

**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".

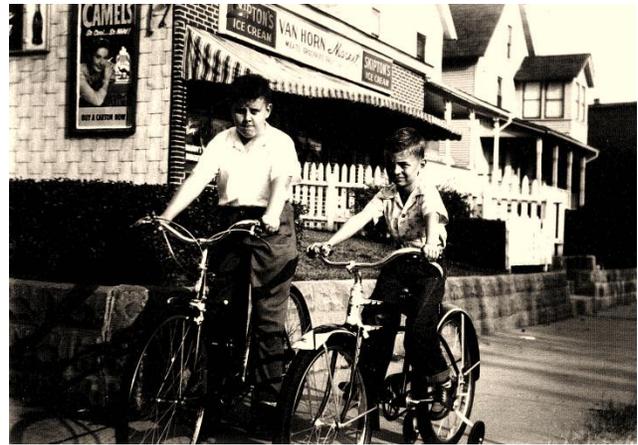
My parents came to Springfield, Massachusetts from Poland by way of Philadelphia. My Dad was born in America but his parents went back to Poland in 1920. As a young man during the late thirties he returned to America, and was quickly drafted. My Mom's family had been here longer. She had hardly ever 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 arctic 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  
(5<sup>th</sup> Row down, 4<sup>th</sup> from the left of 64 head shots in our 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Class Picture)*