

I doubt if a freshman at Bishop Armstrong High School, or whatever ~~the~~ Christian Brothers is called now, can quite appreciate the trepidation with which one runty 14-year-old contemplated his enrolment in what was called (for some reason never explained to me) Christian Brothers College, back in the early 1930s. I mean I was very nervous. Scared to death, in fact.

To understand why, you have to understand that gang wars were not invented in New York in the 1950s. Not even by "West Side Story." In the Sacramento where I grew up, ~~the~~ us little kids over at St. Francis used to hear all about the battles at 21st and Broadway, where, apparently, about once a week the paddy wagon had to be called because the Argonauts were fighting with the Brothers boys again.

The Argonauts were an association of young men with, among other things, athletic interests, short tempers and -- so I heard -- large and numerous fists. They fielded teams in various sports, and these teams often journeyed from the Southside Park area to 21st and Broadway, where they engaged the Brothers' teams in regular contests. The outcome of these contests were ~~often~~ often in dispute, and the disputes were usually settled by unpeaceable means.

Now I was just a little kid, and since the age of six I had managed, by a combination of persuasion, charm and pure cowardice, to avoid getting into any fistfight. I didn't want to fight any Argonauts. I didn't even want to be there when they arrived.

Nevertheless, that September day, I was sent

to GRS.

And in the four years that followed, I never saw an Argonaut. Somebody said the gang was finally broken up, but I didn't really want to hear about it.

Excitement in those four years took many forms -- handball at recess, handball at noon, handball after school -- but the one I seem to remember best, after handball, was hanging around the school gate at 22nd street.

I am unable now to explain the charm of this activity, or non-activity, but everybody did it. Why? There was very little traffic. No girls ever walked by. The neighborhood was not scenic. Maybe it was just better than being in school. Maybe we were secretly hoping the bell wouldn't ring and we'd be in a good position to leave quickly.

One occasional, but unpredictable, flurry of excitement would occur some noon hours when two of my classmates, Bill Schwab and Seymour Kost, would pile into Kost's Model A and roar, well anyway rattle, off in the general direction of a building just across the ~~bridge~~ Sacramento River at the I street Bridge, where several gentlemen of Chinese descent conducted games of chance. This my two classmates did any time either one of them had 50 cents. (You all remember 50 cents, I'm sure. It preceded the dollar bill.)

When the weather got nice, spring or fall, some of us would ~~not~~ take our lunches out to the curb and sit in Donald Fox's old touring car. Then, if there was time and grapes were in season, sometimes we'd daringly chug out to the vineyards

on the edge of town -- which was very close, in fact -- and grab off a few bunches of grapes. True to a pattern of human behavior still observable in terms like "ripoff," we never called it stealing. We hocked those grapes. And for some reason they tasted much better than any you could buy in the store.

It is interesting to note that good old Don has for many years been one of the most respected and valued members of our city police force.

On days when you didn't take your lunch, you could buy a superb hot dog for a nickel at the little lunchroom on the northeast corner of 21st and Broadway, and a Coke for the same amount. The restaurant which occupies that corner now is much larger, but it does not seem to me an improvement.

Teachers, then as now, ~~came~~, came in all sizes, shapes and types. There was the expansively styled lecturer, engagingly exemplified by Brother Benilde, who used to have us memorize passages from Shakespeare. (Brother Benilde is also unforgettable to me because for a time I sat in a front seat -- when he could keep an eye on me -- and thus was in a good position to receive the little flecks of saliva that used to gather at the corners of his mouth and fly off in unpredictable directions. He also had ~~another~~ a gift for ^{the} distinctive phrase. "Glackin, I am not amused," was one of his favorites.) There was the teacher young enough to be one of the boys, almost; Brother Stanislaus and Brother Dominic were two of the most likable of

these, although there were many, for in those days the Order sent many of its young new Brothers into the crucible of CBS for tempering in its ordeal by fire.

There was the teacher who was really a nice guy but you better not fool around if you know what's good for you, exemplified by a fine man, Brother Patrick, who was principal. There was the all-serious-business type with the heart of pure gold, like Brother Matthew, who taught us ~~European~~ history, ~~and~~. Brother Matthew, for me, was also the teacher who never seemed to get my name right. "Glooken," he would call. "Glerkin." Eventually I learned to answer to anything with two syllables that started with G. There was also, now that I think of it, a teacher (of religion), Father Connor, who persuaded a number of us sophomores to sign a pledge never to drink ~~any~~ alcoholic liquors. ~~With~~ With all the other things I have to feel guilty about, I don't really need that memory.

Grand men, every one. How in the world did they ever put up with us? ~~that they ever managed to~~

- BILL GLACKIN

Stan - cut this any way
you want. ~~I have my doubts~~
~~about the last sentence.~~
~~Seems a little poor.~~