



THE

BEST

FORT

EVER

The Brightside
Neighbourhood

Stipes



Gas

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21

"The Best Fort Ever" was made as part of a comic book making workshop that I facilitated for kids at The Workers Arts and Heritage Centre (WAHC) in Hamilton, Ontario. The intent was to provide a step by step visual aid to guide the participants through the process of making a comic. Because of the WAHC's focus on local, and working class histories, and because of my work on the Brightside Neighbourhood Project, I chose Brightside as the setting for the comic.

The story of kids building bunks with found materials was based on accounts from several of the Brightsiders who had shared their versions of bunk building with us in previous interviews. Angelo and Vince's story would have happened between the early 1930's and late 1950's, based on the ages of the interviewee storytellers. The characters are fictional, but based on a large Italian population in the neighbourhood. The inside cover image is a drawing that I did of Burlington and Gage Streets as it appears today in the current Brightside landscape. It's hard for me to imagine that the two older buildings on the left were once surrounded by vegetable gardens, ponds and inlets close to the time that this story was taking place.

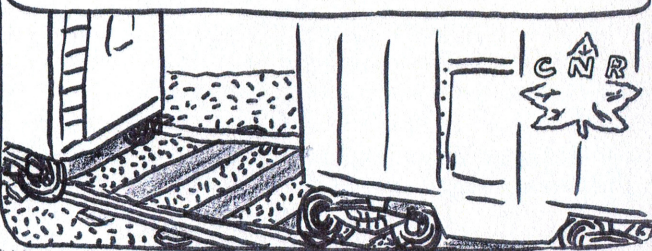
The characterization of the two boys and other images of people, along with the houses and aerial view of the neighbourhood were all sourced from photos provided to us by Brightside participants. The Brightside Reunion booklet from the 1983 event was a key source for these photos.

While I had been working on sketches for the project since we started our research, the comic is my first attempt at re-creating a narrative from Brightside's history.

Matt Malnes, May 2018



WE LIVE BETWEEN THE TRAIN TRACKS...

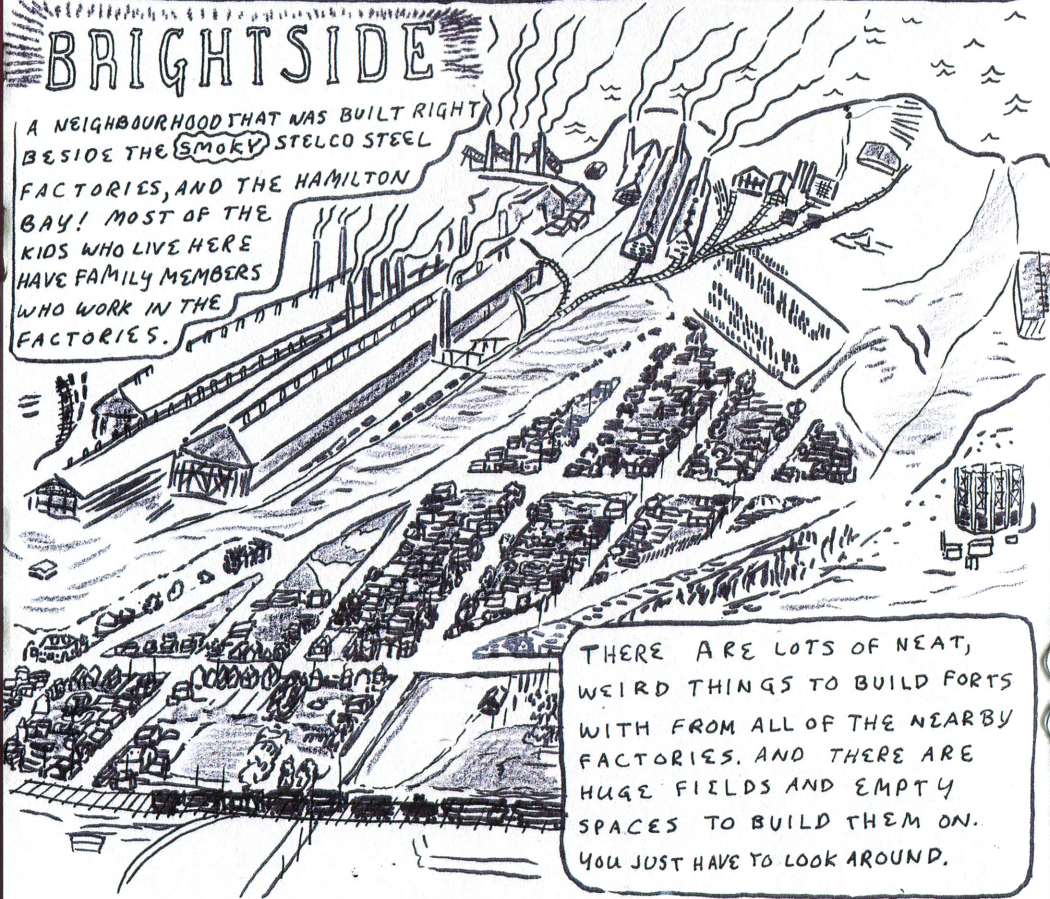


...AND A FARM THAT HAS HORSES, COWS, AND APPLE TREES. IT'S A PLACE CALLED...



