

Brightside in 1919
Steel Company of Canada
(Stelco)

International Harvester

Introduction

Brightside was a neighbourhood of workers and immigrants that flourished in the shadow of heavy industry in Hamilton Ontario's northeast end from 1910 until the late 1960s. Originally designed to attract skilled labourers from the British Isles, the streets of Brightside, such as Manchester, Birmingham, Sheffield and Leeds, were named after British industrial cities. By the early 1920s, however, the neighbourhood largely consisted of people who had come to Canada from southern and eastern Europe, seeking employment and a better life. Amidst the soot and noise of Hamilton's steadily expanding factories, with the giant Steel Company of Canada (Stelco) at its western border, Brightsiders created a vibrant oasis in what, to outsiders, might have seemed like a difficult and even uninhabitable environment.

Brightside was home to factory workers, bootleggers, urban farmers, gamblers, sports teams, unionists and plucky homemakers who knew where to intercept their husbands before they drank and gambled away their earnings on payday. Brightside kids made their own fun, roaming the surrounding fields, ponds and inlets, and gleaming materials from the surrounding industry to build their rafts, forts and milk crate scooters.

During the steamy summer of 1946, when four of Hamilton's biggest employers squared-off against thousands of striking workers, Brightside was immediate to the conflict, which was focused upon preventing materials and workers from moving through Stelco's gates. With the picket line literally at some of their doorsteps, many Brightsiders joined in the struggle, some walking the line while others stayed for weeks inside the besieged steel mills, receiving care packages surreptitiously smuggled across the Birmingham fence.

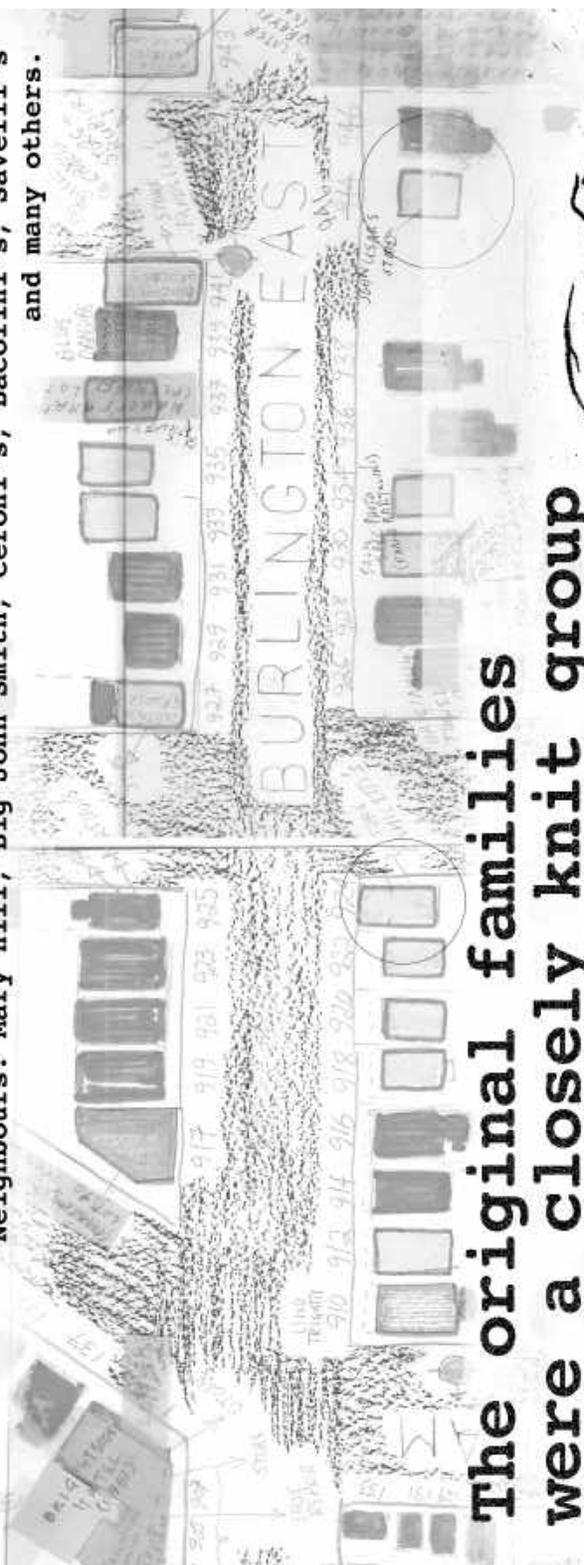
The struggle for a better life for working people also informed the work of Dr. Victor Cecilioni. Having grown up in Brightside, he spent his career as a family physician to steel workers, and was one of the first to do epidemiological research into the link between heavy industry and the high rates of cancer and respiratory ailments in the industrial district. As the fortunes of Brightside's families improved, a younger generation went on to achieve success in fields such as teaching, law, graphic arts, management, journalism, broadcasting and professional sport. While many of this generation left the neighbourhood, they did not forget the values of mutual support, cooperation and resourceful determination of their upbringing.

Despite the central role Brightside has played in shaping Hamilton's character and culture, many contemporary Hamiltonians have never heard about the neighbourhood. In the 1950's and 60's, the houses and businesses were steadily bought up and demolished to make way for industrial expansion. Today, all that remains of the neighbourhood is a handful of houses on the south side of Burlington Street and a single business to the north. But despite the loss of its physical footprint, the memories, experiences, values, cultures and relationships that shaped this neighbourhood continue to inform the sense of identity of Brightsiders, and the life and character of the larger city. In the press for innovation and development, cities risk forgetting about the people, histories and cultures that animate them. Notes from the *Brightside Neighbourhood Project* provides a small but heartfelt look into the unique culture, legacies and people of Brightside.

In the Industrial District
BRIGHTSIDE
The Mechanic and Working man
I WILL Build Your House
On Easy Terms
PHILIP M. COOKE
Developer's Advertisement, 1911
from: Craig Heiron, *Lunch-Bucket Lives: Remaking the Workers' City*, (Between the Lines, 2016) p.47.

John Fioravanti

Brightside Addresses: 924 Burlington St. E, Birmingham St., 946 Burlington St. E.
Neighbours: Mary Hill, Big John Smith, Ceroni's, Bacolini's, Savelli's
and many others.

