Northwest Passage

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I navigated the northwest passage in the 1950s. The northwest passage I navigated was not a sea passage from the Atlantic to the Pacific through northern Canadian waters. Nor was it any journey from one geographic place to another. Rather, the northwest passage I navigated was the passage of my early years growing up on the northwest side of Chicago.

I lived in the Jefferson Park neighborhood. This neighborhood starts at Milwaukee and Lawrence Avenues, and stretches north and northwest to the southern edge of the Edgebrook Golf Course. It is one of several neighborhoods that make up the northwest side of Chicago, and adjoins the neighborhoods of Forest Glen, Portage Park and Norwood Park. It has a sub-neighborhood known as Gladstone Park. The north-south streets in this part of the city for the most part start with an L or an M. Jefferson Park and Gladstone Park each has a stop on the Union Pacific Northwest Line of Metra, and Jefferson Park also has a stop on the CTA's Blue Line to O'Hare Airport.

During the 1950s, the people in Jefferson Park were thoroughly American but at the same time fully aware of their ethnic roots. Based on my recollection, the most numerous ethnic backgrounds were Scandinavian, German, Polish and Italian, with smaller numbers of those with ancestry from other ethnic groups, including Irish, Jewish, Russian, Greek, Romanian, Bohemian, and Slovak. I also recall one Korean family and one Chinese family in the neighborhood. The most common name was Johnson, which occurred frequently among the many Swedes in the neighborhood. At one time there were three unrelated Johnsons in my elementary school class of about 40 students. There were also four in the class, including me, with a Norwegian or Danish name ending in s-e-n.

It was a middle class neighborhood without extremes of wealth or poverty. Most of the homes were single family homes on standard city lots with small neatly-kept yards. There were some apartments, generally in owner-occupied two flats. Very few married women in the neighborhood worked. The occupations represented in the neighborhood included office worker or manager, skilled

tradesman, salesman, engineer, small business owner, barber, milkman, policeman, fireman, school teacher and bus driver.

The neighborhood was majority Catholic, with almost all of the others Protestants. There were a small number of Orthodox and Jewish families. The Catholics in the neighborhood attended St. Tarcissus Church. The Protestant churches included a Methodist Church and a Baptist Church, but most Protestants were Lutherans due to the large numbers of Scandinavians and Germans. The Lutheran churches tended to be ethnically-based, with each nationality having its own Lutheran Church. This was consistent with the organization of the churches in Europe, which were for the most part state churches that were established when each country adopted Lutheranism during the Reformation. The immigrants who came from those countries to the United States brought over the traditions of their respective state churches, and as a result, there were separate Lutheran churches for those of Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, German and Slovak ethnic backgrounds.

It was typical among my contemporaries to have either parents or grandparents who were immigrants. My grandparents were all European immigrants who came to the United States as young adults in the early years of the twentieth century. They made their way to Chicago, which at the time was a growing city with many employment opportunities. They raised their families and lived out their lives in Chicago. My father's family lived in Portage Park on the northwest side and my mother's family was from the west side near Garfield Park, although they moved to the northwest side in the early 1950s, so that our entire extended family lived on the northwest side during most of the 1950s.

My contemporaries and I were at the leading edge of the post war baby boom. Our parents had grown up during the Great Depression, and it was typical to have had a father who served in World War II, and who then returned to get married and to begin having a family shortly after the war ended. This pattern, following a period when many fewer children were born during the war years, resulted in my being the oldest child in my family, as were many of my friends and classmates in school.

During the 1950s, America and Chicago were enjoying the economic expansion that followed the long period after the deprivations of the Great Depression and the war. Dwight Eisenhower was President of the United States. The country was at peace, and President Eisenhower provided steady and stable leadership to a country that was ready to put the depression and war behind them and live the American dream. There was a 1960s joke which described an Eisenhower doll as follows: you wind it up and it does nothing for eight years. But while those eight years were passing, I think those in my part of America were ready just to do their jobs and live their lives without a lot of activity on the part of the government.

Chicago shared in the post-war peace and prosperity of the country, as its population peaked at over 3.5 million in the 1950s. Richard J. Daley was Mayor, and although he was referred to as "Boss" and his organization was known as the "machine," the people in our neighborhood were willing to accept those features of city government in exchange for city services and schools that they found to be very satisfactory. In that part of the city at that time, Chicago was the "City that Works."

