braiding of dog leashes. My brother Tony was not involved in the finishing process but was assigned a daily quota. Once he reached his quota he was released to do what ever he pleased for the remainder of the day. My sister Adeline (Lena) was in charge of cleaning the house and preparing our meals while mother and I worked on the dog leashes in the shack. We worked summer, fall, winter and spring.

The winter months were the worst. It was very hard to keep warm. We would wear heavy sweaters and always be very happy when we finished for the day and were able to go inside the apartment. Mom and I had no quota, it was our job to finish the dog leashes which were braided by our employees and Tony. It is strange that I can't seem to recall what my brother Frank was doing at this time. I know for sure he was not doing work since he was only five years old at this time. There were times, however, that I can remember him sitting on the finished dog leashes waiting for us to go up to our apartment.

I finished one year at "Boys Vocational High School" and then was transferred to

"Manhattan High School of Aviation Trades" located on Sixty Third St. in Manhattan. I started school in September of 1936. It was my choice to become trained as an airplane and engine mechanic. It was my hope that after graduation I would be accepted in the U.S. Army so that I could further my career by becoming a pilot.

The school was well equipped, it had a Navy Hellcat intact and a large assortment of engines including inline and radials. It also had an excellent machine shop. In addition to the vocational training it also had a high standard of academic courses that qualified you for entering college. I did not get involved in any sports or clubs because I always had plenty of work waiting for me at home. Immediately after school I would change my clothes, eat and go down to the shack where the work was waiting for me.

Sometime during 1937, Mom decided that it was time we had our own house. We looked around and found a house that would be suitable for our business and living needs. It had a large heated garage where we could work and a basement where we could put the leather-slicing machine. The house was central heated by a coal fired boiler which provided steam to the radiators located in all the rooms including the garage. The house was located on Elderts Lane and Sutter Ave. Just one block away from the apartment we were renting. I was the oldest child at home and Mom always seemed to include me in any big decisions that she had to make. When it was time to purchase the house, my opinion was requested and I had some reservations about the idea of buying the house, since we had to use all of our life savings as a down payment for the mortgage. Mom saw my concern and told me that it was not my place to worry how we would make the mortgage payments. Pop and Mom indicated that they would do all the worrying for the whole family.

It was a great day when we moved into our new home. We were now property owners. Once we settled in, the garage was set up for the manufacturing of the leashes and the leather slicing machine was installed in the basement. It was at this time that Pop left the WPA and starting to work on the dog leashes with Mom, Tony and I. Pop prepared the leather for braiding and also made the special braided horse whips which sold like hot cakes. Pop was the only one who could make these whips and he could not keep up with the demand. Tony was still working on his daily quota, Lena was the chamber maid and cook, and Mom braided the handles. I was responsible for rolling and polishing the leashes, and tacking the ends of the handles after

mother got done braiding them. In general we all pitched in where ever it was required. It was also my job to keep an accounting of the work as completed by our employees and also to record the finished products that were delivered to the company.

Every Saturday morning we would pack my brother-in-law Ray's car with the weeks work and take it to the factory. The factory was in downtown Manhattan. It moved from Brooklyn just after I stopped working there. When we arrived at the factory the owner would make out a check in my name for the full amount of the work he received. Ray and I would then go to the local bank and cash the check. I had no problem cashing the check since I had been introduced to the bank personnel by the factory owner. With the cash in my pocket we would head home. Upon arrival, the garage would be filled with employees waiting to get paid. I would pay them all and give what remained to Mom. We made good money but it required the hard work of the entire family. There is a saying "A family that prays together stays together ", I like to add to that "A family who works together stays together".

There is one story that specifically comes to mind. It occurred when we were still living on Blake Ave. and Mom and I were working very long hours in the shack. Tony was working on his quota and would have free time. Mom wanted to do something special for me for all the extra hours and she told me that she was going to buy a bicycle. She told me that I could go to all the local department stores and pick the bike of my choosing. She said "Don't spare the expense!" I found the bike I wanted at Macy's on 34th Street in Manhattan. It was a beauty, red with white stripes. The bike had white wall balloon tires with stainless steel rims, front and rear fenders, head and taillights, a rack in the back and an accessory case below the frame which encased the battery for the lights and horn. Believe me it was the best bike in the store. The price of the bike was \$34.00. This was a lot of money since people were lucky if they made \$15.00 a week. Mom said don't spare the expenses so I took her on her word. The bike was to be delivered to my home COD in two weeks.