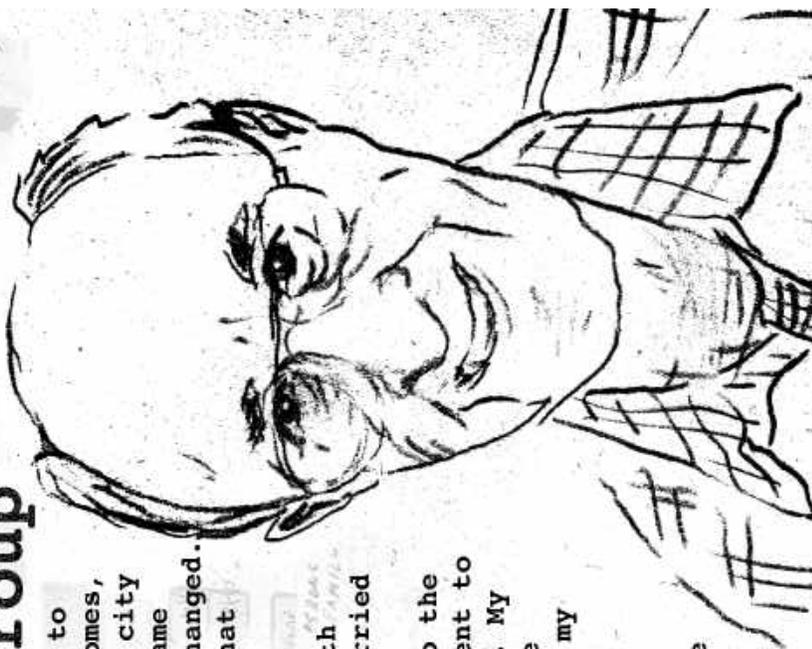


The original families were a closely knit group

when I was growing up. As I got older and went off to university, Stelco and the city started buying up homes, and people started moving out to other parts of the city because of the environmental aspect ... Newcomers came into the Brightside area and rented homes. Things changed. Then Stelco started demolishing some of the homes that were purchased by them or the city.

Some of the older people stayed and continued on with life. I left my house on Burlington St. in 1960, married and started a family in the east end of the city. My parents remained in the house and enjoyed life to the fullest. When I started my family in the 60's, we went to visit every week. My father died in 1975. He was 84. My mother continued to stay in the house for a few more years. She sold the house in 1980 and moved in with my sister, where she lived until her death in 1984.

Brightside was not the same place as when we were growing up. As people moved away and died off, there were less and less homes and people in the area.



Mary Fioravanti

Brightside Addresses: 46 Leeds (1937-1960), 946 Burlington St. E.

Neighbours: Melko on the north, Capriotti on the south

**I was proud
to be a
Brightsider!**

When I came home from school I was heading north, but it never bothered me, it never made me think that I was less than good - you know, I was a good person. Just because I lived down [near the industry] I didn't think that a person who lived down the mountain was better than I was ... I was proud to be a Brightsider!



They had a fire in the washroom [of the Brightside hotel]. There was me, Maurice, Moe, Turk-us guys used to drink in there. So we all had a table full of beer ... then we hear these fire trucks coming. Someone says, "You gotta get out." We say, "not until we finish our beer!" When I get outside, my wife is out front in the car, trying to stop the firemen from going in the hotel: "Don't go in there! Let it burn!" I says, "I was in there!" She says, "That's your fault!"

Vince Palango

155 Birmingham St.,

64 Lancaster St.

Neighbours

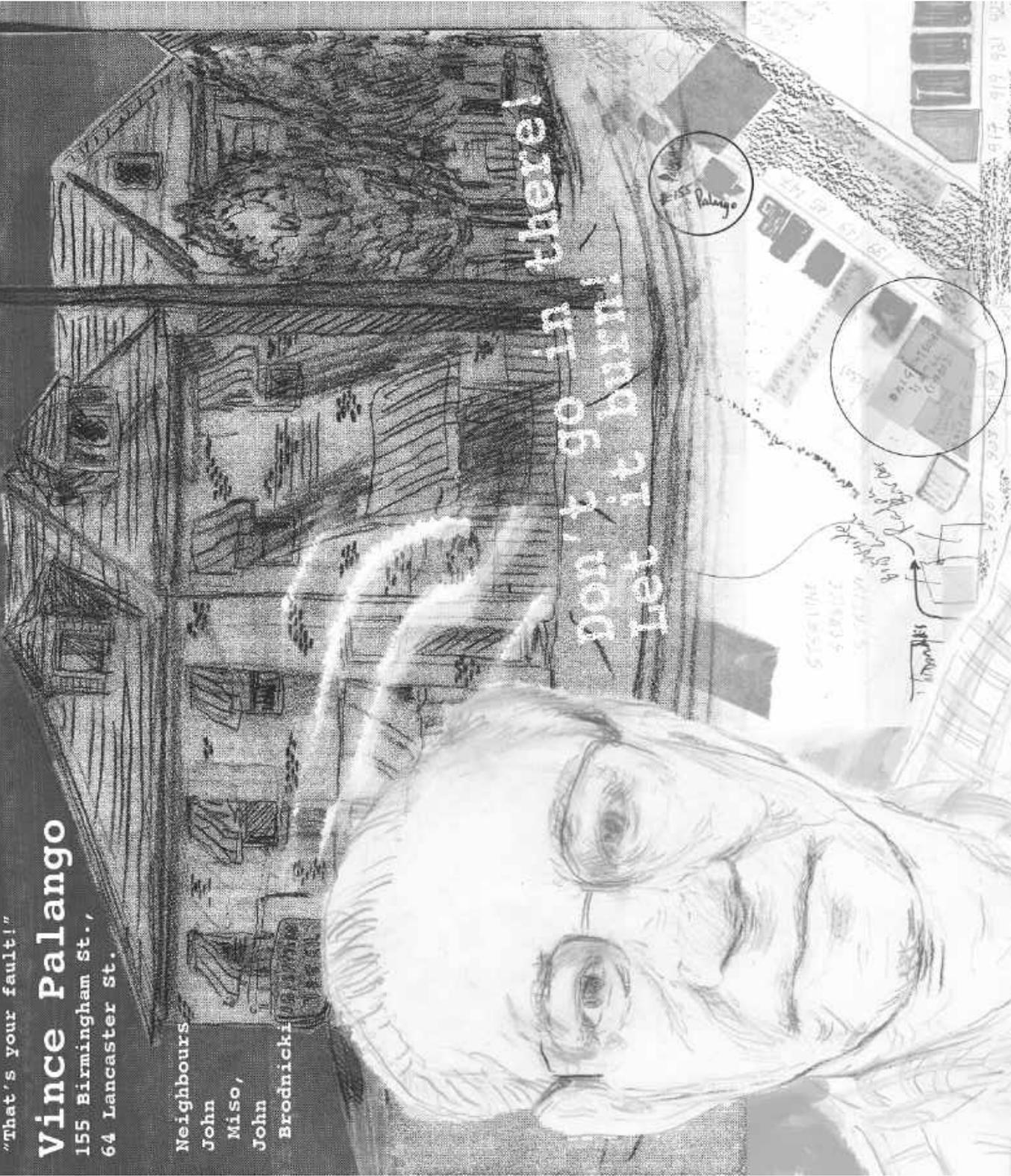
John

Miso,

John

Brodnicki

Don't go in there!
Let it burn!



Diane Morelli

Brightside Address: 556 Gage Ave. N.

Neighbours: Egedio Adoranti & family,
Zanin, Andreatta, and Radvaks families

The shed in my back yard, in the east end of the city, was made of wood from [my great uncle Natale Palango's] house when they were dismantling and exporting it – and I'm so sorry I did not go down and take ... something!

