

ONE DAY AT A TIME

MY STORY - JACK BRIGGS (Birth to Young Adult)

I WAS BORN ON AUGUST 11, 1933 AT 9:03 P.M. AND WAS KNOWN AS A DEPRESSION BABY. THERE WERE HARD TIMES THEN, NOT JUST IN GREENWICH, CONNECTICUT BUT ALL OVER THE COUNTRY. MY DAD WAS A BARTENDER AFTER PROHIBITION ENDED & WE LIVED UPSTAIRS OVER THE BAR WHICH WAS OWNED BY MY DAD'S BROTHER, AL BRIGGS WHO ALSO OWNED THE BUILDING WHICH INCLUDED THE BAR, A RESTAURANT, LARGE DINING ROOM WITH A DANCE FLOOR, AND FOUR LARGE APARTMENTS UPSTAIRS. THE BUILDING WAS LOCATED AT THE BOTTOM OF GREENWICH AVENUE AND JUST AROUND THE CORNER FROM THE GREENWICH RAILROAD STATION. I WAS A VERY HEALTHY BABY AND VERY ACTIVE IN MY CRIB ACCORDING TO ALL REPORTS FROM MY MOTHER.

AFTER CONTACTING POLIO AT THE AGE OF TWO I UNDERSTAND MY LIFE CHANGED COMPLETELY. IN THOSE DAYS POLIO WAS CALLED INFANTILE PARALYSIS AND VERY LITTLE WAS KNOWN ABOUT IT. THERE WAS NO CURE OR TREATMENT AVAILABLE AND I UNDERSTAND I HAD IT FOR TWO MONTHS BEFORE ANYBODY KNEW I HAD IT. MY MOTHER WAS TAKING ME TO THE ROOSEVELT HOSPITAL IN NEW YORK CITY. THE POLIO AFFECTED MY LEFT LEG AND MY RIGHT ARM. I FIRST HAD BOTH MY LEGS IN CASTS FOR OVER A YEAR TO HELP KEEP THEM

STRAIGHT. I DID NOT WALK AGAIN UNTIL I WAS FOUR YEARS OLD. AT THAT TIME I WAS FITTED WITH BRACES ON BOTH MY LEGS AND MY RIGHT ARM. I CAN REMEMBER WALKING TO ST. MARY'S SCHOOL UP GREENWICH AVENUE WITH MY ARM UP OVER MY HEAD IN THE BRACE. I WORE THE BRACE ON MY ARM UNTIL I WAS EIGHT YEARS OLD. THE BRACES ON MY LEGS WERE UP OVER MY KNEES UNTIL I WAS EIGHT YEARS OLD AND THEN I ONLY HAD TO WEAR ONE BRACE ON MY LEFT LEG UNTIL I WAS ELEVEN YEARS OLD. FOR ALL THE YEARS I WORE BRACES, IT WAS ONLY A FIVE BLOCK WALK TO SCHOOL ON UPPER GREENWICH AVENUE. AFTER DISCARDING ALL MY BRACES, ONE OF MY FIRST JOBS WAS SELLING NEWSPAPERS. THE "GREENWICH TIME" SOLD FOR FIVE CENTS IN THOSE DAYS AND THEY WOULD COST ME THREE CENTS EACH TO BUY. WHEN I FIRST STARTED OUT I WAS SELLING TWENTY PAPERS A DAY, MAKING MYSELF FORTY CENTS PLUS TIPS OF COURSE. ON A GOOD DAY I COULD MAKE SEVENTY-FIVE CENTS TO A DOLLAR. I GUESS THAT WAS GOOD MONEY FOR A TWELVE YEAR OLD KID. THIS WAS IN 1945 AND WORLD WAR II WAS OVER AND IT SEEMED LIKE THINGS WERE GOING TO BETTER FOR EVERYBODY. MY DAD HAD BEEN DRAFTED IN THE ARMY IN 1943 BECAUSE HE HAD A NON-ESSENTIAL JOB AS A BARTENDER EVEN THOUGH HE WAS 35 YEARS OLD, MARRIED WITH THREE CHILDREN TO SUPPORT. MY SISTER JOAN WAS FOUR YEARS YOUNGER THAN ME, AND MY BROTHER JAY