Those were the longest two weeks in my life. While I was waiting for the bike, Mom kept teasing me that when the bike came she would send it back. In reply I would tell her that she couldn't do that for it would tarnish our credit rating and the name of D'Urso would be disgraced. The bike finally came, Mom paid the bill and the D'Urso family had a bike that was paid for in cash. The rumor around town was that we had bought the bike on time and that we should have found a better way to spend our

money. Although the bike was bought for me, Tony had access to it. In fact, he used the bike more than I did. He worked based on the daily quota which gave him more free time. When I think about it I realize that, because I was always busy working, even the local kids rode the bike more than I did.



Fig 10. Gene with his Bike (193x?)

When it came to work Tony's brain was always working hard to either figure out an easier way to do it or to figure out a way to get someone else to do it for him. I specifically recall one instance where he came up with a scheme to where he had all the kids on the block doing his work for him. He did this by offering them rides on my bike. Even my friend Jim was in on it. I was really upset with him because he would take advantage of the fact that we were friends and ride the bike all over the neighborhood. I believe Jim used the bike even more than my brother Tony. This also meant that he was doing most of Tony's work. Jim eventually became an employee of ours.

I was going on seventeen when I bought my first car. Pop for some reason never drove and he was relying on me to get my license. In fact the whole family was after me to get my drivers license. We lived in an area we called "The Hole". It was safe to drive around in this area without a license since the chance of being stopped by a policeman was very slim.

My first car was a 1931 Whippet. It had a six cylinder inline engine. Instead of a fuel pump it had a vacuum tank. We paid \$25.00 for the car.



Fig 11. Example of a Whippet Auto

My brother Tony, Jim, Sal and myself learned to drive on this car. None of us had a learners permit or license. I remember the first time we tried to start the car on a cold winter night, the battery was low and we had to push it to get it started. I was in the drivers seat, Sal, Jim, and Tony were pushing the car. The ignition key was on, the transmission in neutral, choke and throttle out. As the car was rolling I shifted into first and the car started up and moved at a fast rate, I got nervous and instead of pushing in the throttle I pushed in the choke. Boy did I go around the block in a hurry. I probably took the corner on two wheels. That was our first experience driving a car and it almost became our last! We were grateful that no one was hurt.

We all took turns driving the car. Although we all knew how to drive, none of us would take the car out beyond our boundaries. My friend Tony was older than us and he had just got his drivers license, so we approached him one day and asked if he would take us for a ride in our car. The car was legally registered so there was no reason why we couldn't venture out into the big city. He agreed, we filled the gas tank and ventured out into the big city. Tony was the driver. Sal, Jim, my brother Tony and myself were the passengers. Tony had the license but he was the worst driver. He was so nervous driving the car that a passing patrol car noticed it and stopped us. They told us to get out of the car checked the car registration papers and Tony's License and found them all in order. This didn't stop there though, they also took the seats out of the car and searched the car from the back to front. They found nothing and then they turned to us and apologized.

Tony was really shook up by the experience and when the policemen told us we were free to go, he told them he was going to go straight home. The policeman told him you don't have to go home continue on your ride, relax and enjoy it. Tony was

chicken and he drove the car back to my house and went home.

From that time on I drove the car without a learners permit and drivers license. To avoid meeting up with any of the policeman we drove the car in our neighborhood until we got our learners permit. Tony Greco never drove our car again or for that matter joined us on our escapades of us driving without license.

With the car being so old it was only a matter of time before parts would break down. The first thing to go was the vacuum tank. The vacuum tank was located high enough on the firewall so gasoline would be fed to the carburetor by gravity. The vacuum tank had a capacity of about a quart of gasoline. It was the function of the vacuum tank to create a vacuum strong enough to suck enough gasoline from the main tank in the back of the automobile. This was supposed to keep the vacuum tank filled at all times. We tried to get a replacement from the local car salvage yards but had no luck. A new replacement cost more than the car was worth. Once we decided that we could not replace the part we had two choices. One was that we could fill the vacuum tank by hand, ride around about a mile and then refill the vacuum tank. The other option was to get in the back of the car and blow into the main tank until the vacuum tank filled up. We choose the later and every one took turns in filling the vacuum tank as we rode around the neighborhood.

The next thing to go was the radiator. It sprung leaks and again we could not afford to replace it. It meant that we had to carry a bucket of water with us and periodically fill the radiator. Around this time there was a movie called "Gunga Din" starring Cary Grant. Every time we drove by my house we would have to fill the bucket with water. So when we got to my house we would all shout "Gunga Din, water, water!" You would have had to see the movie to understand. If you didn't I advise you to see the movie.

