

## FUN WITH A G STRING AT THE CHURCH ON THE HILL

The world I lived in as a child could only be described as INNOCENT. Back in the old days we'd been through a depression and a war, but TV hadn't grown up yet and while the movies showed plenty ways to kiss, and we fifth grade kids practiced many of them, no one could imagine an X, or even an R rated flick.

Our neighborhood in Queens New York City had fallen spell to a huge building boom. Fields and farms where we used to play gave way to housing developments. Those of us living in pre war houses and apartments welcomed the new kids coming in from the immigrant neighborhoods in the city, as we fondly called the borough of Manhattan.

Along with the old and new residents came the places of worship. Catholic Churches seemed in the majority and most of the kids knew a neighbor girl who planned on becoming a nun. Synagogues also were found in close proximity, most reformed, the most liberal, some conservative with orthodox moving to Brooklyn.

Even though many Protestants moved in, like my Aunt's husband whose parents migrated from Germany and were Lutheran, in those days there rarely were enough of them in the same faith to start a church. So grew up the interdenominational churches such as the one my cousins attended. The Church on the Hill could have been used as a setting for a Bing Crosby movie.

Of course that wasn't the reason I eagerly accepted my cousin Freddy's

invitation to join him at the Sunday School Christmas party. I was more interested in a cute red headed boy from my class who also attended the Church on the Hill. The party would be an ideal place for Robert and I to get better acquainted.

Snow fell as my cousin and I hurried to the church for the party. We kind of ignored snow in those days and certainly couldn't look forward to a day off from school. We simply plowed through the street on kid power as we did that pre-Christmas night during those innocent days. We carried our contribution to the ever present grab bag a staple at Christmas parties and boxes of homemade cookies for refreshments, as we called our festive repasts.

A sophisticated eleven year old, I was a bit chagrined to see so many second graders headed for the church. Oh heck, my cousin was in the second grade. What did I expect? I knew the kindergarten and first graders had their own party as did the high school kids. And when we got to the church and I saw Robert, the redhead, getting out of his Dad's car I didn't mind putting up with a few babies. He had the usual packages all the kids carried but he managed to wave as his father drove away.

"I bet Mr. Spencer went to get the movies," I told Freddy who happily agreed as we traversed the slippery pavement to catch up with Robert.

Not everyone had a television set at home then. So all of us, even the sassy pre-teen-know-it-alls, eagerly looked forward to the highlight of the evening,

rented movies played on the film camera that came with the flicks. So what if these cartoons and short shorts happen to be the same entertainment coming to us from early black and white TV. So what if we watched them every Saturday at the kiddy matinee over at the Victory Theater.

We all harbored a forget-what's-coming-next gene and only remembered the parts we hooted at like when Wimpy said, "I'll gladly pay you Tuesday for a hamburger today." We loved watching them, and a party without the moving pictures was like a party without Oreo cookies and sarsaparilla soda. Unthinkable

So when Mr. Spencer came in carrying a film projector and a box of movies we quit our rowdily competitive game of musical chairs and cheered like crazy. The urbane older boys commenced talking in Donald Duck lingo, quite a talent in those days. Speaking like Donald could make or break the social life of an adolescent male. Now me, I couldn't begin to wrap my tongue around those quacks, but I did a mean Mae West, my staple for the ever present talent show portion of all of our parties.

"Oh Boy," the boys quacked in harmony when Robert's dad announced that besides the familiar cartoons, he had rented some real Hollywood type movies for our enjoyment. Wow! The rowdy boys and even some of girls set up the theater. Chairs in a row, projector table in the back, screen in the front.

We all grabbed cookies and green punch, the kind of drink you got at

church socials instead of the sarsaparilla served at birthday parties. We all agreed we'd even like cream soda better than the green punch, even if the mom dishing it up was so proud of the green sherbet floating around the big bowl.

Before the movies started the Pastor came in with his wife and two young children, one toddling the other still a babe in arms. We oohed and ahhed at the little ones but were cut short as Mr. Spencer banged a spoon on a real glass quite unlike the red paper cups holding our sugary green punch.

“Everyone take your seat. It's Showtime!”

We raced for chairs and I even left Freddy to his own devices and wangled the seat next to Robert. Once there I couldn't think of a thing to say so simply stared and giggled.

“You gonna do Mae West?” he asked.

“I guess,” I said. What else could I do? I couldn't sing, I couldn't dance, I didn't even know who Mae West was. But my lively young aunt had rehearsed me in a few famous lines, so that turned out to be my party shtick.

But, first things first. The house light dimmed. The projector whirred and the first cartoon flashed across the screen. We had a Popeye, a Crazy Cat and then on to Disney. We loved Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck and all their buddies. Still we let out a cheer when Mr. Spencer announced the first short direct from Hollywood. “Let's hear it for 'Fun with a G String.'”

We watched with fascination as a young lady carrying a violin with one of those show biz gowns fluffing out all over came onto a stage and bowed to the audience. She must have been warm though, because without missing a note she whipped off her silky scarf and flung it to her silver screen audience of cheering men. Hmm, that should have given us a clue as to what was going to follow.

Not a chance in this innocent world. Not even the quacking eight graders bothered to cheer the violinist on as she kept on with her bow going back and forth, stopping only to shed another item from her dressy attire. After the scarf came the fingerless gloves, then the puffy outer skirt revealing a full length inner skirt. The quackers came alive when she shed her blouse for a concealing, so far, bra.

Mr. Spencer, ignoring the screen while involved in an intense chat with a few other dads including the Pastor, didn't seem to catch on to what we were watching. So by the time those in charge gazed at the screen, the violinist had shown the world the other G string, the one dangling on her shapely tummy. She had only two little thingies concealing a tiny part of her well-rounded boobs, and not a one of us kids listened to her obvious skill on the violin she still played "The Flight of the Bumble Bee". That classic piece cause plenty body jiggling.

The dads in charge finally caught on to what the screen revealed. The children were watching a strip movie, at the church Christmas party no less. Mr. Spencer ran for the projector and in his haste to hit the off button, sent the whole

machine flying toward the floor killing any chance of a cinematic evening. As his face turned crimson, the kids howled.

Finally the Pastor himself took over, calming the excited party goers and sending someone upstairs to fetch the pianist who worked with the chorus. She quickly sat at the recreation room upright and hit the key board with rousing renditions of our favorite holiday songs. The ladies at the green punch bowl got out more cookies and even found trays of little sandwiches.

“Can we play spin the bottle?” one of the older boys shouted. The grown ups groaned and quickly organized a game of charades, easy enough for the second graders to join in. The grab bags, usually saved for the finale, were set up, one for the boys, one for the girls. Knowing how to feel around, I came up with my favorite, a bottle of orange blossom perfume from the dime store.

The party grew so lively soon the G string lady was forgotten even as the Dad’s picked up the pieces of the projector boxing it up to go back. The talent show was great and I got a big hand from my Mae West spin off.

I did notice a few of the dads looking toward Heaven as I recited the lines my aunt fed me. “Hello, boys,” deep voice, stick out chest, “Save your nickels, save your dimes, when you have a buck, come up to see me sometimes.”

The evening’s highlight came when Robert walked Freddy and me home, and held my hand. Too bad the romance didn’t go any place since after he left my

life; the cute red head became a wealthy brain surgeon in the Nation's Capitol.

The next year at the church Christmas party, all the films were fit for the whole family, and I'd discovered I did have a talent after all. While the other kids sang and danced, I recited, from memory, an original story of mine.

And they liked it, they really liked it.