WAS FIVE YEARS YOUNGER THAN ME . MY DAD ENDED UP IN THE COMBAT ENGINEERS IN EUROPE AND WENT THROUGH THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE , CROSSING THE RHINE AND WAS IN ENGLAND , FRANCE AND GERMANY . I CAN REMEMBER SOME OF THE LETTERS DURING THE WAR WHEN HE FELT HE MIGHT NOT MAKE IT BACK . THE COMBAT ENGINEERS WORKED OUT IN FRONT OF THE INFANTRY BUILDING BRIDGES FOR THEM TO CROSS . AND OF COURSE THE GERMANS KEPT BLOWING UP THE BRIDGES AS HE WAS WORKING ON THEM . I GUESS ABOUT THIS TIME MY MOTHER WENT TO WORK AT FAWCETT PUB. IN GREENWICH AS A FILE CLERK , WHERE SHE LEARNED TO TYPE AND TAKE SHORTHAND . AFTER A FEW YEARS SHE HAD HER OWN DEPT. WITH TEN GIRLS WORKING UNDER HER SUPERVISION . PRETTY GOOD FOR A 'POOR DUM POLLACK BLONDE' . FOR THE LAST FIVE YEARS BEFORE SHE DIED OF CANCER (AT AGE 41) SHE WAS A PRIVATE SECRETARY FOR ONE OF THE FAWCETT BROTHERS WHO OWNED THE COMPANY . SHE WAS ONE OF THE GREATEST LADIES IN THE WORLD , AND YOU NEVER KNOW HOW MUCH YOU MISS THEM UNTIL THE'YE GONE . I STARTED TO DO BETTER AND BETTER SELLING THE (GREENWICH TIME) AFTER SCHOOL AND BUILT UP A NICE ROUTE OF CUSTOMERS AND THEN SOLD AT THE GREENWICH POST OFFICE UNTIL IT GOT DARK OR I SOLD THE LAST PAPER . I WAS UP TO FIFTY SALES A DAY FIVE TIMES A WEEK . I THEN GOT A HELPER TO SELL AT THE POST OFFICE AND I

VENTURED DOWN TO THE GREENWICH RAILROAD STATION TO SELL TO COMMUTERS COMING IN FROM NEW YORK CITY AND TO THE TAXI DRIVERS WHO MET THE TRAINS . I WAS SOON SELLING 100 PAPERS A DAY . I WAS MAKING \$ 2.00 A DAY PLUS TIPS . ONE OF MY CUSTOMERS WAS A LOCAL UNDERTAKER ON GREENWICH AVENUE . HIS NAME WAS BUD KNAPP . FOR YEARS HE HAD WATCHED ME WALK BY HIS FRONT DOOR EVERY MORNING IN MY BRACES ON THE WAY TO SCHOOL . ONE NIGHT AROUND SUPPER TIME , HE SHOWED UP AT OUR APARTMENT UP OVER THE BAR AND ASKED TO TALK TO MY MOM AND DAD . HE EXPLAINED THAT HE WAS A SHRINER AND WANTED TO TAKE ME TO THE “SHRINER’S HOSPITAL FOR CRIPPLED CHILDREN” IN SPRINGFIELD , MASSACHUSETTS TO SEE IF THEY COULD HELP ME AT ALL WITH MY POLIO PROBLEM BECAUSE I WALKED SO BAD AND HAD A TERRIBLE LIMP . TO MAKE THE STORY SHORT , FOR THE NEXT THREE SUMMERS WHEN I GOT OUT OF SCHOOL I WOULD GO TO THE THE HOSPITAL IN SPRINGFIELD AND HAVE OPERATIONS ON MY LEGS . I USUALLY GOT OUT OF THE HOSPITAL AFTER LABOR DAY JUST IN TIME TO GO BACK TO SCHOOL . I THINK I MISSED A LOT OF SUMMER FUN . THE YEAR I WAS 13 I REMEMBER HAVING A NEWSPAPER ROUTE FOR THE PORT CHESTER NEW YORK PAPER CALLED THE “DAILY ITEM” WHICH WAS A SIX DAY DELIVERY . IT WAS A BITCH DELIVERING DURING THE WINTER

