

Johnny Beggins Transcript

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MTP: All right, J-B, Johnny B. One of the first questions that I wanted to ask you was what is one of your earliest memories about Braddock Park? But before you answer that question, I want to share with you mine. I don't think I've ever told this story to anybody. It has to do with you and that's why I want to tell it now.

You may remember, I have a sister named Nancy. Nancy was in the Jerry Fleming age group. Amiel. Chucky. Those were all her friends.

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JB: You're saying like, Chucky O? Chucky O'Hara?

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MTP: Chucky O'Hara. Yes. She was hanging out at the park when you and I would have been five or six years old. Of course, at five or six, I wasn't allowed at the park, just because it was far away. You were (allowed) because you lived across the street.

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JB: And I had a bunch of babysitters. You know what I mean.

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MTP: That's right. You had your sisters and you had your big brother. One night, my sister came home, and I remember this like it was yesterday. She's telling my mother in the kitchen a story about this kid at the park. My ears perked up. I just listened in. She tells the story about this little kid who none of the big guys can beat in stickball or steam. Of course, my mother doesn't know what these things are. My sister's explaining what she could. "You're not going to believe it. This kid is pitching, and he's striking all the big guys out, and then he gets up and he hits. He's smacking it out of the park." Finally, I got really curious and I said, "Who are you talking about?"

And she said, "Oh, you don't know him because you've never been there before, but his name is Johnny. Johnny Beggins."

I was like, "Wow." I can remember thinking it was probably 2 years before I actually got up to the park for the first time, but I remember thinking that you were this phenomenon because of that. That my sister was in awe of you and the natural athlete that you were and are. You were just born to do that. Just incredible. That's my earliest Braddock Park recollection.

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JB: Well, if you remember, my dad was the baseball coach at Our Lady of Lourdes. He coached all those guys like Mario Ivino, John Scotto. John Scotto lived by you. He lived a couple of blocks west of you heading toward Lourdes, by the Gallino's house. You remember when you lived over there. John Scotto might have been the greatest athlete in Queens Village history. He was like Jim Thorpe.

He was amazing. But my father coached those teams for years. That's why I said before I had babysitters up the ying yang. My mother would open the door, and I would run across the street. When I couldn't cross the street, I would run down the block and stand in front of Patty Gallagher's house and scream for somebody in my house to come let me cross the street because I was so young. I do remember that.

It was great growing up. Even when I was younger. Even though it took us a couple of years. If we were 10, 11 and 12, the guys who were 16, 17 and 18 were deep into heroin and shit like that. I can honestly say I never, never, never had a problem. No one ever messed with me. I don't remember anybody messing with us. But that was funny. I'd be at the park. There'd be softball games, baseball games, and my mother would just open the door and then cross me. I was on my way. It was fun.

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MTP: The only guy I remember who was affected by that (drugs) was a guy by the name of Lenny Pesh.

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JB: Lenny Pesh. He had the shakes. He had that twitch.

MTP: Yeah, he had that twitch. Now, maybe, he was just born with that. But I always had attributed it to him being drug involved. Maybe I'm wrong?

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JB: Well, I can honestly tell you if I'm wrong, I'm wrong. Gary Granada. Remember Gary Grenada? He lived over by Paul Lonergan or I'm going to say, by the Safara's. He told me one time Lenny had a bad trip. A lot of those guys got really fucked up, like Eric Fressle's brother, Ricky. He died of a heroin overdose. Terrible, terrible thing. You had a lot of guys who never came back. Guys who got into it and didn't know any better. Just like the kids who were Jamie Fleming's age. Bimbo who got into heroin and remember Frankie Pepe? I got a story for Frankie Pepe. Write that name down and tell me later. That story is going to turn your fucking head on your shoulders.

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MTP: So since we're talking about the older group, one of the things that I wanted to ask you about was Jerry Fleming, because I don't think anybody knew Jerry, in our group as well as you did. I think we were all in awe of Jerry and afraid of Jerry all in the same breath. I can remember Jerry being just so quick witted that you needed to really calculate whether you could win this argument or this tease with him, and if not, you were on your way to being the butt of the jokes for the next half hour.

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JB: Well, no. It could last for years. You know what I mean? Remember Bobby Green, who we all know and love. What was the nickname that Jerry gave him? Bergikov, the village idiot, and that lasted for years. I was "Little Beggs", "Mini Begs", "Stupid Beggs", you know.

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MTP: Jerry had a nickname for everybody.