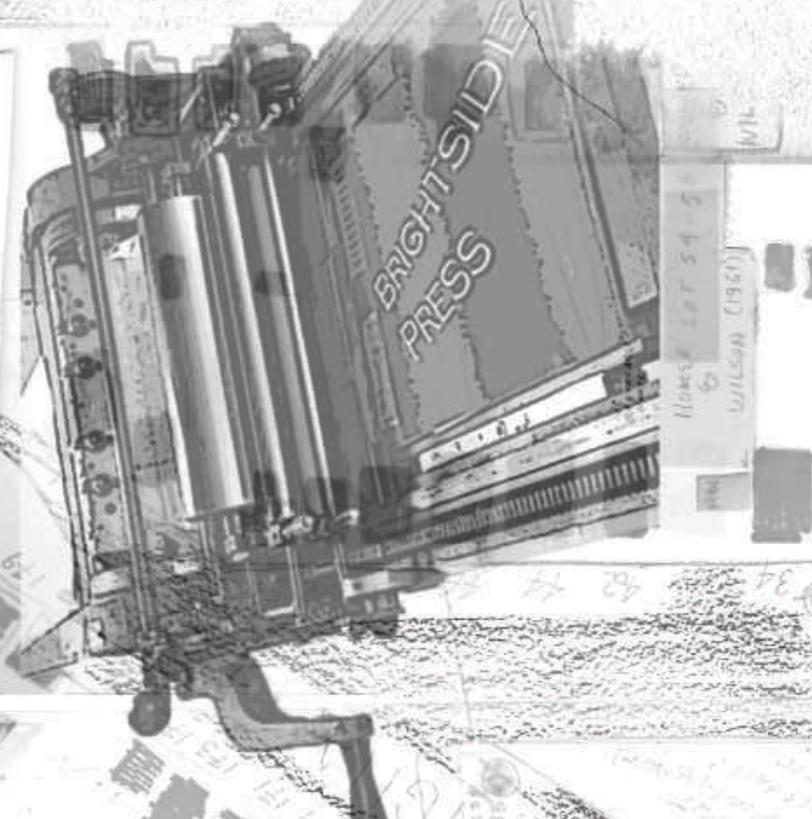
Now, our house was wood, but Rose had a brick house. And she had French doors going into her living room. I don't know if she took those French Doors, but that's what I would have liked.



John Brodnicki

Brightside Address: 56 Lancaster St.
Owner of The Brightside Press since 1957
Neighbours: Dino Galgani, John Michaluk,
David Andrews, and the Palango, Ciprietti,
Rossi, Giavedoni and Adoranti families

I left one of my printing presses at 56 Lancaster. Crow and I have something of a vacuum. Shortly after we got married, we became un-Bright-sided for some reason. Anyway, when my house was being knocked down, I got a call from Shine. He said, "You better get down here, because they're knocking your house down." So, by the time I got down there, the bulldozer had already covered in the joint. They didn't save any thing - they just buried it. So my press is actually there today, buried in that rubble.



In the 1946 strike, I was eighteen years old. I was working at Stelco, but I wasn't a foreman. People from England, all these guys were fancy machinists, titled guys, so they went around the plant and they were telling all the foreign type people, not too well educated: "You go out and strike, we'll go with you." You know what happened? The opposite. They all stayed in, and all our guys went out on strike. But they [the scabs] paid the price...

THE STEEL COMPANY
OF CANADA LIMITED
DOCK ENTRANCE
100 YARDS EAST



Ernie Palango

Brightside Address: 155 Birmingham St.
Worked at: Dominion Glass,
American Can, Stelco (52 years)

Ernie Palango

Fred Traini

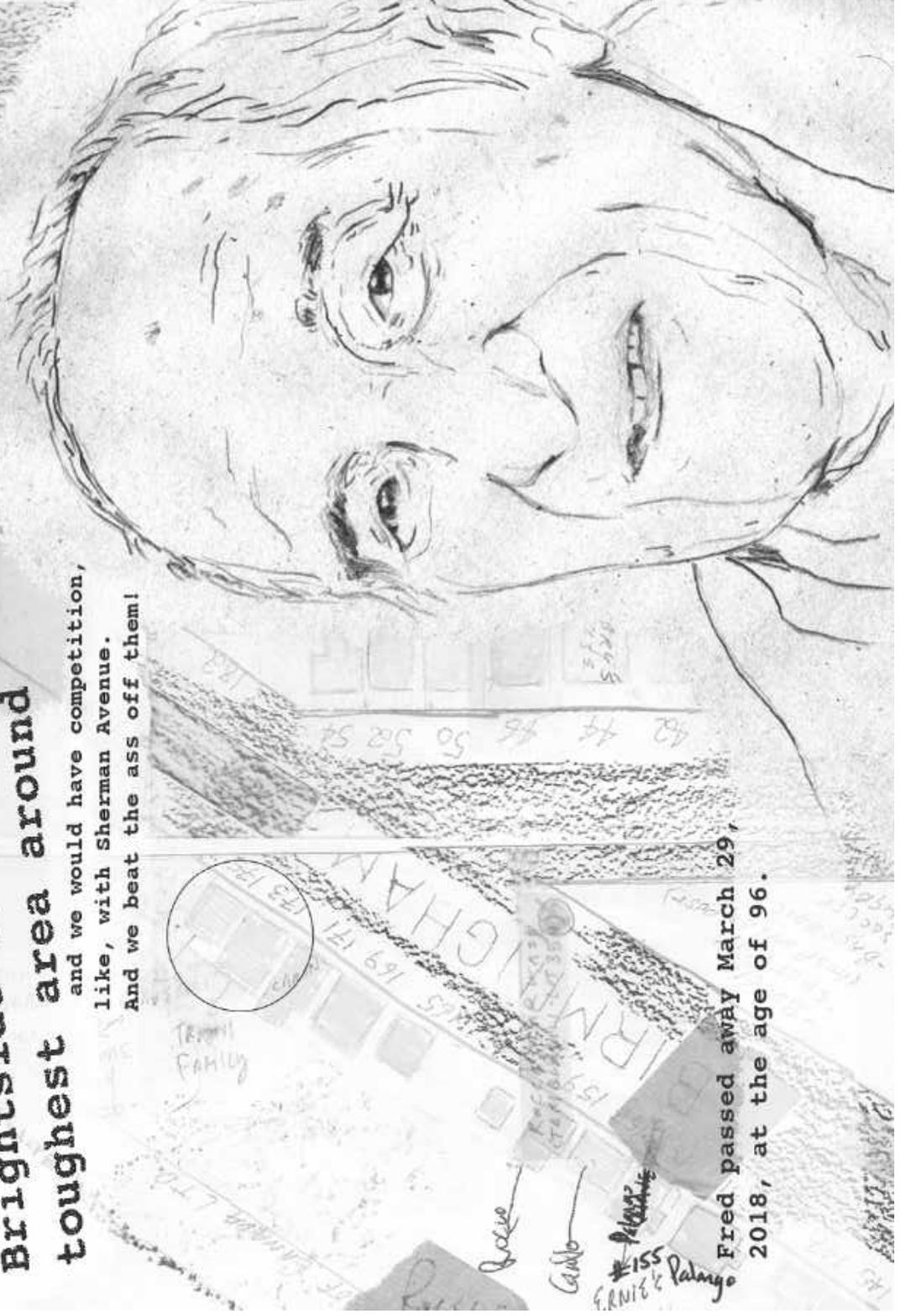
Brightside Address: 173 Birmingham St.
Occupations: Milkman, Owner of Springy's Sports and Cycle

I was born in 1922. I guess I was 24 [at the time of the '46 strike]. That was the dirtiest strike I ever seen. You know, it was father fighting son. It was terrible, because we didn't believe in scabs ... and if you scabbed that meant that you were doing someone out of a job. Yeah, it was dirty. But we enjoyed it.