UP AND DOWN THE MANY HILLS IN DOWNTOWN GREENWICH, BUT I NEVER MISSED A DAY. MY LEFT LEG WAS ALWAYS COLD BECAUSE THERE WAS POOR CIRCULATION AND IT WAS HARD TO KEEP IT WARM. THE SUMMER I CAME HOME FROM THE SHRINER'S HOSPITAL WHEN I WAS 14, I FIGURED I WAS TOO OLD TO SELL NEWSPAPERS, SO ONE OF MY OLD CUSTOMERS, BILL TREPP, WHO OWNED TREPP'S FLOWER SHOP ON GREENWICH AVENUE GAVE ME A JOB AFTER SCHOOL WORKING IN THE FLOWER SHOP, CLEANING FLOWERS, SWEEPING THE FLOOR, AND PUTTING TOGETHER BOXES TO DELIVER THE FLOWERS: THEY WERE THE OLD 'HOOK THE CORNERS' SOMETHING LIKE THE PIZZA BOXES TODAY. I CAN REMEMBER DURING THE CHRISTMAS, EASTER AND MOTHER'S DAY HOLIDAYS I WOULD BE DOWN IN THE CELLAR FOR A WEEK PUTTING TOGETHER HUNDREDS OF BOXES. THERE WOULD ALSO BE HUNDREDS OF PLANTS THAT HAD TO BE WATERED UNTIL THEY WERE SOLD, WRAPPED AND DELIVERED ALL OVER GREENWICH AND STAMFORD. DURING DELIVERIES I WAS A RUNNER ON THE TRUCK AND WOULD TAKE THE ORDER TO THE DOOR OF THE HOUSE OR APARTMENT, WHILE THE DRIVER GOT THE NEXT STOP READY. TIPS WERE USUALLY A QUARTER IN THOSE DAYS AND SOMETIMES A DOLLAR DURING THE CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS. WE WOULD DELIVER OVER A HUNDRED ORDERS A DAY AND WOULD STILL BE DELIVERING AT 10 P.M. ON CHRISTMAS EVE. EVERY HOLIDAY WAS THE SAME, AND MR TREPP WOULD PAY

ME ONE DOLLAR PER HOUR IN CASH, WITH NO TAXES. I WORKED FOR MR TREPP FOR TWO YEARS EXCEPT FOR MY SUMMERS IN THE SHRINER'S HOSPITAL. I ALSO STARTED SETTING UP PINS IN THE GREENWICH BOWLING ALLEYS ON WEST PUTNAM AVENUE WHERE THE CADILLAC CAR AGENCY IS NOW LOCATED. I USED TO SET A 30 GAME MATCH EVERY NIGHT. I WOULD GET 30 CENTS A GAME, PLUS A NICKEL TIP PER GAME FOR A TOTAL OF \$4.50 PER NIGHT. THERE WERE NO MACHINES TO SET PINS IN THOSE DAYS, IT WAS ALL DONE BY HAND. ALL THE PIN BOYS WOULD GET TOGETHER AFTER THE LEAGUE GAMES AND BOWL AMONG OURSELVES. I BECAME A GOOD BOWLER WITH A 165 AVERAGE, LEFT HANDED. THE GREENWICH BOYS WOULD BOWL AGAINST THE STAMFORD PINBOYS AND WE WOULD WIN THE MONEY THEY MADE SETTING PINS. WE WOULD THEN LEND THEM A DOLLAR TO GO HOME ON THE TRAIN TO STAMFORD, UNTIL THE NEXT NIGHT. WHEN I GRADUATED FROM THE EIGHTH GRADE MY DAD BOUGHT ME A J. C. HIGGINS BIKE FROM SEAR'S ROEBUCK TO RIDE TO THE HIGH SCHOOL, WOW! WITH THE BIKE I WAS ABLE TO GET AROUND PRETTY GOOD AND I WAS A FAST RIDER. THE COPS ON GREENWICH AVENUE WOULD YELL AT ME ALL THE TIME TO SLOW DOWN. THERE WAS ONE COP (RED LARSEN) ON THE CORNER OF GREENWICH AVENUE AND HAVAMEYER PLACE THAT WOULD ALWAYS MAKE ME STOP WITH ALL THE CARS. HE EVEN GAVE A A HARD TIME LATER ON IN

