A Blast From the Past!

Photos Courtesy of Wildwood Historic Society

P & O Friends

3401 Pacific Ave., Jackson’s Drugstore on the SE corner of P&O, 1960s

A postcard of Hilltop Diner from the collection of Wildwood Historic Society

212 E. Oak Avenue, next door to Hilltop, 1960s

“We do not remember days; we remember moments.” ~ Cesare Pavese, The Burning Brand
As time went by and winter came and passed, and as spring and summer of 1960 was approaching, the group attracted a few more members. John 'Rateye' Neborak, Bob 'Ozzie' Osborn, Carmen Bersani, Johnny Kill and Jimmy 'Brownie' Brown. There were even a few girls that liked to come by and be with the boys. Lynda Phillips, Donna Phillips, Brenda Giacalone, Jonlyn Fulton and Linda Donovan became the P & O Girls.

We couldn’t wait until Easter Sunday when Mack’s Pizza opened, and Memorial Day which meant the start of summer and soon Starlight Ballroom would be rocking again, and we spent almost every night there. Talking and dancing with the Philly girls and hopping to walk them home. We spent most of our days on the beach at Maple Avenue, usually near the boardwalk where we played ‘buck buck,’ ‘mum freeze’ or some other game we learned from our Philly friends.

Then Labor Day came again and it was back to the corner. Doo Wop became a passion for us and most nights you could hear us out there harmonizing. At that time the songs we were singing weren’t that old. This was what we enjoyed, and it made the winter pass a little more quickly. Along with playing ‘Stinky Joe’ on occasion, (Stinky Joe was a version of hide and seek.) Hopping parking meters, lying down in the middle of Pacific Avenue waiting for a car to come, became a pass time as well. Sometimes we would go to Bargain Night Wednesday at the Shore Theater where a double feature cost a quarter. We would hop that old gray wooden fence that once surrounded Maxwell Field and sneak into a Wildwood High School football game. Sometimes we would get caught, but were successful more times than not. A couple of the boys played for WHS then, and it was fun watching them.

In the spring of 1961 we invited two more guys to join us. Harry Hastings and Kenny Petrosky were new in town and thus became the newest members of the P & O Boys.

As time passed, others came by just to sing doo wop with us. Bobby Ansell, George Sloan and a few others whose names I cannot recall. Charlie Sangillo came by just to hear us sing. He really liked doo wop, and was a collector of records. The old 45 RPM’s, which many he still has today. A few of the Kelleher girls and the Turner girls, Lana and Carol, and Marci Liemberg and other young ladies from the area would hang out occasionally, just to hear us harmonize and pretend to swoon. It was truly a great experience, one I will never forget. The police would come by and ask us kindly not to congregate on the corner. So we would go to the Hilltop Diner and sit for a while. Or we would go up to the boardwalk by Starlight and hang out there until it was time to go home. We grew up at the right time in the right place. I was part of the greatest bunch of guys and girls you could ever imagine.

We survived the flood of 1962 and a couple of us even wound up at Margaret Mace School after being evacuated, where we spent a couple of days and nights, falling asleep counting Kelleher’s. We got through the assassination of JFK in 1963 and the start of The Vietnam War and the beginning of the Beatles, Rolling Stones and the entire British Invasion.

Eventually in the mid to late 60’s most of us got married. Some of us were in each other’s weddings. A couple of the boys got married to a couple of the P & O girls. We still hung out from time to time, went to dinner, to the movies, had parties, talked about the ‘good old days’ and how much fun we had when we were kids. We’re all in 60’s now. Our hair is a little thinner and grayer now, our steps are not as brisk, our faces have a few more creases, our eyes have become weaker, our hearing not as astute and our memories may not be as sharp. Some of us have had major surgery and minor set backs. All of us have lost loved ones over the years. We’ve had achieving hearts and proud moments. Some of us have maybe even gained a pound or two. Perhaps our dance moves may leave something to be desired now. We’re all on different kinds of medication now, and visit doctors regularly, but we made it this far. (If I knew I was going to live this long, I would have taken better care of myself.) (From the 60’s to our 60’s wow!) We have grown children of our own now and grandchildren to share our stories with. Some of the girls and guys still live in the area and others in different states and countries. Unfortunately there are a few that aren’t with us any more. Eddie ‘The Flea’ McLaughlin, Kenny Petrosky, John ‘Rateye’ Neborak, Harry Hastings, and George Sloan.

Although the corner of Pacific & Oak has gone through many changes in the last fifty years, as has the town itself, the memories will always be there. The friendship and togetherness we shared. The long winters and short summers we spent with each other. Starlight and the Hilltop Diner are long gone. Jackson’s Drugstore is just a memory. But the corner is still there.

Every time I come back to Wildwood and go to the boardwalk, I hesitate at Oak Ave., look in the direction of where Starlight Ballroom once stood, and remember the nights of my youth and how the floor would sway whenever a ‘stomp’ record played. When in town I always stop, park the car, and go stand on that corner for a few minutes. I take a deep breath. I look around and reflect on what was the happiest times of my life. I’d give anything just to go back for one day, or one hour to stand there once again with all those guys and girls. Just to hear the laughter, the voices, to see the smiling faces, and enjoy the company of the P & O Boys once more.

I’ve been told that if you drive by there in the winter and stop, lower your car window and listen very intently, you can still hear a few of the boys singing their version of ‘Over The Rainbow.’