Because of our schoolwork and homework, we were not permitted to drive the car on weekdays. We drove the car on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. We had the Whippet about four months, just enough time for all of us to learn how to drive. We then sold it to the junkyard. It was on my eighteen birthday during May of 1939 that I obtained my learners permit and Mom and Pop bought me my second car. It was a 1933 seven-passenger Buick sedan. It was black and was in excellent condition.



Fig 12. Example of a 1933 Buick Sedan

The back of the sedan was so large that on rainy days we had ample space to play cards. The engine was a straight eight and was very powerful. It had a slow pickup but once up to speed nothing could catch it. It had mechanical brakes and it was required that each wheel be adjusted separately. It was very difficult to adjust all four brakes in order to insure that each wheel would brake at same time. If one wheel stopped before another you could very easily go into a spin.

Because I was concerned, I would always check the brakes before using the car on the weekends. It was easy in our neighborhood because of the dirt road. I would drive the car at a certain speed and hit the brakes hard. I would then get out of the car and check the marks made in the dirt. If all wheels locked no problem but if one or more wheels did not lock we would make the required adjustments. The type of driving that I did, the car had to be in perfect shape. The motor purred like a kitten and the brakes responded with the least amount of pressure on the brake pedal.

The car was a seven passenger limousine. It had large wired sprocket wheels with wide white wall tires. The tire size was 7.50 x 17. Replacements for these tires were very expensive and hard to find. In the back of the car there was a rack which when extended could be used to carry luggage or any kind of material you did not want to put in the car. When the rack was not in use it was raised and pushed up against the back of the car. The car was so roomy in the back that some of the older boys nicknamed the car "Whore House On Wheels". They would always proposition me to let them borrow the car for the night. They would offer money and I would always refuse them. I was the only one who drove my car, period.

The car had a twenty gallon tank and it really needed it because we only got eight miles to the gallon. Thank God the gasoline was cheap at this time. The standard price for gasoline was six gallons for a dollar and if there was a fuel war you could sometimes get up to 7 or 8 gallons for our dollar.

In the spring and summer months we would take the car to Coney Island. It was generally Jim, Sal and myself who went on these excursions. We started out by going to the local gas station and putting some gas in the car. We all chipped in with what ever money we had and paid for the gas. To make an impression in our limousine we would smoke cigars and try to look like we were part of the Mafia. The travel route to Coney Island and back took us on Linden Blvd, Kings Highway and Ocean Parkway. It was very easy for us to get involved in races on these highways. As mentioned before the Buick was slow on pickup but when it got up to speed no one could touch us. Also I should also state that because of the car's weight and its lower center of gravity it was able to hold the road very well through the curves. We knew where all the curves were and always took advantage of this when racing. I don't remember ever losing a race.

There were times when Jim and Sal would get angry with me during the races because I took unnecessary risks to win the races. I guess we had God on our sides because with all the close calls we encountered we never had an accident.

I was stopped only once during the time I was driving without a driver license. Jim and I were driving on Sunrise Highway and we were approaching Grant Avenue when a policeman stopped us and asked me for my driver license. Of course I did not have one and we made a deal with the policeman that the next time we were in the area we would have a bottle of whiskey for him. Once we were released we had nothing to worry about except to stay away from his beat. I wonder if he is still waiting for the bottle of whiskey.

Every Saturday morning Tony and I, and sometimes Sal or Jim, would pack the car with the finished dog leashes and deliver them to the factory in Manhattan. Our normal route into Manhattan was to take Sunrise Highway into Atlantic Ave and turn right onto Flatbush Avenue to the Manhattan Bridge. The Long Island Railroad ran on Atlantic Ave elevated above the street. In the middle of Atlantic Ave. you had steel columns spaced approximately thirty feet apart parallel with the avenue supporting the elevated structure. The avenue was wide enough to accommodate four lanes of car traffic, two lanes going East and two lanes going

West. Instead of locating the columns at the extreme end of the avenue, they located them in the middle of the two lanes going East and in the middle of the two lanes going west. The columns made a great challenge for the young drivers like myself. It was always fun to see how fast you could drive the car from one lane to another lane without hitting the columns in the process. Again it was a miracle that my brother Tony, Jim and Sal survived during those trips into the city.

I remember one incident when my sister Lena was driving me through the columns of Atlantic Ave. I had to admit that she was one of us. Lena was an excellent driver.