Everybody played football.
They were all good football players.
They were all tough.

**Brightside was the
toughest area around**

and we would have competition,
like, with Sherman Avenue.
And we beat the ass off them!



Fred passed away March 29,
2018, at the age of 96.

BRIGHTSIDE

REFLECTIONS

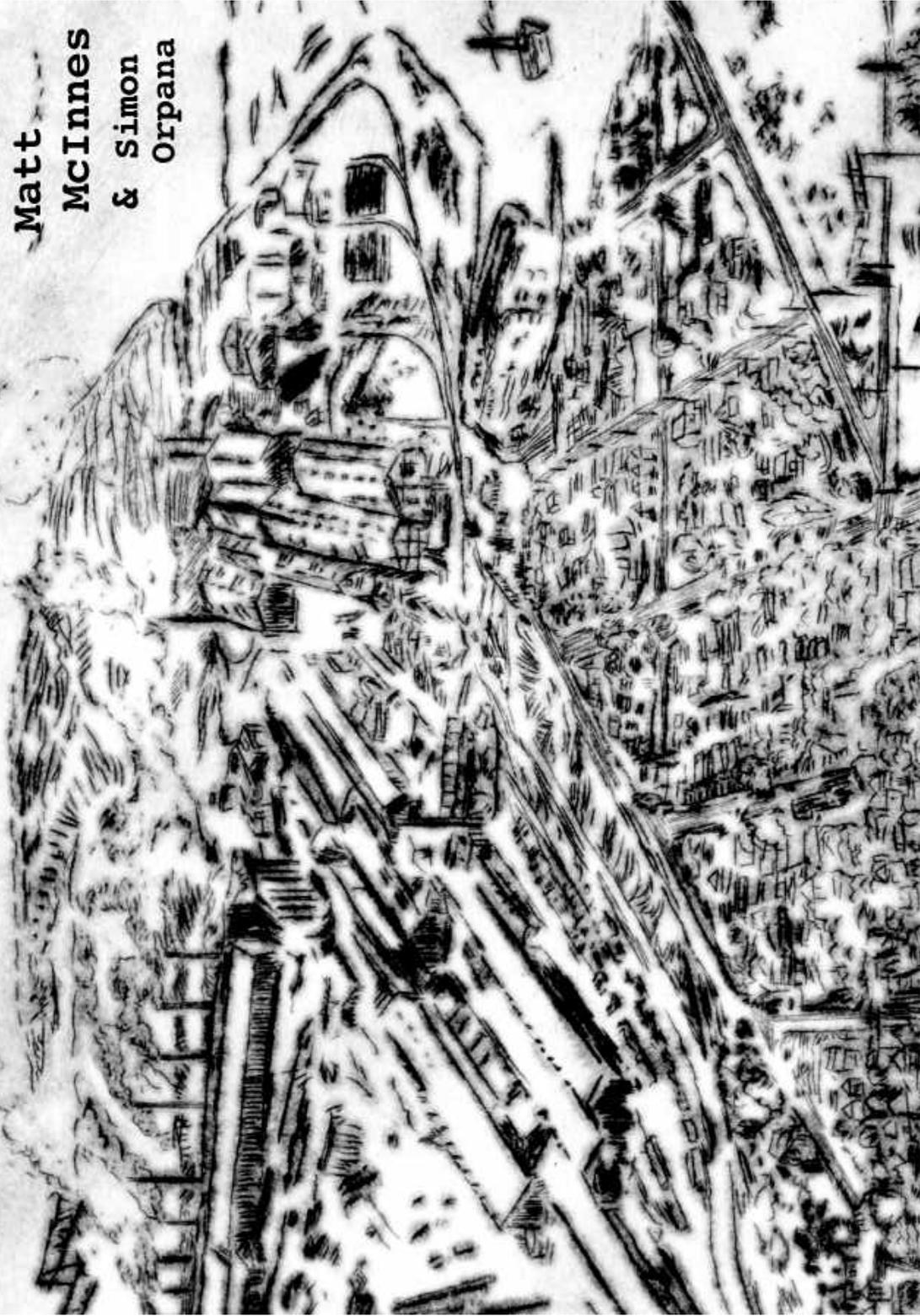
ON MY CHILDHOOD

Words & Photos:

Joe Bartolacci

Art:

**Matt
McInnes
& Simon
Orpana**



Written in Sault Ste. Marie,
Ontario in 1973, missing my home.



It was always with us;
we grew up alongside of it.

I used to think that it burgeoned with us,
but no, the steel mills were always more powerful.

We just didn't know it.

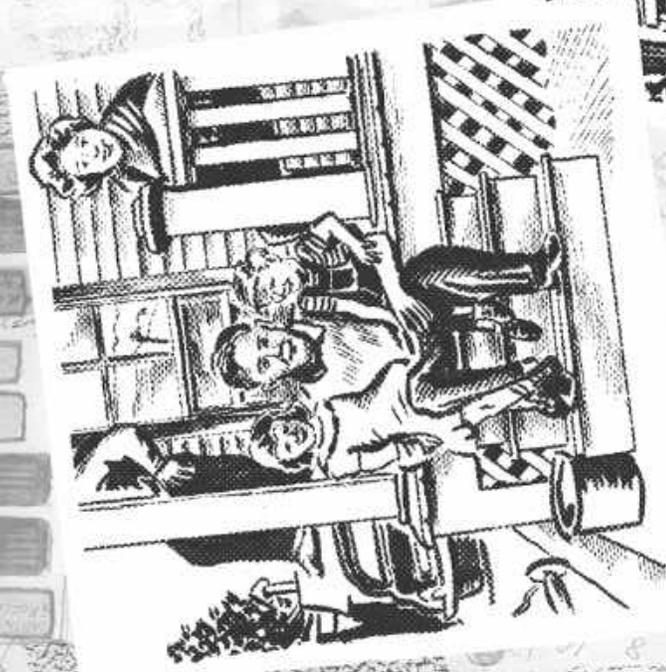
The houses on Leeds St. were simple, when looking back at them now, but they always seemed like castles: colourful, comforting, warm and indestructible. The soot from the Steel Company was a part of the paint, part of the décor of our industrial home ground.

Every morning my grandmother would pick up the broom that was a part of the verandah's fixtures and deftly sweep away yesterday's soot from the grey peeling paint of the boarded floor. We would sit for a moment and from the little patch of grass in front of us would drift up the freshness of spring, just before it was lost amidst the pungent odour of sulphur that came with the forging of steel.

Ours was a little street, but I seem to recall uncle Rico's house, that small one that seemed so different from the rest. It sat on a small hill that we called the mountain.