BRIGHTSIDE

A NEIGHBOURHOOD THAT WAS BUILT RIGHT BESIDE THE SMOKY STELCO STEEL FACTORIES, AND THE HAMILTON BAY! MOST OF THE KIDS WHO LIVE HERE HAVE FAMILY MEMBERS WHO WORK IN THE FACTORIES.

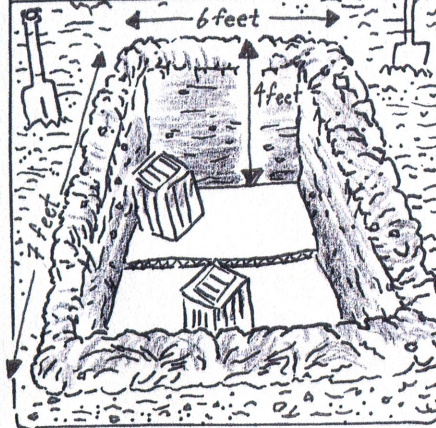


THERE ARE LOTS OF NEAT, WEIRD THINGS TO BUILD FORTS WITH FROM ALL OF THE NEARBY FACTORIES. AND THERE ARE HUGE FIELDS AND EMPTY SPACES TO BUILD THEM ON. YOU JUST HAVE TO LOOK AROUND.

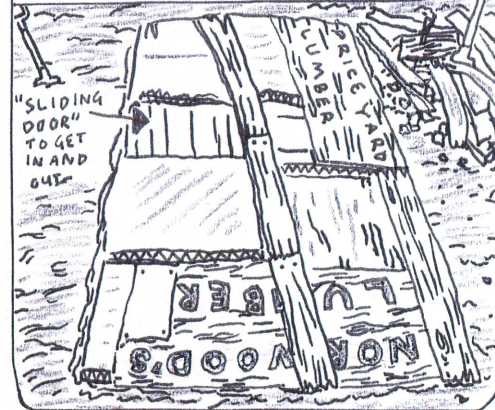


THE KIDS IN BRIGHTSIDE BUILD **UNDERGROUND BUNKS**. THEY ARE A LOT OF FUN, BUT THEY ARE ALSO A LOT OF **HARD WORK!!!** TO BUILD A BUNK, YOU HAVE TO FOLLOW **3 STEPS**

1. Start to dig a hole and pile the dirt around the hole to add an extra foot of ceiling height...



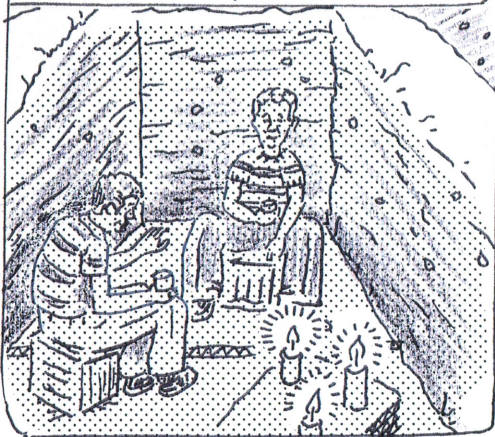
2. you cover the hole with random scraps of found lumber and cardboard, to make a flat roof with a sliding door to get in and out.



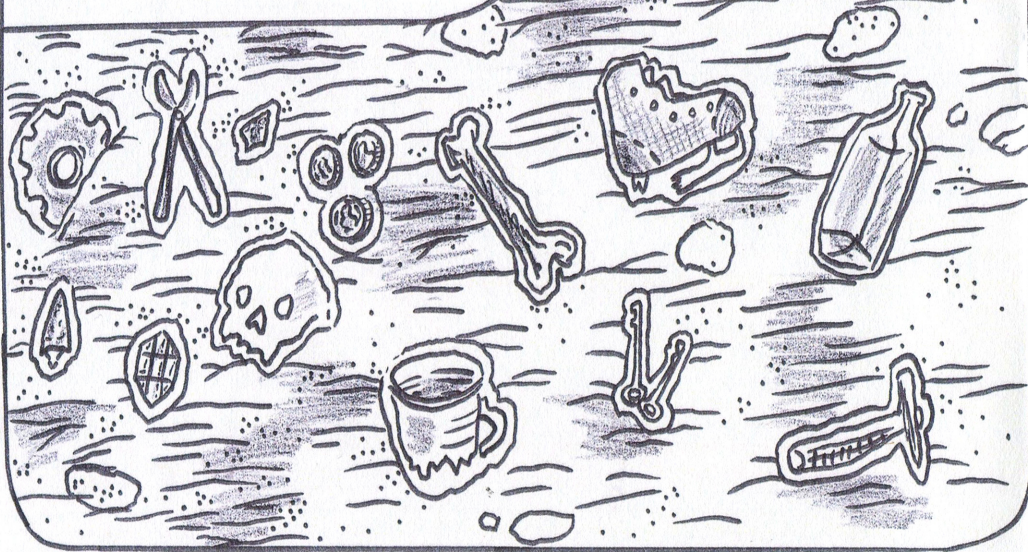
3. once the roof is on, we cover it with grass and sod, if we can find it. The idea is to disguise the bunk so no one knows it's there!