Most families in our neighborhood lived in single family houses that had been built in the period from the 1920s to the 1940s. Homes in the neighborhood did not have central air conditioning, and very few even had any window air conditioning units. We did, however, have large elm trees in the parkways between the streets and sidewalks to provide some cooling shade. On warm nights it was common for people to sit out on their front steps to cool off, and this made for a neighborhood where people tended to know each other and to know what was happening on the street. In the fall, when the leaves fell from the elms, people raked their leaves into the streets where the leaves were burned, and on pleasant fall nights there would be a series of fires along each street with neighbors spending time with each other while they took in the scent of the burning leaves.

I attended Hitch Elementary School at the corner of Bryn Mawr and Austin. Hitch was one of the Chicago Public Schools and had about 500 students from kindergarten to eighth grade. It was named for

Rufus M. Hitch, an educator who served as a district superintendent of schools in Chicago in the early twentieth century. The school was built in about 1925, and together with its schoolyard, it occupied a full city block. The school was heated by a huge coal burning furnace, which was in a separate small building with a tall smokestack in the schoolyard. Periodically a truck would come by and leave off a load of coal to be burned in the furnace. Our only air conditioning was to open the windows on warm days. The desks were old-style desks that were bolted to the floor, and they had inkwells that were no longer in use. Each classroom had a pendulum clock on the wall that needed to be periodically wound with a key. There were no televisions in the school, but we had movie projectors for showing educational films, and radios for listening to educational radio shows.

Hitch School did not serve lunch, so that the students were let out at noon for lunch, and sent home where their mothers typically gave them lunch. They then returned in time to be in their classrooms by 1 pm when instruction resumed. None of the students lived more than about five blocks from the school, so the one hour break was enough for lunch and the round trip walk between home and school. There were a few students whose mothers worked. These students would stay for lunch, and one of the teachers supervised them in a classroom where they ate the lunches that they brought from home, and drank milk that they had saved from the morning milk break that we had each day.

At Hitch School we had recess every morning and afternoon for about ten minutes. There were regular games that took place during recess, with one popular game for boys being "Johnny Across." Johnny Across was a tag game where, at the beginning of the game, there was one boy in the middle to do the tagging, and then the other boys in the game would run back and forth between two goals. You could be tagged between goals, and then once tagged you would become a tagger until everyone but one person had been tagged, with that person being the winner. There were several games of Johnny Across going on in various parts of the school yard, and consistent with Chicago tradition, each game had a boy who was the "boss." In order to join a game, you had to ask the boss for permission and the boss would decide

whether you could join. The girls tended to engage in various jump rope games during recess. One of these, which was called "Double Dutch,' involved two jump ropes going in opposite directions.

Mayor Daley's influence was felt by students in the Chicago Public Schools during the 1950s. The head of the student council at Hitch School and other elementary schools in the Chicago Public School system was not the president, but rather was the mayor. I was elected mayor of Hitch School for one semester, and during that time, one of the teachers and I attended a lunch downtown where Mayor Daley hosted all of the mayors of the elementary schools in the city.

Mayor Daley was very focused on cleanliness in the city, and promoted it with the slogan "Keep Chicago Clean." He implemented this policy in the public schools as well as in the city at large. To support the mayor's program, our school student council, in addition to having a mayor as its top officer, had an elected officer called the Clean-up Commissioner, whose job was to promote cleanliness at the school. Our spring vacation was called Clean-up Week. On the Friday before Clean-up Week, each student was expected to come to school dressed for cleaning up, with a mop, broom, paint brush or other suitable cleaning up or fixing up equipment. We then had a clean-up assembly followed by a clean-up parade, where the entire student body walked around the square block that our school occupied with their clean-up clothing and clean-up equipment, while the neighbors came out to watch.

Softball was a favorite game among boys in our neighborhood, and of course it was sixteen inch softball which is unique to Chicago. The adults had industrial leagues and leagues sponsored by the Catholic Church, but for young boys the softball games were generally organized when a few boys got together and decided to play. We could play during the day at a local park where diamonds were laid out. Some of the diamonds were used by the organized adult leagues at night, but during the day they were open. We improvised the game to fit the number of players we had, and we could play with as few as three boys, with one being the pitcher for both sides and the other two being the two opposing teams. We played pitcher's hand out, which meant that if the batter hit the ball, he would be out if the pitcher had the

ball before the batter reached first base, and safe if he reached first base before the pitcher had the ball. Because there was only one batter, a hit resulted in an imaginary man on base, and the imaginary man would advance if the batter had another hit. With a succession of hits, there could be bases loaded with imaginary men, and the next hit would score a run. We often had more than three players so that we could have some real runners and both an infielder and outfielder instead of just one fielder. In order to play without a full team, we would also declare one field to be an automatic out. For example if the hitter were a right handed batter who would naturally hit to left field, a hit to right field would be an automatic out.

