



Arrigo Park, When I Was Wounded

Robert P. Buono

I had just been released from the army, during the riots in Chicago. At that time the VA insisted that I come to the Taylor Street VA hospital in Chicago for what is called a comp and pension exam.

During the exams they drugged me stupid. Then they told me to go home after they were done with me. I was there alone. I was unable to drive a car because of my injuries in Vietnam, so I had taken public transportation. After they drugged me up at the Taylor Street hospital, I was very confused and the only thing I knew was to walk towards the lake and I would get to my family. At the time veterans were required to travel in uniform. And that was the time of the Chicago riots surrounding the Democratic convention. As I was walking, a group of protesters saw me walking and realized that I was pretty f*****d up. I needed crutches at that time and I was overdosed on drugs at the Taylor Street hospital.

The crowd decided to attack me. I was unable to fight back. If I let go of my crutches I would fall down. If I didn't let go of my crutches I could not swing a punch. So I attempted to flee. Let me tell you that a guy on crutches cannot flee very fast. The crowd followed me and grew in numbers and as it grew they got increasingly violent. Violent intent focused on me. Then I got trapped into a construction site. I couldn't get away from them anymore so I turned to face them. There were a lot of them and only me. Later I went back and the place where they caught me was the construction of the Christopher Columbus statue in Arrigo Park. My mother was Arrigo. At the time I didn't know it but I was in my mother's neighborhood when she was a child. She did not live there anymore when she married my father. They bought a home in Indiana close to where my father worked.

If I had been healthy enough I could've easily gotten through the construction debris that was laying around but I was on crutches. I couldn't do it so I turned to face the crowd with the intention of fighting to the death and taking some of them with me. They were really angry and really brave until all of a sudden they had fear on their faces. I don't know why. One crippled guy against all of them, I obviously would lose this fight. I had heard a strange noise over the yells from the crowd. The Italian neighborhood had developed their own self defense plan. Any person in the neighborhood that perceived danger would take a baseball bat and beat it on the curb in front of his house, other people would hear that and everyone would get a baseball bat and beat it on the curb. The entire neighborhood would come to protect their neighborhood. Calling for danger they had all run up to face it. Now they were standing on the other side of the construction site facing the crowd, backing me up and they were all carrying baseball bats. The convention protesters would have lost the fight.

When I turned around I saw all these Italian guys standing behind me with baseball bats. I found I had people on my side. I didn't know how to thank them enough. After the mob left, my saviors insisted that I go to one of their homes and they asked me who I was. I told them I am Robert Buono which is an Italian name. Then they told me welcome to Arrigo Park. And then I told them my mother is Dominika Arrigo. They had come to help a total stranger. They couldn't see the front of me from where they were. They couldn't have known that I was Italian. All they did know is that I was in the soldier's uniform and I'm on crutches being threatened by a large mob. If that crowd had decided to beat me up, I would've died. I was still recuperating from all my injuries from combat in Vietnam. There's no way I could've tolerated a beating. And this group of people who had saved my life now came to realize that I was one of them. My family was part of their community. That's where my mother had grown-up, that's where she had gone to school, she had gone to church and where she first met my father. I still had relatives living in that community. Then some of them drove me to my Southshore train station so that I could go home.