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JB: Well, everybody did in Queens Village. I when I was a cop in the Midtown North school. We were sitting around the bar. Me, Barry Burns, Patton, Gowrie, Tommy Evans and guys like that. And we're all talking. 30 people in the bar and this guy says, "One fucking question. Does everybody in Queens Village/Bellerose have a nickname?"

Well, we looked at him. I was Beggs, Horny Warny, Howie. You had Jerry, Mal, Burnsey.

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MTP: Whiskey.

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I was sitting there laughing because it was so funny. I went through everybody's name. I went down like Johnny Fleming was Flem. And you never called, "Hey, John." It was if someone called you by your real name you were either you getting punched or they owed you money. (Do) you want the money (or do) you want me?

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MTP: I remember when I first started calling Charlie O, "Chuck". He said that was really, really special to him that he had a nickname.

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JB: Well, I thought, Charlie O, was a great nickname. He was one of the many cast of characters. He would do something crazy and you would just, "Alright, that's Charlie being Charlie." And you went on your way. Everybody had a nickname. It actually took a cop that I worked with to point that out, and I still giggle when I think about that story. "Oh you have Burnsey. You have Beggs. You have Fee." I was useless.

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MTP: So Jerry somehow was, let's call him 'the king', or the President of the park.

JB: He was the mayor or whatever you want to call him. He lived on Edmore right there, three houses from the park. I was up at the park, even going back until I became a police officer. I lived across the street. If you didn't want to sit in the house and watch TV, you went up to the park. Sooner or later, someone was going to show up. And when we were growing up, we could have seven different crowds, enough to play softball from 10:00 in the morning till 7:00 at night. All around the park, you had a bunch of kids growing up, girls and guys. People don't understand that. I tell people like it was. I always compare it to Wonder Years growing up in Bellerose and Queens Village, but it was a lot more fun than ever shown on that TV show. It was wonderful. And like I said, you could go to the park, get into a softball game, a basketball game, play handball all day, play a tackle football game on the infield of the track. Or if you wanted to just go on the swings. Remember the monkey bars?

MTP: We used to hang out there a lot.

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JB: The monkey bars, Michael, there was no padding. Nothing on it. If you fell down from the third level, your chin was going to get hit. It was like some kind of a freaking Monty Python skit. You were going down and you were going down like a rock.

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MTP: I can also remember when that pool was used. I know you were up there when they actually ran water through that pool. When we were teenagers, they never did. But when we were little, they actually ran water in there. It was 4 inches deep. It was piss warm. And it was great.

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JB: The sprinklers would come out to sides. Back in the day, what I was told, this is before my time, they used to have dances and show movies in that park. That was before we were there, maybe in the mid-50s.

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JB: If I get this right, you'll love to watch this. It's on YouTube. I believe it's called "The Braddock Boys". Mr. Hyland. Remember Joni's father? One of the greatest guys in the world. He's in it.

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JB: And the guy did something like you doing, but these guys are in the 50s and Mr. Hyland, we all know and love that guy. He was a gentleman. Funny as the day is long and if he got mad at you, he could snap your neck in a second.

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MTP: One of my one of my favorite memories of playing basketball when he was the coach and was trying to teach us how to do a take the ball from out of bounds in. And Howard was the guy who was taking the ball in. He didn't throw it. And Mr. Hyland said, "Howard, you're not gonna do a jig back there!" And he takes the ball, and he starts doing this dance. Joe Howard and I were on the floor crying. I couldn't breathe for the rest of practice.

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JB: He was great. I loved him and Joni and the daughters. They have an amazing thing going on Rockville Center. It's called the [Backyard Players](#). It's for handicapped kids; Down's syndrome and things like that. Oh my God, Mike, they are doing God's work. I mean, when they run a benefit or fundraiser, they can't count the money that comes in. If I remember correctly, Ellen's the top dog. Joni and all the sisters, (You remember, they had five or six sisters and they finally had the youngest, a baby boy) and one girl in the Highlands was better looking than the next. So that's why, Mr. Highland, probably had a bat or a shotgun somewhere in his house on 222nd Street

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MTP: He was great.

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JB: You want to get back to Jerry or ?

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MTP: Yes. So tell me. Tell me what else?

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JB: Well, Jerry's father was probably one of the greatest. His father is actually in the softball Hall of Fame. Fast pitch.

MTP: The King and His Court.

JB: No, no. He beat the King and His Court twice. That was Eddie Feigner. Eddie Feigner was the pitcher for the King and His Court. Mr. Fleming beat him twice. Mr. Fleming, I remember my mother told the story that when my mother and father moved into Bellrose on Fairbury Avenue, my father was walking through the park. I guess 1957/1958. My dad, my sister Eleanor was born in '55. I think they did one year in Brooklyn and then my father came out to Bellrose. Do you know why our neighborhood was full of cops and firemen and city workers? Because they weren't allowed to go into Nassau County until 1961.

