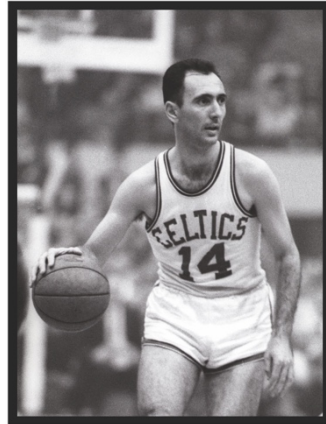


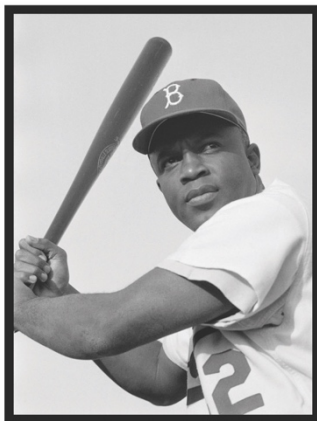
Between our tours with the Brigade, my new out-of-town school, and becoming more independent generally, I found myself answering the question, “Where are you from?” more often. I suppose it’s only natural to want your hometown to stand out, even if it never had seemed like much from where my drawers hung. But St. Albans had more than a few ‘claims to fame.’

In fact, my brother Jim grew up playing basketball with future Hall of Famer, Bob Cousy, who lived just a couple blocks away.

Cousy also attended Andrew Jackson High but never made the school team until he broke his hand falling out of a tree, which forced him to become ambidextrous.



After that, Jim and the neighborhood kids could no longer keep up, and Bob went on to play 13 seasons for the Boston Celtics.



Not that I was ever a sports fan – either then or now – but it was noteworthy, and really a source of pride, when Jackie Robinson moved to St. Albans.

And just two years after breaking the color barrier with the Brooklyn Dodgers!

He moved his young family into a fashionable section known as Addisleigh Park, which was already a prominent community of very famous African Americans.

When Fats Waller (who wrote Ain't Misbehavin') purchased his Addisleigh Park home in 1938, I was only six and far too young to understand the importance of the legal battles which ensued as Waller fought the town's "racially restrictive covenants" in the courts.



That he won was also a source of pride. First on moral grounds, but also because he brought many of his legendary friends to St. Albans with him. Lena Horne, Count Basie, and Ella Fitzgerald all had beautiful homes just seven or eight blocks from our little apartment over the delicatessen on Linden Boulevard.



It might as well have been a world away.

But as luck would have it, the very year that Jackie Robinson came to town, the Menendez family broke through a seemingly impenetrable barrier of our own. We purchased our first house!

115-76 231st Street



In the Cambria Heights section of St. Albans!



Remember Peter Fitzhenry, my mother's favorite uncle? The one who gave her away on the day of her wedding? The one who was getting rich running a saloon?

Well, Uncle Pete was particularly fond of his sister Mary and especially of her two children, my mother and Aunt Catherine. Still, it was a surprise when Aunt Mame died and Uncle Pete's Will was finally read.

Peter Fitzhenry's assets were left in a Trust to be divided (upon his widow's death) amongst his relatives with – by far – the largest shares being allocated to my mother and her sister.

Though Aunt Mame lived on another ten years, it did little to depreciate their savings. Aunt Mame was absurdly frugal. One time, Uncle Pete bought Mame a special new wardrobe for their vacation to Florida but when they arrived, he learned that all the clothes had been left home. Aunt Mame explained how she “hadn't wanted to subject them to the rigors of travel.”

My sister Pat reminded me of a childhood visit to Aunt Mame's. In her garage, two old Cadillacs were up on blocks, her windows were filled with taxidermized birds, and when we entered, she was sitting there eating watered-down soup which a neighbor had brought over.

When my mother inherited her share of Uncle Pete's estate in 1947, it was a life changing event for her.

Gone were the icebox and the wash basin. We now had an electric dryer, a washing machine and a brand-new GE refrigerator.

And while we only moved a little over two miles to the east, we found that we'd been transported to a completely different way of life.



My mother's new coat.

Simple things:

we had a driveway (I could have a car),

we had a yard (I could have a nap),

and most importantly, we had a basement (I could have a party)!

The car was a 1931 Model-A Ford!

I paid \$150 for it.

Gasoline was 17 cents a gallon.

