

Anthony Sorrentino, "It's an Inside Job: An Italian-American Community Organization on Chicago's Near West Side and the Chicago Area Project, 1934-1974," (1974) TMs (photocopy); 21-66.

## CHAPTER ONE

### GROWING UP IN "LITTLE ITALY"

#### Discovering America

I arrived in Chicago with my family at the age of six, a small immigrant boy who could not speak English, and I remained in and around the area known as the Near West Side of Chicago for almost forty years. One of my problems was the task of learning to live in a new country, but in many other respects, my difficulties were typical of those confronted by almost every boy who lives in a poor, deteriorated community.

I remember it was a cold day, in 1919, when I arrived with my family in this strange new land - this huge metropolis with its somber atmosphere-and peculiar traffic noises. We appeared as Lilliputans in the land of Giants. The never-ending stream of cars, trucks and horse-drawn wagons and teams on the main streets seemed to my mind like demons of death - in contrast to the tranquility of the scene of our home in Sicily, dominated by the Mediterranean Sea.

Within us there was a gnawing fear - nostalgia for our native country and uncertainty about the future. My mother would look out from our dingy flat to the drab streets and cry for "Marsala Bella." Our loneliness lasted some months, but gradually we began to experience some joys and good fortune and became better accustomed to our new way of life. We realized that this new land had many things to attract us. [end page 21] The innumerable shops and stores displayed a great variety of foods, packages of candies and sweets, gay and colorful boxes cans and appliances. All were in abundance - at least for all to see, if not to have -in practically every neighborhood store. From that moment on I have never ceased to marvel at the abundance of food and goods available in this country.

Like many, if not most of the immigrants who have come here, we settled for a short time at the home of relatives. Even after we landed at Ellis Island in New York, we spent the first week with my father's brother in Brooklyn. My uncle Pietro wanted us to stay there, by my father, who was a man of his word, had promised his brother Carlo that we were going to Chicago. When we arrived in Chicago, we lived with my uncle Carlo, where we had only one small bedroom for the whole family. In addition to my parents, my family consisted of Nancy, an older sister, and James, a younger brother. My father contrived to allot each of us sufficient space on the one bed to give us a relatively restful night.

My father joined his brother in a candy factory and my mother went to work with my aunt in a tailor shop. My sister, then nine years old, functioned for a time as the mother of the house and ministered to our needs in our parents' absence. Our aunt warned us to remain indoors and admonished us not to open the door to strangers. When the representative from the gas company called to read the meter - an entirely unknown contrivance to us - we unwittingly created a neighborhood furor. The man [end page 22] knocked and knocked on the door until finally three neighbors, led by a kindly old lady, came to our door and persuaded us in a familiar Italian voice to open the door.

After that it was comforting to know that Mrs. Panico would be there if other strangers intruded. I recall that in those early days we were often apprehensive as we were left alone listening to sounds totally unfamiliar to us. Intermittently through the day peddlers in horse-drawn wagons hawked their wares in tones which often seemed garbled to us. In the distance a peddler mournfully chanted "rags a line" (rags and old iron). The fruit and vegetable peddlers were a familiar sight, since they were also common in Sicily. Totally unfamiliar to us were the exciting noises of the horse-drawn fire engines galloping through the streets. (I believe they were converted to motor vehicles around 1920.)

But perhaps the most depressing, almost sickening sound we heard was the funeral march played by an Italian band accompanying the hearse. The mournful music had a melancholy and depressing effect on us. Incidentally, the trumpet player of this band was Louis Panico, the landlady's son, who shortly after became the leader of his own band. A few years later his very popular orchestra played in night clubs, and he became known as the "King of the Wabash Blues."

Another street sound we became acquainted with in those early days and which continued right, through the Depression was the coal peddler. In those days virtually every home was heated with coal, ordered by the ton. However, some families often used up the supply before they had enough money to reorder in quantity. In the interim they would purchase coal [end page 23] from the peddler, usually three bushels for a dollar.

After listening to the sounds of peddlers, fire engines and funeral marches during the day, we were delighted with the return of our parents. My father always brought home candy, and my mother usually brought home groceries and bakery goods.

After living with my uncle and aunt for six months, my parents were able to save a little money and they rented a flat nearby on Aberdeen and Harrison Streets. From this moment on we made regular visits to the 12th Street Department Store (owned by Phillip & Son, but referred to as "Filliposon") to purchase furniture and household goods, all on the monthly installment plan. Unlike in Italy, material desires in America could be gratified instantly: a few dollars down and the balance a few dollars a week or monthly. One of the big purchases, I remember, was the Victor Victrola, where we played records by Caruso and other famous singers. For laughter and hilarity, we played Italian records by "Nofrio," a Sicilian comedian. His anecdotes and stories usually dealt with the everyday problems of living, and with the frustrations of an Italian trying to express himself as he struggled to speak English - when he

tried to use the telephone (there were no dial telephones in those days), to order a meal in a restaurant, or purchase special articles in stores. One of the humorous stories I recall is about the immigrant who learned to say "appla pie and cuppa coffee." But after ordering the same thing, day after day, he got tired of this diet. He asked a friend who was more knowledgable [*sic*], and he taught him to say "hamma sandwich." Proud of his expanding English, he went to the restaurant and ordered whereupon the waiter asked, "white or rye?" Confused, the immigrant [end page 24] rattled, "appla pie and cuppa coffee." This delightful ethnic humor unhappily has disappeared.

The other major diversion was visiting friends and relatives. In addition to my uncle and aunt, who were childless, there were many "paesani" from Marsala who frequently came to our house with, of course, reciprocal visits. Here the adults conversed [*sic*] at length about their families and experiences in Sicily, while drinking wine or eating homemade cakes and pastries and sipping aineste, strega and other Italian liquors. And the folk tales they narrated, both humorous and serious, were entertaining and instructive. They also had proverbs for every occasion. I have long since forgotten most of them, but somehow a few on money matters stick in my mind. *Sensa soldi non se canta la messa*, they would say, meaning: the Mass is not said without payment, or the priest will not say the Mass without money. On the glittering effect of money they would say *E sordi fanno veri vista al orbi*, i.e. money will make even the blind man see.

The conversation at other times was on the somber, mystical side. There were sometimes references to the "Malocchio," the "evil eye." For example, if someone had a persistent headache and was listless it was suspected that someone had given the sufferer the "evil eye." To deal with the phenomenon there was a method of both prevention and treatment. To ward off the evil eye, my mother, for example, would go around sewing or tying pieces of red ribbon or cloth on our garments, or she would make the "horns" with her fingers. If a person appeared to be suffering from the Malocchio, then the treatment

consisted of a ritual of preghiere, [end page25] prayers which usually some old lady was especially versed in performing. If the old lady began to get tired and started to yawn, this was a sign that the person had actually been afflicted with Malocchio. After a few minutes both the old lady and the patient would begin to feel normal and return to their duties as though nothing had happened. And then there were the “worms.” Here again special prayers were said by the old lady who crossed your forehead or stomach with olive oil. Often times a person so treated was reported to be miraculously cured.