When we moved to East New York and I graduated from elementary school I did not get to see Grandma and Grandpa as often as when we lived on Kent Avenue. With the new car we managed to get to see Grandma and Grandpa much more often. The car belonged to the family but I had use of the car after my work was finished. I was also required to take Mom and Pop where ever they wanted to go. These trips included rides to the Italian theater, to Grandma and Grandpa's house and of course to our one and only cousin Michael Cardamone who at this time lived on Skillman Street in Brooklyn.

Going to visit our cousin was a sight to behold. As soon as we got into the door they greeted us with bear hugs and kisses (kissing cousins). Next the food and wine would be served and you would hear cousin Aurelia shouting out the window "Anthony, Anthony come upstairs". Anthony would come running upstairs and say "What Ma". and Aurelia would reply "You have to go to the store. We need some bread. " Anthony would reply "Oh Ma I am in the middle of a ball game send Frank ". So who do you think went to the store? It was always Frank.

Most of use did not have phones in our homes at that time so consequently, company was almost always unexpected. None of us had living rooms and most of the entertaining was done in the kitchen. Aurelia would always make me feel uncomfortable by telling her boys that they should follow in my footsteps by studying hard and continuing their education like I was doing.

Mike and Aurelia had four sons starting with the oldest there was Joseph, Anthony, Frank and the youngest Michael (my Godchild). We were close and we saw them grow up to manhood. Joseph attended College and received his Engineering Degree. He is now retired from the Naval Shipyards in Maryland. He married Dorothy a girl from New Jersey and they were blessed with two

girls Rose Marie and Michelle. Anthony also went to College and graduated with a teaching degree. He started teaching at Public School 157. The same school I attended. Later he became assistant principal of P.S. 157. He married Antoinette a local girl. Frank also graduated from college and he married Lucy a local girl. Michael my Godson was different, schooling was not for him. He did not go beyond high school. Somehow he went to work in the garment district on Seventh Avenue in Manhattan and has been very successful. He was married the first time and divorced. The last I heard he remarried and adopted a son named David. So Aurelia's dream was realized for 3 out of 4 of her sons.

Michael was different. He was not interested in college and wanted to go into business for himself. He co-owned a dress design company on seventh avenue. I don't think my wife Irene will ever forget the time she visited his shop in Manhattan and was told to stroll through the shop and pick out any of the dresses that she liked. I believe she came home with four beautiful dresses.

I first became interested in girls when I was approaching 14 years of age. It seems to me that the girls at this age were more aggressive than the boys. The girls that I remember living in our neighborhood at the time were Grace, Yolonder Compania, Jenny, Francis Abruzzo and there was Tony's girlfriend Mary. Mary's parents owned the local grocery store.

When we were living on Blake Ave. Tony and I slept in the front room, It was separated from the rest of the apartment. This was good since we could go out without our parents knowing about it. Our girl friends knew this and also knew that Mom was strict and sent us to bed early. (This was before we got into the business of making the dog leashes).

As soon as we went to bed, Tony and I would hear pebbles hitting our window. We would look out and see Grace her sister Yolonder and Jenny in the street below daring us to come out. Tony and I would get dressed in a hurry and go down to meet the girls. When we got to the street the girls would run away from us. We chased them and usually caught up with them around the block. We got a little hug and a kiss for our trouble. At that age the big excitement was the sneaking out of our room and the chase.

I was sweet on Grace. Grace was outgoing and she liked to have a good time. We didn't go out but we did exchange notes. Her father was from the old country and was very strict. With my schoolwork and the homework I never had too much time to

spend with Grace. There were a lot of nights when Grace came to visit Mom and I in the work shack and kept us company. This did not continue too long. Her father heard about it and put a stop to it. From that time on we used to meet at church.

Father Hart a young priest of 25 was assigned to St. Fortunata church. One of his duties was to plan activities for the youth of the parish. He started a co-ed club at the church and had us meet once a week. We all attended this club. In addition to being a member of the club, the girls Grace, Yolonder, and Jenny also sang in the church choir.

Another activity we all enjoyed as we were growing up was swimming. On occasions we all would get together and go to a local isolated beach. The only way to get there was to walk. We called the beach "Nassau Beach". It was about a four-mile walk from our homes. We had to cross Linden Blvd. and follow a trail through the marshes and tall grass. About half way to the beach there was a creek. We named this creek "Bare Ass Creek". When the girls were not with us we would take off our clothes and cool off in the creek. We usually did this on our way to the beach as well as on our way back home. Most of the time the girls were with us and we teased them by trying to get them to join us in the creek without their suits. It never worked, however! I wonder to this day what I would of done if the girls agreed to go swimming in the bare?

