

# 69th Street



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In 1946 when I was ten I started my round trips to 69th Street. They would originate when somebody would say, “Let’s go down 69th Street.” The “down” came from the fact that you walked down West Chester Pike to get there. Actually you walked east to get there and west to get home. So “over” would have been more apt, but we never said “over,” it was always “down.”

But what it meant was always the same: we’d walk through the stores and concourses, in one door and out another, and we’d hit them in the same order. A couple stores, like Todd’s Model Shop, only had one door, so you had to enter and leave by the same door. But most like the five-and-tens had two, and you could enter or exit the two concourses at either end. At age eighty-five, looking back seventy-five years, I think it was the concourses that were the most fun.

With a few exceptions, like Todd’s Model Shop and Jonas Toy and Stationery at 7028 Terminal Square (which had a front door and rear door), where you lingered, mostly you kept walking. This was important when you were ten. Keep walking. Otherwise, a grown-up may holler at you. You didn’t want that. Sometimes I would do the walk with a pal or two, like Ducky Magee or Eddie Higgens, but often I did it alone.

The adventure would start where Mother, Dad and I lived at 11 Berbro Avenue. I’d cut through the alley going east to Elm Avenue, then cut over to the left and continue going east down West Chester Pike to Brief Avenue, turn right and come out on Terminal Square.

I’d go to Todd’s first. I’d linger outside then inside looking at the model trains and planes. Then I’d walk north to Jonas Toy and Stationery at 7028 Terminal Square. You had two options in Jonas’s. You could work your way through the counters and exit the back door that led up to Garrett Road. Or you could circle back and go out the front door, turn right and walk down to the entrance to the Trans-Atlantic concourse under the 69th Street movie theater.

I loved walking through the Trans-Atlantic concourse under the 69th Street movie theater. I’m not sure why. It was echoey like all concourses. I liked the echoey part. It was always empty. Sometimes I would tear-ass running through it because there

was no grown-up to holler at you. The *Upper Darby Telegram* was on the right. It was published every Thursday. The telephone was Boulevard 4880. In 1940, the *Upper Darby Telegram* editor was Kay Campbell. The other Upper Darby paper, the *Upper Darby News*, was in the McClatchy Building; Howard Wiley, editor.

Also in the Trans-Atlantic concourse, was the Trans-Atlantic Cocktail Lounge. That’s how we referred to the concourse: “The Trans-Atlantic.” The Trans-Atlantic Cocktail Lounge ad in 1942 said they were in the “arcade.” I think Aunt Lil would drop in the Trans-Atlantic Cocktail Lounge for a gin and tonic. If your business was in the concourse (or “arcade”), your address was 7020 Terminal Square.

When you exited the Trans-Atlantic, you turned left and walked up to Market Street, which was what West Chester Pike now became. I’d walk east on Market Street and pass the Greek restaurant. Then in Woolwoth’s five-and-dime. I’d check out the toys, tools and flashlights. Then up the west side of 69th Street (it was south, but you were walking up the hill). Then another five and dime, Kresge’s, at the top of the hill to check out what Kresge’s had in the line of toys, tools and flashlights. Then down the hill, east side., back to Market Street.

I’d cross Market Street, and on the north side I would enter Liggett’s and walk through, then up a couple steps and disgorge into the 69th Street Terminal concourse, which was the mother of all concourses. Liggett’s drugstore was nice because you could go in one door and come out another door. I’d walk west in the 69th Street Terminal concourse. I don’t think it was there in 1944, but by the early 1950s—when I occasionally would still take the 69th Street round trip—a Nedick’s would open where I would buy a hot dog in a toasted bun and an orange drink with floating orange flakes.

When I emerged into daylight, I would head southwest to Fairfield Avenue where I would go into the alley behind some kind of a plant that was there where there were a couple dumpsters that provided choice trash hunting. Then I would head home, carrying any good stuff I retrieved from the dumpsters—and on the rare occasion a toy, tool or flashlight I had the money to buy—via Keystone Avenue, Miller Avenue, past Elm Avenue,

past Larchwood Avenue, finally arriving at Berbro Avenue. I remember the route like the back of my hand.

