

Recalling a Pelham Parkway Past; A Nostalgic Gathering Celebrates a 1950's Neighborhood

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EAST MEADOW, L.I., Sept. 11— Mickey Mantle, Duke Snyder and Willie Mays were their heroes, President Dwight David Eisenhower was in the White House, and it seemed like one big continuous block party to the kids who grew up in the Pelham Parkway section of the Bronx in the 1950's.

"We didn't know it then, but the old neighborhood was a unique place," said Harry Schwartz, one of several thousand former residents of Pelham Parkway who attended a reunion here today in Eisenhower Park on Long Island.

"I grew up on Wallace Avenue, learned how to walk on Pelham Parkway and went to P.S. 105 like everyone else," said Mr. Schwartz, 54, a businessman who came from Boca Raton, Fla., for the reunion, the third the group has held since 1980.

All agreed it was a perfect day for a picnic, or block party. There were lots of warm sunshine and fond memories of such favorite Pelham Parkway meeting places as Jesse's corner candy store, where the "two-cent plain" actually cost just 2 cents, and the Mell-O-Dee Music Shop, where one found the latest music of the 50's. Abrams Was an Alumnus

"I lived right in the heart of Pelham Parkway on Holland Avenue on the same block as P.S. 105," said Robert Abrams, the former New York State Attorney General, whose political roots are in the east Bronx.

"The school was the center of all activities," he said. "You played basketball until 11 o'clock at night and softball on weekends. One's whole life centered around the school yard."

"All of us here grew up in a special place," Mr. Abrams said. "It was a working-class neighborhood in which 99 percent of the people were Jewish."

"Our parents worked in the garment industry or had little stores and shops," he said, recalling that he worked behind the counter at his father's candy store, Red's Luncheonette, on Holland Avenue.

"Deuce, how ya doin'?" said Mr. Abrams, greeting Howard (Deuce) Cohen, an old school friend and one of the organizers of today's picnic. Mr. Cohen said a lack of parking in Pelham Parkway made holding the reunion in the Bronx impossible.

Mr. Cohen, who grew up on Bronx Park East, across the street from the Bronx Zoo and the New York Botanical Garden, said his old neighborhood covered a radius of a dozen blocks, with three or four apartment buildings per block. "You'd walk out of your apartment house and there were always a hundred kids hanging around," he said.

"Everyone was friends with everyone else. Our apartment doors were never locked, and in the summer, they were always open to let the breeze blow through," he said. "And if you did something wrong, before you got home your mother knew about it and you were in for it."

When asked what he meant by "something wrong," he recalled the risky nature of a favorite street game. The Hazards of Stickball

"We used to love to play stickball, but the cops didn't like it, so when they came around we used to hide the stick in the street drain until they left. Boy, how times have changed," said Mr. Cohen, 55, who now lives in Northport, L.I., and operates an executive placement and consulting firm.

At one point, someone produced an enlarged snapshot taken in June 1950 of a sixth-grade class on the steps of P.S. 105, with the teacher, Arlene Weeks, in the back row.

Ellen Weiss, who still lives on Pelham Parkway, brought her 1959 yearbook, *The Anchor*, from Columbus High School, to get some new autographs. Mr. Abrams also graduated from the school, as did the actress Anne Bancroft, Regis Philbin, the television talk show host, and Sy Sperling, president of the Hair Club for Men.

The reunions have not only led to renewed friendships, but rekindled some old romances. *The Flame Goes Out -- Again*

Chuck Gitlin, another organizer of today's event, who grew up on Cruger Avenue across the street from P.S. 105, said a picture in an old yearbook recently encouraged him to try to get in touch with a high school girlfriend.

"I had not seen her in 35 years," he said, adding that with the "help of a friend of a friend" he was able to find her and renew their old relationship.

"But it only lasted about a month and a half. It didn't work out this time either," said Mr. Gitlin, 54, a Long Island manufacturer of automotive accessories such as neon lighting for cars.

"Most memories, like those of the old neighborhood, tend to be sweet," he said, "because we forget the bad parts."

Terry Cooper Spevak, Ellen Gitlin and Beverly Webber reminisced over a 1954 photograph of their fourth-grade class. (Maxine Hicks for *The New York Times*)