I was on my way!



(Nick and me again.)

The car was older than I was. I'm still not sure what possessed me to disassemble the entire engine and lay out all the pieces and parts on the garage floor. (Or then boil them in soapy water in my mother's big stew pot!) But I can tell you that putting them all back together was one of those early challenges in life which prepared you for all of the bigger, later challenges.

I was learning to say, "Take a big, big bite and hold on tight!"



Now, about that basement...

Nick would arrange the guest lists for all of our parties.

He had a real talent for it!

Fifteen to twenty kids,
half boys, half girls.

(Here's Nick with my sister Pat.)



And my
brother Jim
with his
future wife,
Jeanie.

Jim rarely
attended
these almost
weekly parties.

He was always welcome but by this time he preferred hunting, fishing, or caring for his horse. From that point on, Jim owned either the front end or the back end of a horse at any given time.

Our group was still three years younger than he was and mostly concentrated on Spin-the-Bottle, Post Office, Couch Hockey, and Pony Express. When girls would ask me what Pony Express was, my answer was always, "Similar to Post Office but with a little more horsing around."

We had a lot of sofas and some of the girls would come from as far away as Jackson Heights. Oddly (or perhaps predictably), the one girl I never invited to our basement was the one I liked best.



Nancy Tobin was the girl who lived across the street. She was beautiful. And she liked me a lot too, I think. Or at least she acted in ways that would let me know that.

I couldn't really call her "the one that got away" because I never asked her on a date, either. Still, I have the sweetest memories of our flirtations, and with Nancy that was enough.

Here, we're merely headed to my sister's 17th Birthday Party.

And here's Jack Eschmann, Eugene Farrell and me. As I said, the old apartment was nearby so we kept all of our old friends.

Gene lived over Mr. Zobel's butcher shop. He was one of the good guys. His mother was a struggling widow and his older brothers had been in the war.

Jack was always around. He had started dating my kid sister Mary and he kept his car in our driveway, a 1928 Crystal Coup with a rumble seat!



When I turned 16, I applied for a job working behind the hotdog stand at Jones Beach. I figured, working really close to the water – and with all of those girls around – it would be wonderful. But their Personnel Manager who'd come out from Manhattan said, "I don't need counter help right now. Dishwashers for the Marine Dining Room is what I need."

"Anyway, applicants have to be 18 or older to work inside. How old are you?" As he stared me up and down, I gave him the answer he was looking for, "I'm 18!" I started that afternoon.



I immediately rented a furnished room in Wantagh, a block from where the employees' bus dropped off the kitchen help. (Again, I was 16. I look back on this sometimes and wonder, what were my parents thinking?)

I got along great with the other dishwashers. And I suppose, with a name like Menendez, the manager figured I could speak or at least understand Spanish. But I couldn't, and not one of the other dishwashers spoke English, so I lasted just one week.

Fortunately, I was saved by Pepe, the dining room maître d. He had me transferred and trained to become one of the busboys. I guess I did better at that because one week later, Danny the Head Chef had me transferred to the “cold side” of the kitchen.

While the four chefs on the “hot side” cooked the lobsters and the steaks, etcetera, the four of us on the cold side prepared the salads, the sandwiches and the desserts.

I returned to that same summer job until I was 18. Each season I rented a different furnished room in town. Best of all, there was plenty of time in our schedules to enjoy the beach!



This was the start of good times! There were more than a few girls during this period and plenty of dates, but one in particular stands out.

I had never met her prior to that evening which was her High School Prom. Nor do I ever recall seeing her subsequent to that event. What I do remember is that we had a wonderful evening, mingling with her socialite friends.



I had correctly – or incorrectly – categorized her Catholic Academy High School as one of those snobby institutions which required membership into an upscale country club with horse stables (like the one we were at that night). I was mostly wrong but there were more than a few young ladies there who seemed overly impressed with their status. Fortunately, I discovered that I was immune to all of that.

It was my friend, Dolores Schlueter, who had set up our date. The young woman was her neighbor. And all I knew was that the prom would be somewhere out on Long Island. That, and the fact that Dolores' friend was blind.

She could see shadows or outlines of people if they stood with their back to the window. Daylight helped, but only a little. She wore a wristwatch where the glass popped open, and she could feel the hands on the dial. She had really adapted to all of this extremely well.