But there was something else about the streets of Upper Darby that I want to mention. It's not what you saw, which I've detailed; it's what you didn't see. The streets of Upper Darby looked quite different in 1946 for what wasn't there.

The first thing that wasn't there that comes to mind is litter: particularly paper, plastic and Styro-foam litter. Paper and Styrofoam cups. Plastic water bottles. Soda cans and beer cans. In 1946 you drank your beverages from glass. Beer was in glass bottles. Coca Cola was in glass—thick glass—bottles. You kept the bottles and turned them in for a two-cent refund. You drank your water from a drinking glass.

*Paper Wrappers* You didn't see paper wrappers of fast food. There wasn't any fast food in 1946. You didn't see junk mail in the streets. There wasn't junk mail in 1946.

*Plastic* Although plastic was invented in the 1930s, it didn't become part of litter until decades later. You didn't see plastic in the streets in 1946. Littering wasn't a crime in 1946 because there wasn't any litter

*Graffiti* What else didn't you see? There was no graffiti in 1946. None. There was no such thing as spray paint. You heard of a gang—one—called the "Davis Gang," but the members were upper class white boys that lived in upper class Drexel Hill. Upper Darby had no Hispanics. No graffiti.

*Cellphones* The point isn't that you didn't see cellphones; you didn't see pedestrians, shoppers, drivers, workmen glued to them talking, texting, gaming or staring at the thing.

*African-Americans* Upper Darby had no colored in 1946. When I walked to 69th Street and back, I never saw one. Why? Except for a block or two in Yeadon, all the deeds to houses in Upper Darby had restrictive covenants that stated you could not sell the house to "any person not of the White race."

*Music* Car radios had one small speaker, there were less cars, and some cars didn't have a radio. (You didn't encounter boom boxes because there were no colored.)

*Homeless* You didn't see people sleeping or sitting on the sidewalk in 1946. If somebody would have

sat on the sidewalk—nobody did—they would have been arrested. If anybody begged—sitting or standing—nobody did—they would have been arrested.

*Barred Windows* You saw no barred windows and doors in 1946. People left their front doors unlocked. I have no memory of a single burglary in Upper Darby in 1946.

Then there were things you saw in 1946 that you no longer see. The walk up Miller Avenue coming home was lined with great elm trees. Also the cross streets. Elm Avenue was *named* after its elm trees. All those trees were lost to Dutch elm disease. In 1930 there were 77 million elm trees in North America. By 1989 Dutch elm disease devastated over seventy-five percent of them, including the elms on Elm Avenue.

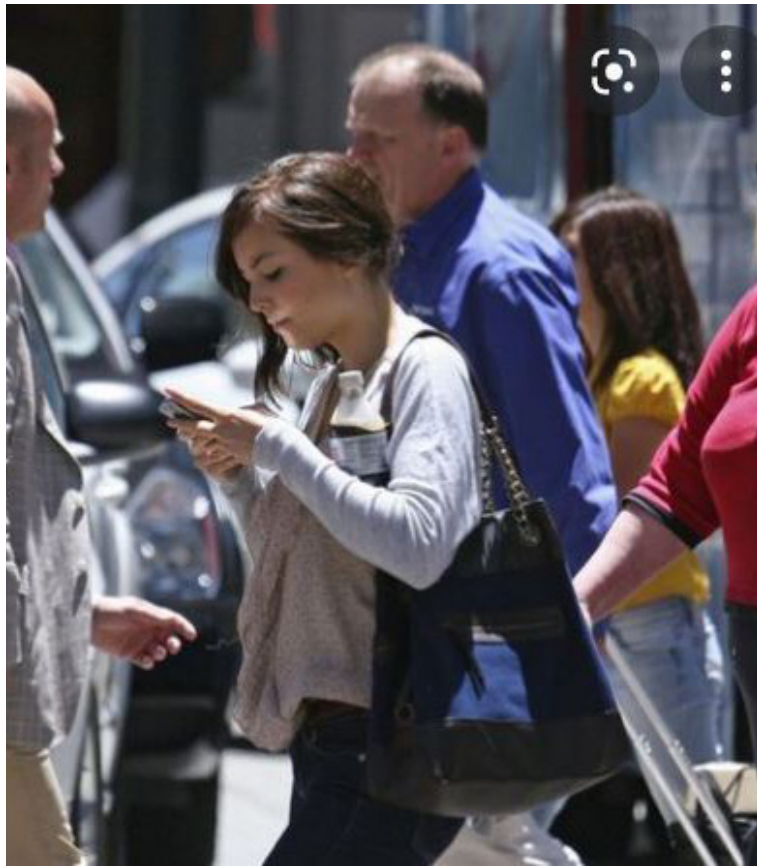
Also, when you looked at the night sky, you saw hundreds of stars. I know there are still places in America—not just mountaintops—where you can still see the stars, but you can't see the stars in the cities and most of the suburbs due to light pollution. I've seen no stars from my deck over the ocean in Malibu since I moved there in 1992.