We were all neighborhood kids and our first concern was always to protect each other. The parents were aware of this fact and that's why we had their permission to go to the beach provided we went to the beach and returned together. The beach was really isolated. Once we got there and there was no shelter from the sun and no lifeguards to protect us from the surf. So it was important that we stuck together and watched over each other. The swimming was great with medium waves. The fishing and crabbing was also lots of fun since the sound water was loaded with both.

As often it happens whenever there are good things happening there must be some bad that enters. Our beach visit that day was no different. At the beach we had two problems, one was the green flies who would eat you up alive and the other was that there was no shelter from the sun. I can still remember how we all were laid up for a couple of days because of a sunburn we received during this outing at Nassau Beach. From that day forward we had a lot more respect for the sun's rays and made sure that we did not stay out too long in the sun unprotected.

When Grace and I started to attend high school we didn't get to see much of each other, she was busy with school and I was busy with work and school. We started to drift apart. We saw each at church and around the neighborhood. She was maturing much faster than I and was getting more outgoing. Once she discovered dancing there was no stopping her. She attended all the dances at school and also the ones at the church. Being shy I was not one for dancing and it was not long before Grace found someone who liked dancing as much as she did and they become inseparable.

It was at this time that I met Ann Biovona. She also was from the neighborhood. She lived down the block from the house on Elderts Lane. When ever I had free time I would visit Ann and we would sit on a swinging bench located on the front porch of her house. We spent many evenings together talking about everything and anything. I guess we both needed someone to talk to. When Mom heard of our meetings she went straight to Ann's parents and put a stop to us meeting at their home. My Mom advised them that while I was going to school, I was not to see Ann. She said that if after graduation we still wanted to see each other we would have her blessing. Ann and I kept in touch during my school years and after graduation. I don't know why my Mom got so excited about our relation because it never advanced beyond the stage of some friendly flirtation. We stayed friends a long time but we lost contact with each other after I went to Baltimore.

Of course my brother Tony had his experiences with girls. One that comes to mind is his relationship with Mary. Mary's father owned the local grocery store which we all patronized. As the story goes Mary had a crush on Tony and there wasn't any thing she would not do for him. With the father owning the grocery store, some days she would give Tony a large size coconut cream pie. Tony would hide the pie in our bedroom and when everyone went to bed he and I would eat the whole thing. Tony always shared the pies with me. In those days we bought our groceries on credit and we would pay up at the end of the week. A record of the purchases was kept by the customer and the grocery clerk. One of the grocery clerks was Mary and apparently when Tony got the pies she never recorded it. The free pies came to an end when Tony was caught going out with another girl. Mary threatened to put the cost of the pies on our credit record if he didn't get rid of his new girl friend. Tony and I knew that she would be in more trouble than either of us if she blew the whistle. She didn't and

Tony kept his new found girlfriend. But that was the end of the free pies!

In addition to attending High School Tony was also attending a local vocal school. He studied music and voice training. He sang many classical tunes. One of my favorites was "I Believe". He had a beautiful baritone voice and sang at many shows held at the vocal school. They were generally performed at the Manhattan Center located on Thirty Fourth St. We all attended these shows and were all very proud that our brother was part of it. As far as the family and our friends were concerned Tony had a terrific voice. Its too bad he never made it to the top but whenever there was a gathering he was always asked to sing.

I would like to write a little about the church we attended while we were living in East New York. The church was converted from a old barn and had a lot of property surrounding it. The property and church was enclosed with a five-foot cyclone fence. There was one area that was paved. This was the area where they held dances every Friday night. Grace and all the girls attended these dances. I usually was on the outside looking in sitting on my bicycle too shy to go in. The dance was part of the youth program under the direction of Father Hart. It wasn't long after we moved into the area, that the people of the parish got together to start a building fund for a new church. It was a big success and we built the prettiest church of its time. I watched its progress from start to finish. A picture of the finished church St. Fortunata was put into my machinist tool box and is still there. I am proud that my family took part in the building of the new church.