We would storm the four steps up the front of the house and attack its stone walls; so very few of the houses were actually made of real brick, so it seemed only natural that this would be our fortress.

JOE BARTOLACCI'S HOUSE



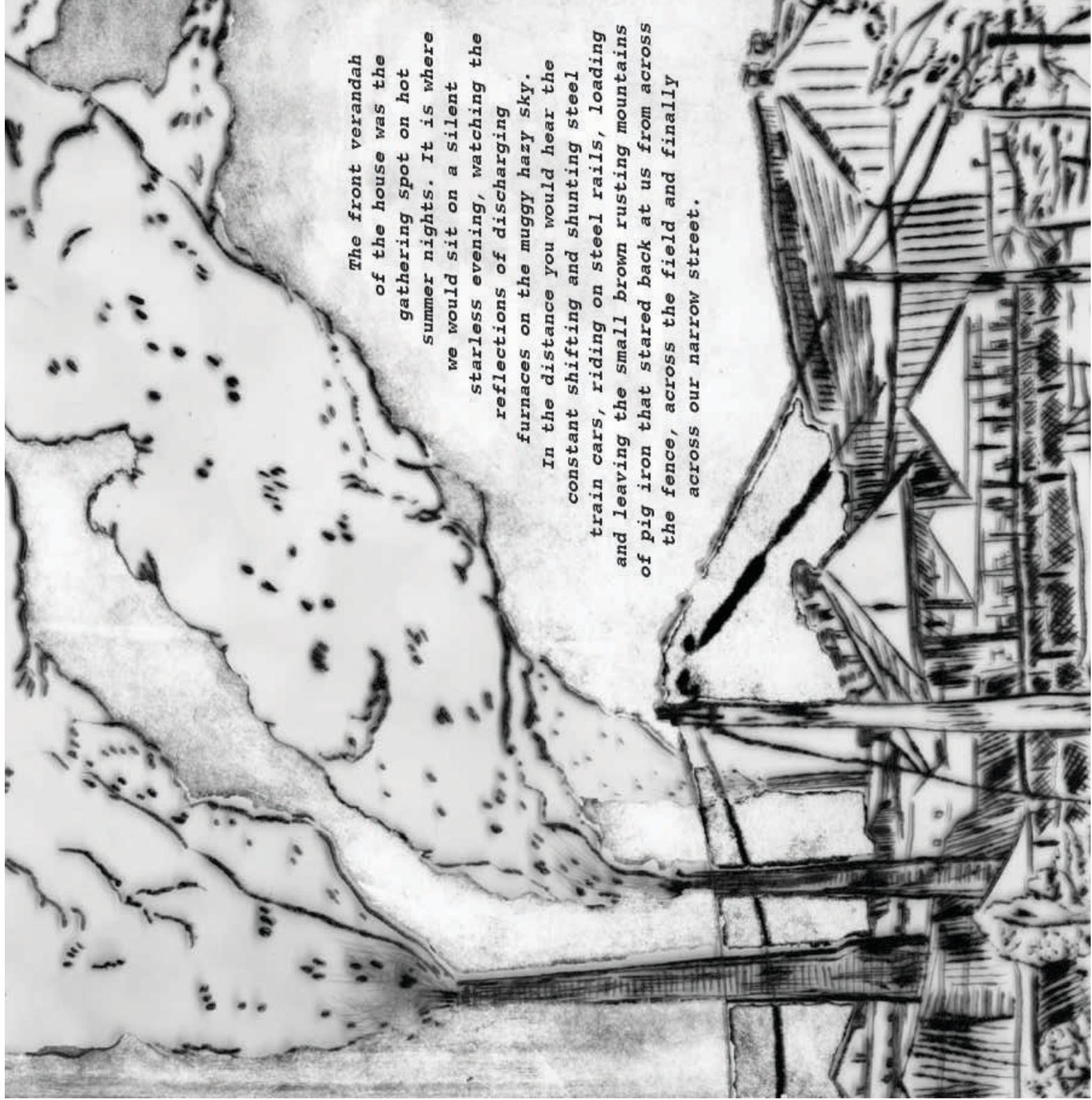
The sense of distance, even though it was only five houses down, was made more real to us by the crowded front foliage before such a tiny lawn. The maple tree, and mixed about it the ferns and fronds, spoke to us of tropical mysteries and dense jungles that might lay further down the block.

Our house was covered in brown and beige shingles, and I remember how masterful my grandfather seemed when he was putting them on, diligently ignoring all the help my grandmother ungraciously offered from the upstairs window.



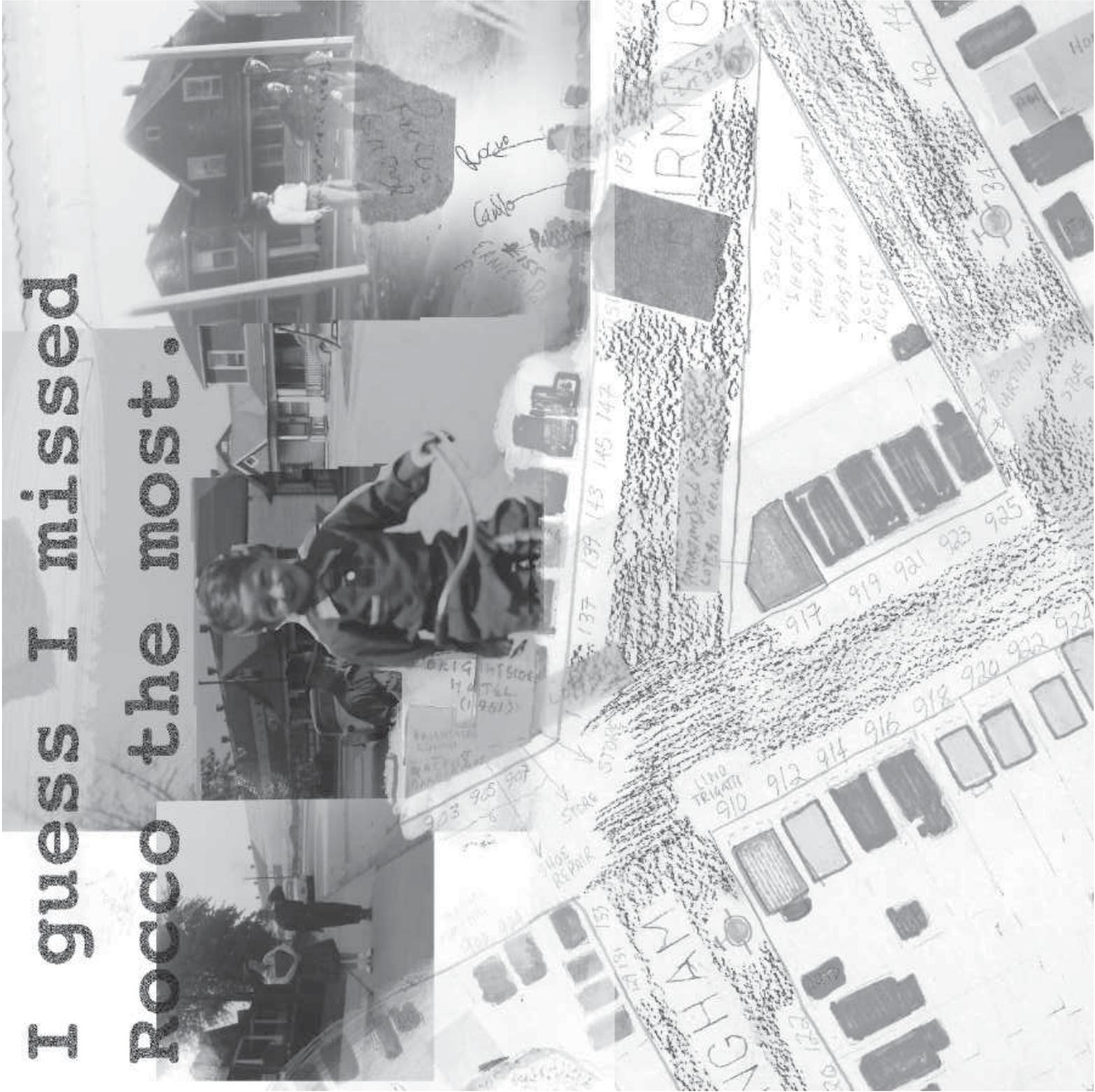
The front verandah
of the house was the
gathering spot on hot
summer nights. It is where
we would sit on a silent
starless evening, watching the
reflections of discharging
furnaces on the muggy hazy sky.

