

## A Sunnyside Story Redux

Jack Rothstein  
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Sunnyside, a neighborhood located in Northwest Queens in the city of New York is my home town. I was born in a tent alongside the East River in Manhattan and spent the first 7 years of my life living in Williamsburg home of Jews and hipsters. We left Williamsburg a year after my father, a hero of World War 2, a man that fought at Guadalcanal and the Philippines, had his life cut short fighting for humanity. Fighting for freedom. My father died in my arms a month before my 7th birthday. His last words, “give me a kiss”, he kissed me on the lips and then he kissed my 3 year old sister on the lips, and on that bright sunny Indian summer autumn day lay down on his bed and took his final breath.



*L/CPL Thomas P. Noonan Jr. Playground 47th Ave and 42nd St Park*

A year later we moved to Sunnyside. We moved to an apartment building located on 47th ave and 42nd street across the street from the 43rd street Park. I was scared to death. I felt so alone. I had a few friends living in Williamsburg that I left behind and moved into the unknown and was scared. My mother became fast friends with a neighbor that lived in the building who had a boy my age. I was introduced to him. I was scared about meeting him. This boy embraced me with a big hug and was the friendliest kindest most

loving human being of my age that I ever met. His embrace quickly chased the fear away. His name is Mark Wilensky. He still lives in Sunnyside today. He is the most valuable resident of that neighborhood. To this day my first friend of Sunnyside is the same, expressing kindness, a warm embrace, and is a friend to all that come across his path. We hung together for many years. Went to school together and played ball in the playgrounds together. We had a great time growing up in that neighborhood.



Jack Rothstein with Sofia

I was a ball player. I loved sports. I loved to compete. The playgrounds of Sunnyside provided a great venue for ball playing. Cold weather did not matter. We had indoor gyms to play in when the weather was nasty. I played ball with the Irish kids. It mattered not to me. I wanted to play with the best players and the best players were Irish. In spite of my religious orientation both Mark (a Jew) and I were accepted by the Catholic kids. He and I played CYO basketball for Saint Raphael's parish. It was a great experience. I loved every moment of it. I will always cherish those memories.

Many of the older kids I grew up with became police officers. They had an in with the department. Sunnyside, an Irish neighborhood produced many cops. It was an alternative to college. They joined up and passed the necessary exams both physical and mental and wore the uniform. I played ball with those kids. Grew up with them and certainly do not hate them. I never got beat up or punched out in all the years I spent living in Sunnyside. I was embraced by the boys. They taught me how to drink properly. Many of them went to Vietnam to fight in a needless war. None of them came back the same. A number of them never came back. I never went nor did I consider volunteering. I went to school instead, and being the only son of my mother having lost my father because of wounds he contracted in Asia during WW2, I was exempt. I have no regrets about that. War is a nasty business and those that have had the misfortune to experience it are never the same again.