My father was well liked and respected by the peasani. As the oldest son of a large family, he was considered a leader and hence members of the family or relatives asked for his advice or to mediate family disputes. He was regarded as fair in his judgments and his character held to be of unquestioned integrity. He sought to instill these same qualities in our family and often spoke of the importance of honesty and maintaining a good name. His guiding principles for family living were obedience, loyalty, love, respect and honorable actions at all times. I recall a lesson he taught me on the importance of respect. When entering the home we children were expected to acknowledge our father by obediently saying vossia me bene deca (Give me your blessing.) Likewise, we were to address all of our elders in this manner. After a few years in America, I was beginning to think this was old fashioned and one day I refused to say it. Firmly and sternly he ordered me out the door and to come back when I was prepared to ender like a Christian. I waited outdoors, somewhat rebellious. I entered again, but stubbornly refused to utter the acceptable words. Again I was whisked out the door. Finally, after I had virtually [end page 26] frozen my ass on the outdoor porch I meekly re-entered and dutifully, but *sotte voce* said vossia mi bene deca. He responded, Dio ti benedice (God will bless you.)

This sounds as though my father was religious, but he was not. Like many Sicilians in those days, my parents were nominal Catholics. However, they adhered to many of the religious rituals, paid devotion to special saints and remembered their birthdays. A story was told how my father once prayed to St.

Nicholas for the job he was seeking on his first trip to America a few years before we arrived. One day after a fruitless search in Detroit, he came home worn out and frozen. He was so mad at St. Nicholas for not answering his prayers that he took the statue of the saint out on the back porch and said, "Now it's your time to freeze."

While my father was a man of vigor and vitality, my mother was docile, had little initiative and gradually became virtually dependent. Except for working during the first year of our arrival in Chicago, she was always confined to the house and local neighborhood. She never did learn to speak English; she died at the age of 76.

With the beginning of the new year, we were told that my sister and I had to go to school. My brother, who was not of school age, was boarded during school hours at the home of a distant relative. Most children from very poor homes, especially from immigrant families, are not adequately prepared for school-their first great experience outside the family. They are not emotionally prepared with assurances, explanations and introductions to some of the elementary tools of learning which children usually receive [end page 27] from middle class families. Besides this lack, my sister and I were confronted with an even greater barrier in our old world cultural traits and language. No friendly voice to put us at ease. Fear and misery clutched us and remained within us for a long time. I'm not sure whether the bruising effect this had on our personalities has ever really healed.

The huge school buildings, the regimented appearance of things in the school, the tall, rigid-looking teachers who flaunted authority and exuded a pungent odor of powder and perfume-this was a strange, disturbing world. The principal was a tall middle-aged man, well-fed, with a serious frown on his face and a stern glassy look in his large eyes, which seemed out of focus. I thought of him as the dominant

ruler of the institution who meted out punishment to transgressors, not as a kind human being whom I could like.

This setting inhibited me. I realized all too soon that my Italian lingo and Italian-made garments set me apart from the other children. This feeling of being different and peculiar in the eyes of others further contributed to what the sociologist, Robert E. Park, referred to as “that sickening sense of inferiority.” There were constant reminders of this: “Dago, dago, eats nothing but potatoes,” the boys would sing with their threatening gestures. I reacted with some fear and a feeling that to strike back would be futile, so for the time being I retreated and sought a friendly response in a different way. For one thing I tried to be “good” in the classroom in hopes that I would be rewarded with the approving glances of the teacher. But deep within I had the feeling that this was [end page 28] to be a rough world, that I was going to be pushed around and dealt with by hostile forces which my child’s mind could then little understand. I now believe these new pressures had a profound effect upon my childhood personality.

Thus rather early I had experiences in the competitive struggle for power and status which so clearly characterizes American society. It was clear to me before that there were only two alternatives: to withdraw and be satisfied with my meager lot, or struggle to achieve some of the good things in life. Somehow, as we shall see later, experiences which followed enabled me to pursue the latter course of action.

### Working, Playing and Death

In Europe boys are encouraged to learn a trade while they are still children and often apprenticed by the time they are in their early teens. In keeping with this tradition my father thought it was time for me, when I was barely 10 years old, to begin to learn a trade. One day after school he took me to Mr. Briatta’s barber shop and arranged for me to report there every day after school. My duties were two-

fold: pay close attention to the way Mr. Briatta and his assistant cut hair, shaved faces and trimmed moustaches; secondly, keep the floor swept and the cuspidors clean. But no pay. However, I was constantly distracted from these tonsorial endeavors by Mr. Briatta's enormous red moustache. I swear it was a foot long and he wore it as proud as a peacock often twirling it [end page 29] with his fingers. Besides, the boys would beckon to go out and play marbles or pitch pennies. After a few weeks my father inquired about my progress and Mr. Briatta told him rather sadly, by stroking his chin with his knuckles (a gesture which literally means: no, it can't be done-impossible) that this boy is not cut out to be a barber. Thus ended my short-lived apprenticeship.

Another early work experience my father arranged was working with our landlord's family when we moved to Polk Street. Mr. DeGiovanni was a shoemaker and had a repair shop on the ground floor. The family lived in a rear apartment where his wife and about six children assembled men's and women's garters. The two oldest boys would go to the A. Stein & Company, a few blocks away every week with their home-made push wagon to pick up the rubber and metal parts which had to be assembled by hand. Then all week the children in their spare time worked around a huge kitchen table and "made garters." I helped out for a season in this friendly sweatshop after school and each Sunday I was rewarded with one whole quarter.

Shortly after we moved a few blocks away across from the DeLeo Bakery and on certain days I would accompany the driver as he delivered bread to homes and stores all over the city.

Whatever ambitions I may have entertained to become a sailor or captain of a ship in Sicily were abandoned. I wanted to do what other kids did, such as belong to a neighborhood gang. I set forth meekly at first, making friends with kids on my block, and gradually I became accepted as part of the neighborhood gang. Before long I was playing peg and stick, [end page 30] marbles and baseball. Our

gang would make “bomb-fires” as we used to call them, and roast potatoes when the flames receded. Sometimes we would steal a bushel of coal from the coal peddler. Almost always we stole the lumber to make the fires. It was a fascinating game to jump over fences into somebody’s yard for a prize box or bushel. Occasionally the butcher’s chicken coup served as fuel. And if the boxes or crates were unavailable you could always tear off a couple of pieces of lumber from somebody’s fence. We’d fight with an enemy gang, breaking into their clubroom and ransacking the place as a way of getting revenge. Sneaking into a movie theatre unnoticed by the vigilant ushers was a thrilling experience: our crowning achievement was when we “sneaked: into the gallery of the Old Star and Garter Burlesque house on Madison and Halsted. On a more regular basis, however, we went to the Waverly and Halsted movie houses where for five cents we could se Tom Mix, Hoot Gibson, Harry Carey and other silent movie cowboy stars of that era.

Our small gang usually played in the streets, alleys. or backyards. An old basement or coal shed refurbished by our talents would constitute our clubroom. Sometimes the clubroom would be built on empty lots by the boys with boards acquired by devious means. An old kerosene lamp or stove furnished a little heat to thaw out the place. The clubroom was usually full of smoke, damp and smelly, but it was adventure. It was here that life took on meaning and satisfied our desire for companionship. Although several settlements and centers were just a few blocks away, we did not attend them regularly, except for holidays, when free candy and apples were handed out. [end page 31]

One place I also attended occasionally was the old Jewish Peoples Institute-we called it the "Hebrew Institute"-where' you could see movies for a penny and take out books at the branch library. I believe this was the beginning of my habit of picking up books and hence to my eventual hobby of collecting books. The J;P.I. was located on Taylor and Lytle Streets; by about 1925, when the Jewish population

moved out, it became abandoned and a few years later it was torn down. This is now the site of the Jane Addams Housing Project.