Choosing up sides for a softball game had its own ritual. Two team captains would be chosen and then one would throw a baseball bat to the other. The one who caught it would hold on to it where it was caught and the two captains would alternate placing their hands around the bat as they worked their way up the bat handle to the end. As you got toward the end you might just put one finger around it instead of your whole hand, because the last person whose entire or partial hand fit completely on the end of the bat would be the one to choose players first. The captains then would alternate choosing players until the teams were formed.

We often played sixteen inch softball in the streets on a street corner, with the storm sewer cover in one corner being home plate and each of the storm sewer covers in the other corners being a base. A hit to center field was an automatic out because that was a neighbor's front yard, and in the case of the corner where I lived, that neighbor was a woman who lived alone and became quite upset when the ball was hit into her yard. Depending on the number of players, either right field or left field, both of which were on the street, would also be an automatic out. Our streets were not very busy but if a car approached from any direction, the first person to see the car would yell "Car," at which time the game would stop and the players would move off to the side of the street until the car passed. The game would then resume.

Baseball gloves were forbidden in sixteen inch softball. New balls were quite hard before they were broken in, but we never played with a new ball. My uncle played in an industrial league and would give us balls that became too soft for his league but they were perfect for us. Not only were these soft balls easy to catch; they also did not travel so far when hit, so that we could play on the street or in the park with only a few players and not worry about having to chase the ball for long distances. Some of these balls, after being used first in an adult league, and then by us, reached a consistency comparable to that of a powder puff.

The sixteen inch softballs also had the advantage that they could be used indoors in the early spring before it was warm enough outside to play. One of our local parks, Rosedale Park, had a gymnasium where sixteen inch softball was allowed. Playing indoors with a sixteen inch softball was an old tradition in Chicago. One of the names for a sixteen inch softball, which was used by my father, was "the indoor."

When we were trying to gather up a group of boys to play softball or some other game, the group would go from house to house to gather as many as we could. Although the houses usually had doorbells, we did not use them. Rather we would stand in front of a boy's house and together we would yell "Yo" followed by the boy's name. For example in the house next door to us lived two brothers named Jimmy and Joey, so we would stand in front of their house and alternate their names, repeatedly calling "Yo Jimmy, Yo Joey" until one of them or a parent would answer the door and let us know if one or both of them was home and could join us.

While playing softball on almost a daily basis during the season, we also paid close attention to major league baseball. Collecting baseball cards, which were a nickel a pack for 5-6 cards and a piece of bubble gum, was a popular activity for boys. Although we were north siders, the neighborhood was split between White Sox and Cubs fans. This was likely due to the fact that the White Sox were an exciting team in the 1950s, known as the Go-Go White Sox, who were regularly contending for the pennant.

Usually they finished in second place, behind the Yankees, but in 1959, they finally won the American League Pennant. This was the White Sox' first Pennant since 1919, which was the year of the Black Sox scandal, when several players on the team purposely lost the World Series to the Cincinnati Reds in exchange for gambling winnings. In contrast, the Cubs during the 1950s, despite having a few stars such as Ernie Banks, were perpetually in the cellar or close to it.

You were expected to show allegiance to one team or the other, but not to both. I agreed on most things with my best friend Paul, who was in my class at Hitch for all eight grades, and was also in my Boy Scout Troop, but we parted ways on baseball teams: I was a Sox fan and Paul was a Cubs fan. Jack Brickhouse was the announcer on WGN-TV for both the White Sox and Cubs when only home games were televised. My brother, who like me was a Sox fan, used to contend that even though Brickhouse claimed to be for the Sox when he was announcing their games, he was really a Cubs fan. My brother turned out to be correct, because when the two teams started televising all their games so that they each needed a separate announcer, Brickhouse went with the Cubs. Our sister was raised as a Sox fan but later in life, as an adult, converted to the Cubs.

From our neighborhood, Wrigley Field was easy to reach, by taking the Milwaukee bus to Addison and transferring to the Addison bus which went right to Wrigley Field. Comiskey Park was a long trek by auto in the days before the expressway system was built. It required taking Elston or Milwaukee to Foster, Foster east to Lake Shore Drive, south on Lake Shore Drive to the south side where Comiskey Park was located, and then west to the park. It was also a long CTA journey to see the White Sox. My Boy Scout troop once went to a White Sox game by bus, and our group had to transfer three or four times to get there, and do the same on the return trip.