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MTP: Oh, no kidding.

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JB: You could only go as far as the five boroughs and then you know why they changed that? Because they wanted to break the voting bloc. When you had cops, firemen or whatever civil service. If you had a voting bloc that big, you could control an election. Then they let them go out to Nassau County and then Suffolk County. They also let them go up to Westchester and I believe Orange County or the it's the one above that. I had a guy I work with who lived 80 miles from the fucking city. He was out of his mind. 80 miles and he was living two days at his in laws.

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JB: I said, "You must have a girlfriend on the side." That's why we had so many people our age who were cops and firemen. It was just as far as we could go.

JB: Getting back to Jerry, Jerry's father was just a great athlete. Jerry would come up to the park. I'd be sitting there on the park bench by the basketball courts near Fairbury. All of a sudden, Jerry would stroll, or meander over. He walked like he was 1/4 of an inch off the ground. You know what I mean? He'd come walking in. He looked to his right to see if anybody's there and he would just stick out his right hand and wiggle it this way. Everybody would laugh every day. He would just stop and wiggle his hand. Come over. Hang out. Sooner or later, he would get a young kid to go get his New York Post and a sandwich at K&L Deli and just hang out.

Jerry was a big guy. He was 5 foot nine, but he was big. But Jerry was a good athlete. Jerry could shoot. He could shoot the basketball. He couldn't play the game because he was too big. But have you ever tried to beat him in stickball?

MTP: I remember him being in softball. Yeah, the fact he could get on base was always a miracle. And it was because he knew how to hit.

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JB: He was one of those guys that could use the bat like an extension of his arm. You know what I mean? He could whack it to you right down the right field line or pull it. But of course, it was always a single because he couldn't run. It was part of the game. Jerry was a great guy.

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MTP: Actually, in softball, I remember sitting on the benches that are next to the handball court and we were watching a Shaeffer League game. And Jerry gets up to bat. Jerry's always a good hitter. He's always going to get on base. He hits a line drive over the third base, gets one bounce to the left fielder. The left fielder throws him out at first base and the crowd goes crazy. Jeff turns around and drops his pants. That was it. It just leveled the benches. Everybody was on the ground and he just walked back like "You're going to make fun of me?"

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JB: He always had just one liners usually attached to some stories. As Nina would say, you have to take every Jerry story with a grain of salt. But he was a wonderful guy. He got sick. Cancer.

JB: On the picture that I sent you. What was it? 2004? I think he died in 2004. I was off the NYPD and I was the head of security at the Central Synagogue at 55th and Lex. The real nice reform. I don't know if you have you ever been in it. It's stunning. I was the director of security there. Because Rabbi Peter loved having the Cardinals guy. "I got the Cardinal's guy" and it was a great gig. I'm going to say Jerry got sick in 2000 maybe, and it was bad. It was terrible, man.

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JB: Quick story as you'll get Jerry's humor right away. My brother Jimmy said, "Listen, you got to call Jerry. He needs help." I said, "What the fuck can I do?" Well, you know Jimmy, "You just call him, please." So, I call him up and Jerry was not in hospice, but he was sick and he was going through cancer treatment. He goes, "Beggs, I don't know what to do." I said, "Jerry, if there's any way I could possibly help you, you know I would." Well, I was at Saint Patrick from all those years, so I had a lot of connections. Tons. I was hooked, Mike. I'm not going to lie to you. His cancer. I hate cancer. I fucking hate cancer. His cancer meds were like \$3000 a month. \$3000, a fucking month, Michael. So what happened was, I'm going to start crying. I said give me a day or two, so I went to [Cardinal O'Connor](#) and I told him the story. He goes. "OK, you know Monsignor Ralph?" Monsignor Ralph was Bishop Daley's right-hand man. Like first secretary in Brooklyn. So Cardinal O'Connor said, "You know Bishop Daly and you know, Monsignor Ralph, call him." So I called Monsignor Ralph and I explained to him what I just said to you about Jerry. And I said, "Monsignor, listen, I'm not saying he's the most Catholic Catholic. But \$3000. He's a Catholic kid from Queens Village." You know what I mean?

I get a call like 2 days later and it's Jerry. And he goes, "Begg Catholic charities got involved." And he goes, "Begg, I don't know what the fuck you did. My meds just went from \$3000 a month to \$300 a month."

