

SIDEWALK MEMORIES

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Watching the film playing at Maxie's Deli brought back all kinds of memories of growing up throughout the 1960's, from age 6 to age 15, in a three-family house on Lucerne Street, just a couple of blocks from the G&G, and near the corner of Morton Street and the Ave. (Blue Hill Avenue, of course). The title of the project "Sidewalk Memories" leads me to focus on the games we would play.

There were big whiffleball and squash (punchball) games in the sort of communal backyard we shared with three other houses. I grew up not quite realizing that grass was a living thing, as no grass ever grew in our yard – I thought it was just pasted down in front of suburban homes we would visit. There were touch football games in the street, where the best pass patterns involved sideline routes between two parked cars. We actually had enough woods behind some of the neighborhood houses to have some spirited games of hide-go-seek, where if you were "it", you always dreaded the last kid hiding beating you back to "goals", screaming out that magical phrase "All-y, all-y in-free" (sp?).

The sidewalks themselves were also centers of athletic contests. Hit the penny, baseball against the stairs (we didn't call them stoops, like those future Yankee fans in New York), and an interesting concoction we called "Three Blocks". This game involved two players facing each other three sidewalk cracks apart, with the pitcher tossing a pinky ball with as much spin as his fingers could impart into the third block and the hitter punching it back in the box nearest the pitcher – one base for every time the ball bounced before being scooped up.

One of the monumental changes in modern-day America is the transformation from informal play to organized activities. My two sons, growing up in the bosom of suburbia, have had baseball schedules of Little League, Pony League and summer travel teams.

In our third-floor apartment in Dorchester, my parents didn't need a schedule on the refrigerator. If it was a weekday afternoon after school let out or anytime on the weekend, we were outside, playing with our friends. Period!