Here is a short story from Jim Malone
from his original email
Joe...I have a short story that I wrote a few years ago. It is a Hungry Hill story...part fiction, part non-fiction. It runs 4 1/2 typed pages, 2,000 words.
Jim Malone

JADA WOODS

By: J.R. Malone May, 2003

Jada Woods ran the numbers game in my Springfield, Massachusetts neighborhood during the years following World War II. He was the Irish Mafia I guess, although the term was not in use then. More than six feet tall and weighing well over two hundred pounds, he was a big man with broad shoulders and a slim waist, and the jet black hair and deep blue eyes of the "Black Irish." His eyes had a sparkle and his closed lips turned up at the corners as though some little joke was playing in his head. Usually, he wore a white shirt, opened at the collar, but with the sleeves buttoned; black pants, belted, cuffed, and neatly pressed; and black shoes polished to a high shine. He lived on Miller St., in a modest house on a street lined with similar, modest houses.

There was a difference: Jada Woods drove a shiny black Cadillac. Most families in the neighborhood had no car, those that did, had Plymouths or Chevys. Jada had the only Cadillac.

The neighborhood was Liberty Heights, everyone called it "Hungry Hill," populated by mostly Irish families with a mix of other, mainly European, nationalities. Jada Woods owned a couple of saloons and the Ward 2 Democratic Social Club which was located on Carew Street near the corner of Liberty Street. There were several businesses in a group of storefronts that faced both streets. The intersection of Carew and Liberty Streets was not a right angle; the storefronts formed a V with its point at the corner and widening along both streets to form a triangle.

Harry's Grill was located at the point of the V. The front door faced the corner, and a second door opened onto Carew Street toward the rear of the space. The space widened toward the rear with four booths aligned along the Liberty Street wall; and, in the space opposite, a few tables and chairs were placed where they fit comfortably. The floor was linoleum and the ceiling was stamped tin from which several electric lights were suspended as well as three fans. Across the rear of the space was a counter with several stools to sit upon, and behind the counter were the kitchen and pantry area and a rest room. A pin ball machine sat between the last booth and the counter on one side, while a juke box was against the opposite wall.

Along the Liberty Street side of the storefront triangle were Modern Radio Repair and Libcar Florists, and along Carew Street were Tom's Barber Shop and the Ward 2 Democratic Social Club. Each business had big display windows facing the street, the Ward 2 Democratic Social Club windows were painted black and the place was locked and unoccupied except on week ends. People said that poker was played there starting on Friday evening and going until mid-morning Sunday. It stopped then so that the players could go to 11:00 o'clock Mass, the last Mass of the day, at Our Lady of Hope Church, about half a mile away.

Jimmy Shea and I lived near the corner of Carew and Liberty Streets, Jimmy on the second floor of a yellow two family house that faced Liberty Street, across the alley that ran behind the store fronts. I lived a couple of blocks away, on Woodmont St., in another two family house. We were both twelve years old during the summer of 1946. Harry McGill was a recently discharged veteran of the Marines who had just opened Harry's Grill. Jimmy Shea and I did little jobs for him: sweeping out the place, filling the salt, pepper, and sugar containers, emptying ice melt water from the soda coolers, and occasionally making hamburger patties with the hand press used for that purpose. In return for our labors, Harry gave us a grilled cheese sandwich and a Pepsi or an Orange Crush and allowed us to hang around. We liked hanging around Harry's because the older guys hung around there and we would relish their conversations as they played the pin ball machine and the juke box. Occasionally, Jada Woods came into Harry's for breakfast or a sandwich. Of course, we did not talk to him, but once in a while he would nod in our direction, at least we thought he did.

After supper one Friday evening that summer, I met Jimmy Shea in the alley next to his house. We were standing there with our bikes, deciding what to do for the rest of the evening when Jada Woods came out the back door of the Ward 2 Democratic Social Club, looked around and then came over to us and asked if we would ride our bikes to the Cypress Cafeteria and bring back a

bag that would be ready for him; he said, “I’ll give you kids a buck if you’ll do it.”