The streets of America including the streets of Upper Darby looked quite different in 1946 from what you didn't see and did see in 1946.

*Imagery*



Age ten Edward has started his round trips to 69th Street It was *not* what you saw; it was what you *didn't* see. The streets of Upper Darby looked quite different in 1946 for what *wasn't* there. The paper, plastic, Styrofoam. graffiti, Negroes, homeless and barred windows and doors were not there—*Phoenix*



have the right to participate, subject to reasonable restrictions and requirements imposed by such corporation or association.

14. *RACIAL RESTRICTIONS*...No property in said addition shall at any time be sold, conveyed, rented or leased in whole or in part to any person or persons not of the White or Caucasian race. No person other than one of the White or Caucasian race shall be permitted to occupy any property in said addition or portion thereof or building thereon except a domestic servant actually employed by a person of the White or Caucasian race where the latter is an occupant of such property.

15. *ANIMALS*. No hogs, cattle, horses, sheep, goats, or or similar livestock shall be permitted or maintained on said property at any time. Chicken hens, pigeons, rabbits and other similar small livestock, not exceeding a total of twenty-five

Upper Darby had no blacks in 1946. When Edward walked to 69th Street and back, he never saw one. Except for a block or two in Yeadon, all the deeds to houses in Upper Darby had restrictive covenants that stated you could not sell the house to Negroes. Two years later, on May 3, 1948, in *Shelley v. Kraemer*, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down racially restrictive housing covenants as unconstitutional under the Equal Protection Clause —*Phoenix*



In 1930 there were 77 million elm trees in North America.



### **Dutch Elm Disease**

The beetles are believed to have arrived in 1928 a shipment of logs from The Netherlands destined for use as veneer in the Ohio furniture industry. Quarantine and sanitation procedures held most cases of Dutch elm disease within 150 miles of metropolitan New York City until 1941 when war demands began to curtail them. The disease spread from New England westward and southward, almost completely destroying the famous elms in the "Elm City" of New Haven, Connecticut, reaching the Detroit area in 1950, the Chicago area by 1960, and Minneapolis by 1970. By 1989 Dutch elm disease devastated over seventy-five percent of them, including the elms on Miller Avenue in Upper Darby—*Phoenix*



**Elm Avenue**

Edward would cross Elm Avenue walking up Miller Avenue in the 1940s. Elm Street was lined on both sides of the street with great elm trees that arched over the street

and cut off the sunlight the entire block. Contemporary Google Street View looking north on Elm Avenue from its intersection with Miller Avenue shows the elm trees were lost to Dutch elm disease—*Phoenix*



**Miller Avenue**

Edward would walk up Miller Avenue in the 1940s lined with great elm trees like Elm Street lined on both sides of the street that arched over the street and cut off the sun-

light. Contemporary Google Street View looking up (west) on Miller Avenue from its intersection with Larchwood Avenue shows all the elm trees a were lost to Dutch elm disease—*Phoenix*