The little gang and the meager clubroom were the predominant influences in shaping our personalities. The settlements and community centers did good work, but the fact was that the rank-and-file kids of my neighborhood went there only occasionally. They played basketball and ping pong and made handicraft articles, but the time spent on them was infinitesimal compared with the hours spent on the streets and alleys in random "unsupervised" activities, which were always stimulating and attractive.

Getting into mischief and taking things was a means of attracting attention and having new experiences. At times it was the only means of getting money for candy and movies. I remember my experiences with two brothers whose father, a drunkard, did not provide them with the little money boys need for childish pleasure. Consequently, they got into the habit of begging along Halsted Street. I often went with them. I can see us now, dirty, raggedy little kids, pathetically pleading: "Mister, gotta pennie, please?" After begging for pennies, I got to be a professional beggar of Unit Cigar Store coupons. The premium store where [end page 32] the coupons were traded was nearby and I was attracted like a magnet to the pocket knives, flashlights, sleds and roller skates on display. I would find out the number of coupons required for each article, then begin earning them by going to a United Cigar Store, where I'd wait outside for the customer to come out and beg him for the coupons. It would take many months to accumulate [sic] enough.

We lived a block from a cookie factory, and on certain days when the wind was blowing our way the aroma of those freshly-baked cookies made our mouths water. Responding to those delightful odors, we would saunter over to the cookie factory and ask the drivers if we could help them unload the wagons so

they'd give us some of the cookies sometimes returned by the stores. But when the driver wasn't looking we would snatch 'a box of fresh cookies and munch them in our shanty club or hoard them for later on.

In our shanty club or on some of our excursions through alleys or empty lots, we would assert our manliness by picking up "butts" and smoking them. This was kids' play, an activity that did not make us feel particularly guilty, but even now, almost fifty years later, I recall with a sense of guilt one of those clandestine smoking parties that occurred in a different context.

It was at the time of my father's death. He was laid out in our home and a somber, soul-sickening atmosphere pervaded our dwelling. The strong odor of flowers, candles lit on each side of the casket, my mother and sister crying and pulling their hair hysterically, the neighbors and relatives who milled about the house with sorrowful expressions-this [end page 33] feeling of gloom, death, tragedy and disaster which filled our home did great damage to me during those three days. It has continued to influence me even to this day. There I was, a small, scared, insignificant kid in that bleak, dreary, despairing situation, with a feeling in the pit of my stomach that my greatest treasure had been taken away, that my life had been crushed.

I suppose I could stand just so much.. Every now and then I would go out and play with the other kids, trying to hide the great pain within by outwardly acting tough and hard. Oh well, it was just some kind of a big show they were having at the house. I joined the kids and put on a front-acted like the world was still the same. Alas, so did the other kids, for they soon pulled out a whole package of cigarettes [*sic*] and passed them around. Sure I would take one and smoke it like a man! And I did. And ever since I've wanted to hide and forget that incident, wanted to divulge it to no one.

But now that I am writing this book I am relating this incident because one of my intentions in writing is to try to understand myself by recalling my childhood and in the process to understand children who are even today subjected to circumstances similar to what mine were. Now I can understand that my behavior was an innocent, childish whim, an outlet, an escape from the deadening weight of that situation which my sensitive nature could no longer withstand. Since then I have learned that a given act has a reason, a history. Children don't just suddenly act up: their behavior reflects the successive social experiences which they have had in the family, play group and neighborhood. [end page 34]

For a while I was a Boy Scout at a local settlement. This developed quite accidentally [*sic*]. A boy friend of mine interested me in scouting by explaining the wonders of camping and outdoor life. I joined the Boy Scout troop so I could have the kind of life I'd read about in the "Rover Boys" and "Tom Swift" series. It was one of several constructive experiences that enabled me to prepare myself for a better life.

It was a common activity for boys of ten or eleven years of age in my neighborhood to be shoe-shine boys. I had mentioned the idea of being a shoe-shine boy a number of times while my father was working, but he always reprimanded me for even considering it. Where he came from, he said, only the lowest characters would ever stoop to such a disgraceful occupation. The tradition of the small, enterprising businessman was strong in his mind. No son of his would ever be a bootblack.

One day when I was ten years old my father was brought home in a taxi from the candy factory. He had gotten the first of a series of paralytic strokes which about a year later caused his death. While he was home convalescing from the first stroke I proposed that I become a shoeshine boy, but again he denied permission. We were then living on a meager subsistence advanced from an insurance policy of \$1000 from the candy firm he worked for. The idea of drawing out more than a few hundred dollars haunted

him: he knew he was going to die and didn't want to leave us completely penniless. For a while he gave himself courage and even contemplated opening a fish store. But it was not to be.

Meanwhile, I saw other boys earning about two dollars a day on Saturday and Sunday by shining shoes. I realized that four dollars a week would be a great help to our slim family budget. (Fortunately, at that [end page 35] time another uncle, a younger brother of ray father, had come to join us. He paid board, which helped a great deal.) The boys were telling me how easy it was to shine shoes. One day I went along with a boy and watched him as we walked around Madison and Halsted. Inspired by this experience, I again approached my father. I told him how simple it was. I even promised to carry the shine box out of the neighborhood covered in a package so it would not reflect on him. Finally, when I realized he said neither yes or no, a sign he was giving in, I set about to raise a dollar and ten cents by selling homemade lemonade in the neighborhood. This was more or less kids' play, but penny by penny, I raised the required amount to purchase the shoe-shine box and thus embarked upon my career as a shoe-shine boy.

When I got on Madison and Halsted-"hobo land" or the "area of homeless men" or "skid row"-scores of shoe-shine boys were busily at work. This was not encouraging. How could a neophyte like me crash into this monopolized market? Aimlessly I wandered off a few blocks north to the Randolph Street wholesale fruit and vegetable market. By about noon I surmised that the workers and proprietors of the wholesale fruit and vegetable establishments might be ready to go home, so naturally a shoe shine would interest them. It did, and by doing a good job I established a regular trade. After that I earned about two dollars every Saturday. On Sundays I covered the cheap hotels and lodging houses, can houses and taverns on West Madison Street.

The nickels and dimes jingling in my pockets were wonders. They gave me a sense of accomplishment at the end of the day and enabled me to purchase food and household requirements. Equally important, they enabled me [end page 36] to go to the movies to see cowboy pictures and buy candy and hot dogs along the way. After my father died, this small but regular financial help was more needed than ever before.

After two years as a roving shoe-shine boy, I "graduated" into a shoe shine parlor. The Greek proprietor of a combination hat-cleaning, pressing and shoe-shining business called me in as I was passing with my shine box, and after demonstrating my ability-I naturally put on my best airs, cracking the cloths in rhythmic fashion and hurling two brushes confidently in my palm-I was offered the job. This meant working from 8 a.m: to 11 p.m., on Saturday and from 8 to 4 p.m., on Sunday - a total of twenty-four hours over the weekend. In addition to the shoe-shining I had to scrub hats in benzine, wash the cuspidors, feed the pressing machine and mop the floors. Working side by side with Mexican and Negro men, I earned here about \$6 every weekend.

After my father died, we were left without a breadwinner. I was eleven years old. My sister was thirteen and still in grammar school. My uncle worked in the candy factory, but with his meager wages could pay only his board and support his family in Sicily. Soon after this he returned to Italy to be reunited with his family. Since my father was not a citizen-he died five years after we were in this country-we were not eligible for any allotment from governmental agencies. To tide us over for a few months, some generous friends of the bootleg world contributed some funds to carry us along for a few months. But a regular income was soon needed, small as it might be. A neighbor suggested my sister could work in a paper box factory. Despite child labor laws, my sister went to work at the age of 13. With her [end page 37] \$15 a week, plus my part-time work as a bootblack, we supported our family.