A half a buck each! I was lucky to get a half a buck at Christmas or my birthday. So Jimmy and I agreed to do it.

We rode our bikes along the flat of Liberty Street, past the library and the Liberty Theater, and past St. Benedict Cemetery at the corner of Armory Street; then down the long hill passing Gordon Bill park and the railroad yards to the Boy’s Club on Chestnut Street; a zigzag to the left and right and down hill again past Dwight Street to Main Street. The Cypress Cafeteria was a block to the right, at the corner of Main and Cypress, about two miles from the Ward 2 Democratic Social Club. The newspaper plant was located on Cypress Street, so the cafeteria remained open all night to accommodate the newspaper workers. It was one of three or four eateries along Springfield’s Main Street that were open all night. Jimmy Shea and I arrived there around seven that evening, Jada Woods had told us to ask for Ray and say that Jada had sent us. We did that, and Ray handed a good sized, white bag to me, and then quickly turned his attention to other business. The bag was not terribly heavy but I needed to use both hands to carry it. Jimmy and I left the cafeteria, I put the bag in the basket of my bike, and we pedaled back up the hill, standing on the pedals nearly all the way.

Jimmy Shea and I had Westfield bicycles, manufactured in the nearby city of the same name. The bikes had fat tires and wide handlebars, and only one speed. There once were fenders and a chain guard, but they were long gone; and the steel frames had been repainted several times. The brakes were coaster brakes, applied by pushing back on the pedal. We had attached metal wire baskets to the handlebars and the front axle. We rolled up our right pant leg so as not to get caught in the chain; and, in wet conditions, received a stripe of water from the rear wheel up the middle of the back. Nonetheless, we loved these bikes and we took care of them—we cleaned them regularly and repainted them when we wanted a new color and could find some paint to use. We oiled the brake mechanism in the rear axel through an oil cup with a little spring cover on it. We also put a little oil on each end of the front axle, along the chain and on the pedal bearings. To gain speed, we stood on the pedals, and did the same to pump up hill---it was not cool to get off the bike and push it up hill.

When we reached the Ward 2 Democratic Social Club, it was after eight and starting to darken. We brought the bag to the rear door and knocked. Someone peeked through the curtain on the door, the lock clicked, and the door opened to reveal Jada Woods and his closed lips grin. He said "Come on in boys." Jimmy and I looked at each other, and I felt a little shiver before entering. The inside seemed to be painted as black as the front windows; the place was filled with smoke from cigarettes and cigars. There must have been a fan running somewhere because the smoke was swirling around in eerie patterns. There was an upholstered chair and a small table with a lamp on it near the door where Jimmy and I stood. The only other light was a bare bulb under a metal shade hanging from the ceiling to about a foot and a half above a large round table that was tightly covered by what seemed to be a surplus army blanket, many of which had appeared after the war ended. Around the table I could see seven pairs of hands with arms that disappeared into the gloom above the lamp shade, and I could barely make out hints of faces, some under fedoras, in the dimness. There were ashtrays and opened cigarette packs on the table, but I recall neither playing cards, nor money, nor chips being there. It was quiet, there was no conversation as Jimmy and I stood nervously. Jada gestured for the bag which I handed to him. He said "Thanks," reached into his pants pocket, brought out a handful of change and gave a half dollar to each of us. Jimmy and I mumbled some weak thank you and got quickly out the door which we heard lock behind us. By this time it was close to dark, so we each headed home.

The next morning, Saturday, Jimmy Shea and I were in Harry's Grill doing chores when Jada Woods came in for a coffee to go. On his way out, he stopped by us and said, "You boys did a good job getting the food last night, how would you like to do it again tonight?" We agreed without even looking at each other---it meant another buck.

That evening, Jimmy and I lingered in the alley behind the Ward 2 Democratic Social Club waiting for Jada Woods to tell us to again ride to the Cypress Cafeteria. Seven o'clock passed and he did not come out, seven thirty, no Jada, eight o'clock still nothing. Finally, a little after eight, Jada Woods came out into the alley and said that no one wanted anything now; they would get some food later.