In those days, when you paid your fare on a CTA bus, the bus driver gave you a paper transfer with an outline of the CTA system on the transfer. There was a place on the transfer where the driver punched the date and time, and the driver also punched the CTA system outline at the place where you

got onto the bus. You could ride the next bus without a fare by presenting the transfer, and each time the transfer was used, the bus driver would punch it to show the location where you transferred. You could travel on an unlimited number of buses with a single transfer as long as you were on a continuous trip in the same general direction.

It was worth the long trip to go to a White Sox game, with exciting White Sox players such as shortstop Luis Aparicio who was an expert both at fielding ground balls and stealing bases, and second baseman Nellie Fox, who was also a great fielder and reliable hitter. The White Sox in those days were not power hitters, but they had speed and made the most of it when they were on base. They also had excellent pitchers like Billy Pierce and Early Wynn, who helped keep the other side from scoring and made it possible for the White Sox to win with only a few runs.

` The 1950s also brought Bill Veeck to the White Sox. Veeck was a colorful entrepreneur, with a long history in baseball, who organized a syndicate that bought control of the team from the Comiskey family, which had owned the team since its founding. Veeck brought new energy to the team. He installed an exploding scoreboard in Comiskey Park, which set off sound effects and fireworks when the White Sox hit a home run, he put on fireworks displays after night games, and ran promotions such as giving away live lobsters to a few fans by putting the lobsters under their seats. He had lost his leg in World War II, and he walked with a wooden leg with an ashtray built into it.

Even before buying the White Sox, Veeck had a reputation for using publicity stunts to bring fans to baseball games. In 1951, when he was owner of the St. Louis Browns, he fielded a player, Eddie Gaedel, who was three feet seven inches tall and bore the number one-eighth on the back of his uniform, to bat for the Browns. Predictably, Gaedel's strike zone was so narrow when he crouched to bat, that he was walked by the pitcher. He did not score, however, and the American League would not permit him to play again.

When I went to Comiskey Park with my father and brother, we would hang around under the stands for a while following the games. While the White Sox could go directly from their dugout to their locker room to a parking lot to drive away, the players from the visiting team, after changing their clothes following a game, would have to walk through the stands from their locker room to their bus and would often stop to talk or give autographs to those few who were waiting. Bill Veeck would also hang around under the stands following the games and talk to the fans.

I recall one game when the Yankees were playing the White Sox, and we waited for the Yankees to come through. Bill Veeck was standing there talking to some fans, together with Red Barber, who was the Yankees' sportscaster, so we joined their group. Along came Yankee catcher Yogi Berra, on his way to the team bus, and he stopped to join the group. During the conversation, Yogi complained to Veeck that the White Sox third baseman had hit him when he was at third base. While we were standing in the group with Berra, Barber and Veeck, Yankee manager Casey Stengel came out of the locker room, heading toward the street where the team bus was parked. We called to Casey to try to get him to stop and join the conversation, but he just kept walking through without acknowledging us, and unlike the members of his team, who rode on the team bus, Casey stepped into a black limousine parked just behind the bus, and the limousine immediately drove away.

The night that the White Sox clinched the Pennant in 1959 was memorable. It was late September, and the White Sox were playing the Indians in Cleveland. If the White Sox won, they would clinch the Pennant. In those days, only home games were typically televised, with WGN-TV carrying both the White Sox and Cubs home games, which did not conflict with each other because the teams were in town on different days. Out of town games were covered only on the radio. However, because of the importance of this game in Cleveland, it was televised.

It was a warm evening in Chicago when the game was played in Cleveland. Because we had no air conditioning, we decided to run a series of extension cords into our back yard and watch the game

outside on a portable television. If the White Sox won, it would be their first Pennant since the Black Sox Scandal of 1919. The White Sox won the game 4-2. Immediately at the end of the game, the air raid sirens throughout the city, including the siren a few blocks away at Hitch School, went off. Knowing that Mayor Daley was a White Sox fan from the neighborhood where Comiskey Park was located, our family assumed the sirens were Mayor Daley's way of celebrating the victory in Cleveland, and it was late so we went to sleep. We were correct. However, we found out the next morning, from reading the *Chicago Tribune*, that other city dwellers thought it might be a real air raid. These were the days of the Cold War when people were genuinely afraid of a Soviet air raid. According to the *Tribune*, Chicagoans went into the streets in some neighborhoods, others took cover within their homes and at least one person was reported to have headed for Wisconsin. Bell telephone and Tribune switchboards were overwhelmed with calls from persons trying to find out if there was a real air raid coming.