This was not a happy period. I sometimes wondered how we lived through those trying times. Possibly the cementing force was the strong Sicilian sense of family. It was tough on my mother to be left without a man. And the thought of remarrying was simply outside of her tradition. In the old world Sicilian family, the widow wore black clothes for years, practiced denial and stayed close to home. As a result, my mother developed few outside interests, never learned English and I'm afraid became self-centered as she grew older. In some respects, the situation was even more tragic for my sister, Nancy. She had to work long, monotonous hours in a nearby paper box factory, many days plagued with migraine headaches. After supper, she often had to sleep for several hours to recover from her weakened condition. She was the breadwinner and in a sense head of the household. She had my father's vigor and exuberance and tended to make the decisions. She used to adore my father, respected him fiercely, and all her life looked for a man with his qualities. Of course, she never found him. (Finally, disillusioned, she married when she was 39 years old and died when she was 49.)

My sister and I especially resented the idea of "charity, though for a time after my father's death, we had to accept it. This consisted merely of some staple commodities furnished by the county, some of which we could not use since we were not accustomed to such products, and occasionally clothing and a pair of shoes we detested wearing because of the inescapable "charity style" they had. After a few months of humiliating experiences with "charity" we worked hard and never again had to resort to this form of support. [end page 38]

My father's death, when I was eleven, had a shocking impact on me and my family. It created an indescribable void in our lives. We were left alone in the world. My shoe-shine occupation then became an urgent necessity. In addition, on weekdays, I went junking with the other boys, through alleys, dirty yards, dilapidated buildings, factory districts, flophouse areas, where we could garner rags, bottles or

metals that we could sell for a few pennies. We found or “took” things wherever we could-occasionally jackrolling drunks along the alleys of West Madison Street. Fortunately, we were never caught.

### Life on the Street: Vendors and Gangsters

Speaking of junking reminds me of Felix, the junkman who lived next door to our house. He was a bachelor and lived alone in two dreary rooms lit with a kerosene lamp. He would set forth every day with his small pushcart to travel miles of streets and alleys in search of rags and metals. Returning at the end of the day with soot and dirt embedded on his lean, but rugged face, he would sort his junk in a shed in back of the house and store it until he had large quantities to sell. Day in and day out, year in and year out, Felix practiced his lowly art with never a variation in the humdrum routine. Being a next door neighbor, I would frequently visit him as he returned with his junk at the end of the day and chat with him about his “finds.” If the “finds” for the day were scanty it was quite apparent there would be no cheer in his voice. But perchance he had an abundant haul-then he would be more sprightly and eager to answer questions. He helped me and a pal of mine a great deal in our own junking endeavors.

On warm days after work Felix would sit in his yard alone with his corn pipe, and as he looked up in the sky I sometimes wondered: was he thinking [end page 39] about a different, richer life? Or was he thinking of the countless alleys, of the garbage, dirt, filth and rats which he came upon every day of his existence? Or was he, in his meditation, in his solitary, almost misanthropic role, at peace with the universe?

I recall, too, the time I used to go to Josie’s grocery store down the block. One day as I entered the store, Josie, calmly but quite concerned, pointed to a macaroni drawer where a mouse was playing havoc. “Please Tony,” she said, handing me a rag, “Catch it.” With the dauntless spirit of a Sir Galahad I marched forth with the rag, pursued the mouse and upon grabbing it squeezed it fiercely, squashing it to

death. I don't care to remember whether the macaroni I had previously purchased from Josie came from the same drawer. There were times when a gang of boys would mock "Bozo the umbrella man," drunk more often than not, who gruffly chanted, "Umbrella to repair" as he ambled along with his welding kit over his shoulder. We would taunt him and he would threaten to hit us with his tools. "You're nothing but a drunken bozo," we would say jeeringly. On occasion he would be visited by an Irish woman from the nearby rooming house district and together they would get sickly drunk. Then he would chase her out and pull her by the hair as she fell over the sidewalk.

Besides the peddlers I have already mentioned, we had a number of other colorful itinerant vendors in those days. Of course the most common were the fruit and vegetable peddlers-and I might add most popular with families-since the Italians have a great passion for "fruita e vendura." [end page 40] As a child we often had as a first course pasta with one of many vegetables: pasta and beans, pasta and cauliflower, pasta and broccoli, pasta and kohlrabi, pasta and lentils, pasta and zucchini with tomato sauce, and even pasta and peas. The regular spaghetti or linguini with meat balls or braccihli [*sic*] was reserved for Thursday and Sunday suppers. Because meat was scarce, apparently these two days were designated for such dinners.

As we learned more about American food in later years, we would feel ashamed that we had been brought up on such peasant fare, but no longer. After decades of steaks and roast beef, and because of being and ethnic today is being fashionable-we now again relish that wonderful peasant food. Finally, I must say of Italian food that it is inexpensive, nutritious and low in calories and cholesterol. Pizza is of course very popular today. But I remember when it was sold on the street by our Neopolitan Pizza Man. On warm summer nights he would stroll through the streets with a large tub on his head, knife in hand and with a musical chant announce a pizza, calda, calda. When a customer beckoned, he would ceremoniously place the tub on the sidewalk and cut the desired piece for five or ten cents, using the

cover of the tub for cutting and his apron to wipe the knife. Not very sanitary, perhaps, but the aroma was terrific [*sic*] !

Another unusual vendor was the Passatempo (pass time) vendor with his push cart laden with lupini (a giant Italian bean treated in salt water), ceci, pumpkin seeds and a dozen varieties [*sic*] of roast Italian beans. These tasty morsels were munched by the Italians as they sat in front of their houses on warm evenings. They added to it a glass of homemade wine. Another [end page 41] popular snack in our neighborhood was the five-cent "Nutti sandwich," an earlier version of the hero or submarine sandwich. Actually, it often served as a meal since it consisted of a large chunk of fresh Italian bread served with Italian cold cuts. When we did not go home for lunch during the school period, hundreds of kids would run to the Nutti Bakery, but we were also influenced by that other famous sandwich, the hot dog. We had a vendor who made it seem imperative that you buy a hot dog, especially after a swim at the Sheridan Park Pool. Che mangia muore mai, Bruno would repeat endlessly (he who eats never dies), and besides, to add to its already tantalizing appeal, Bruno added to the hot dog that Italian flourish, little hot peppers. Yes sir, he who eats never dies!

The Greek "waffle man" did not have a slogan, but when he came by in his colorful horse-drawn wagon, you ran in his direction for one of the most delicious treats of all. The wagon itself was a major attraction. It was one of a kind: high wheels, enclosed with windows and gaily decorated with white, red and blue colors. As you approached the wagon the Greek would flip down a drop-down counter and fill your order. While he also sold hot peanuts and candies, the big seller was the hot waffles. As he proudly handed you a large piece for a few pennies, he would with a flourish, sprinkle it liberally with powdered sugar. None of the present frozen variety will ever equal the delectable waffles of our now extinct waffle man.

In addition to the vendors there was either a candy store or a grocery store with vegetables displayed on the sidewalks. All of these stores had some homemade lemonade, cold slices of watermelon, and some even had hot corn on the cob to eat right on the spot. These treats cost only a penny or two. [end page 42]

It was here on your street or in front of your house where much of the drama of life was played. During the summer this was the important social centers: everyone could see what was taking place, housewives would exchange news and confidences, watch religious processions or deal with the itinerant vendors.