In the distance you would hear the
constant shifting and shunting steel
train cars, riding on steel rails, loading
and leaving the small brown rusting mountains
of pig iron that stared back at us from across
the fence, across the field and finally
across our narrow street.



I guess I missed

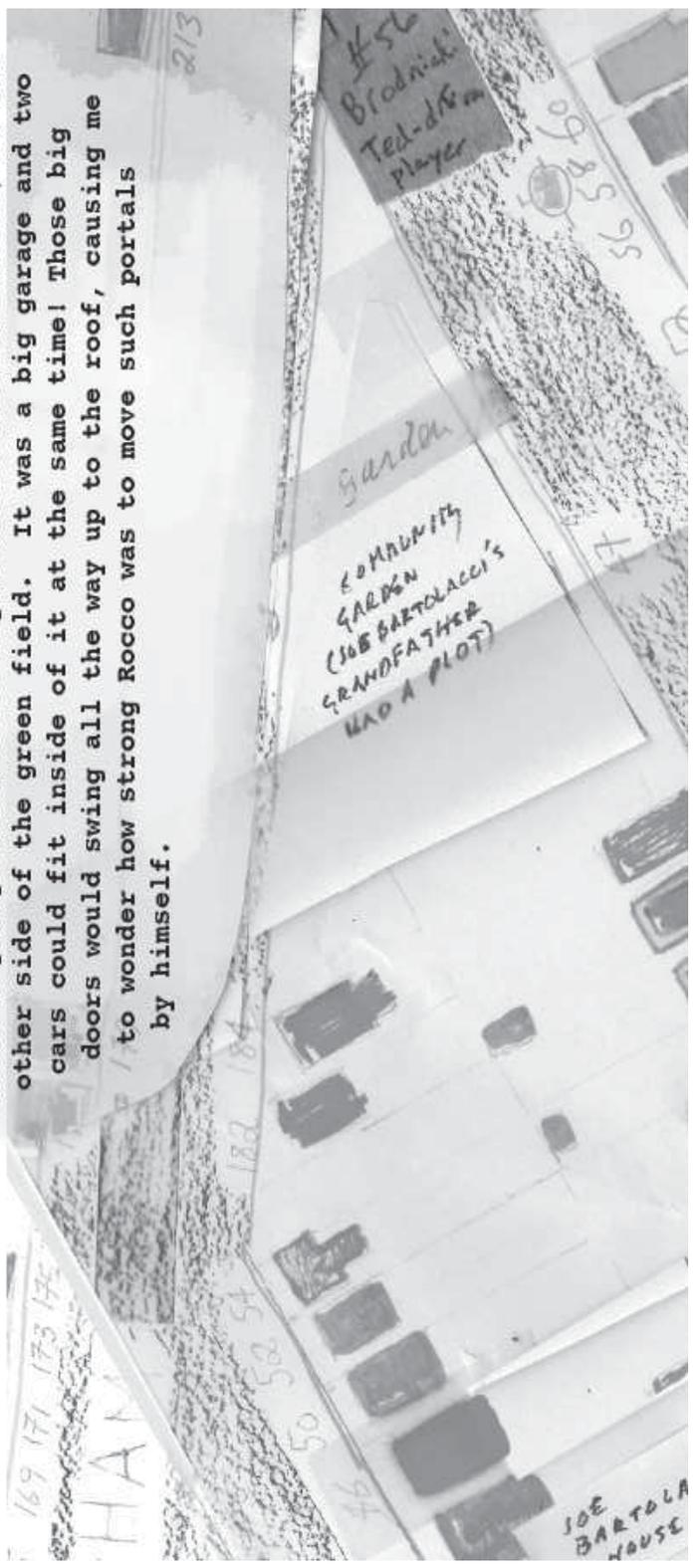
Rocco the most.





