

Kenneth Silvestri

SUNDAYS AS A CHILD

In the early fifties Paterson still had remnants of trolley tracks peeking out through the pavement near what was once the end of the line on River Street across from our Sunday late afternoon ritual of many years at Johnny and Hanges Jersey Weiner hot dog stand.

My mother was so afraid that I would spill sauce on the car upholstery of their 1951 Pontiac
that she had my father lift me up on to the hood
keeping the engine running in winter
so I did not freeze to death. I wondered about that since she
was continually disappointed that I was not a girl.

My father was well known there
having once had this neighborhood as his patrol beat.
Ann, who looked more masculine than Johnny or Hange,
worked the front by herself, miraculously and with gusto yelling out all
and every order

Seeing my father, she would always say "Hey Lieutenant, whata you have?"
"two all the way for Kenny, one each for me and Louise," his response
"and two orders of fries and coffee," Ann would embellish the relay with
"two two daugs all the way, two two fries," never saw my father pay.

I can still smell the boiling oil and hear the franks pop up from their
submerged cremation
as Hange, one hand cradled the cardboard plate
the other slapping mustard, onions and the secret gravy
meticulously on each roll.
meanwhile Johnny got the coffee, its a deep rich aroma threading its way
through the throngs,
pushed by the breeze of the equally distinct smell of the adjacent Passaic
River.
All followed a well-orchestrated system
That I would, when I later studied anthropology, fully appreciate.

Afterwards, like clockwork, we would drive a few blocks to East 18th Street to Noni's house, her kindly empathic 4'11" frame was contagiously expansive. I seldom remember my father's father who seemed to live in the basement

continued

■ POETRY ■

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by the coal furnace with his couch, tv and indigenous wine
occasionally calling out in Italian for Rosalie to bring him his coffee and cake.

She would pinch my cheek, call me chickie
cut some provolone for me
serve my parents dessert
then sit comfortably by the window hands together rotating her thumbs
with one eye overseeing her backyard garden with a trance-like smile.

An hour or so later, a few blocks away
I was home in my room with a view of the grape vines,
of hanging squash, rock gardens and a late night train
heading north to Hawthorne.