



The Milk Run

It was a hot summer day. I think it was on a Sunday in July actually. The reason I think it was Sunday is because I was not at the city pool on this day. (Monday through Saturday I would pocket the \$1.25 my mom gave me for entry to the city pool, then take my chances on sneaking past the pool manager, Terri Glaze Hubauer. I was a real pro. Me and some of my friends who would not give permission to be mentioned in this short story (Ryan Jenkins, Chris Leggett, Heath Hipp, Mikey Parvin) would pull the old "distract and sneak " maneuver. As soon as the pool attendant left the window we would run through the door as fast as we could. Slipping and sliding into the already wet and stinky humid locker room of the city pool. We would then hop in the showers so we would look wet as if we had been there for hours before reappearing poolside. The Oneonta City Pool wasn't like today's

city pool. You know, the one with all the fancy stuff like splash pads, slides.....Chlorine. This was the pool below the armory that doubled as a catchpen in the winter for us dumb kids that were willing to slide on cardboard from the top of the hill on snow days, only to be shredded by the jagged fence surrounding the pool at the bottom.

With all that being said, It was a Sunday. For the most part, I had grown up on Fifth Avenue a couple blocks behind where the Post Office is now. Being this close to town gave me special bicycle privileges. The kind of entitlement that the rich kids my age over in Eastwood and the likes could only dream about. Freedom was my reward for being poor. Not just any old freedom. Huffy bicycle freedom. The kind of freedom that could only be obtained at Western Auto or Ace Hardware. I can see it now. She was blue with white handlebar grips, mag wheels and no chain protector, because chain protectors were for the weak and provided no danger for a 10 year old "Hells Angel" in training. Another added bonus to not having a chain guard was the ability to snag a chasing dog's whiskers. I grew up just a few houses away from a lady who had **allegedly** played her guitar butt naked on the checkout counter at Food Town. (If you know, you know) This person had plenty of dogs and we were heavily armored with mop handles to fight off the hounds of Hades as we rode past. Mom would let me go anywhere. It was a fun childhood to say the least.

On this particular Sunday mom was cooking our usual Sunday dinner. This consisted of fried pork chops cooked in a black cast iron skillet, beans of some sort, mashed “tators” and cornbread. This time of year we probably had a few sliced tomatoes and onions since they were in season. Sunday was a “gathering day” for us. If there's any “Yankees” reading this, that means we all came together to share a meal. I'm the youngest of seven and by this time a few of my siblings were married so mom was basically cooking for a small army. We struggled more than I ever realized. I never knew what mom had to do to put this meal together, until this Sunday in July. **"Robbie"**, I hear her yell through the house. ***"What mom"***, I yelled back in a tone that would normally get me swatted with a shoe at the very least. **"Ride your bike to the store and get a gallon of milk"**. She stuffed two bucks in my pocket and off I went on a milk fetch, grumbling the whole way. I turned left at the corner of Mrs. Galbreath's house, then left onto Fourth Avenue and finally a quick right into the Food Town parking lot kicking dogs off my legs the last twenty yards or so. Running full speed to the milk section, I grabbed the gallon of milk. In my haste I almost grabbed the one with the blue cap, but I caught myself and snatched up the gallon of whole milk with the bright red cap, just like the one Jesus poured from at the last supper. Dale Lanier rang me up and I was back on the blue bandit heading home in record time. (Of course I

took the thirty five cents I had left over with the intention of adding it to my city pool heist money) On the way back I decided not to donate another pound of flesh to the dogs and peddled straight across the old ball field that was located right where the post office is today. Milk in tow in a soggy paper bag, I hit the pitcher's mound going at least 120 miles per hour in my 10 year old mind. That's when it happened. The paper sack gave way and a whole gallon of dairy delight fell through the bottom of the bag bursting in slow motion onto the pitcher's mound. I looked back to see if there was anything I could spare but the hounds of hell had spotted me and took chase. A few moments later I was home, wet paper sack in hand, torn socks from the pooch patrol on Fourth Avenue and no milk. My mother burst into tears. Did she not know that I had just avoided death by two of the most menacing Chihuahua's known to man? Probably not, but the truth is we were poor. I kinda already knew it, but at that moment it sank in. As I think back, I want to end the story with me taking some of the money I had saved from my city pool shenanigans and made things right. In my mind I took that money, went back to the store to buy more milk....but I didn't. I'm not sure how the story ended because it didn't affect me. I'm sure one of my older sisters or brother went and got some more. They all pitched in that way when the chips were down. I never missed a thing or felt lesser than anybody growing up. Being poor is a state of mind that not many people ever overcome. In the end I realized that we weren't

poor at all. We were broke, and being broke is a circumstance everyone can work their way out of. Thank you Mom, Cookie, Debbie, Chuck, Diane, Bonnie and Tammy. We all did ok in the end; although I can't walk by the dairy aisle and not remember "The Milk Run" of 1985.