So I said, "Jerry, listen, I just asked somebody to do something for a good guy." I said "Now, Jerry, this is the point. I don't know what's going to happen. If these people want to show up and say Hail Mary's to you, let's go along with it." So Jerry, without missing a beat, Michael, without missing a beat, he goes, "Begg, if they want me to dress like an altar boy, I'll dress like a fucking altar boy."

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JB: And I was just like, "Oh my God." You know Jerry, I can't remember him ever being really mean to anybody. You know what I mean? Everybody can have a bad day. Lord knows, I've been there but he was pleasant to everybody. Remember, he owned Easy Street for a couple of years. He owned Gantries. I also think he was a connection with Paul Lafara and the pot deals that went on at Braddock Park.

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JB: Jerry was just so damn funny. He had a lot of funny friends like Jimmy O'Connell – 'Ock". Ock is in the basketball Hall of Fame. He was a writer. He was the national editor for college basketball for decades. He's in the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame. Look him up. Jimmy O'Connell. As a writer.

MTP: First of all, I only knew his name is Ock.

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JB: What was the joke? Hey, do you know Ock only has one sock on? No hum a few bars and I'll try to pick it up. I still use that line all the time.

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MTP: That, and the picture, I forget who was with their dog out in the outfield and Jerry said, "A boy and his dog."

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JB: The whole neighborhood was a cast of characters. You said Chucky O'Hara before. He hung out with Jimmy Lonergan. Jimmy Lonergan might have been the most dirtiest basketball player in the history of the game. He was all ass and elbows. He would fucking crush us.

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JB: All our buddies, we were very lucky growing up. I would tell guys that I would go to a party with guys that I went to the second grade with. And some of these guys said, "I don't even know guys from my college." It was like I said before, Michael, it was it was like the fucking Wonder Years.

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JB: We could go. We've been talking about Braddock Park so much. But Queens Village-Bellrose was huge. We could walk everywhere, which we did. We could go during the summer block parties.

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JB: 216th, 217th A block Chris's house on 215th.

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MTP: So Chris told the story on his podcast about one day he was working up at Baskin Robins.

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JB: Yeah, I was there.

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MTP: And there was a block party on his street. He was really upset because when he got home, we were all there having a great time with Mrs. Warne. Chris wasn't even there. We didn't need anybody to be in a particular place. We could just be there.

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JB: Well, you know, even though we were 16/17 and drinking and stuff like that, we didn't act like assholes. Well, we had a couple. But you know, Michael, Mike Werle, broke my heart when he passed away. The joke was when, we thought it was the drink that made him a little crazy. And then when he stopped drinking, we all realized he was just fucking crazy.

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MTP: He was just crazy.

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JB: He was crazy and I loved him to death that he would call me once in a while, make me laugh.

MTP: He was a highly intelligent guy.

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JB: You bet your ass, brother. You bet.

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MTP: You know, if you, if you allowed the crazy to settle a little bit and you had a one-on-one conversation with him, it was amazing.

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JB: Well, he had a tough childhood with his father.

MTP: That was that was really hard. When I was in fifth grade, his brother and I were hit by a car. It was right next to Kurt's Deli, where the bar was on the corner of Jamaica Avenue.

JB: Yeah, that, that, that was the Belt Parkway.

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MTP: We got hit right there at that light. An undercover cop carried me home, but we tried to find Mr. Werle, and unfortunately, he couldn't walk out of the bar. He was so drunk. So we ended up not going to the hospital for several hours because there was nobody around to take us.

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JB: I don't think I even knew that.

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JB: You know it. It's amazing. When my mom died back in early 2020, Margaret McManus, once in a while, I'll get a message from her. I'll send her a message, birthday. She told the story. I don't even remember we were playing Chinese handball and she went head first into the handball wall. It sounded like a ball peen hammer hitting a wall. I remember it because I was in love with the girl. You know what I mean? I sent Charlie O'Reilly, he ran to my house faster than the time when he handed the cop his ID and then ran away from the cop. "I got your driver's license, come back."

She told me she remembered that story. I remember it too, because I remember the thud. It's like if you threw a waterlogged softball against the wall, it made that noise cause that wall was not going to give. I think people put bullet holes and never went through that.

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JB: We had that. People were going to look out for you. Not just our friends. The older guys looked out for us. There was a couple of times I got hurt in that park when I was younger, probably playing softball with the guys I shouldn't have been playing with, but they knew I could play second base. One time, remember Grandpa? Bobby White? Well, I was doing a rundown with him, and I got in his way and he plowed through me like he should have. I was out. Down goes Frazier, man. I was out. They carried me to my house and my mother answered the door. Here's Bobby White and Amiel or whoever, Mike Dado, carrying me. "Mrs. Beggins, I think he was knocked out cold." I had a Shiner and stuff.

