

Excerpt from...THE BROOKLYN WIND

Songs by that Bob Dylan guy were being played repeatedly on the radio. I kinda liked what I was hearing; it was definitely different. I mean, he had a voice kinda like mine...or at least I thought so as a 14-year-old who hummed the lyrics while delivering newspapers to various local shops on Brooklyn mornings before going to school at Saint Joseph's. Yeah, I had to deliver newspapers in the morning and if I wasn't in some sort of trouble after school, I would go to work at Frank's Gelato Shop on Jefferson Street. Frank was a good guy...if I was in trouble, he was used to it. He knew my parents, Lilliana and Joe Montiviggio, so on those occasions when I was late or didn't show up for work, he would keep it between us because Frank didn't want to give my parents any other stuff to worry about.

I always liked Frank, and he liked that Dylan guy, so he played lots of Dylan songs in the shop and the words were always running through my head. Of course, I never hummed them around other kids because so many kids thought Dylan was a weird jerk, but I had heard a rumor at school that Anna Acceta, my crush, liked him so I figured, hey, if Anna likes him, then I should listen to him because, you know, someday, I could maybe talk to her about him. I had never mustered the nerve to talk with her, so Dylan might be the opportunity. You never know, right?

So I delivered the papers, hummed to myself, suffered through the nuns at St. Joseph's, went to Frank's when I wasn't in trouble, listened to more Dylan, and always brought something home from Frank's for my brother, Louie, who was three years younger than me. Louie had the polio, which had caused him to lose muscles, so he couldn't walk and had trouble talking. Poor little guy--his voice sounded like gravel was being churned in his throat. Whatever he said came out slowly, but he could still make wisecracks and he had such a great, sideways smile. He went to a special school, where he spent most of the day in his wheelchair. I always gave Louie credit because, unlike me, he tried so hard at everything.

After school, and then after work at Frank's, I would take Louie out somewhere in his wheelchair for a walk, usually through a nearby Brooklyn park. He loved to count birds and he insisted that I keep a pad where I would write down the number of birds and different kinds we saw each time we walked. We didn't really know the names of any of

the birds, so I would write something like "orange top" or "red wing" or "tall neck," or "fat beak" and Louie would express his approval with that smile of his.

Many of the local adults were used to seeing us walking, and they would call out stuff like, "Hey, the Montiviggio boys are out again! Lookin' handsome and getting stronger, eh?" Sometimes they would give us candy or a cannoli and they would bend down and try to chat directly with Louie. He would always smile, mutter whatever words he could, and do his best to wave.

When we got home, mom would review in detail the latest record of how many birds we saw and kiss us on the forehead to show her approval. Then she would tell me to go do my homework while she helped Louie with his. And dad, after being home for only about an hour from his day job as a handyman, would go off to his night job as a custodian at the police department. Of course, I rarely actually did my homework; instead, I mostly thought about Anna a lot and kept going over Dylan songs in my head.

One crisp fall night, I found myself continually repeating a simple line from a Dylan song as I sat in the bedroom I shared with Louie. On that night, there was a sort of mystery to the song "Blowin in the Wind" that hypnotized me as I continually thought about it. The idea that "the answer is blowin' in the wind" struck me as mysterious but encouraging. Could it really be that the answer to whatever I was looking for was actually doing that--blowing in the wind? The answer to why the damn Dodgers had turned their back on Brooklyn several years ago? The answers to tomorrow's geography test? The answer to whether I could ever get Anna's attention? The answer to whether Louie would get better someday and be able to live a happy life?

Late one night when Louie and our parents were asleep and all I could hear were the screaming sirens that always crowded the Brooklyn air, I turned on my radio very quietly and sure enough, the song was playing, "Blowin in the Wind." It was then that I decided that the only way to know if Anna would ever pay attention to me was to muster up the courage to try to talk with her. After all, I thought, whatever the answer is, it's blowin around somewhere.