I remember how in those days moonshine stills were abundant. As you passed by certain houses you could smell the yeast which was used in the manufacture of alcohol. One night a still exploded, severely damaging the home of one of our neighbors. The family, which consisted of four children in addition to the parents, knocked on our door in the middle of the night asking for shelter. Inadequate as were our already cramped quarters, we admitted them to our home and shared what we had with them. This meant that most of us slept on the floor for several weeks.

I remember also when in the middle of the night we were awakened by frantic knocking at our door. Frightened, my mother inquired about the identity of these visitors in the night. "Anita, Anna, open the door, it's me, your brother Andrea." We were of course stunned. Andrea from Marsala! How could he be here! How did he get here? Finally being assured, my mother opened the door and sure enough, there was Andrea with two companions.

After we all calmed down we learned the story. My uncle and his friends were fugitives. They had gotten jobs as sailors in Italy on a freighter which delivered cargo to Texas. They abandoned ship and some home came to Chicago and arrived at our modest abode. Well, this meant more sleeping on the

floor for a few more weeks! My uncle's companions went to relatives in other cities. He stayed with us and worked in a [end page 43] factory. After six months he decided to go to Detroit where he lived in the home of my mother's sister. Later he went to San Francisco and became a prosperous fisherman. Before he died at the age of 55, he had the satisfaction of having become a naturalized citizen.

Frequently, we became aware of the violence, tragedy and death which stalked the streets. One day, one of our neighbors was killed in a nearby alley, suspended on a pole and garroted with wire by the throat. News of many such events were announced by men who paced the streets shouting the news as they tried to sell newspapers. With the advent of radio and television, those newsmen happily ceased to have a function. Their tactics had a disturbing effect on many households: they shouted the news, but so vaguely and mysteriously that no one could understand it. Since your curiosity was greatly aroused you had no alternative but to drop everything and go out and buy the paper-for twice the usual price.

Frequently the news was not so startling as the newsmen led you to believe.

Lawlessness was on the streets in those days. Young men in their newly acquired automobiles would race furiously down the streets, whipping the corners while the police frequently gave chase.. This was the height of the roaring twenties, when youthful gangs were riding high and mighty. Most famous was the "42 Gang," a daring, fearless lot at open warfare with the police and society. Easily identified by their attractive white felt hats, then in vogue, the newspapers called them "hoodlums" and the police pursued them relentlessly. To us younger kids they were just young men like the others, only we respected and admired the more. My [end page 44] sister and her friends, I recall, spoke highly of these fellows. They may have engaged in "Gang shag" activities-that is, mass sexual intercourse with girls outside the neighborhood, But they did not molest local girls: with them they were gentlemen in every sense of the word.

These young men, along with the older men in “organized crime,” were the heroes of our day. They had “class” and they had “guts.” Which reminds me of a story recently told to me by a friend. He said: “When I was a boy I broke a window at a local settlement house and a social worker got a hold of me and reprimanded me for my misconduct. She raised a stern and threatening finger at me and said, ‘Now do you want to grow up to be a gib gangster like Machine Gun Jack McGurn or Diamond Joe and Al Capone?’ In answer to this pointed question I meekly said ‘No,’ but I really meant yeas. After all, these men were the big shots in my community-they were successful and powerful. Hell, they were our civic leaders-men with the greatest prestige. Naturally I wanted to be like them. But sensing the type of response the social worker expected, I lied and said, ‘No, I don’t want to be like them.’”

Other sides to life in our area were bright and cheerful and gay, for where there are human beings, there will also be song and dance and laughter. We had birthday parties where we'd spin the bottle and play kissing games. We had feast days, holidays and special occasions at home when the tables were colorfully laden with food and delicacies. Sometimes we "snuck" into neighborhood weddings at local halls for free eats, but especially to dance with girls; here we had a chance to satisfy that compelling urge to hold close the warm bosoms of our neighborhood girls. [end page 45] On warm summer evenings fire hydrants were opened to refresh the air and wash off the sweltering bodies of frolicking children, while older and women sat around outside the houses watching and telling tales of old. Men would play bocci and amorra and drink the wine which one compare or paesani or neighbor had brought out.

Speaking of wine reminds me that in those days most families made their own wine and did much of their canning, especailly [*sic*] of tomatoes. The men would go to the railroad yards where the grapes were brought in and order their load; others would buy the grapes from peddlers who came into the neighborhood. When a load of grapes was sold-100 to 200 boxes, each weighing approximately 40

pounds-the kids would all flock to the scene for the pleasure of helping to carry the boxes into the basement wine cellar. The reward was eating all the grapes you could, plus a big bunch to take home.

Colorful and exciting were the religious processions, usually preceding the opening of a street carnival sponsored by one of the many fraternal societies. Men would carry a statue of the patron saint led by a band. Kids would follow the band and the statue through the streets and occasionally pious men and women would signal that they wished to make an offering. The offering consisted of paper money which was pinned on the society's banner. At the end of the procession the banner was fully bedecked with hundreds of dollars. All these and many more scenes of life and love were as much a part of the life of the slum as was its gloom, tragedy and death.

#### Moving Up: Inferiority and Pride

Although I was sensitive to the general social world, I was thrust into when I was six years old, I became even more aware of it as I grew up in the [end page 46] midst of poverty, a fatherless home and great uncertainty about the future. My driving ambition was to finish grammar school and go to work. I remained in school under compulsion, day-dreaming much of the time, wondering and hoping for a better future. Among other reasons, I detested school because I had to wear patched short trousers long after I was ready for long pants. Without the aid of consolation of a superior figure in our home, my prospects seemed hopeless and bewildering, and my feelings of inferiority and inadequacy got worse.

It was because of these feelings, I suppose, that one summer day in 1928, I reacted so quickly to Henry A. Meyer. Here was a man who constructively influenced me from the moment I met him. He was a theological student who was working part-time as playground director and boys' worker of the local Italian Methodist Church.. He and his wife seemed to be so kind and friendly that I reacted with all the boundless enthusiasm and thirst which a growing boy in a deprived situation is capable of expressing.

When Mr. Meyer organized a scout troop, I quit the troop that I belonged to and joined his. He encouraged me to lift myself from the miseries and limitations which my community imposed on me. He expressed his confidence in me by giving me responsibilities which he thought I could carry out.

He was also the first person who introduced me to literature. The few books I had read at this time were the Tom Swift and Rover Boy series. When I graduated grammar school, he and his wife gave me a copy of The Three Musketeers, by Alexander Dumas, the first book I ever received as a gift. I enjoyed this book, but it was more difficult to read than the others. I then read Tom Sawyer and became an avid reader and admirer of Mark Twain. I started collecting his books and others which soon led to [end page 47] my life-long hobby. To this day, I can hardly pass a book store without going in, and if it's a second had book store I will invariably go in and browse around. Before long I was bringing home too many books to please my mother. Her concern was two-fold. First there wasn't enough room in our small four room flat to build a library. Secondly, how in the world could I ever read all those books? After a while she seemed to say, "Enough is enough!" Besides, I could not become a professor, so why bother with too many books! But her objections were to no avail. I continued to bring books into the house without her knowing it, hiding them wherever I could. However, in later years she mellowed. At times, with a warm glow on her face, she would say, "Who knows, maybe you will be a professor or a lawyer. After all when you were born they didn't raise the flag on your father's ship for nothing."

