

## Fred

*Fred I -05-2015 by Harry Zirkelbach*

St John's Parish boundaries were near the Church. Four blocks of either side defined the parish east and west boundaries. Four blocks north on the front door defined that boundary. The south boundary defied limitation, for housing and roads ceased four blocks south, the area beyond a wooded no-mans-land of trees, an occasional farm.

To complicate these boundaries, just north of the Saint John's, was another Catholic Church, Holy Trinity, one of several Polish parishes of east Erie, Pa.

The importance of this fact, was that both parishes had a School, Grades 1 through 8, and that in the 64 blocks of St John's, the eight grades drew more than four hundred fifty pupils. Because the community was predominantly Catholic.

And that area included families whose Children had graduated, were too young for school, or had no Children.

A neighbor and friend was in that last category. They had married in the 1910 decade, were childless.

St John's parish had many social gatherings, benefiting parents and their friends. The secondary purpose of these groups, raise money for school support. for while there was no tuition for school, there were bills to be paid.

This childless couple were friends to my parents, part of a group that gathered many times a week for one or another adventure.

Often this required transportation. During the day, that husband drive.

Fred had retired early, had a limited male companionship, took delight in these charities. He knew all his wife's friends, first name. And when the ladies began a conversation in his vehicle, he couldn't resist joining. This was usually of little consequence. Except, those journeys where he had an urge to tell the ladies short stories.

In these moments Fred became emotionally involved in the conversation. Further, he had the uncontrollable habit of being unable to join a conversation without facing those addressed. So as he ambled along any street, it was his

inclination to turn his head around and speak directly to a woman no longer coordinating his eye-mind-steering.

As the car moved along those moments, it was not uncommon that another vehicle would appear, an intersection crossed, stop or red light encountered. At which moment the Catholic community in the car would address their hospitable host in phrases more fitting to the pulpit, "Jesus Christ Fred, watch out!".

Distracted from his narration by that appeal to the Savior, Fred would align the car, and more that infrequently tell his passengers, "Did you see that idiot? He almost struck our car", always without regard from what horror Fred's passengers had been saved.

It was generally agreed, Fred was congenial, too often frightening, and one of the luckiest men who ever had a drivers' license, for he never was struck by another vehicle, was in an accident.

So for years, Sodality Ladies and others continued to accept Fred's hospitality; adjusted to suggesting that Fred watch the road. But they never totally broke Fred from that face-to-face conversation in his moving auto.

Rosary beads flew whenever Fred talked while driving.