

Our neighborhood was a peninsula on the southern point of Brooklyn. One side of the cape was populated.

The other half, were fields long, flat, and green. They led out to the salt marshes that we called "the back weeds". They were the badlands of the neighborhood, where few people dared to tread alone.

Winding down to the south a like spinal cord made out of asphalt, a long boulevard that we simply called the "the avenue" connected the smaller streets where everyone lived.

The end of the Avenue lead to water, where there were two beaches named Kiddie, and Charlie's.

Kiddie beach would sit unused and locked up for most of the year, until on memorial day a small parade would make it's way down the avenue to unlock the gate and declare it open. During the summer we would go there to swim out to the raft that floated in the middle of the canal and eat cheap hotdogs.

Charlie's Beach would be separated from Kiddie beach by a rusty chain link fence. Its only use was for teenagers to drink Budweiser longnecks at night, and a nautical graveyard for rowboats that were abandoned in the glass and tar littered sands.

With the exceptions of one Lutheran church, and one Catholic church the buildings in the neighborhood were

small, no more than two stories high. Houses were abandoned all through the neighborhood. They would be used for bases for games of manhunt that would rage across our tiny cape.

The scarier houses would be declared haunted, and be left alone until a group of older kids made an expedition inside.

It was mostly a quiet neighborhood. Its main industry was commercial fishing, but the fish died off when the sewer plant was built across the harbor.

Most of the men that lived in the neighborhood were firemen, cops, or utility workers. They would have tattoos of anchors, crossed rifles, or bulldogs on their forearms. Most of the women were homemakers, nurses, or nursery school teachers; they would be quiet and meek until they called their children in for dinner, then their voices would be heard across a three-block radius.

Before we left, our scout pack met up on the avenue, in front of a building called the Court Club. It was a grey building, with a disintegrating stucco exterior. The sign that designated it had red lettering with a style that was no longer in favor that faded to a pale orange.

The court club could have been a nightclub at one point but those days were gone. The neighborhood used it

for community meetings, and as a central place for groups like us to gather.

Both our mother's and fathers came to wish us good-bye. Our moms pecked our cheeks and smoothed out our cowlicks with palms wet with saliva. Our dads shook our hands and gave our shoulders a pat. Fixed on our fathers' heads were baseball caps with embroideries of their old units or ships from the war.

Our dads had similar trips when they were our age. They told us about the camp fires and war games they had. To show us they would pull out a dusty box full of old photographs of them in their Cub Scout uniforms. The caps and bandanna's were slightly different, but they were mostly the same.

Our dads had these smiles in the pictures that were part goofy, and half optimistic. It was the same kind of smiles that we would see gracing children's faces in old magazine ads. They were smiles of a different era, they were smiles that would look at the stars and expect John Glenn and God looking back down at them.

Looking at the mirrors in our houses, our faces couldn't make the same contours; our mouths couldn't make the same shapes. We couldn't look at the stars anymore and

expect anyone looking back at us, because the Challenger blew up two years before this trip.

Digging deeper in the dusty old boxes, our dads pulled out a shiny piece of metal. It was a rectangle, with an arrow racing across the sun. It was the arrow of light medal, the final achievement for the cub scouts, before we moved on to the boy scouts.

The arrow of light was our reason for our gathering at the court club. The trip was supposed to be our final trails, before we meet back up at an auditorium for medals of our own.

Some of our parents gave us charms and objects for luck. Some of us received watches. Some of us received Saint Christopher medals. Eugene's mother gave him his father's helmet from Vietnam.

Jason's girlfriend, Jenny O'Donnell came to give him a hug and a closed mouth kiss on the cheek good-bye. She was off to a girl scout meeting soon after, and had her uniform on. We tried not to laugh when his heavy gear almost tipped him over when he over extended his neck to meet her lips.

We all looked at Jason and Jenny with envy because no girl came to give us good-bye kisses. Except for Devlin, he looked away from Jenny and pulled his hat down.

When the scout leaders came, they lined all 20 of us against the court club and made us count off to four. Then we were pushed off five squads, tomahawks, braves, warriors, Mohawks, and apaches.

We eyed each other in our groups, not sure what to make of the other kids. The Kinder twins Michael and Paul, were separated into the tomahawks, and braves squads. They wrinkled their noses and protested against it. They looked at their parents who frowned back. The twins hushed up.

The Titus Cousins were Jimmy and Timmy. They had the look that was half of one bloodline and half of something else. They shared the same freckles and button noses. Otherwise, they looked like two completely different people. They lucked out and managed to both be sent to the warriors, with Anthony, and Jason.

The Apache's were Devlin, Milo, Johnny, and Stephen. Devlin was suited to his name. He looked like a pint sized devil with his tangled red hair and face that flamed in the cold wind that snapped down the Avenue. He had sharp teeth that bit more than one of us in fights in the schoolyard. The rest of the Apaches looked at him warily and tried to keep their distance best they could.

The rest of the Tomahawks were Eugene, George, and Brian. They tried to comfort Michael the best they could

without making themselves look weak, except for Eugene who kept looking out to the Avenue for his father. His dad was stationed in Germany and promised to be home soon when he called earlier that week.

Eugene traded his cap for the helmet that kept sliding from side to side on his small head that made him resemble a bobble head doll.

Paul from the Braves squad looked over to his twin. He kept his jaw tight, and folded his arms in a pout. Spizzeri, Wagner, and Jimmy mostly ignored Paul, and each other. Spizzeri, kept rubbing his Saint Christopher medal for luck. Jimmy nervously opened and closed his Swiss army knife, his brother the night before reminded him again about the Cropsey. Wagner looked out the fields, and the salt marshes beyond.

The last group the Mohawks, consisted of Timmy, O'Brien, Matthew, and Daniel. They were quiet kids, except for Timmy. He was known in the neighborhood for his prowess in the fields. He would be there in all weather, all year round running, throwing or kicking all types of balls. As he was waiting to load his gear into a scout leader's car, he was tossing a baseball up and down. In his bag was a radio so he can listen to the World Series.

We waited for a little while with our new squads, we continued to eye each other up and down. We went through our gear careful of the pyrotechnics that we hid before we left, until finally the scout leader Big Jim young showed.

He inspected our ranks squads, and shook our parent's hands as we loaded our packs, into the mini-vans designated for our squads.

When we were all done he shouted, "Saddle up boys!" and we drove across the Verrazano to Staten Island, and then finally Camp Pouch.