In response to the uproar, Mayor Daley was quoted in the *Tribune* as saying the next day that the sirens were set off "in the hilarity and exuberance of the evening. I regret if anyone was inconvenienced, but after 40 years of waiting for a pennant in the American League, I assume that everyone who was watching the telecast was happy about the White Sox victory." Fire Commissioner Robert Quinn said: "This was intended as just a tribute to a great little team." A federal investigation followed the incident, but no charges were ever brought.

Although the season for softball and baseball was long, stretching from early spring through the summer and into early fall, we played other games as well. In the fall we would play touch football at a local park or in the street. It could be either one handed touch or the more difficult two handed touch. As with softball, we did not have any organized teams, but rather played with however many boys we could gather for a game, and no equipment was needed other than the football.

Fall was also yo-yo season. All of a sudden, one day yo-yos would appear and all the neighborhood boys would be playing with yo-yos and doing various tricks such as walk the doggy, rock

the baby and around the world. The Duncan yo-yo company, which manufactured the yo-yos, would hold competitions in Chicago neighborhoods. On scheduled days in the afternoon after school, a man from Duncan would be at the corner of Milwaukee and Austin to hold the competition. Anyone who wanted to participate could do so. The contestants formed a line on the sidewalk. The man from Duncan would call out a trick and then go along the line while each participant attempted it. If you succeeded, you would go on to the next round, and if you failed one trick, you were out of the competition. Eventually as the difficulty of the tricks advanced, there were only a few left, and they received new Duncan yo-yos as prizes.

Winter brought ice skating at our local park. Part of the field was flooded for skating, and with the cooperation of cold weather, we could skate. A few boys had hockey sticks and pucks that they would use on the ice but there were no organized games and not even any pick-up games to speak of. Mainly we just skated back and forth and around the skating rink. There was also a pond on the Edgebrook Golf Course that would freeze and attract skaters, and we could also skate on the north branch of the Chicago River which wound through the golf course and the adjoining Cook County Forest Preserve.

Scouting programs played a big part in many of our lives. For the boys, there were the Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts. For the girls, there were Brownies, Girl Scouts and Camp Fire Girls. As boys growing up in the city, many of us had our first experiences of living in the outdoors by going on the hikes and camping trips organized by the Scouts. The Chicago Council of the Boy Scouts operated many local camps for weekend trips. In addition, one of the largest Scout camps in the country, the Owasippe Scout Reservation, was operated by the Chicago Council near Whitehall, Michigan. Owasippe had several camps on two different lakes, and it brought boys from the city to the Michigan outdoors. Owasippe was large enough to have its own hiking trails and was close to several rivers in Michigan where we would go on multi-day canoe trips, camping out along the way.

It was in Cub Scouts that I learned the symbolism of the stripes and stars on the Chicago Municipal Flag. The flag has three white stripes and two blue stripes. The three white stripes stand for the three sides of the city: north, south and west, and the blue stripes represent the two branches of the Chicago River: north and south. The flag has four red six pointed stars which have six points because five pointed stars are reserved for states and countries. Each star represents a significant event in Chicago history: Fort Dearborn, the Great Chicago Fire, the Columbian Exposition of 1893 and the Century of Progress Exposition of 1933.

A common job for boys in our neighborhood was a newspaper route. At that time, Chicago had four English language daily newspapers: the *Tribune* and *Sun-Times* in the morning and the *American* and the *Daily News* in the afternoon. The afternoon newspapers each had several editions based on which stock market quotes were included, such as early markets, late markets and final markets. The final markets edition of the *American* was the Diamond Final and the final edition of the *Daily News* was the Red Streak.

I delivered the *American*, which was the best newspaper of the four for learning how to operate a business. There were also a small number of customers who subscribed to one of Chicago's two Polish language daily newspapers, which were the *Dziennik Chicagoski* and the *Polish Daily Zgoda*, and we delivered those as well. With each of the other three English language newspapers, the paper boy delivered the papers, but the newspaper company collected from the customers. Especially for the morning newspapers, which were delivered before the customers woke up, the paper boys for these other three newspapers had little or no contact with their customers, except at Christmas time when they would go door to door to their customers to distribute a calendar for the New Year to each customer and hope that the customer would give them a Christmas tip.