You CAN make cardboard furniture, or sit on orange crates, and the floor is cardboard too. We bring candles in so we can see. Only the builders are allowed in.



DIGGING THE HOLE, YOU ALWAYS FIND MYSTERIOUS AND REALLY INTERESTING ARTIFACTS: BOTTLES FROM THE GLASS FACTORY, PIG IRON FROM STELCO, BONES AND ARROWHEADS FROM OLD VILLAGES, PARTS OF OLD TUBE SKATE BLADES FROM THE HOMER WILSON FACTORY, COINS, TOOLS AND FOSSILS!



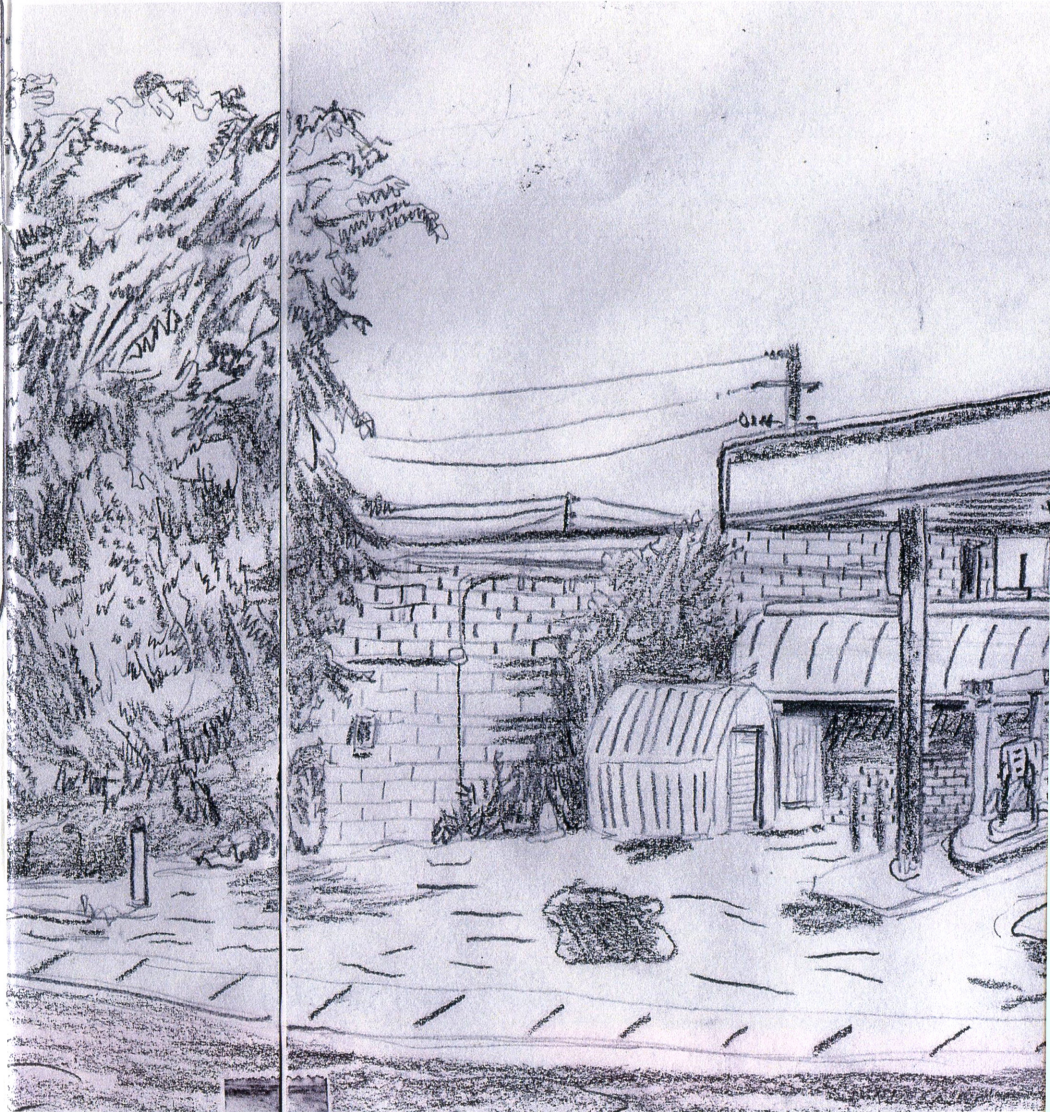
SOMETIMES WE PRETEND THAT WE'RE EXPLORERS, DISCOVERING A NEW TERRITORY. OR, WE'RE SOLDIERS DEFENDING A SECRET BASE....



OR SOMETIMES...



WE FEEL LIKE WE'RE THE STEELWORKERS IN THE FACTORIES NEXT TO US.



Matt McInnes, Burlington Street, Looking West (detail) 2018