

INTRODUCTION

Where it all started

We were a bunch of rag-tag teenagers growing up in the 1950's in the North End (north west) of Winnipeg,

whose parents for the most part was trying to build a life in the post war era. It was a community lifestyle filled with the love and adventure mixed with the desire to have fun no matter how mischievous we became at times. Indeed, the memories will be with us forever.

The kids in the neighbourhood were a very close-knit group of friends. We were a happy lot enjoying the good things in life. It was very simple in those days, drugs weren't on the scene, shootings and stabbings were limited to black and white movies at the theatres starring Roy Rogers & Dale Evans, The Lone Ranger & Tonto, Batman & Robin, Tom Mix, or Gene Autry & Smiley Burnette. But never the extreme violence of today.

Living in the north end of Winnipeg was truly a remarkable experience. Most of our time was spent at the local community club – Tobans. Skating every day during the winter months became a regular occurrence, with football, baseball, and muchka ball during the summer. Looking back on our neighbourhood gang, I have a feeling of despair knowing that many have passed. The memories will live on,

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and hopefully some words here will help keep that flame burning.

Moving to the north end had a great influence on my life, and upon reflection the many experiences I encountered as a young child are as vivid today as yesterday. This was an exciting time of my life, and the more I recall of those “good old days,” the more it brings back many smiles and great memories. Although, to many, the North End was viewed as living on the “wrong side of the tracks”, we never felt inferior, nor deprived in any way. Never once did we feel poor or neglected, even though many folks encountered hard times making ends meet. Kids from the North End were a wholesome, fun loving bunch, who wanted to enjoy life and all that it offered.

I really didn't have any pre-conceived ideas of the differences in demographics when my parents moved from the West End of Winnipeg to the North End. The West End was perceived by many as more affluent, while the North End was made up of many immigrants (mostly Ukrainian, Polish, German, and Jews).

Our neighbourhood consisted of many wartime houses that were part of a Federal government initiative being built in the late 1940s. Many war veterans moved in and began families. Needless to say, the North End produced many outstanding people, (in no particular order) Judges, Entertainers, Arts, Lawyers, Doctors, Sports, Teachers,

Entrepreneurs, and just hard-working good family people. Some famous names include Billy Mosienko (NHL player with Chicago Blackhawks scoring 3 goals in 21 seconds, and the record still stands today), Monty Hall, Aggie Kukolowicz, Fred Shero, Tracey Dahl, Ed Shreyer, Lloyd Axworthy, Gary Filmon, and Burton Cummings to name a few.

Fortunately, I managed to contact a number of the “kids” from our neighbourhood in the North End of Winnipeg. Most of us are nearing eighty years of age and some are already there or beyond. Being able to connect with some of our old neighbourhood gang has been exciting and just a huge thrill to relive the experiences of our youth. With increased communication sources available to us, I have received several emails from those contributing to this book. In some cases, Joyce Ormshaw (Hauser) and I have met with the “old gang” and made notes of our discussions. We have taken the liberty to edit all submissions, but cautious to retain the facts and “flavour” of their messages. It’s hoped that all readers will enjoy Together at Tobans and all that it offers. It’s been a beautiful ride for us!

Winnipeg was deeply segregated, a city divided, the North End cut off from the rest of the city by the vast CPR yards and distinguished by its “foreign” character. A 1912 publication described the North End as “practically a district apart from the city,” adding that “those who located north of the tracks were not of a desirable character.” The largely

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Eastern European working-class residents of the North End were called “dumb hunkies,” “bohunks,” Polacks; antisemitism was rampant.

Much was extremely positive about the North End. Selkirk Avenue was a thriving commercial street with a dazzling variety of shops and stores whose owners typically spoke several Eastern European languages. A rich and varied cultural life characterized the North End: newspapers published in many European languages; literary associations, drama societies, and sports clubs; a wide range of alternative schools; and according to one author, “a music teacher in every block in the North End to give the Jewish, Ukrainian, and Polish kids massive degrees of musical instruction weekly.” There was a thriving co-op sector, mutual aid societies, a labour temple, and radical politics of a bewildering variety of kinds.

Now that I’m in the so called “golden years” and having moved out of the North End in 1960 when Diane and I got married, I cherish those early years in the North End even more. Many folks say, “you can take the kid out of the North End, but you can’t take the North End out of the kid”, which is so true. Sadly, the North End as we knew it, has changed substantially. 1. Canadian Dimension Volume 44, Numer 1: January/February 2010