

MEN'S CLUB Open Mike Program



BY HOWARD ARKIN

Every Thursday morning, one of the first things I do is go to my laptop to see if my Men's Club invitation has arrived. The invitation of course being my invitation to partake in the North Shore Towers Men's Club Open Mike Program done on Zoom.

On Wednesdays, Toby Horowitz sends out an agenda that Gary Darche comes up with about topics of the week that will be discussed on the Open Mike Program. The topics vary from political to local and national issues.

I study the topics closely, hoping to find one that I might be able to show that I have some knowledge on the subject. The members who participate, typically 20 to 30 members, have different

opinions and it's always interesting to hear the different perspectives.

Sports is a subject that is usually discussed and that is where I like to chime in. How can you not look like a sports fanatic when you are critical of the Jets or Giants?

You can't help but be impressed by the knowledge that many of them have on the topics discussed. The programs have drawn members who are in Florida, consisting of Lee Hiller, Ron Gold, Amie Rabinowitz and Steve Weiland. Steve showed up bare chested at the last program. Do you think that Steve was trying to tell us something?



Gary Darche, Open Mike Maestro

An ancillary feature of the Zoom program has enabled us to see some nicely furnished apartments. I have spoken to my wife Janette about this. Oh yes, there is a minor complaint that I must register. A few times during the program you can hear prolonged voic-

es of telephone conversations in the background. Gary has a mute button and in the future has threatened to silence the culprits.

There are a few other great additions that have helped lessen the apathy during COVID-19. Toby Horowitz, President of the Men's Club, has started a Men's Club Newsletter to keep our members

informed of what is going on around the Men's Club during the COVID, and having members to contribute articles for the newsletter. Toby has done a great job on the newsletter and we love the content.

Fred Chernow's programs on Channel 995 and Board President Ed Phalen's discussions with the other board members have been quite necessary and informative. Fred and Ed are both members of the Men's Club.

I would advise all of our membership to take advantage of these programs as we count down to the days to our social events and next dinner or breakfast at Buffy's. For information about joining the North Shore Towers Men's Club, please contact Toby Horowitz at tmhgmt@yahoo.com or 516-848-5394.

The Candy Store and Luncheonette

BY HOWARD ARKIN

Every decade seems to showcase the golden age of something or other. The golden age of the movies was the 1930s and the 1950s was the golden age of baseball. I would personally add another to the 1950s list: It was the golden age of the candy store and luncheonette. This was the place that people could gather and read newspapers and magazines, discuss current events, boast about your Saturday night date or even place a bet with the local bookmaker, who was often the store's owner.

My corner store owner was a big, happy man named Nat. Nat could have very likely been the youngest son in a family that had decided he was not going to become a lawyer, doctor or President of the United States. I imagine his family thought that they might scrape together enough money and buy him a candy store so that he could earn a living. He was a kind, good natured man who was liked by everyone, even the group of teenagers whose main mission in life seemed to be to annoy him. I can remember one of these teenagers, Les Frank, asking Nat for an ice cream cone. Nat handed him the cone and Les asked him if he would "trust" him, meaning "Can I pay you later?" Having already taken a bite out of it, this gave Nat little choice but to extend credit.

Nat sometimes lost patience with someone and would banish them from the store. Being the kind man he was, he would usually lift the

ban in a short time. One of the boys who always seemed to be under perpetual ban was Stewie Ziegler. I can still see Stewie outside, his nose pushed up against the store's window as we laughed at him. On more than one occasion the boys saw fit to lock Nat in the basement. This of course resulted in a mass kick out and lengthy banishment from the store.

It was about this time that the boys began to take notice of Nat's two daughters, both of whom were very pretty. The days of locking Nat in the basement would come to an abrupt end, but the memories and good times would continue. One memory I have is sitting at the counter one day and noticing that Nat was mashing white bread into the tuna fish he was preparing. Obviously this would make the sandwich more profitable for him. After letting me taste it, I was convinced it actually tasted better. Today I take my tuna straight, I think.

One Saturday morning, shortly after receiving my driver's license, Nat, a huge New York Giants fan, asked me if I wanted to go to the game with him that afternoon. As a new driver I was more than happy to do the driving. It seemed logical to take the Triborough Bridge if we were leaving from Nat's store, which was on Pitkin Avenue in East New York. Nat thought otherwise and I followed his instructions. I remember a big traffic jam in front of Macy's that afternoon. So much for Nat's navigational skills!

I lost track of Nat over the years until one

day in what might have been around 1976. I went into a luncheonette on Main Street in Kew Gardens Hills and there he was behind the counter. I wondered if these customers like white bread mixed into their tuna. Seeing Nat again brought back other memories about the luncheonette I remembered from the 1950s. Three staples of any decent luncheonette were ice cream, syrup and bottled soda besides Coke and Pepsi. Breyers, Fox's U-bet and Hoffman Soda were the top of the line brands, but I don't recall Nat carrying any of them. I suppose this was another attempt by Nat to save a few dollars. I also remembered another candy store across the street from Nat's owned by a guy named Herbie. Herbie would have never tolerated the shenanigans Nat put up with. Herbie's store had a back room which featured card games and other games of chance with characters who were not to be messed with.

I believe my great interest in reading newspapers was nurtured in my local luncheonette where I found them en masse. New York had seven major newspapers in the 1950s and every day I couldn't wait to read as many of them as I could, or at least the sports section. Till this day, I still open a newspaper from the back.

Feeling nostalgic, a few weeks ago I decided to go back to the old neighborhood and see what had become of Nat's luncheonette. As I suspected, it was now a bodega. I hope that those customers one day can recall special memories, ones like I still have from Nat's 1950 luncheonette.