

... from *Macaroni and Cheese Manifesto* (Third Edition)
Copyright © 2009, 2013, 2018 Steven H. Biondolillo

The Man in the Alley

In the time when our summers seemed endless,
And through streets and back alleys we roamed,
Then a game we did play
Off and on through our days
That belied that we all felt alone.

Yes the game was a break from rough housing,
From bravado from sticks and from stones,
Was an urchin's main cope—
A high desperate hope
That in someone we might find a home.

Now this game was not played without danger,
It demanded one sneer and be wry,
Because no one could know
And no weakness could show
The prayer still behind steel curtain eyes.

Though the game was no more than a question
(But a question much more like a plea),
Its response might reveal
And its power might steal
Who it was that we wanted to be.

Automatically out burst the lit'ny,
The initial conservative list
Of distinctions and types—
Of predictable stripes—
The ones easy and rarely e're missed:

Someone strong, someone smart, someone crafty,
Someone fast and courageous and lean,
Someone brave and real quick
(With a chain! With a stick!)
Like a linesman, a pug, a marine!

Someone bold, someone tough, someone nasty,
Someone hard and determined and mean,
Someone good with his fists
(With a blade! With a brick!)
Like a fighter, a wrestler, a fiend!

Marciano, Dick Butkus and Atlas,
Sammartino, George Patton, Joe Greene,
Mickey Mantle and Thorpe,
Flash and Thunderous Thor,
Man of Steel, Man of Labors, Bruce Lee!

So we boys cast about for our heroes,
For our fathers, our brothers, our friends,
For the question was *this*—
As we learned how to fish
For the answers to dictate our ends—

“If you found yourself caught in an alley
In a moment of ultimate need,
And a savior could choose
Or your life you might lose,
Then, pray, who would the perfect man be?”

No the church of the street is not pretty,
Yes it raises its sons o’er the knee:
“You shall reap what you’ve bought,
You’ll become what you’ve thought,
Yea, the man in the alley is thee!”

So I speak with you plainly my brother,
For I’ve paid inconceivable fee,
When you’re frightened and blind,
When your life’s on the line,
Then the man in the alley is me.

Yes, the man in the alley is me.