My job was just to put her at ease about being on a blind date at her own prom and to safely guide her path. And to hopefully have fun, which we most certainly did.

It was a noteworthy night in my life because it made me see a lot of things very differently.

Meanwhile that job at Jones Beach was helping to carve a path for my life, by virtue of it being a path I didn't take. Many of the other restaurant staffers worked at the Florida resorts during the winter season and came north for the summer work opportunities. After a few seasons, I was able to see that this wouldn't fit the lifestyle that I desired and pictured for myself.

When I returned home after my third summer, my friends were applying for jobs in the Long Island aircraft industry. Grumman Aircraft and others were paying high wages for floor sweepers, machine operators, and equipment maintenance men. My experiences up to that point, as well as my time conversing with customers at the grocery store, led me to think I'd do better in an office, working at a desk.

I had already quit high school, so I was free to move on with my life and into any industry where I felt I could make a start.

After all, how much longer could I go on playing the bass drum in the Andrew Jackson High School Marching Band?



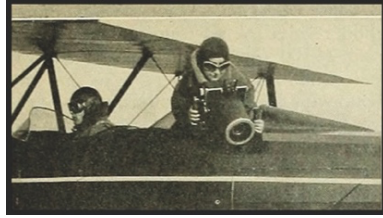
I applied for the job of “Mailroom Boy” at the Fairchild Camera and Instrument Corporation on Van Wick Blvd. in Jamaica, Long Island. It paid about half of what my friends were making at the aircraft factories.

Marge Kessler was the Operations Manager. Once I’d passed the initial interviews with the personnel department, they asked Marge to meet with Eddie Menendez to get her final approval.

I sat in that lobby for a very, very long time before approaching the reception desk. The lady said, “Oh, Mrs. Kessler was down here a while ago. Did you not meet with her?”

With that, Marge promptly returned to the reception area; we talked, and I was hired. Marge confessed to me a number of years later that she’d been told to look for an Eddie Menendez, but all she saw was a skinny Irish kid. So, she just went back to her office. Anyway, a few months later I was promoted into the sales department to work for Mr. Kilpatrick.

His function was to monitor and chart all the U.S. Military contracts, by dollar value and units.



The company had recently changed their name from Fairchild Aviation, which it was during World War II, since they manufactured aerial photography equipment for the war effort, including machine gun cameras, radar and x-ray cameras, and radio compasses.

While they still produced some of those products when I joined them in 1950, they were heading to market with their newer consumer versions such as the Cyclops Camera.

Announcing . . .
THE CYCLOPS CAMERA

AT LAST a sturdy, efficient, dependable aerial camera, costing less than \$200, is available. Large purchases abroad make it possible for the Fairchild Aerial Camera Corporation to offer the CYCLOPS at a sensationally low price.

The CYCLOPS places photographic operations within the reach of more commercial operators than ever before. Independently or in cooperation with local professional photographers, they now may expand their sources of income by exploiting the many possibilities of aerial photography, with the assurance they can offer the fine quality aerial photographs that are easy to sell.

The CYCLOPS for the first time makes aerial photography possible for thousands of owner-pilots and non-piloting flyers. Aerial photographs are as easily obtained as snapshots on the ground.

The CYCLOPS is just the camera commercial photographers and private flyers have been waiting for.

Distributed by
FAIRCHILD AERIAL CAMERA CORP., 62-10 Woodside Ave., Woodside, L. I.

● Priced to make aerial photography practical for profit or pleasure **\$194**

They had also begun to develop equipment for office use, such as the revolutionary Fairchild Lithotype for Publishers, which could print in a variety of fonts and sizes!



I stayed on that job for two years. We had money in our pockets



(Nick, me, and Eddie Emmerich, out with the girls.)



(Here, Nick and I are with Jack O'Connell and a friend of his.)

Even in that photo booth,
it always felt like we were on the move!

Additionally, Jack O'Connell and I had both joined the Knights of Columbus.



Here, at age 18, I'm on my way to a big charity event. I credit the Knights with showing me some of the social skills which helped in business.

For me, it was a kind of finishing school where you learned to speak and joke with people of different ages and sensibilities.



After two years of membership, I had moved up the ranks. I enjoyed being an insider at the party. But it was about this time that I allowed myself to become “voluntarily drafted” into the Army. I was 20 years old and leaving St. Albans behind.