A crowning achievement was when Mr. Meyer selected me to give a three minute talk on the radio for the Boy Scout finance drive. My elation could not have been greater, though at the same time I felt miserably inadequate to the task. I couldn't understand why he selected me when there were other boys who were much better equipped. When I asked him, he cordially replied, "George and Leonard are not dependable. They might not show up, but I know you won't let us down." Obviously I did not, and the

experience was terrifically gratifying when a picture of me with several prominent men appeared in the newspaper.

I have reflected on this experience ever since and, of course, the whole idea is very simple. This man felt that he could depend on me: he knew I was loyal. I have used this simple role as a guiding principle: if [end page 48] one is conscientious, dependable and loyal in his work or with his friends, he can easily compensate for some of his other shortcomings.

My relationship with Henry A. Meyer, which lasted for many years after he moved out of the neighborhood, also gave me my first introduction to youth welfare work and suggested how the church can have a constructive impact if it reaches out in the community. Although not a large or significant institution in the Italian community, the Italian Methodist Church sponsored a neighborhood center and playground adjoining its church at Polk and Carpenter Streets. As I said, I met Henry Meyer here. I attended the neighborhood center, was introduced to books, crafts and American food. Actually the people were so friendly and congenial that it's a wonder I didn't join the Methodist Church. The influence of custom and tradition was clearly at work here. While not all Italians are great churchgoers, 99% will say that they are Catholics. And even those who attend infrequently, if at all, will baptize their children in the Church, have them make their first Communion and Confirmation, get married and buried in the Church. While my parents were in that category of poor churchgoers, they adhered to all the above practices. Hence, instilled in me as a child was the feeling that to become a Protestant was forbidden and alien. Even to enter inside a Protestant Church was sinful and would bring bad luck! Thus, although I participated in the social activities at the store-front center sponsored by the Methodist Church, I never attended the services. Only once, as I recall, enticed by a girl, did I even dare open the church door for a furtive glance and after that ran away quickly.

Henry Meyer was the first person who helped give me a glimpse outside [end page 49] the neighborhood and prepare me for later adventures. The new vistas he opened up to me were considerably in contrast to the sordid aspects of life in my neighborhood with its delinquency, crime and violence rampant in the 1920's and early '30's. This man started to give me the feeling that perhaps after all I too might be regarded as a valued member of our society.

This has since made me realize what is involved in the task of helping troubled persons overcome some of their difficulties, whether they be emotionally disturbed, insecure or delinquent. Because this experience had a beneficial effect on my life, it made me realize that the fundamental problem of aiding the delinquent or the mentally ill or any person who is out of tune with his environment is to find a person or a group that will receive and welcome the individual and in a friendly, helpful, understanding spirit, giving that person the feeling he is liked, wanted and respected. If that person is dealt with in this manner and in addition furnished constructive guidance-new and better incentives, ideals and opportunities-his rehabilitation would seem to be assured.

The conditioning effect of poverty and slum life are not easily erased, however, and the early feelings of inferiority kept recurring, particularly after Mr. Meyer moved out of the city. But with the strong crutches he had provided, I was able to keep struggling until opportunities became available.

In June, 1928, when not yet 15 years of age, I graduated from the Andrew Jackson Elementary School. I was determined to try to find a job. There were dozens of factories within walking distance of my neighborhood and for [end page 50] some reason I decided on calling on several printing companies. In some vague way I thought that perhaps working in a print shop would lead to higher things. After all, hadn't Ben Franklin gotten his start in this humble way! I also had another strategy: I would call on several print shops regularly. Week after week the shop foreman would inform me that there were no

jobs. But I kept on calling. Finally, one man with a serious expression called me aside and said, “Look, lad, I appreciate your determination and that’s a good quality. Believe me, if I had a job you would get it.”

That man sounded sincere, and although I was discouraged, I did not feel completely rebuffed. There would come the day. That happy day arrived shortly after when Mr. Meyer took me to an employment agency downtown. I had to lie about my age-saying I was seventeen-and I was offered a job as an office boy in the loop at \$12 a week with the Sardeson-Hoveland Company, which operated a chain of women’s apparel stores in small towns mostly in the Midwest. My mother, however, gave credit to Santo Antonio Di Padua for my luck in getting this job. She had made a pledge to Saint Anthony that if I was fortunate in finding a job she would send \$5 as an offering to our Church in Marsala. She of course kept the promise and we received a large portrait as an inducement to send more favors, especially when looking for lost articles, for Saint Anthony is the patron saint who is supposed to guide finders seeking lost objects or causes.

While filling out the application for employment, I was glad that I lived on an unfamiliar street, then known as Sholto Street. Heaven forbid that the office workers should know I lived in the vicinity of Halsted and [end page 51] Taylor Streets., an intersection always referred to by the newspapers as the hub of activity of the Italian politicians and racketeers of the Near West Side. I regretted too that I had to put down: “Born in Sicily, Italy.” True, I was blond and could pass for a non-Italian, but then there was my name-Tony-an unmistakably Italian name. It wasn’t that I was ashamed of being Italian, but doggone it, what did they think of me? Did they think that I juggled nothing but spaghetti and guzzled Italian wine? What could they think when the papers carried headlines of Italian gang murders and racketeers? I suspected that they almost certainly thought of Italians as inferior, cut throat, with the Sicilians, for some unknown reason, at the bottom of the heap and the most dangerous lot.

Well then, I was an Italian, or worse still, a Sicilian. My name, of all things, was “Tony” and I lived in the slum, in gangland. What could they think of me? I hoped they thought I was different from the stereotyped [*sic*] image they had of Italians. I hoped they would remember the hundreds of famous Italians-scholars, writers and artists who have enriched our civilization. I hoped, but the feeling was always there that they associated me with a group that at the time was considered the least desirable of all immigrant groups.

Because I had nothing to anchor to in my own community as a means of moving up in the world, I vaguely sensed that somehow I must try to fit myself into the outside business world. That objective, as we shall see, did not materialize.

I had no interest in going to school further. I had been just an average pupil and I had no interest whatsoever in intellectual pursuits. I wanted [end page 52] to work with my hands. But the office job had much influence on my later occupations. The neat, clean businesslike atmosphere of the office and the contacts with many people in the office building were in great contrast to the spirit of poverty of my home and the drab environment of my neighborhood. This sudden change to a different social world had a profound effect upon my attitudes and outlook in the world. Here all about me were people I regarded as successful. They had good incomes, compared with mine and, of course, a number of them had incomes that would assure them a place in the Social Register. I lived amidst wealth, opulence and Big Business during the day, but had to retreat to a hovel, comparatively speaking, at the end of the day.

At the office I sat at a desk befitting any big executive, but at home I sat at a broken down kitchen table. The gulf between the two worlds was staggering. Gradually I decided to do something about it. How

was I, a meagerly equipped boy, going to compete in such a world? My education and my social experiences were inadequate for participation in this new social setting.

At first I wanted to run away from all this. It was impossible, I thought, for me to participate in this new world. I was self-conscious of my meager and clumsy vocabulary, which included a liberal number of "dees and does," "dis and dat" and the other typical jargon of the streets. It took me a long time to learn to pronounce the "th" sounds. I was nervous when speaking in the presence of the self-composed, complacent office manager and always uneasy in the presence of the officers of the firm. But I just had to stick to this job, despite the uncomfortable and sickening feelings [end page 53] which for many months assailed me.

I went to night school to learn to manipulate the typewriter which was beside me at the office all day. Encouraged also by a few boys from my neighborhood who went to night high school, I proceeded to take other courses so that after six years, together with special home study courses, I completed my high school education.