With the *American*, we each had our own business. We obtained our newspapers and supplies from a distributor named Russ, who was assisted by his adult son, who was called Little Russ, even

though he was at least as tall as his father. Russ had a side room off of the gas station at the corner of Elston and Austin, where we would go each afternoon on weekdays to obtain our newspapers for the day. Saturday newspapers were delivered late Saturday morning, and the Sunday newspapers were delivered early Sunday morning. Russ sold us the newspapers, the canvas bag for carrying the newspapers, rubber bands for keeping the newspapers folded, and receipt books to give our customers a receipt for each payment. We would fold and rubber band the newspapers at Russ's distributorship, which had shelves along the sides of the room for that purpose. He provided us with the newspapers on credit, and every week after we collected from our customers we would pay him for the week's newspapers and keep the difference.

The daily newspaper at that time was 7 cents and the Sunday edition was 20 cents. A customer could have 6 day delivery for 45 cents or 7 day delivery for 65 cents. The newspaper boy would make 10-15 cents per week on each customer. We also offered accident insurance for 5 cents a week but we did not receive any commission on that. Each week we would personally collect from each customer, and many customers would give a tip every week. Virtually all customers gave a tip at Christmas time.

Russ provided other opportunities for us to make money. He was an active member of the Knights of Columbus and when the organization had raffles, he would give us raffle tickets, which were called "chances," to sell to our customers, and he paid us a commission on the sale of the chances. We also could sell subscriptions to the *American.* If we sold a subscription, we would receive the ongoing revenue from the new customer, and we would also receive a commission on the new subscription.

In addition to teaching how to run the financial end of a business, the newspaper route provided an education in dealing with customers. With most customers, all that was required was to throw the newspaper so it landed on the customer's front porch. When there was no snow on the ground, a newspaper route could be completed quickly as we would throw the newspaper as we rode by the houses

on our bicycles. In the winter, snow often required that the route be completed by walking, which took a lot more time.

Some customers, however, had special requests that required additional time in all seasons. One of my customers lived in a basement apartment that could be accessed only from the rear of the house. That customer required that the newspaper be carefully balanced upright on the door knob. Another customer had a dog who liked to take the paper to the customer, so I had to stop and look for the dog and place the newspaper in the dog's mouth each day.

Along Elston Avenue near the corner of Austin Avenue where Russ had his newspaper distributorship, there were a number of small businesses. The distributorship was attached to Mike's gas station, which was owned and operated by our neighbor Mike who lived about a half block away. It had a pop machine where bottles of pop were ten cents each. Across the street from the gas station was a Tastee Freeze which sold soft ice cream cones in various sizes, with the smallest one costing a nickel and the largest a quarter, as well as milk shakes and sundaes.

Along Elston in the other direction from Russ's distributorship, there was a white frame house built up next to the sidewalk with no front yard. Living in the house were an older Greek man and members of his extended family. Among the paper boys, we referred to him as the "Old Greek." The Old Greek did not like it when paper boys parked their bicycles in front of his house. When that happened, he would come out of the house and express his displeasure by making a show of moving each offending bicycle to the sidewalk in front of the newspaper distributorship. He never harmed the bicycles and as a result, the paper boys were never deterred from parking in front of his house, and even took some delight in causing him to come out and move them.

Next to the Old Greek's house was a drug store operated by the pharmacist and his wife. After that was the local barber shop where a barber named Jim gave haircuts to the boys in the neighborhood

for a dollar. Jim had a large selection of comic books in his waiting area, which encouraged us to come for haircuts.

Next was a small grocery store. Although we had a Jewel super market near Milwaukee and Austin, this small store was convenient for daily needs. The store had shelves reaching to the ceiling in order to store as many groceries as possible in a small space. The grocer had a long tool that he used to retrieve items from the upper shelves. When you had gathered all the groceries you were going to buy on the counter, the grocer would check you out by placing on the counter the brown paper grocery bag that he would use for the groceries. Before filling the bag, he would write the price of each item on the bag with a pencil, add them up by hand, and then collect the amount due. The bag in which you carried the groceries away would be your receipt.

As the 1950s ended, the northwest side was about to become more connected with downtown as a result of the construction of the expressway that was originally known as the Northwest Expressway when it opened in 1960, but was later re-named the Kennedy Expressway in 1963 following the assassination of President Kennedy. Before the expressway was built, travel downtown by automobile was a long drive down Elston or Milwaukee Avenue with numerous stops and starts at cross streets, and local traffic along the route. Once the expressway opened, it was an easy 15-20 minute drive downtown. The opening of the expressway also coincided with the change of the city's main airport from Midway to O'Hare. Whereas the drive from the Northwest Side to Midway required stop and go traffic along Cicero Avenue from its far northern reaches to the airport in the 5500 south block of Cicero, now the trip to O'Hare was only about 10-15 minutes on the new expressway.

