

Homer and Wilson Memories

By Joe Bartolacci

Saturday mornings were a luxury, as a child could sleep until after 8:00 AM, awaiting the machine symphony that started slowly but gradually built to an orchestral rhythm. The message of the presses travelled by sound, and by concussive impact- first the smaller dye presses- the ones that made the old-style garden implement; then the mid range machinery that stamped out the circular tubes used for roadway bed supports, and finally the big thunderous machines that would punch through a thick flat steel plate like a hot knife through cold butter. The rhythm was soothing and steady. Periodically it would change, like a brass section of an orchestra flipping their music sheets to a new melody.

Nonna Fileri would swear to Madonna on those Saturdays when the factory workload demanded overtime. To Mr. Wilson and Poochie, the orchestra meant good news as the work orders at the factory exceeded capacity for a normal working week. To Nona Fileri, it meant she had to sing louder as she made her Saturday morning Ciumbalona, a sweet Italian Coffee Cake that was a weekend staple at 42 Leeds Street.

60 inches. 5 feet. That was the distance from inside walls of the factory to the inside walls of Nona's kitchen. In between that space was about two to three feet of dirt where my friends Danny Reid and Harold Martini could play with our Dinky Toy trucks and Dinky graders, making our own construction projects. As we grew, the space contracted. Soon, it was tight enough that we could not pass each other top get another Dinky car or truck. Too soon, by order of the Matriarch Fileri, the gap was sealed with chicken wire to ensure our safety. I saw it as deprivation.

How close were we to Homer and Wilson? Well, when we played street baseball, and a foul tip landed on the 1st story roof, the game was over. I would have to wait until the family was out of the house to crawl out of my Nona's bedroom window onto the roof to get the ball back. Once you made the leap across that chasm, you explored the rooftop a little further for other treasures. If the upper ventilation window of the factory was open, you could peer inside. Piles of burlap bags were stored there; future shipments of stamped materials would go out in these bags. They also made a convenient unofficial rest area for workers on their lunch breaks. Homer and Wilson hired both men and women, a carry over from the war-time years. Once (and only once) I discovered a pair of young lovers doing more than resting on that pile of burlap bags. My intrusion was unwelcome; however, they were sufficiently concerned for my safety that they told me—ordered me—to come in from the window and escorted me downstairs to meet with Poochie, the shop foreman. My climbing days were over once my surreptitious activities were reported to my Mother Tina. Poochie smiled. I didn't. Perhaps as consolation, I did ask Poochie if I could get a job at Homer and Wilson after school or on Saturdays. He told me to come back when I was 16. I did, but those stories will wait for another day.