After a few years of office work plus the confidence which schooling was developing, I came to feel more at ease. I especially noticed this feeling when the boss's son came to work with us for a few weeks during vacation time. To my delight I noticed that he was green in some respects: I had to teach him some of the office routines. I noticed that he was in strange territory when he tried to operate some of the simple office machines-stamping, mimeograph and addressograph machines. But he was a nice chap and I rather liked him. We would go to lunch together and talk of some of the: adventure stories we had read. But the boss's son stopped coming around after a few weeks and I had an uncanny idea about the reason. The boss didn't want his son, who lived in a \$50,000 home, associating too intimately with the lowly office boy who lived in a slum.

This was further evidence that if I wished to find a place for myself-after all I couldn't continue being an office boy at \$18 a week for all my life-I couldn't expect any Open Sesame opportunities such as the boss's son would inevitably fall into. I had to struggle and fight and work if I wished to assure myself some of the economic and social opportunities which everyone strives for. [end page 54]

I was always conscious of the great disparity between the various social situations I moved in. While at work I was always-and I mean always-aware of the fact that people I worked with all had superior economic resources-better clothes, better homes and better opportunities for recreation and education. The mere thought of this difference would make me feel miserable. As the all-around office boy, I also performed a number of personal favors for the office executives, including delivering packages to their homes. I would always come away emotionally disturbed from those visits. These homes represented another world, distant and unattainable. And I would leave, the pictures of those nice steam-heated homes with beautiful carpets, drapes and elegant furniture, kept swimming in my mind. I would feel bitter and frustrated.

One episode I shall never forget. It was in the summer of 1931, while I was at summer camp during the two weeks I was given a vacation from work. I lived in a tent with another boy who was also seventeen years old. We became buddies after sharing the same experiences. I suspected he had an education and “up bringing” superior to mine, but in general I was not too self-conscious about our differences. I thought we would continue to be friends in the city. After we left camp I was invited to his home, in a good middle-class community [*sic*] I immediately became uneasy as I entered what seemed to me a paradise of luxury. I don't remember many details except that I was clumsy and out of sorts and wanted to run away from it all.

I was glad to leave and go to a movie with my friend. As I left him I rather coldly and meekly hinted that it would be my turn to invite him next. I went home on the bus feeling miserable, angry and rebellious. By [end page 55] God, one thing I would never do would be to invite him to my home. How could I? I could picture him walking up our rickety back stairs, entering through our simply decorated kitchen and meeting my mother, who could not speak a word of English. What would he think of me then, the product of this meager home? Would he understand or would his concept of me change? Those were the questions I pondered. Right or wrong, my emotions were such that I decided to close the door forever. I would never see him again.

However, I had many other companions in my own neighborhood, and since our homes and parents' backgrounds were similar we were at ease with each other. My friends at this older adolescent period were of two types: the corner boys and the college boys. Although I maintained contacts with corner boys on an individual basis (several went to jail) I began to develop much closer ties with the boys who were aspiring toward higher education.

But I kept meeting many of the corner boys at dance halls and later in correctional institutions. I remember one occasion when we went with a criminology class on a field trip to the Cook County Jail. As we were shown around by one of the guards, I saw one of the inmates, an old friend, who was doing maintenance work. I was so surprised to encounter him in this way that I spontaneously went to him, shook hands and exchanged courtesies. Instantly the guards came up to us and searched both of us. This scene, of course, elicited varied interesting responses from my professor and classmates.

One of the college boys was Vito Lucatorto, who was in medical school and today is an physician. We visited at each other's homes, studied together, [end page 56] went to movies and to the big ballrooms for dancing, which were flourishing in that era of the big bands. Few people had cars and hence we

always traveled by streetcar or bus. Through Vito, one day I met Peter Scalise at a local center when Alonzo Stagg, the famous football coach, was the speaker. From that moment on, Pete and I became truly close friends and also spent much time studying and talking for endless hours about many personal and social concerns. We were quite idealistic and gradually we both became very actively involved in the community organization which I discuss in this book.

Joining this intimate group a few years later was Joseph Guinta, an earthy, vigorous person who came up the hard way; he was truly our finest example of an indigeneous [*sic*] leader. He also worked actively in our many civic and community projects and was employed as I was with the state as a community worker on the Near West Side. Today he has responsibility for a state-wide program-the Illinois Juvenile Officers Information File-under the auspices of the Department of Law Enforcement.

This intimate friendship of four close friends-"Doc," Pete, Joe and myself has continued uninterruptedly for over forty years and we are actually closer in many ways than we are with relatives. To this day, our children refer to us and our spouses as "uncle" or "aunt." In addition, we are also compare and commare since we have served back and forth as best men at each other's weddings or as godparents for our children at their baptisms or confirmations.

Another friend who had an impact on me was Seymour Nash, introduced to me by Pete Scalise.

Seymour was a Russian Jew who lived just west of our neighborhood and attended Crane Junior College with Pete. His parents were [end page 57] Orthodox Jews and very poor. One son was a truck driver and a daughter later had a career in the health field. But Seymour! I thought he was the smartest guy that ever lived! Soon after I had met him he was studying at the University of Chicago and I was merely going to evening high school at Crane. Occasionally on Saturday afternoon after working at Sardeson and Hoveland, we used to go to the downtown library to study or visit the Art Institute. He knew poetry,

literature, art, music and could converse intelligently for hours. I remember once we went to the Rockefeller Chapel at the University of Chicago to hear Jane Addams give a lecture and then attended a social function in one of the university halls. This was a different kind of crowd than I had been used to and it was my first introduction to the world of liberals and others who in these Depression days were considered left-wing and radicals.

Another interesting activity which Seymour introduced me to on Saturday afternoon was to be an usher at the old Auditorium Theatre. No pay, but after everyone was seated you saw the plays. I vividly remember seeing the musical, "Of Thee I Sing," and other plays, which I enjoyed. One play, however, which I thought was a little odd was written by Gertrude Stein; after we came out of the theatre I remember we kept repeating: Pigeons on the grass, alas, alas! or "A rose is a rose is a rose."

Seymour had hopes of becoming a professor, but upon completing his undergraduate degree, he also married and hence had to work. He taught education courses for a few years, later received a masters degree and became a social worker. But his career was short-lived. He died of cancer in his early thirties. [end page 58]

Being in college at age twenty-one was no more confronting [*sic*] or assuring than when I was in grammar school. What was I to become? Who would help me? My family was subsisting on a poverty level. I had no rich uncle to subsidize me. My friends were likewise struggling. The meaningful contacts and relationships were all limited to people in my own community and these did not include more successful [*sic*] businessmen or politicians. My family was a simple, small, humble unit with not even one vote in it to entice the local precinct captain to furnish useful contacts. (My mother did not become naturalized until many years later). In other words, the outside world with its opportunities and resources were inaccessible to me.

This was especially disturbing during the Depression, when for six months I was unemployed and aimlessly paced the streets in search of a job. I would walk through the downtown streets and see wealth all around, men with positions, influence and power. How did these people do it?. What does it take? I searched for answers in my then naive way, but always ended up against a stone wall. I especially remember one of those days that seemed so dull and meaningless as I paced West Madison Street, where I had labored as a shoe shine boy. Only now there were some changes on West Madison Street: there were more homeless men and vagrants milling around on corners where "soap-box orators," radicals, and communists were heralding [*sic*] the new order. I listened to some of the orators and wondered.