Jimmy Shea said "When?"

And Jada replied, “Probably not until around midnight.”

Before I could think, Jimmy said, “We’ll be here. ”

Jada said, “OK, see you then. Just knock on the door;” and went back into the Ward 2 Democratic Social Club.

Now, there was no way that Jimmy Shea and I could ride bicycles two miles to the Cypress Cafeteria and two miles back again at midnight. His parents had the same rules as my parents: we were to be in the house when the street lights came on. In July, that was about eight thirty in the evening. It seemed that we had made a promise to Jada Woods that we could not keep.

So Jimmy Shea and I worked out a plan. We will go home now, about eight thirty, say we are tired from being at Harry’s and playing all evening, and go to bed. Our parents were usually in bed and asleep by ten o’clock or so. Although I did not have an alarm clock, Jimmy did. He will set it for 11:30 and put it under his pillow so that his parents won’t hear it ring. Then he will sneak out and ride to my house. My bedroom is in the attic on the third floor. I keep all sorts of stuff in my room, so I will tie a string to my big toe with a bolt on the other end, and hang it out of the window down to the ground. Jimmy will find the string and tug it to wake me, and then I will sneak out.

After making the plan, I went home. My parents were listening to the radio, so they did not raise any questions when I said I was going up to my room for the night. I lay on my bed in the attic, fully dressed, except for my socks and Keds which I held on my chest. The string and bolt were tied to my big toe and hanging out of the window. Visions of disaster ran through my head—I’ll would never get out of the house, my parents will hear me—if I get out, someone would see me and march me back home---we’ll get caught by someone as we ride down and back---even if we

make to the end, we'll get caught getting back into the house. I lay staring at the ceiling, I was too nervous, I could not sleep.

The tug on my toe woke me up. For a second, I was startled, and then I remembered. I gave a couple of tugs on the string to let Jimmy know that I was awake, and then laid there listening. The house was quiet, so I put on my socks, took my Keds in hand, and started down the stairs. It seemed as though every floor board and stair creaked or groaned. I took a step and listened, took another and listened. It must have taken forever to go from the attic to the second floor, along the hall, and down to the first floor, then open the door, go across the porch and down more stairs to the street. Jimmy was there and waited until I got my bike from the back of the house. We walked the bikes down Woodmont Street until we felt safe, then got on and pedaled to the Ward 2 Democratic Social Club.

We were really afraid because Jimmy's house was right across the alley from the back door and if one of his family happened to look out, we might be seen, even though there was some shadow around the door. We could hear voices inside the place; and when Jimmy tapped on the door the voices stopped. The curtain parted and the door was unlocked and opened. There stood Jada Woods with that smile.

He did not seem at all surprised to see two twelve year olds standing at his doorway at midnight. He told us to ask for Eddie this time, so off Jimmy Shea and I went to the Cypress Cafeteria through the dark of night. There was little traffic at this hour in 1946, but we were nervous whenever a car came from any direction, believing that it was looking for us. We sped up as we passed the cemetery, so innocent by day, so menacing at night. The railroad yards were ablaze with light while locomotives steamed and hissed, and railroad cars were moved to form trains. I was entranced by our shadows in the street lights, coming up from behind as we approached the light, then lengthening in front up us as we moved away, repeating the process at each street light along the way.

The Cypress Cafeteria was brilliantly lit outside and inside. It was crowded with people, mostly men, but some women. They were standing three or four deep at the counter toward the rear

hollering orders and picking them up on trays which were taken to tables, all of which seemed to be occupied. Jimmy Shea and I stood outside looking in, frightened that someone in there would know us or question what we were doing there after midnight. We decided we would say that our parents had sent us for food.

We needn't have worried, a few people looked at us, but no one raised a question. Eddie gave Jimmy the bag and we pedaled uneventfully back up Liberty Street hill to the Ward 2 Democratic Social Club and delivered the bag to Jada Woods who gave us each a dollar this time. After he had closed and locked the door, Jimmy Shea and I stood there for a time looking at our dollar bills. Then Jimmy went to his house and I rode to mine, returned my bike to the back and did my slow step and listen back up to my attic room where I got into bed and fell into the sleep of the innocent.