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JB: They were going look out for you. I mentioned before, when the park was going through some tough times with the heroin. Remember Pistol? Remember Pistol Pete and Peter Evangelista and those guys. They were older than Jerry and the boys, and they were really, really messed up. Pistol Pete used to sell speed to Billy Joel. They were all older guys. Jerry Fleming used to tell me that story all the time. Billy Joel, when he was younger with the Hassles, he would buy his speed at Braddock Park. I don't think it was Matt Troy. It was another congressman or representative who called Braddock Park, 'Needle Park'. It was all over the front page of Daily News.

MTP: I remember that.

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JB: Yeah, yeah. People are going to believe what they want to believe. We were on the inside, Michael. At any time, did you ever feel ill at ease about something that was going on in the park?

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MTP: No. That's the strange thing. We were going up as young kids. I have a fourth grader right now. I can't imagine him walking five or six blocks away and hanging out. Quote unquote, "hanging out at some park". Safety was never the issue. I never felt unsafe.

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JB: Well, and it wasn't just four or five blocks, Mike. You had girls like Jackie Golden, Kathy Marks, Margaret, Joe Howard. They were coming a mile and ½ away.

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MTP: Linda.

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JB: At least on their bicycles. And remember, I would have like 35 bicycles in my backyard. The cops would raid and I have 50 kids in my backyard hiding and my father was a Sergeant with the NYPD. He didn't care. One day the cops came in and my mother opened the door. I came in later because I probably went a different way. It was 20 people sitting in my living room floor watching an NCAA basketball game. And there's my father, "OK, sit down. The cops are leaving. You can go." We would have 20-30 bikes in my mother's backyard because they would get stolen. It was a fine opportunity. You couldn't keep an eye on it all the time. But it was funny, man. Funny as hell.

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MTP: Who else do you remember?

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JB: I'll go through the all. Artie LeDrew. Remember Artie LeDrew?

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MTP: Gosh, you know there were a couple of Arty LeDrew's. Older men who would hang out. Do you remember the guy who would always preach? He would always carry a Bible with him and he was always preaching to us. I don't think I ever remembered his name. And then there was a guy who always introduced himself as Sandy Kofax. And he was there for a while. Then there was Quack, even though he was employed.

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JB: He was employed. He was the "parky". He would take us to a summer league handball and punchball tournaments and knock hockey tournaments and stuff. We'd have 200 people on a Monday or Tuesday afternoon at the park. They came from all over the place. You had the people from Saint Gregory's. Not just Our Lady Lourdes, Saint Gregory, PS 33, PS18.

MTP: The park was an amazing center for so many different activities. On a busy Saturday, the park was packed. A couple of 100 kids there.

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JB: It was hilarious. Like I said before, you could hit a wall one day. You could play basketball, softball game, handball, touch football, go on the swings. Walk over to K&L Deli or Kurt's Deli.

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MTP: We used to play Johnny on the pony on the center track.

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JB: Remember Johnny Ride the Pony was oh, my God. There's a picture. I think you took it. I wouldn't have taken it.

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MTP: I took, I took it. It's a picture of me and you, Mike Werle. We're all holding on to one of our limbs.

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JB: There's a picture of Kathy Marks. She married a guy from Malloy. I can't tell you the last time I saw her. It might have been at one of Mary Ann Cook's reunions. She looked stunning. She looks great. Always a great girl. Jackie Golden. Terry McDonough. Terry Castano now. She got married young and she lives in Florida now. She's a friend of mine on Facebook.

Joey Ondres calls me once every couple of weeks just to check in. He's done very, very well for himself. He had his problems, but he's was a money man for Lynyrd Skynyrd, 38 Special. He saved them their money and he still works hard. He was just up in New York and he sent me the picture of Jerry's plaque.

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MTP: Who did that (plaque)?

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JB: That that was started maybe the day of Jerry's funeral. I believe it was in January. I'm going to say 2004. Gene Black. You remember Kevin black? Tommy Black was a year older than us. Gene Black was living in Atlanta, came up with that. I guess after the funeral, they were sitting in the bar and they said, "Fuck 'em. We can do anything we want. We'll go get one." And they went to like a trophy store. And they did it right away. Someone got a different one than the one I sent you because that was 25 years ago. You know, 20 years ago when Jerry died and they put that up there. The newer one was put up by Joey Tercy. Joey Tercy was an Our Lady of Lourdes guy.