Life seemed bleak and harsh with no bright future on the horizon. All these impressions and scenes created a sense of frustration helplessness and conflict. Had I continued having such experiences for a period longer than six months, I don't know what might have happened to me. Several of my street corner buddies who were having similar experiences turned [end page 59] to crime and spent many years in prison. But for the grace of God, I too might have followed the same path.

The saving factor was the Chicago Area Project. On one of those typical forlorn days my brother came home to tell me that a Mr. Alderman, representing the Chicago Area Project, was asking for me. He was especially interested in whether or not I was employed, and if not, asked that I get in touch with him. As described more fully in Chapter Three, Mr. Alderman was the field worker assigned to our community by the Chicago Area Project. I had met him about a year before through a friend who tells his story in Chapter Seven. I quickly saw Mr. Alderman and was gratified to learn that I could be placed on a state project designed to furnish employment. Known as the "Children's Leisure Time Service," this agency made personnel available to community organizations, such as the Area Project. (At that time a small

group of us banded together and under Alderman's guidance we organized a club know as the "Guiding Brothers," which later developed into the community organization which is the subject of this book..)

Thus I became a recreation leader, working with boys' gangs in my own community as I have described in other chapters. As our community organization took form as a tangible enterprise, other opportunities developed and in time I came to occupy an important role in it. But what was important to me at the time was the feeling that somehow this was "different." It was not merely having a job, important as that was, but the sense that this might be an instrument to help bridge the terrific gap in our social world. Through this project, I thought, many of the young people of our community might have an opportunity to identify with something so [end page 60] that together we could carry on our fight for a place in society. This was the spirit of Clifford R. Shaw, Henry B. McKay and their colleagues, who came into our midst- not unscrupulous organizers who would exploit us, but humble intelligent men who wanted to encourage us yet themselves remain the background and let us take the credit.

The story of the rest of my life is largely the story of our neighborhood enterprise and the Chicago Area Project, which comprises the remainder of this book, but here a few milestones in the subsequent development of my career.

My assignment with the State's Children's Leisure Time Service as a gang worker lasted less than a year. The state terminated this project as federal funds became available and the WPA was established. Since my sister was working I did not qualify for WPA. However, the Chicago Area Project had funds available to enable me to continue working in the neighborhood with the newly launched program. Since this work was primarily in the afternoons and evenings, I was able to attend college in the mornings. As I recall, my salary in those days came from a special fund available to the Chicago Area Project from the Boy Scouts of America. The source of the funds was royalties from Irving Berlin's song, "God Bless

America," earmarked to promote scouting in "less chance areas." I was a pioneer in that recruiting and training program which continues to this day as "street-corner scouting." This was around 1935.

In addition to the work with corner groups, I began to do some writing for our local Community News. I was doing a column called "The Neighborhood [end page 61] Surveyor" and in order to get news and to keep up with the neighborhood affairs, Guy De Filippis, who was the editor, and I would attend some of the meetings. One night we went to see what was happening at Our Lady of Pompeii Church. We knew that a service was in progress that week, well attended by many of the young people. As we entered the vestibule the crowd started to come out, eagerly waiting to go up in front of the church to talk with the guest priest-a Franciscan-who was conducting the Annual Mission, for the young people of the parish, I noticed that a large proportion in attendance were young girls-and as fate would have it-one of them stepped on my foot. She apologized profusely, but our eyes met and her face registered in my mind.

A few weeks later Guy and I went to a meeting of the Young Ladies Sodality at the church. As I recall I had just finished conducting a troop meeting and for some reason I had a Scout ax with me. The girls had just finished their meeting and were talking informally when we arrived. My ax and a lousy tie I was wearing caught Ernie Matengrano's attention. "That's a lousy tie," he said. Several of the girls overheard the conversation and came over-including Ann Sodaro-the girl who stepped on my foot in the vestibule. She differed with Ernie's opinion and we started to talk. It ended up with an agreement that I would be Ann's escort at the caning Sodality dance. After that, we dated regularly and courted for about four years.

Meanwhile, I attended the city junior college for two years, and after that Lewis Institute, now merged with the Illinois Institute of Technology, graduating in 1938, with a Bachelor of Science degree.

Subsequently I studied sociology at the University of Chicago. Upon graduating from [end page 62]

college I took and passed a Civil Service examination and became certified as a junior research sociologist in the Department of Sociology of the Institute for Juvenile Research, of which Clifford Shaw was departmental head. Just prior to this, however, I had to receive my naturalization papers in order to qualify.

As a staff member of the Institute for Juvenile Research, I continued to work on the Near West Side, developing the work of the West Side Community Committee until December, 1945, when I was given supervisory responsibilities for other projects then being developed in other parts of the city. Part of my supervisory responsibilities included working on the Near West Side so I maintained almost uninterrupted contact with the West Side Committee.

From 1954 to 1957, I served as Clifford Shaw's administrative assistant and had central office responsibilities for the Chicago Area Project, which by that time had launched community projects in several Black areas on the South Side, West Side, in a Mexican and Puerto Rican neighborhood, and in other communities-a total of twelve projects. During this period I also assisted Mr. Shaw in teaching several courses on delinquency at the Downtown College of the University of Chicago. I now teach these courses at De Paul University.

When Clifford Shaw died in August, 1957, I succeeded him as administrative director of the Chicago Area Project. At about-the same time a reorganization of welfare services by the State of Illinois transferred the community services phase of the Institute which comprised the Area Project [end page 63] into the Illinois Youth Commission. I became an assistant superintendent of this new agency for Cook County and in this capacity we continued to expand delinquency prevention work, based on the procedures and methods of the Chicago Area Project. In 1970, the State services were again reorganized

and our work was transferred into the Juvenile Division of the Illinois Department of Corrections. At the present time we are promoting neighborhood organization projects in about thirty areas.

In 1939, with a secure job and my career showing some promise, Ann Sodaro and I were married and we continued to live on the Near West Side for about ten years. Within five years we had three children: Robert, Patricia and Dolores, now all married. Three grandchildren have resulted from these marriages. In 1957, we moved to Hinesdale, a suburb of Chicago where we live today.

When I was growing up my mother would often proudly tell me that when I was born the Italian flag was raised on one of my father's small boats in the harbor in Marsala, Sicily. This was done so that as he came home from Malta-at that time on the schooner El Niobe, in which he had part interest with an uncle-he would know that the child they were expecting was a boy. Now the birth of a boy was always especially welcomed and celebrated with greater joy and clamor than if the child was a girl. For example, the first bath water, if a boy, would be thrown out the balcony into the street to symbolize that this boy's place eventually would be in the world. But the first bath water of a baby girl would be flushed down the latrine, symbolizing, I hope, nothing worse than the fact that this [end page 64] poor female child's place would eventually be in the home.

My mother, however, often made a big point about the flag being raised to announce my arrival. To her this had special significance: it was an omen that I would eventually grow up to be someone of importance. That never really happened, but perhaps in some way that we cannot fathom this incident was the beginning of what Eric Berne calls the "script" which is written for each of us rather early in life. Perhaps in some way this early beginning can explain in part the ambitious spirit and exuberance which some people have attributed to me from early childhood.

These past forty years have seen changes in the life of the immigrant boy who landed here in 1919, with fear and trepidation. He moved along, however, with some anxieties, but never in a spirit of resignation, so that he finally achieved a satisfying and significant place in society. Also during these four decades the problems of an ethnic community were approached with daring and determination to make it a better community. Backing up all these efforts, both in the life of that boy and the history of the community, was the Chicago Area Project, the creation of Clifford R. Shaw, a social scientist and a humanitarian in the best sense of the word. [end page 65]