The building of the expressway did cause some dislocations. Hitch School was two blocks north of the expressway where it crossed Austin Avenue. We lost students from Hitch when their homes were demolished to make way for the expressway. In addition there was a group of students living on the other side of the expressway whose homes remained intact, but they now would have to cross the expressway to

go to school. A foot bridge across the expressway was built at Austin Avenue to accommodate these students and you can see it on the way between downtown and O'Hare at Austin.

Ultimately, although not right away, the expressway would transform public transportation to the Northwest Side as well. During the 1950s, the end of the line for rapid transit to the northwest side from downtown was Logan Square, which was the end of the Milwaukee elevated line, now known as the Blue Line. From the far northwest side where I lived, the fastest CTA trip downtown required taking the Milwaukee bus to Logan Square and transferring to the elevated at Logan Square, which became the Dearborn Street subway downtown. With the opening of the expressway and the move of the airport to O'Hare, the rapid transit was extended in 1970 to Jefferson Park, where there was a shuttle bus to and from O'Hare, and later, in the 1980s, the line now known as the Blue Line was extended to run on the expressway median all the way to O'Hare.

Politically, our neighborhood was predominantly Republican during most of the 1950s. We had a Republican congressman, Timothy P. Sheehan, who represented our northwest side district from 1951 to 1959. In the 1958 election, the district went Democratic with the election of Roman Pucinski. This Democratic trend was solidified in the 1960 election, in which John F. Kennedy was elected President. In addition to Kennedy's youth, charisma and appeal to voters looking for a change after 8 years of Republican rule under President Eisenhower, there was strong support in the Catholic community for electing the first Catholic president. Twenty years later, in 1980, many of these same voters, who were Republicans turned Democrats in 1960, would return to the Republicans as the Reagan Democrats who helped elect Ronald Reagan.

Outside the neighborhood, but still on the northwest side, there were popular Chicago attractions that no longer exist. One of these was Riverview Amusement Park at Belmont and Western Avenues. Riverview had roller coasters and many other types of rides. It also had attractions such as a fun house called Aladdin's Castle, and a game where you could throw baseballs at a target which, if hit,

would cause a seat to collapse and the man sitting on it would fall into a dunk tank. Another attraction on warm summer nights was the park maintained by the Olson Rug Company at Diversey and Pulaski. Mr. Olson had built the park, and he opened it to the public. It had a walking trail that included a waterfall and statues of Native American Indians intended for city dwellers to experience the north woods of Wisconsin without leaving the city.

Our neighborhood was not insulated from national events. For example, Walt Disney had an impact on our neighborhood in the 1950s. Prior to the time when Disney's Mickey Mouse Club began to air on television on weekday afternoons, it was typical for us to spend our entire afternoons outside, weather permitting. Once the Mickey Mouse Club show began, there was an hour each weekday afternoon when young people often spent their time in front of the television set, watching the Mouseketeers and the Disney cartoons and entertainment that filled each hour in 15 minute segments. The Mickey Mouse Club show may have been the first step toward the childhood obesity problem that America faces today.

Walt Disney also gave us Davy Crockett, which hit our neighborhood as it did much of America at that time. Young boys were wearing coonskin caps and imitation buckskin clothing to look like Davy Crockett, collecting Davy Crockett trading cards, listening to Davy Crockett records and reading Davy Crockett comic books. There were three Davy Crockett television specials which were combined to make a Davy Crockett movie. Even though Davy Crockett died in the Battle of the Alamo at the end of the series and movie, he was so popular that additional episodes portraying events in his earlier life, most likely fictional, were produced and released after the main series had run its course.

Another national event that affected our neighborhood was the launch of the Sputnik satellite by the Soviet Union in 1957. That the Soviets could beat the United States in orbiting a satellite was a severe blow to American pride. Up to that point, we believed that America was destined to be the leader of the world in every endeavor, and that the Soviet system of Communism needed to be contained and

eventually eradicated. Shortly after the launching of Sputnik, Hitch School tried to do its part to help Americas regain its lead over the Soviets by increasing the amount of science education we were receiving. Whereas we had previously had science 2-3 times per week taught by our regular teachers, we now had science class every day, with a dedicated science teacher. It is impossible to tell whether our nation's effort to surpass the Soviets in space was helped by increasing science education at Hitch School, but Ronnie, who was one of my classmates at Hitch did go on to earn a Ph.D. in physics at the University of Chicago and to spend his career working for the space program.