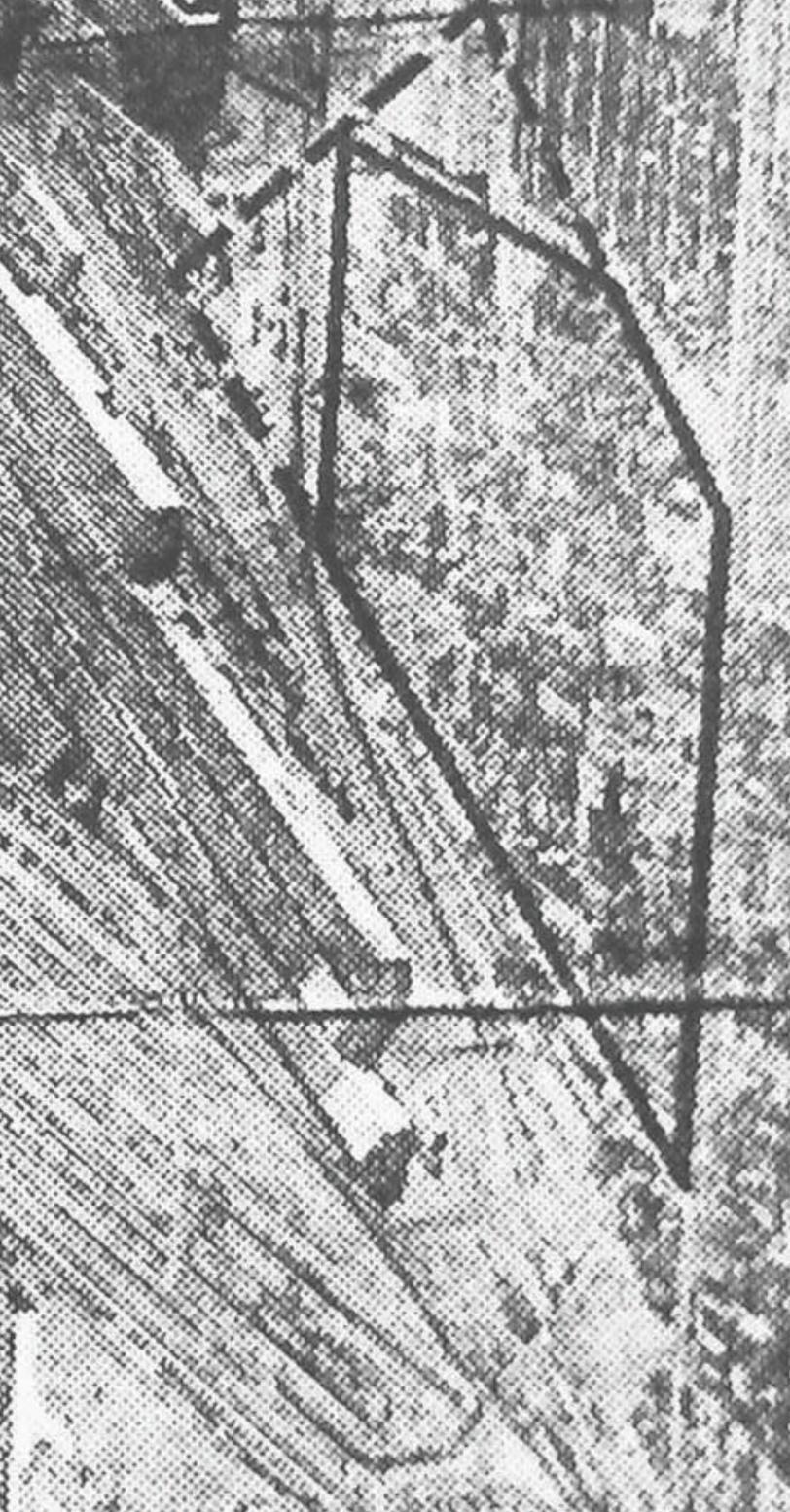
My father was an important man, then. We all knew it because he was the only man on the street that drove to work and wore a tie. Some days he would wear a suit. His importance was felt by everyone, too, because as we simmered together on warm, summer nights, friends and relatives sipping fresh lemonade, he would be asked what he thought of those people going into that dingy Hotel on the corner. Through his "hrumphs" and so-forths, we knew we would never go there, at least not when we were being watched.

Rocco's garage used to be right across from our house, on the other side of the green field. It was a big garage and two cars could fit inside of it at the same time! Those big doors would swing all the way up to the roof, causing me to wonder how strong Rocco was to move such portals by himself.



But the big white garage with the thin red stripe and peeling paint had to go. The men who made steel had to have more space to park their cars.

Steel-making meant tearing down Rocco's garage, and with it Uncle Marlo's home, the Campanella's little house and Sharon's home.



I guess I missed Rocco the most. He was bald, and my dad said that no one could wash a car as well as he did, even if he did charge a whole dollar for it. On Sundays he would wander back to where his work had been, and in my Sunday suit I would peer at him through our windows, watching him kick at the stones where his garage had been, wandering and walking about its outline, picking up a small piece of slag that had slipped through under the fence. He would hurl it back towards where it had come, almost a defiant gesture, as if trying to push back the fence, the tons of steel and the passage of years that the fence stood for. Almost defiant, yet shrugging his shoulders he would turn and walk up what had been Birmingham Street past the ghost of wooden structures and dust covered cars. He was looking older, tired and somewhat bent.



Then I thought how safe I was, because the field was between the fence and our house. The field always seemed greener on Sundays because it still wasn't a real parking lot and the broken scattered pieces of glass on an early Sunday morning would sparkle and glow in the sun, making the patches of weeds seem fuller, almost like a real lawn that somebody actually cared to see grow.

Leeds Street isn't there anymore, nor is the field and almost no one could tell you now where Rocco had spent so many early Saturday mornings polishing the fenders of my Father's 51 Chevy. The parking lot is big now. The sky still flames to life on muggy summer evenings, but it saddens me that no one is there to watch the lights dim and fade as the steel settles in its moulds.

-Joe
Bartolacci



Nobody from Stelco or the City of Hamilton ever called a neighbourhood meeting to outline their plans for expropriating and dismantling the neighbourhood. Instead, the city and the industrial giant worked in tandem, buying up homes one by one through the 1950s and 60s. With a younger generation of Brightsiders moving away to start careers and families of their own, corporate and city planners of the period likely knew that it would only be a matter of time before even the homes of the most stalwart Brightsiders would be made available to them. Residents who remained until the end witnessed the slow, steady dismantling of their neighbourhood, just as they had witnessed, decades earlier, the filling in the inlets and the transformation of the surrounding green lands by heavy industry.

Former residents have many different views about what caused the destruction of their neighbourhood. Living so close to industry exposed them to serious health risks, which is one of the reasons the city's 1946 Master Plan wanted residents gone from the 'blighted' area. Some residents also cite Stelco's need for more parking lots; they were simply 'in the way.'



Driving east on Burlington St., one passes a vacant lot where the Brightside Grocery used to be. A little further is the single Brightside house remaining on the north side of the street. It is incorporated into a building that, until recently, housed the Venetian Salami factory.

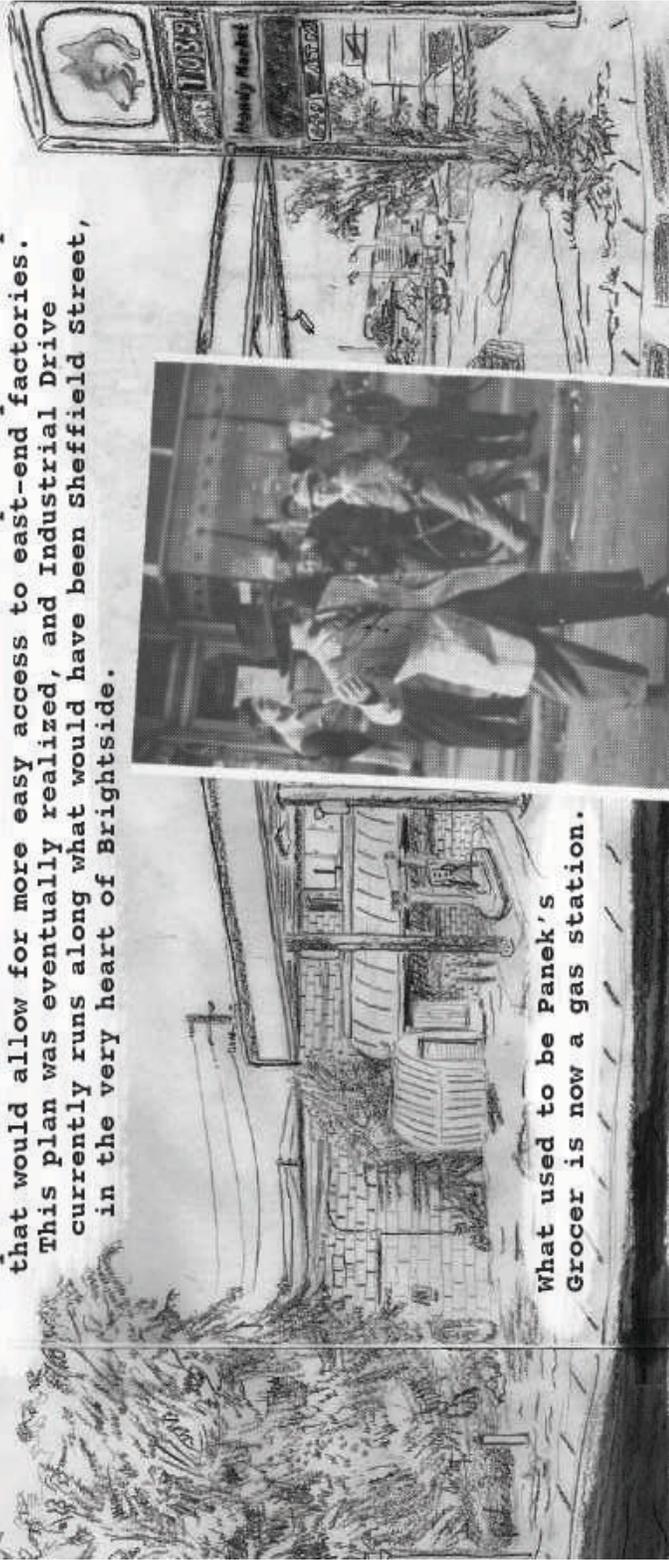
This 1966 aerial shows
half of Brightside gone.
Photo courtesy of Lloyd
Reeds Map Collection,
McMaster.



