

West End Memories - *The Galaxy*

First published Jan 27, 2015 in Newswest

In the days before Wellington West and Wellington Village were common neighbourhood names, there was downtown and Westboro. Between these was the 'West End' which encompassed Hintonburg, Mechanicsville and the area from the railway yards, the current O-Train, to approximately Churchill Avenue where the village of Westboro began.

The Burnt Butter Italian Kitchen is located today on the north west corner of Wellington Street and Sherbrooke Avenue, a location which for many years was occupied by the Galaxy Restaurant, a favourite hangout for the Champlain and Fisher Park High School crowds in the mid 1960s.

The Galaxy was a social hub where kids could connect and get caught up on the latest news and scandal. When homework and chores piled up at home, it became a useful hideout from our parents. It was run by two lookalike brothers, George and Frank who were quietly friendly and never seemed to mind us at all.

On week nights, as soon as the supper dishes were done, teenagers from the surrounding neighbourhoods would race out the door and set out for the Galaxy. In winter, after a twenty-minute walk in the early evening darkness, we four pals would arrive at the restaurant, frozen stiff as boards, because it wasn't cool to wear mitts or hats.

Most of the time several of the vinyl-upholstered booths would be packed with a constant turnover of kids coming and going. Many of us would sit for a couple of hours with a fifteen cent coffee or pop, laughing and gossiping in a blue cloud of cigarette smoke. Smoking was still cool in the sixties and the advertising of the day wasn't shy to remind us what brand of cigarettes nine out of ten doctors smoked.

Every now and then one of the gang who had a part-time job and a few bucks might come in on a break from work, and order a hamburger. There would always be a mountain of fries with that, so the rest of us would obligingly help to empty the plate.

We girls would keep an eye on the door in case some of the boys from the pool hall down the street showed up. In the current Giant Tiger location was a small department store called "The United Store". Above the shop was a sketchy pool hall, frequented by boys in their late teens, or early twenties many of whom were already out of school. They seemed worldly and dangerously attractive to us, but we were just schoolgirls, and they paid us little attention. Their girlfriends were in another league, and wore short skirts, beehive hair styles and lots of lipstick.

The jukeboxes at every table provided a background soundtrack, and belted out three songs for a quarter non-stop. We played The Mamas & the Papas "I Saw Her Again", The Beatles "Nowhere Man" and the Young Rascals "Good Lovin" by the hour. One of the boys could sing perfect harmony with Crispian St Peters' "The Pied Piper". We were all impressed.

Although much time has passed since then, some of us still keep in touch. When we get together occasionally, we remember so many stories about all of us, and wonder how life turned out for our friends. I'm sure that many of the sixties kids from the neighbourhoods in the area have great memories of the Galaxy, George and Frank, and all the gang having fun and hanging out at what was then our second home.