It must have taken more than an hour for Jimmy Shea and me to pedal down to the Cypress Cafeteria and back to the Ward 2 Democratic Social Club. I am sure that we talked just about every minute of that time, but I have no recollection of any conversation between us. I was out in the night for the first time. I was in forbidden time and space. I was excited and frightened. It was the first time that I had felt that way; and, I must say, I have never quite had that thrill again. Oh, I have been thrilled all right and excited and frightened since then; but nothing has matched that first venture into the forbidden. I have never told this story before; and I recently talked to Jimmy Shea and found that he hadn't either. We had done a job for Jada Woods; you just don't talk about that.

The Other Side of Our Lady of Hope Parish

Written for the Video Commemorating the Closing of OLH School, by Walter Urbanek, 2008

We were from the other side in more ways than one. Our family came from that other Catholic country. Our parents had that other way of working, neither left home for a job. And our house was on the other side of Van Horn Park.

Dad with his first customer, Mr. Long

My Mom and Dad owned Van Horn Market. All of my classmates knew the other Van Horns, the Spa and the Park. But I think few knew the corner grocery store exactly 7/10 of a mile up Armory Street. Few of them lived close enough to buy their groceries or their penny candy at what was commonly known as “Stanley’s”.

My parents came to Springfield, Massachusetts from Poland by way of Philadelphia. My Dad was born in America but his parents went back to Poland in 1920. As a young man during the late thirties he returned to America, and was quickly drafted. My Mom’s family had been here longer. She had hardly ever left St. John Cantius parish in Bridesburg a wholly (pun intended) Polish enclave of Philadelphia. As newlyweds after World War II they looked for a place to make a fresh start, a place my father could own a business, a place they could raise a family away from the big city.

Dad visited relatives in the Chicopee-Springfield area and liked what he saw. He learned that the owner of Van Horn Market was ready to sell, so he bought. That was 1946 and the beginning of the baby boom. The next year I was their first born. Their first parish of course was Holy Rosary, the Polish parish you may or may not have heard of. It was on the fringe of Hungary Hill, literally at the bottom of the hill. It was near a street whose name I no longer remember, but whose notoriety was the annual soap box derby. I do remember that Holy Rosary was very dark inside despite the votive candles, and it reverberated with many strange sounds.

In addition to praying in Polish, we spoke that language at home. I should say I spoke it until I started playing with my neighborhood friends, none of them knew that chapka meant hat. The neighborhood was full of kids, they were from Greece and Ireland, but most of all they were undifferentiated Americans. I wanted to be like them, so I stopped with the Polish. I walked with my buddies to kindergarten at Glenwood School. Glenwood too was on the other side of Van Horn Park. The park had many sides, certainly more than four. Glenwood was on one of those different sides. For first grade though, I left public school for Catholic school.

Van Horn Market with Dad in Doorway Unknown Friend with Me in Training Wheels

We had one car and my Mom didn’t drive. Besides, both parents were needed in the store. So it was a given that I would walk to school. Holy Rosary was too far away. My parents had little choice but the Irish parish. At that time all the popes were Italian, and anyway what did it matter, we were all equal in God’s eyes. Changing parishes had some real benefits for me. Everyone spoke English here and the church was much brighter and friendlier.

My childhood memories revolve around our store and Our Lady of Hope parish. We lived in a house joined to the store. The bell rang in our dining room every time a customer came in or out. I knew all the neighbors. And I knew all the delivery men. They delivered Skipton's ice cream, Driekorn's bread and those life-size card board Santas holding cookies and a Coke on Christmas eve.

After school and on weekends I stocked the shelves, swept the floor and broke up cardboard boxes. On weekends I delivered groceries in my wagon. I seldom watched cartoons on Saturday mornings. In the fall we burnt leaves in the street gutter. Winter was the hardest season. We lived on a corner lot and when it snowed the sidewalk had to be cleared immediately for the customers.