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JB: Probably three or four years older than us. I think you'll remember him. He was the youngest guy. He used to work at Shea Stadium selling the beers, and he was a nice guy. We were 12, 13 years old, and he would hand you a beer. It didn't cost him anything. Joey Tercy did that just recently. You see how shiny and new it is. It's brand new. It's a year and a half old. I think I recently sent you one of the new one and I sent the old one years ago.

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JB: But Jerry was the mayor. If you needed something, you could always ask Jerry. He always had a connection somewhere. I wanted to go to that Mets game. Back then, you had to go home, get on the phone and say, "Jerry told me to call you." And somehow things got done. I really liked Jerry because he treated everybody with respect even though we were younger kids. Guys could be real dicks. Even though, growing up, of course, when Jerry was 18, he wasn't going to hang out (with us) when we were 12. But when he was 21 and we were 16 or 17 and we're hanging out like with Johnny Fleming and Head (Jamie Fleming). Johnny Fleming just retired from the Juno Police Department after 12 years. He retired from the NYPD and then he moved down there. Now he just retired from the Juno police. I talked to him a couple days ago and he sounds great. He sounds like John.

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MTP: Juneau, Juneau, AK Juneau?

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JB: Who? Alaska. No. Florida, Juno.

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MTP: Ohh, Juno, Juno down there.

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JB: I'm sorry. I hear Juno. I'm a Florida guy. I've been here now, Mick, for...

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MTP: Whatever happened to Jamie?

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JB: Jamie is a local three guy making great money. Really got away from the bad stuff they were into. There was a whole crew of those kids Jamie's age. That was when, Angel dust hit and that was a scourge. You'd see some of these guys humping a telephone pole outside of Foxies. That was terrible stuff. None of our buddies got into that. We had our beers. I didn't even like pot to tell you the truth. Pot would give me an upset stomach. In the early 80s. We all dabbled in the other stuff a little bit, but then, thank God, in 1985, I got sworn in with the NYPD and I realized I could never, never look my father in the face if I ever, dolled off the job so pot and anything else you would do would just never get done.

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MTP: Actually, we came out as a group pretty unscathed.

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JB: Yeah, you're right. You're right. We were lucky. All our guys were level headed, I always felt. Lord knows we could all be assholes. I look in the mirror once in a while I see myself as well. I think we all

kept tabs on each other. Like Michael. I don't think Sherlock Holmes could have kept tabs on Michael.

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MTP: Actually, I'll tell you a quick story about him. You know, I was writing a lot in college.

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Yes, I remember you told me that. Yeah.

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MTP: I can't remember how I got it, but someone sent me an address in Bayside from Michael Werle.

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JB: Yeah, he lived there for a while. Yeah.

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MTP: So I wrote him a letter and then I came home one day from college and we were out somewhere. Maybe Easy Street or something. He came over to me and he said, "Can you step outside for a minute?"

I was like, "Yeah, something I said?"

We went outside and he reached into his pocket. You know, he used to always wear, like a jacket, like a suit jacket. He pulls out this letter. He said, "I carry this with me wherever I go. You saved my life with this."

I said, "I'm sorry. I didn't. I just wrote you a letter. That was it."

He goes, "You don't understand. Nobody knew where I lived. And this just came at a really bad time for me and really helped me get through. So I carry it with me."

00:39:47

JB: He popped in at Paul's house, Paul Lonergan's house. And you may remember Paul's nephew, little Stevie Accatino. He had Down's syndrome. You might have been in college by then up in Syracuse, but he would run the football pool every week at a dollar a box. 100 boxes \$50. Half would go to the Stephen Junior fund to send him to camp in the summer time and the other \$50.00... I won a couple of times. I take the \$40, I throw another \$10 in.

JB: Super Bowl Sunday big daddy, Big Steve. Remember how big that guy was? That guy was like the size of a refrigerator, and Paul took him in to the hallway by the front door. Now remember Paul's house. You walked to the front door and there was that hallway that before you got into the living room on both walls, on both sides. And Paul had to hold up, Steve. We had raised \$1800 out of \$2100 they needed for the six week camp and we did that probably about six or seven years in a row. Big dad and after that you can really never buy your beer around Big Daddy because he wanted to know who was involved? But then you'd have guys who would win and throw the whole thing in.

You know what I mean? And. And I'm going to win a little money. I want to put something in my pocket. I ain't that great of a Catholic. I might have met Mother Teresa, but I ain't Mother Teresa.

00:41:25

MTP: But you know, it's a great story because it just says the kinds of things that we did for people, we did to take care of each other. Whether you knew that kid or he was part of your family, didn't matter. You were part of the pool because it was the right thing to do.