LIFE WHEN I HAD MY TRUCKING BUSINESS. BACK THEN WE HAD TO PARK IN SOME BUS STOPS TO PICK UP ORDERS FROM STORES THAT DID NOT HAVE BACK DOOR PARKING SPACE. I HAD MET A REAL GOOD FRIEND, WILLIAM PATRICK JOYCE (AN IRISHMAN) WHO WAS THE TICKET AGENT AT THE RAILROAD STATION WHEN I WAS SELLING PAPERS. ON SUNDAYS I WOULD GO OVER TO THE RAILROAD STATION TO HANG-OUT WITH HIM AND HE WOULD LET ME SELL TICKETS, COUNT AND WRAP CHANGE, ANSWER PHONES AND LEARN A LOT ABOUT BUSINESS IN GENERAL. HE HAD A 1947 FORD COUPE, BLACK, REAL SHARP AND HE TAUGHT ME HOW TO DRIVE IN THE RAILROAD PARKING LOT. BY THE TIME I WAS 15 I WAS A REAL PRO. I WENT TO FLORIDA AND BACK WITH BILL AND HE LET ME DRIVE HALF THE TIME. IT WAS GREAT, AND WHEN WE GOT BACK, WE HAD \$1.75 LEFT IN OUR POCKETS. I DID NOT THINK WE WERE GOING TO MAKE IT. WE HAD LIVED ON A LOAF OF BREAD, TWO POUNDS OF BOLOGNA AND SOME ORANGES. IT TOOK US OVER 33 HOURS TO DRIVE BACK IN THOSE DAYS. THERE WERE NO INTERSTATE AVAILABLE THEN. ON MY LAST TRIP BACK TO CONNECTICUT, I MADE IT IN LESS THAN 20 HOURS.

WHEN I FINALLY BECAME SIXTEEN, I THINK I BECAME A MAN. MOM AND DAD WERE NOW DIVORCED, AND OF COURSE I GOT ALONG BETTER WITH MY DAD THAN I EVER DID. HE WAS NOT ABLE TO BEAT ME ANYMORE SINCE I HAD KNOCKED HIM INTO THE BATHTUB ONE NIGHT

THE YEAR BEFORE WHEN HE WAS CHASING ME AROUND THE HOUSE WITH A STRAP HALF DRUNK WHIPPING MY ASS. DAD WORKED ONE WEEK DAYS, AND ONE WEEK NIGHTS AT THE BAR. WHEN HE WENT TO WORK DURING THE DAY, HE WOULD USUALLY COME UP STAIRS AT 6 P.M. WITH A LOAD ON, SO WE HAD TO BE VERY CAREFUL NOT TO GET HIM EXCITED. WHEN HE WORKED NIGHTS IT WAS GREAT! HE WOULD SLEEP LATE AND HAVE DINNER WITH US BEFORE GOING DOWNSTAIRS TO WORK, SO NO PROBLEMS. THE BAR WAS OPEN UNTIL 1 A.M. IN THOSE DAYS AND SOMETIMES THE MUSIC WOULD KEEP US ALL AWAKE UNTIL 1 A.M. THE BEST JOB I HAD WHEN I WAS 16 WAS AT MANERO'S STEAK HOUSE ON STEAMBOAT ROAD. I WOULD GO IN AT 4 P.M AFTER SCHOOL AND PEEL 200 POUNDS OF POTATOES AND DICE THEM FOR FRENCH FRIES. IT WOULD TAKE ME 5 HOURS AND I MADE \$2.00 PER HOUR, \$10.00 FOR THE NIGHT. I DON'T THINK THERE WERE TOO MANY KIDS IN SCHOOL MAKING THAT KIND OF MONEY AFTER SCHOOL. MOM WAS HAVING A REAL RUFF TIME TRYING TO MAKE THINGS WORK FOR US AND I WAS NOT AROUND TO COOK DINNER EVERY NIGHT B - 4 SHE CAME HOME FROM WORK FOR MY BROTHER AND SISTER, SO I QUIT HIGH SCHOOL FOR AWHILE AND WENT TO WORK EARLY AT MANERO'S STEAK HOUSE. IT REALLY TURNED OUT GREAT. I WOULD GO IN AT 11 A.M. AND DO THE POTATOES. WE KEPT THEM IN LARGE

