

INTERRUPTED CARD GAME

By James Collins

Two 14 year-old boys were playing cards in the lobby of a 30 family apartment house in the Bronx on a Saturday in April. They were sitting under the stairwell next to the mailboxes while they waited for their friend who lived in one of the apartments. The lobby was set back from the street by about 30 feet, as there was a major courtyard associated with this building. The boys were playing poker for nickels and dimes, but since the cops frowned upon gambling by teenagers, they hid their loose change in the cuffs of the dungarees.

Patrolman Casey who was a rookie had to take a message to a family in that apartment house. He knew the Sgt. did not like him and was giving Casey every trivial or dirty detail he could find. He had just completed a six-block walk from the station house as he entered the lobby. John Able had just won a pot and was laughing and ragging on Jim C. who lost and this attracted the patrolman's attention. He looked at the two with the cards laid out on the floor. Although no money was showing, Casey asked, "Are you guys playing for money?"

John turned around, got completely flustered, jumped up and said, Yes sir, but was only 15 cents."

"All right, you both know the law and you know we take in anybody we find gambling. The two of you come along with me."

As they walked down the courtyard and across the street, patrolman Casey took a notebook out of his pocket. He pointed at John, and started asking questions. "What's your name and address?" He jotted down each response into the book as they proceeded down the sidewalk.

Jim C decided to ask some questions because he was completely astounded that a police officer would come off the street through the courtyard and into the lobby without a complaint.

"Officer, why did you come here? Who complained? I have lived in this building most of my life and I know everybody in the building. I carry up the groceries for all the old ladies and never cause any problems. We often play cards underneath the stairs especially when it rains. Everybody knows it but nobody ever complained before. What brought you into our apartment house?"

Patrolman Casey came to a complete stop reached into his pocket and took out a folded piece of paper. "Does the Moakley family live in this building?"

"Sure, they live on the ground floor and they been here forever. I cannot believe they would file a complaint. They're good friends."

"What does the father of the house do?"

"He's a motorman on the IND line running up the concourse."

Patrolman Casey turned on his heel, told us, "You kids get out of here do not let me catch you again "as he started to run up the street retracing his steps.

Later that morning everyone learned that there had been a train accident on the IND, which trapped Dave Moakley in the lead engine. They had to cut him out to get him released and he lost a leg. Apparently, the Sgt. sent Officer Casey to notify the family. He encountered the two kids playing cards under the stairs and felt the Sgt. was testing him.

Thirty residents of that neighborhood held a reunion 45 years later in Connecticut. Jim C and John Able were two of the people who showed up. Everyone was reminiscing about the events that happened during their youth. Jim C brought up the event associated with the two-person card game and he told John that he was still upset that John blurted out the fact that they were playing for money. They had agreed, before the game, to hide the money in their cuffs so no one could claim they were playing for money. Some of the other members of the reunion heard the comment and said, "That was a long time ago why don't we just forget about it and stay on the brighter stories."

"No, no, I have got to hear the story," protested John, "I don't remember any of it but when I applied for the police academy they located a half filled out report in the 44th precinct which had my name on it. I did not remember the incident and swore it never happened. They actually went back, located the issuing patrolman, Jack Casey, and brought him in to look at me face-to-face to see if he could recognize me. Lucky for me he could not. However, I never thought it was luck because I never thought the event happened. Because he could not recognize me, they cleared me and I completed 30 years on the job I retired as a Sgt. and had a very exciting career. Jim, thanks for the update, I guess it really happened because you remember it even though I did not and you had no way of knowing about my problem with the police department over that half filled out form. We definitely had an interesting childhood."

THE END