Some from an older generation, who lived through the tumultuous summer of 1946, suspect that civic and corporate elites long held a grudge against Brightside, which had been central to the 81-day strike that brought the steel-making giant to its knees. Nearby Woodlands Park, which had been a site for labour organizing for many decades before 1946, was levelled in the immediate aftermath of the strike. Many people saw this as a form of retaliation; many felt the same held true for the leveling of Brightside.

Historians Nancy Bouchier and Ken Cruikshank have uncovered a further motivation: the city's desire to build a four-lane industrial parkway and overpass that would allow for more easy access to east-end factories.

This plan was eventually realized, and Industrial Drive currently runs along what would have been Sheffield Street, in the very heart of Brightside.



What used to be Panek's
Grocer is now a gas station.

About the Brightside Neighbourhood Project

In November 2016, Matt McInnes, Simon Orpana and Rob Kristofferson started meeting with current and former residents of the Brightside neighbourhood.

In the summer of 2017, the trio joined forces with historian Nancy Bouchier, who was also doing research into the largely vanished neighbourhood. As more and more Brightsiders came to our meetings, what started out as a few recorded interviews, developed into a series of lively, collaborative mapping sessions.

Using old insurance maps, artist and researcher Matt McInnes created a large, hand-drawn map, which participants populated with important sites and stories.



On a chilly late October day in 2017, some of us did a walking tour of what remains of Brightside. From right to left in the photo below is Nancy Bouchier, Matt McInnes, Mary and John Fioravanti, Vince Palango, and Stephen Lechniak, curator of the Brightside Memories Facebook page.



Above, right to left: Rob Kristofferson, Vince Palango, Diane Morelli, John Brodnicki
Top photo, right to left: John Michaluk, Nello Giavedoni, Vince Palango, Diane Morelli, Laura Duffy.



Artist and
researcher
Matt McInnes

Profane Mapping

Despite their fascination, versatility and historical value, maps can easily become technologies of violence and forgetting. In cities undergoing rapid change, like Hamilton, maps can reinforce fantasies of "empty land" ready for the taking, an idea that reaches back to the settler-colonial dispossession of Indigenous territory.

Every aesthetics of mapping has political implications. With their tidy lines, official names and uniform spaces, maps can hide or erase the experiences, memories and diverse relationships that actually produce shared space, furthering processes of dispossession through the codification of amnesia.

For the Brightside Neighbourhood Project, we intentionally cultivated a messy, collaborative, and necessarily unfinished form of representation we call profane mapping.

In contrast to the deceptive clarity of traditional maps, profane mapping aims to represent the layered, complex and surprising textures of social space.

As a document celebrating its own, interpersonal process of production, this mapping helps us remember that it is the quality of our relationships to the land and each other that crucially shapes our neighbourhoods, cities and world.

For philosopher Giorgio Agamben, the work of profanation "deactivates the apparatuses of power and returns to common use the spaces that power has seized."

Researcher & Facilitator
Simon Orpana
in a field.



Notes from the Brightside Neighbourhood Project is by:

Matt McInnes, Artist & Researcher
Simon Orpana, Researcher & Facilitator
Nancy Bouchier, Historian
Rob Kristofferson, Historian

Book layout: Simon Orpana
Printing by Impressive Printing
Made in Hamilton

Acknowledgements

This project would not have been possible without the generous help of our friends, collaborators and funders.

Foremost, we would like to thank all of the Brightsiders who have so generously shared their time, stories, photos, humour and friendship in the making of this project: Joe Bartolacci, John Brodnicki, Laura Duffy, John Fioravanti, Mary Fioravanti, John Michaluk, Diane Morelli, Ernie Polango, Vince Polango, Gilda Savelli, Peter Savelli, and Leno Trigatti. We are grateful to the family of Nello Giavedoni, and particularly to his daughter, Ann, for helping with her father's participation in the project before his passing in December of 2018. We are especially grateful to John Michaluk and John Brodnicki, for their enthusiastic participation, and for arranging an interview with Fred Traini who, before his passing in March 2018, at the age of 96, was the oldest surviving Brightsider. We are extremely thankful to J. P. Marin and the other members of United Steelworkers, Local 1005 for both drawing our initial attention to the story of Brightside and putting us into contact with Brightsiders. We are also indebted to Stephen Lechniak, curator of the Brightside Memories Facebook page for sharing his many photos, experience and knowledge with us.

Thank you to the partners and funders who have shared resources in support of this project. Dr. Lorraine York, Dr. Daniel Coleman and Research Assistant Johannah Bird from the Centre for Community Engaged Narrative Arts at McMaster University generously provided crucial funding and support. Thank you to Andrea Cole, former Coordinator at the School of Graduate Studies, McMaster, for help in securing space at the Action Research Commons Hamilton for many of our collaborative mapping meetings. Thank you to The Workers Arts and Heritage Centre for its ongoing support, and particularly to Executive Director Florencia Bernstein, Facilities Coordinator Daniel Hill for his skillful expertise, and to Program Coordinator Tara Burse for her thoughtful guidance, work and support at each step of the planning, promoting and installation of the exhibit. We are also immensely grateful to The City of Hamilton's Community Enrichment Fund for its generous support.

Matt and Simon would like to give special thanks to Dr. Rob Kristofferson of Laurier, for his ongoing mentorship, help and encouragement. Very special thanks go to Dr. Nancy Bouchier of McMaster for her generous mentorship and participation in the project, and for her research (along with Dr. Ken Cruikshank) into the stories and history of Brightside. Simon would like to thank Dr. Mary O'Connor, recently retired from McMaster University, for her mentorship, friendship and insight into the creative and political dimensions of archiving and everyday life.