METAL GARBAGE CANS IN THE WALK IN COOLER. I WOULD BE ALL THROUGH BY 4 OR 5 P.M. AND WOULD COLLECT MY \$ 10.00 IN CASH FROM TONY MANERO. WE WERE ALWAYS ALLOWED TO EAT SOMETHING LIKE SALAD OR SPAGHETTI, BUT NO STEAK. I ALWAYS HAD AN EMPTY POCKET WHEN I WENT IN THE WALK-IN COOLER AND USUALLY TOOK HOME A COUPLE OF STEAK TIBITS. BUT MY DAY WAS NOT OVER WHEN I WENT OUTSIDE, THERE WAS ALWAYS A LINE WAITING TO GET IN BECAUSE OF THE GREAT REPUTATION OF MANERO'S STEAK HOUSE. PEOPLE WOULD DRIVE OUT OF NEW YORK AND ALL THE SURROUNDING AREA. I STARTED PARKING CARS IN MANERO'S PARKING LOT AND THEN GET THE CAR WHEN THE PEOPLE CAME OUT. I WOULD REMEMBER ALL THE FACES AND HAVE THEIR CAR READY WHEN THEY CAME TO THE PARKING LOT. THE DOLLARS KEPT ROLLING IN AND BY THE TIME I WENT HOME, I USUALLY HAD \$ 25.00 - \$ 35.00 IN TIPS ALONG WITH MY \$ 10.00 FOR PEELING THE POTATOES. I STARTED GIVING MY MOTHER \$ 100.00. IT STILL LEFT ME MONEY FOR GAS, SODA'S, BEEF OR WHAT I WANTED. WHEN I SIXTEEN I WAS GETTING SERVED AT THE BLUE RAIL AND THE SQUARE TAVERN. I WAS WAY AHEAD OF MANY KIDS MY AGE IN THOSE DAYS. LOTS OF NIGHTS AFTER WORK I WOULD RIDE MY BIKE HOME AND GO INTO THE BAR IF MY DAD WAS WORKING THE NIGHT SHIFT. I WOULD SIT AT THE BAR FOR AN HOUR OR TWO AND THEN HELP HIM CLOSE UP, PUT UP THE BAR STOOLS AND SWEEP

THE FLOOR. IT SEEMS THERE WAS ALWAYS SOME CHANGE ON THE FLOOR FOR ME. THIS IS WHEN I GOT IN TROUBLE AND WENT TO BOYS TOWN. I WAS REALLY IN TROUBLE AND IF NOT FOR MR TREPP AT THE FLOWER SHOP AND MY DENTIST DR. FRANK GARGEN WHO KNEW CARDINAL SPELLMAN IN NEW YORK, WHO WAS HEAD OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCHES AT THE TIME, I WOULD HAVE GONE TO THE CHESHIRE REFORMATORY FOR BOYS IN UPSTATE CONNECTICUT FOR TWO YEARS, BUT WITH THEIR HELP AND THAT OF THE JUDGE IN GREENWICH I WAS ACCEPTED AT BOYS TOWN AND WAS ALLOWED TO GO THERE TO FINISH HIGH SCHOOL AND GRADUATE FROM THERE. I WAS ON A PLANE TO OMAHA THE NEXT DAY. BOYS TOWN IS 10 MILES WEST OF OMAHA AND ONE OF THEIR CARS MEET ME AT THE AIRPORT. FATHER FLANAGAN'S BOYS HOME IS EXACTLY THAT. A HOME FOR BOYS, NO GUARDS, NO GATES OR FENCES OUT IN THE OPEN COUNTRY. I SPENT TWO GOOD YEARS AT BOYS TOWN GETTING AN EDUCATION, GROWING UP REAL QUICK, AND LEARNING ALL ABOUT LIFE. I SANG IN THE CHOIR, WORKED ON THE MAIL BUS, WAS IN THE PEP CLUB FOR THE BASKETBALL TEAM, ON THE BOYS TOWN HIGH SCHOOL SWIMMING TEAM AND BECAME A JUNIOR COUNSELOR TAKING CHARGE OF TWENTY-FIVE GRADE SCHOOL KIDS IN THE CHOIR BUILDING. IT INVOLVED GETTING THEM UP IN THE MORNING TO BRUSH THEIR TEETH, MAKE THEIR BEDS AND GET TO THE MESS HALL ON TIME. AFTER SCHOOL THEY