My friends and I walked to school every morning, walked home every lunch time, walked back to school in time for the prayer to St. Roche and returned to the store after school. In eight years it never occurred to me to ask for a ride to school. Walking was what we did. We walked in the rain and in the snow. The walk always began simply enough. We started at Sterling Street, crossed Bevier Street and then Beauchamp Street. Van Horn Park first casually showed itself across the street. But soon the neighborhood ended and the park was everywhere.

You always had the option of walking down those long rows of elm trees with white fences lining both sides of Armory Street. But after a few grades you became interested in "short cuts". We became pathfinders. There were predators in those pine forests. In winter we crossed the upper pond as artic explorers. One winter my brother fell in and I took him to a friend's to dry out before facing our parents. In the spring, game appeared as tadpoles returned to the lower pond. It wasn't until we reached Chapin Terrace that the first signs of civilization gradually began to emerge. It was the Keep It Clean Kids monument at the big diamond. But still there was more Park and it wasn't until you passed the clay tennis courts that you were in a neighborhood again. A string of nameless streets with long rows of houses were next. Would it ever end? Then all of a sudden the end was clear: a barber shop, a fish store, the coffee shop, the dry cleaners and finally "Van Horn Spa". You had reached Carew Street and Bill the policeman waved you on to your goal. You had safely reached Our Lady of Hope Church and School.

Sometimes I woke very early in the morning. Actually my mother woke me, to serve at the first Mass of the day. I don't remember much about those walks, I must have still been asleep. But the reward came afterwards when we would go to the breakfast shop for a cinnamon donut, maybe white toast with butter and always chocolate milk.

Often Joey Ross or Richie Long and I would walk back and forth again to church for the evening novena or school function. It would be too dark for our short cuts. So we would stick to the sidewalks and amuse ourselves by singing of bottles of beer on the wall, or frogs at the bottom of the sea, or marching ants. How crisp and cold were those nights. How we loved rotten peanuts

and eating them anyway.

Quite a few of us made those treks, Richie Long, Jimmy Leahey, John Cassaboom, Joey Ross, and the Tabb boys before they moved to Liberty Street. Come to think of it we were all boys. My brother did the walk too. His name is Philip and he was seven years my junior, he still is. Do the math, when he was first introduced to Sister Helen John, Sister Agnes Edward was already preparing my class to leave. I graduated from the old building in 1961 and headed to Cathedral High School while he still languished at OLOH School, albeit in that brand new one that I never really appreciated.

The priest I liked the best was Father Heberle. Everybody remembers the pastor, Father Powers; most agree he was too scary. I got the impression that even the other priests were scared of him. Years later a priest confided in me that Father Powers always ate alone, separate from his curates. Father Heberle on the other hand was a role model who did everything correctly, which is probably why Father Powers put him in charge of us altar boys. He pronounced his Latin flawlessly, he was actually quite young for a man, and he held tight to his coat when out on church business. Religion was very important to him.

All the nuns were Irish. Most of the kids seemed to be Irish too. We had more than one John Sullivan in our classroom. John P. and John J. weren't even our only Sullivans. We also had a Canavan, a Fahey, a Fenton, a Murphy, a Morrissey and of course a Kennedy. To be fair I must admit we also had a Miklewicz. We were taught by the daughters of Irish immigrants. They were young women who took the baptismal names of their Irish parents, names like Sister

Patrick Maria. Or was it Sister Maria Patrick? Those Irish were very adept at producing these selfless women.

The nuns were convinced that everyone wanted to be green, and I let them think I thought so too. The luck of the Irish it was called. They, like my classmates, knew all about Carew Street and Liberty Street, Hyland's Pharmacy and their part of Hungry Hill. But they too would have liked Silver Street and Caseland Street, Van Horn Market and the other side of the Park.

They knew that the Irish had once saved civilization and that a Kennedy belonged in the White House. But how could they every suspect that someday I would write this and that the Pope would be Polish?

Walter Urbanek, Our Lady of Hope School '61
(5th Row down, 4th from the left of 64 head shots in our 4th Grade Class Picture)