

Knickers



by Frank Gagliano

**Based on autobiographical material,
with a goodly mix of fantasy**

(Screenplay?)

**NARRATOR
(Voice over)**

In those days you wore knickers.

In those days you played marbles. . .

and a game called Skelly:

You'd kneel on the knees of your knickers and you'd shoot your marbles on the dirt lot or your bottle caps for Skelly on a playing field made of chalk on the street. . .

and when you got home you caught hell from mama (who always wore her pearl necklace and earrings with her wrinkle-free, pressed, house dress as she cleaned and dusted) and you caught hell because you were wearing out your knicker-knees “—And do you think money grows on trees, figlio mio (my son)?”

. . .in those days, though, you’d go looking for the money tree or the ship that was supposed to come in or the poor houses everyone was going to, but in those days there weren’t many trees on the block, so there wasn’t much chance of anybody making a killing from the leaves.

In those days you had stoops and in the summer you’d sit on the stoop and someone would open the first floor window where the radio was and you’d listen to the Dodgers play or to President Roosevelt talking from in front of a make-believe fireplace or to the Make Believe Ballroom or the Saturday afternoon Metropolitan Opera On The Air presented by Texaco or/or chat with Poochie’s family next door; never letting on that Poochie was famous for showing her behind in the subway building site to the guys for a nickel—while we boys who could, jerked off, and the younger boys, who couldn’t, looked on with bug eyes and dreamed of a time when they could.

In those days you played stickball or punch ball or stoop ball.

In those days there were seasons:

. . .the skating season. . .
 . . .and the season for Ring-A-Leave-E-O. . .
 and Johnny-On-A-Pony. . .
 and touch football. . .
 and stick ball. . .
 and exchanging comic books, seasons. . .
 and flipping gum cards with baseball players on them. . .
 and the season for. . .

In those days you lived in a cold-water flat; no central heating; just kerosene space heaters that you’d put orange peels on so that the room would smell nice

and when you got sick Dr. Passalaqua would make a house call with his black bag and stick a thermometer in your behind and it didn’t matter because you were bound to get a mustard plaster on your chest no matter what, followed by Aunt Angelina coming over and rubbing your wrists raw because that was the remedy for bronchitis back in Sicily (she said) and it was worth it because you got to stay home from school and listen on the radio to JACK ARMSTRONG, THE ALL-AMERICAN BOY or SERGEANT PRESTON OF THE YUKON, featuring Preston’s fabulous Huskie, KING!

“On, King, go get help! Bring the Mounties back! I’ve got to stay here in the cave with little Patricia! When she comes to, she’ll be scared! And I’ve got to make sure she doesn’t turn over on that broken arm! On, King! Go, old Fella!”

. . .in those days, you’d pass a stoop you’ve passed a thousand times and suddenly see

a gold star in the window. That meant that a soldier in that house on the block had died in combat—like Vinnie Santapadro, when his small skinny mother started wearing black — black dress, black stockings, black shoes, black kerchief on her head, black coat— and every so often she’d step out onto the stoop and scream, “They killed him! They killed my Vinnie!” and sometimes she’d faint.

. . .in those days you’d have cases of seltzer delivered to your house and on Fridays mama bought fillet flounder from the truck of Carmine the fish man or, produce (that we pronounced prah-duce in Brooklyn, back then) from Eddie the Prah-duce Man. . .or lemon ices or spamoni ice cream from Dominic’s cart, or —

. . .in those days you dreamed of becoming a big singer on radio like Bing Crosby or Russ Colombo or that new skinny guy Frank Sinatra, with the Andrews Sisters backing you up. . .

. . .or, at family parties, you’d imitate Abbot and Costello doing the “Who’s On First” routine with uptight cousin Ignaz doing Abbot, cracking everyone up. . .

. . .and when Easter recess week came, you couldn’t wait to go to Radio City Music Hall and wait on lines that snaked around the corner and, while the family inched along to the box offices to pay the fifty cent admission to see a movie and the kicking long long legs of the Rockettes and to pee in the bathrooms with all their brassy gilt where you felt like a million bucks, you’d take a quick run up to Rockefeller Plaza to look up to dream about somehow, someday, performing in the legendary Studio 8H. . .

. . .in those days you dreamed of taking voice lessons and piano lessons and meeting your favorite songwriter Johnny Mercer. . .that’s him singing now on radio’s Hit Parade

. . .GI JIVE. Great song.

**. . .and one day. . .in those days. . .you did meet Johnny Mercer and your—my —life changed,
AND ALL HELL BROKE LOOSE!**

CREDITS OVER THE PLAYING OF G.I.JIVE, WHILE YOUNG PEOPLE — BOBBY SOXERS AND ZOOT SUITERS —JITTERBUG.