

Memories of Old Brooklyn: The Man in the Yard

By [Philip A Farruggio](#)

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Region: [USA](#)
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He was standing there, in the middle of the school yard...alone. At first I envisioned him as a pitcher, standing on the mound with a field full of players, some behind him, and some facing him, in the middle of a game. No, he was standing all alone, dressed in an old winter coat, surrounded by the dying leaves of autumn by his feet. I watched him from my classroom window as he paced about in the yard. He seemed to be waiting, and even though quite far away, I understood who he was awaiting. And being only eleven years old, I was amazed at myself for such a revelation. I knew just what was happening on this chilly Wednesday afternoon at a quarter to three.

The bell rang, startling no one, as we all had been sitting there, for seemed an eternity, restlessly awaiting it. The sound of it still came across as harsh and abrupt and cold, as if a forewarning to us all this November day. The *jail* was open, and the inmates were freed, until but tomorrow morning at eight, when this prison would re-engulf us again. Most of my classmates darted for the exits, swarming into the yard like ants running to a piece of chocolate. I just stood there by the window, gazing out at the sights below. I tried to follow that solitary man, lost now in a mass of adolescents. Finally, after a few moments, I caught sight of him again. He was walking through the crowds searching for what seemed to be but one face. And as far as I could see, he hadn't found it yet. I wondered to myself, who was he looking for, this lonely man dressed in that funny worn coat? I stood up and got my own coat. As I rearranged my books and sorted out my homework, my teacher told me to hurry up as she was ready to lock up. Lock up, I thought, what a sin to be locked up in here all night.... All *day* was enough. I quickly walked back to the window. The school yard was emptying out now. Most of the kids were on their way home, to a glass of milk or a bottle of soda and some cookies. Yet, the man was *still* there, standing by the pitcher's mound, looking about the yard. He still hadn't found who he was seeking. Poor guy.

I remember shouting out "Good bye Mrs. Steckler" and hurried down the stairs. Got to go, I thought, before they lock *me* in here. As I reached the school yard doors, I stopped for a moment. Tonight was Wednesday. Mom always made pot roast on Wednesday, and she knew I *hated* pot roast. Yet, she made it every Wednesday, like clockwork. And I would never eat any, but she made it just the same. As I pushed open the heavy steel door, his presence startled me! The old winter coat made him look menacing. I jumped back a bit as he smiled at me.

"What took you so long, son? I must have seen every kid but you in the yard."

"Well, I got sort of tied up a bit."

"Oh well, here you are, what the heck."

His hug was so tight, I could not breathe. I inhaled the deep smell of the fabric of that old

coat as he kept me in his embrace.

“What’s the matter, too old to kiss your old man? Come on son, give your pop a kiss.”

We walked on, arm in arm, and I never did get to eat Mom’s pot roast this Weds. afternoon.

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Philip A Farruggio is a contributing editor for The Greenville Post. He is also frequently posted on Global Research, Nation of Change, Cross Currents and Off Guardian sites. He is the son and grandson of Brooklyn NYC longshoremen and a graduate of Brooklyn College, class of 1974. Since the 2000 election debacle Philip has written over 400 columns on the Military Industrial Empire and other facets of life in an upside down America. He is also host of the ‘ It’s the Empire... Stupid ‘ radio show, co produced by Chuck Gregory. Philip can be reached at paf1222@bellsouth.net

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