JB: It really was. Paul was always going to take care of you, too. You know what I mean? Paul was making more cash with the chimneys, he did the chimneys from the time we were sophomores in Van Buren, and he's still doing them now. I used to say to him and Bobby, if I ever find your slush fund, I'm going to take it because I know it's a lot of money somewhere, you know?

00:42:06

MTP: We met the guys that they bought that company from was the Jewelers on the 222nd Street and Jamaica Ave. There was a jewelry shop on the corner. Well, the jewelry store was owned by the mom and the son, even though he kind of worked there, he ran the chimney cleaning out of the back.

00:42:18

JB: Right.

00:42:27

And they would hire us to put the Flyers in people's mailboxes. Me, Paul and Bobby and maybe you came along too sometimes, but he would drop you on a corner and you'd have to walk all the way, like from Jamaica Ave. to Hillside Ave. on 215th St. Go to every single door. And so that's how we met them. And then after a few years, Bobby and Paul bought them out, which was amazing.

00:42:43

JB: Which was great because those guys worked. Bobby actually was a fireman for five years and he had to quit. He quit because Paul couldn't do it himself. So he had to make a decision. Maryann, his wife, was an NYPD, so they weren't going to lose anything on the health coverage. So Bobby and Paul came together, and the rest is history. I believe. I don't think I'm talking out of turn. But if I am well, sorry. They're looking to sell it within the next year, year and a half. Bobby's got a beautiful house up in Lake George that we've gone up a couple of times with the boys. Paul's got a place somewhere in Pennsylvania, but last year we were there. And you know what sucks. So four years ago, we were there with Charlie O, and then he passed away, which was really a shame. Then two years ago, we were there and then this year, Mike Werle dies. So we have to get back up there not to kill anybody but get back there and.

00:43:59

MTP: Before we lose somebody.

00:44:02

JB: Mike had a great line. We were sitting there eating drink and be merry. And he started telling people that he had problem with his heart. His heart was pretty fucked up. He goes, "You guys really never thought I had a heart so..." His heart was in pretty crappy shape.

00:44:28

JB: Mike's a good dude. He used to text me a lot when I had cancer a couple of years back. That's why I fucking hate cancer. It got my mother, my baby sister, Kathleen. Kathleen's wake was on December 31st, funeral December 31st. No, no. December 30th. The next day I got on a plane, came back to Florida. My ENT stayed open on New Year's Eve day. He did the biopsy right there on December 31st and first he said, "I'll give you one shot or two shots."

I said well, "I'd rather have one."

He goes, "Well, that's one one's going to numb you."

I said, "Just stick it in." He stuck the needle in it was huge man about four or five inches worth and he took it out and he said, "John, you got cancer. I'm going to send it out to the lab, of course, but you have cancer."

I looked at him like, "What do I do?"

He goes "It's December 31st and you got two shitty years in front of you. I'd go get fucking drunk." So right then and there, man. Let's go. And then everything happened from there from the chemo and the radiation and all that shit.

00:45:42

MTP: You did really well through that.

00:45:45

JB: I got very lucky. They caught it very early, Michael, and I had an amazing team from Nina's sister Mary was the nurse practitioner that ran the whole office with Johnny Morrow. Doctor John Morrow. I had Nina here, of course. And it was right during the COVID. So Emily came home. Her boss said, "You can do your job helping your father." So she was here my whole time. So was Hannah and Jack. The chemo and the radiation, I got through it. I worked until April. On April 2nd, I hit a wall like Evil Knievel would hit the ground. I couldn't get off the couch for 3 months. I lost 45 lbs. I gained most of that back, which I kind of expected to.

I got very lucky. The worse was my baby sister Kathleen I that that's just fucking criminal, right. That makes you doubt shit. You know what I mean? I would have given it up myself. My mother was 94. She lived forever. Kathleen. No, that was bullshit. Mick. Mike, you know.

00:47:11

MTP: How's your brother? How's Jimmy?

00:47:13

MTP: Jimmy's doing wonderful. His oldest daughter Olivia, just got her PhD just the other day. Genevieve is going for her masters, I believe at Baruch in the city. Jeannie Murphy is doing great, still funniest girl around and Jimmy's doing great. He really is. I try to talk to him once a week, and I'm going to see them in less than two weeks. I'll be up in New York. They're having a benefit at Garden City Country Club. I think we know a guy who used to run that thing. Joey Howard. Right. For the Hospice that took care of Kathleen. So I'll go up there and spend the spend a good amount of change. But let's get away from the sad stuff. Got any more questions about the neighborhood? We'll do that.