HAD CHORES TO DO AND HOMEWORK BEFORE BEDTIME . WE HAD GREAT TIMES AND I LEARNED A BUNCH ON BRINGING UP CHILDREN . IF WE WERE REAL GOOD , WE WOULD GET A PASS TO OMAHA ONCE A MONTH ON A SATURDAY , TO GO ON A DATE OR GO TO A MOVIE . MAYBE EVEN HAVE A FEW BEERS IF WE WERE LUCKY . ART LUDWIG AND I HAD A GOOD DEAL WITH CIGARETTES EVEN IF I DIDN'T SMOKE . ART WOULD JUMP OFF THE BUS WHICH WAS TAKING HOME EMPLOYEES OF THE HOME WHO LIVED IN OMAHA . WE THEN PICKED UP AND DROPPED OFF ALL THE BOYS TOWN MAIL AT THE OMAHA POST OFFICE . HEADED BACK TO BOYS TOWN , ART WOULD COME ON THE BUS WITH TEN OR FIFTEEN CARTONS OF CIGARETTES AND WE WOULD SELL THEM AT 50 CENTS A PACK . IT SEEMS I HAVE ALWAYS HAD A WAY TO MAKE AN EXTRA BUCK . FOR OUR WORK AT THE HOME WE WERE PAID FIFTEEN BUCKS A MONTH , BUT WE NEVER SAW IT . IT WAS PUT INTO AN ACCOUNT FOR US IN THE BUSINESS OFFICE . WHEN I GRADUATED IN JUNE 1952 AND HEADED HOME TO GREENWICH , I HAD \$ 187.00 IN MY POCKET AND A BUS TICKET ON A GREYHOUND BUS TO NEW YORK CITY . ART AND I STAYED AROUND THE HOME FOR A WEEK , WENT INTO OMAHA AND DONATED A PINT OF BLOOD . ART THEN ENLISTED IN THE AIR FORCE AND I GOT ON A BUS TO NEW YORK . I WAS ON THE BUS FOR 44 HOURS BEFORE ARRIVING IN NEW YORK ABOUT 3A.M IN THE MORNING . I HAD MISSED THE LAST NIGHT TRAIN TO

GREENWICH SO I HAD TO WAIT FOR AN EARLY MORNING TRAIN. WHEN I GOT OFF THE TRAIN IN GREENWICH WITH TWO SUITCASES, WHO DO I SEE BUT ALL THE TAXI DRIVERS THAT I ONCE SOLD PAPERS TO. ONE OF THE DRIVERS DROVE ME OVER TO THE BAR WITH MY TWO SUITCASES. I PUT MY SUITCASES IN THE HALLWAY LEADING UPSTAIRS AND WALKED INTO THE BAR. MY DAD WAS WORKING, AND I HAD NEVER SEEN HIM WITH TEARS IN HIS EYES. I WAS BACK IN GREENWICH I WAS AN 18 YEAR OLD MAN. I WAS GLAD TO BE HOME. I DIDN'T DO MUCH FOR A WEEK SEEING I STILL HAD A FEW BUCKS IN MY POCKET. I THEN GOT A JOB PUMPING GAS, WASHING AND DELIVERING CARS AT FITZSIMMON'S SERVICE STATION ACROSS FROM THE RAILROAD STATION JUST DOWN THE STREET FROM MY ROOM UP OVER THE BAR. I WORKED ALL SUMMER AND SAVED ENOUGH MONEY TO BUY MY FIRST CAR. IT WAS A 1939 FORD WITH MECHANICAL BRAKES. I THEN WENT TO WORK AS A DISTRICT ADVISOR FOR THE PORT CHESTER "DAILY ITEM" NEWSPAPER WITH 30 BOYS ON PAPER ROUTES DELIVERING SIX DAYS A WEEK. AFTER TWO YEARS AND BEING ONE OF THEIR TOP DISTRICT ADVISORS (TOTAL 76) I COULD NOT GO ANY HIGHER. I WENT BACK TO BILL TREPP AND BECAME A FULL TIME DRIVER FOR THE FLOWER SHOP IN GREENWICH. I ALREADY KNEW ALL 151 STREETS IN TOWN FROM BEING A RUNNER ON THE TRUCK IN MY YOUNGER DAYS.