At this time there I would like to share another small story about my mandolin. I always liked the sound of the mandolin and promised myself that some day I would own one. After a few months of saving, I bought the mandolin I always wanted. No matter how hard I practiced I couldn't get the melodies. I know it wasn't the instrument because my friend John really played it well. One day a friend of John approached me and asked me if I would loan him my mandolin. John's friend was a good musician but had no instrument to play. I agreed to loan him my mandolin provided I went with the instrument. This turned out to be a good arrangement since I was able to go to many parties. I was also able to enjoy listening to the melody of the mandolin as it should be played. For all the years I owned the mandolin the only music I could get out of it was some chords when making background music in a sing a long. It was fun at parties.

EUGENE, ABOUT, 18, GRAD.



Fig 13. Eugene at High School Graduation

It was getting close to graduation and we all were planning what we were going to do after graduation. Our first concern was to find employment. In the year 1939 jobs were scarce. I didn't have too much to worry about because I still had the job of making the dog leashes. Most of us tried to get into the Air Force as airplane and engine mechanics. The quotas were all filled and there were no openings. When we went out to seek employment we were always confronted with the same question "Have you got any experience?" and our replies would always be "How are we going to get experience if no one hires us?" It was rough and many graduates were without jobs. It was June 1939 when I graduated from "Manhattan High school of Aviation Trades". In the year book I was nicknamed "Rip" after Rip Van Winkle. I was told that they gave me this name because I had a hard time keeping my eyes open during the last period of the day. No wonder, I was getting up every morning at about six o'clock in the morning to be at the train by seven o'clock. School was over by four thirty at which time I went home to work on the dog leashes with Mom, Pop and my brother Tony. We would have dinner and then continue working until eleven o'clock. I would only then do my schoolwork. On

most evenings I was lucky if I got to bed before twelve. Based on this schedule and the fact that last period consisted of Political Science class, it was no wonder that I had trouble keeping my eyes open during this class.

My attendance at school was exceptional. In fact at graduation I received the Attendance Medal which was only given to those students who had a perfect attendance record. To this day I don't know if this was due to the fact that I liked school that much or if I just wanted to get away from the work at home.

After graduation I worked full time on the dog leashes. Mom and Pop worked all hours but for me we agreed that I would start work at eight o'clock and finish at six o'clock. Sometimes when it was getting close to six o'clock, Mom would say finish rolling the leashes you have there and you can leave. It seemed that whenever Mom gave me this ultimatum, who would walk in but Jim with a bag full of dog leashes. He would always have a smirk on his face and would say "Sorry Gene!" I would always swear he was doing it on purpose to get me angry. Mom saw this and on many occasions she would say "Its all right Gene you can do them tomorrow". It was great to have regular hours which gave me more free time. I kept myself busy after graduation sending out my resumes to various companies. Mom was praying for me to get a positive response. She wanted so much for me to get away from working on those dog leashes.

It was sometime in December that I received a letter from Glenn L. Martin Co. offering me a job. They were one of the biggest airplane manufacturing companies and they were located in Baltimore, Maryland. For people who never ventured more than thirty miles from home, Maryland was like a million miles away. Actually it was only two hundred miles.

The position was for a "Apprentice Sheet Metal Layout Man" and they were offering a salary of forty five cents a hour which came to eighteen dollars a week. This was good money for the time. My brother-in-law Ray at this time was making fifteen dollars a week. I was a little chicken when I had to face the fact that to accept the position as offered I had to leave home. Mom was strong and she never showed her feelings. She gave me courage and convinced me that taking this job was my opportunity to make something of myself. She even went as far as to say "What do you want me to do, support you all your life. Get out of here and support yourself, we will be alright ". The very next day we sent a telegram to the company accepting the job.

The night before my departure the whole neighborhood was at the house wishing me luck in my new adventure. It was the first time anyone from the neighborhood left home. Grace and Yolonder were there. Yolonder went to the trouble of making me a money pouch. The next morning Mom gave me a hundred dollar bill in addition to my bus fare and expense money. She told me to put the hundred dollar bill in the pouch that Yolonder made for me and pin the pouch to my under-ware for safe keeping. Mom's last word on this subject was "The hundred dollar bill is for emergencies only!" With the bags packed, the whole family accompanied me

to the bus station in Manhattan. As the bus was leaving I looked back and never in my life did I see such a sad bunch. Mom and Pop (forty seven), Josie (twenty two), Ray (twenty six), Tony (seventeen), Lena (fifteen) and Frank (eight). It was also a sad moment for me but I was thrilled to know that the whole family took time out to see me off. I was eighteen years old starting on a new chapter of my life.

Baltimore, Maryland here I come!