00:48:08

MTP: Final thought on the question of why. Why did we have this unbelievable group? And I say we had, but really we have the people that I'm in touch with and you're in touch with so many, people than I am...

00:48:28

JB: Give me a second. I'm going to grab a beer. Give me a second. Hold on.

00:48:43

MTP: What's your sense of how this came about and how we stayed together because it really is a phenomenon. There isn't anybody that I've ever met that could even say that they knew one person from elementary school. Never mind, I've got 60 people I could I could call that I went to 1st grade with you. What made that?

00:49:06

JB: We're not just talking about our group of crazies from the girls to the guys. Lynda Benvenuto is still a friend of mine on Facebook. She was texting me a lot. I think Joe got in touch with some of the girls like Angela Diver and these are all names when you got in touch with me about this, I said, "Anything you want, Mick. I love you, man." We know we talked for a long time, and this is easy. You know this is easy. This is a ground ball. I believe we were birds of a feather. We were all from the same neighborhood. Same kind of family. Same kind of background. We went to all grammar school together. Always hung out. We got in some stupid trouble. We did, but none of us was really, really out there. Sitting in the back of a police car. "My father is a Sergeant. My father's a captain." Well, you come up and say, "Ohh my father's Commissioner, you know what I mean."

00:50:17

MTP: I got my ass kicked for that.

00:50:19

JB: We had great parents too. Like Mr. Warne. Your dad always funny, made me giggle. And you had Joe's father and, you know Patrick Orvis' father. We haven't even mentioned Patrick. He was your next door neighbor your whole life.

00:50:35

MTP: I know.

00:50:36

JB: His father was the oldest living chief in the fire department. I think he collected his pension for like 57 years or something.

00:50:44

MTP: I think he's. I think he's still alive.

00:50:46

JB: No, he passed away about a year and a half ago.

00:50:50

MTP: Because I saw something from Pat. They had a reunion or they gave him an award or something.

00:50:57

JB: Ohh, that was on the news. That was on CBS News. They covered it because he was like the oldest living chief.

00:51:03

MTP: Unbelievable. Yeah, I remember him well. I remember Mrs. Orvis well. Chris and I were talking about Mrs. Soehngen and what an amazing person she was. I always felt like she had an agreement with my mother that when my mother wasn't around, she was my mother. She made sure I was fed. And if I got out of line, she had no problem giving me what for.

00:51:31

JB: You break that thing. You bought it. We go up with that.

00:51:34

Yeah. Yeah. But that's the thing. It's a culture that that we grew up in that's just so amazing to me because it took place on so many levels.

00:51:41

JB: Well, you know, you know people. I can't tell you how many Saturday mornings someone would knock on the door and my mother would have them in and make them like a piece of French toast. This happened hundreds of times. People come to the park. I said to her once, "Does that bother you?"

And she goes, "John, it's a piece of bread and some eggs. Let her eat." You know what I mean? You know, there were people who showed up every Saturday. Might have been the only breakfast they got. I don't know. My brother, Jimmy's friends and guys like that.

00:52:22

MTP: It was a it was a remarkable time. I appreciate it. Well, we're at the hour mark JB. I'm just going to say thank you.

00:52:31

JB: Mick, anything you need, Bro. If you want to do more, you can always start this up another time.

00:52:35

MTP: We'll do more. I'm going to circle back to you. I'm meeting with Linda. I think I told you. Linda and Annie Mcneely and Marianne. Riles. I'm meeting with Riles on Monday.

00:52:46

JB: Yes.

00:52:49

MTP: So we'll have a talk with Riles.

00:52:53

JB: You know what you got to do, give Jimmy the finger? Yeah, just give the finger, you know.

00:52:58

JB: We were at one of one of Mary Ann Cook's reunions. I hadn't seen Riles in five years and he walked by me through the middle of the dance floor and I looked over, I went to wave and he just kept walking. He gave me the finger. I started crying. I was laughing so hard and Nina's going, "Well, is he mad at you?"

I said, "No. That's Jimmy. He gives everybody the finger." At one of those reunions, I took Nina home and she goes, "Listen, if one more girl told me how nice you were to them, I'm going to punch one of them." Why? They were telling Nina how nice I was to them. Peggy Lonergan was getting how much of a pain Paul was to them in the eighth grade. It was funny as hell.

00:53:43

MTP: That's great. All right, TB, great.

00:53:46

Talking to you as always.

00:53:46

JB: Michael. God bless you, man. I love you. And if you need anything, give me a yell. And it was a it was a blast from the past. I love you, man. You be well and good luck with the whole project.