Although much was good about growing up in the 1950s in Chicago from my perspective on the northwest side, there were also some tragedies that touched the lives of young people in Chicago during this period. Two events stand out in my mind. One was the murder of three young boys from the Jefferson Park neighborhood in 1955. The other was the fire at the Our Lady of the Angels School on the west side in 1958.

In October 1955, the bodies of John and Anton Schuessler, who were brothers aged 13 and 11, and their friend, 14 year old Robert Peterson, were found in a northwest side forest preserve two days after the boys had last been seen in a northwest side bowling alley. The crime was not solved, and it created a great deal of fear in the neighborhood, causing parents to be more protective of their children and to place a greater emphasis on not talking to strangers. In 1995, forty years after the murders, Kenneth Hansen, who had been a 22 year old stable hand at a stable near where the bodies were found, was arrested for the murders and he was ultimately convicted. It came out that he had met the boys while they were hitchhiking after having left the bowling alley where they were last seen, and had taken them to the stable where he murdered them. Later, with a confederate, who was the one who informed on him, he disposed of the bodies in the nearby forest preserve.

The Our Lady of the Angels School fire in 1958 shook the entire city. The school, which was located on the west side, had about 325 students, plus the teachers who were nuns. The fire broke out in

the basement while school was in session but it traveled up a stairwell to the second floor where there was no good escape route. Some of the students jumped from the second floor and eventually, but too late for many, the fire department arrived and was able to rescue some on the second floor. The fire claimed the lives of 92 children and 3 nuns. The entire city was saddened by this event, but there was a personal connection for adults in my family. My mother, who had grown up on the same block as Our Lady of the Angels, and my grandparents, who had continued to live there until four years earlier, knew some of the families from that neighborhood who lost children in this tragedy.

As the 1950s turned into the 1960s, my contemporaries and I were finishing up our time at Hitch School. We were in the class of June 1961. At that time, students in the Chicago Public Schools could begin and end their schooling in either semester, depending on their birthday. So in addition to the class of June 1961, there was a class of January 1961. Most of us would head to Taft High School next, which was a few blocks west on Bryn Mawr from Hitch. There we would join the students from other local public elementary schools as well as some of the students from the local Catholic elementary schools. Two of the boys would go instead to Lane Technical High School, which was a selective all-boys school that took students from all over the north side, and focused on a technical education.

Before graduating we were required to study Chicago history. We also learned and sang a song about Chicago that I have not heard since my days at Hitch School. According to a publication called "The Neighbor," published by the Northwestern University Settlement House dated October 15, 1921, the song was written by Chicagoan Charles G. Blandon with music by Chicagoan Granville English. The song went as follows:

> Behold she stands beside her inland sea
> With outstretched hands to welcome you and me
> For every art, for brotherhood she stands,
> Love in her heart, and bounty in her hands
>
> Chicago, Chicago, Chicago is my home
> My heart is in Chicago, wherever I may roam.

Her vision leads, her motto is "I will"
Though great her deeds, her dream is greater still
She aims to be far more than brick or stone
A victory, a bugle forward blown.

Chicago, Chicago, Chicago is my home
My heart is in Chicago, wherever I may roam.

We had a graduation ceremony in the Assembly Hall at Hitch on the last day of school in late June 1961. Our futures, as did the future of America, looked bright. Despite the shock of Sputnik and the first manned voyage into space by Soviet Cosmonaut Yuri Gargarin in April 1961, the United States had finally sent a man into space in May 1961, when Alan Shepard became the first American astronaut to go into space. In addition, we had a new President, John F. Kennedy, who had just announced the previous month that the United States would send a man to the moon within the decade of the 1960s.

As we stepped up to receive our elementary school diplomas, we wore the customary graduation ribbons, consisting of two ribbons, about nine inches long and fastened at the top, colored blue and gold for the school colors, that said we were graduates of the Hitch School Class of June 1961. None of could anticipate the challenges that were coming in the 1960s, which would turn out to be so different from the 1950s Chicago and America that we knew. The Cuban Missile Crisis, the Vietnam War and the anti-war movement, the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, and the assassinations of John Kennedy, Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, were all ahead of us. However, our northwest passage gave us a firm foundation for dealing with whatever might come next.