

CHAPTER 45

(Geco's at War! Chaos! Pandemonium!)

For at least thirty seconds, the siren wailed with such intensity that even those remaining within their apartments in the remotest part of the community could not fail to detect its shrillness.

Like an attacking band of war-ready Indians, the Geco men who had grouped themselves at the west end of Civic Road, let loose with a volley of loud whoops and yells. They ran and slid as fast as they could down the ice-patched road toward the gang.

At the same time, those men, several dozen, from buildings 16, 17 and 18 who had been waiting outside, concealed between building 18 and the Green School, raced the fifty feet or so to Civic, to join up with the others.

The rest of us who were closer to the gang, poured out from the nearest exits in buildings 1, 2 and 3. Thus, in all, there were three separate groups of ready-to-fight older teenagers and adult Geco men converging on the invaders. If the leader (whose name was "Butch") had previously questioned the whereabouts of us "pack of Geco cowards," he now had his answer. However, he had scant time to contemplate the situation. His hands were more than full with Captain Cook.

With his gloves removed, the gang leader, Butch, threw a whizzing, bare-knuckled, roundhouse punch. But he should have taken better aim. Captain Cook deftly ducked, narrowly avoiding the large, bony fist. Then, while bent over and from a sideways position, he smashed his elbow hard into Butch's gut, sending him reeling onto his back and into a snow bank at the side of the road.

Either that it was due to the protection of heavy winter clothing, or to a stomach layered with hard muscle, for Butch seemed to be hardly fazed from a blow which would have dropped most men to their knees, gasping for air. With a smirk on his face, and patting his belly as if to indicate that he had quite enjoyed it, Butch glared back at the Captain. Then he snapped his head to the side toward his gang, and yelled:

"Spread out boys! Stand your ground! Pick a man ... bust his fuckin' face!"

He started to get up, but before he could fully regain his feet, Captain Cook, doing a splendid football-style flying leap, landed squarely on him. The two of them grappled and thrashed about, sending up a cloud of snow at the side of Civic Road. No one would be attempting to separate these two. Nor might they be ringed by cheering onlookers. They were very much on their own.

As vast in numbers as the gang was, surely they were no longer as cocky and fearless, not with the sight of the rapidly approaching swarms of hooting and hollering Gecoites.

Unnerved, some of the less intrepid among them darted forward to retrieve their discarded billies, chains and tire irons lying in a heap at the side of the road. But they were too late! They were blocked by a few dozen Geco men who, with some others, began kicking and throwing the entire lot of weapons into the mounds of soft snow lining the sides of Civic Road. They sank out of sight. Without the aid of weapons, not for them, not for us, this was truly to be a battle of the “fittest.”

Not too much time was spent on squaring-off. It was an instantaneous combination of rough house, hand-to-hand, toe-to-toe conflict. Men on both sides began leaping onto the backs of one another. Others, using their shoulders as pile drivers, rammed themselves into the midribs of their opponents, knocking them flat onto their asses, or in a tumble slamming onto their backs. Some of similar size, attempted to out-bear hug each other, and they stood there grunting and swaying for a few seconds before keeling over together onto the road. Most, though, faced each other, wildly flailing their fists and trying desperately to be the first to gain the upper hand. A tremendous roar of distressed and angry male voices filled the air up and down Geco’s main street.

From the outset, many of the Black Diamonders began ganging up, two or three at a time on one Geco man hoping, presumably, to quickly and permanently immobilize him – thence to continue in this manner, reducing our ranks. Fortunately, by the time the full mass of us Gecoites had arrived, we were of sufficient numbers to prevent these bully tactics from getting out of hand.

Just at that moment when two or three of the gang would have one of our boys on the ground, and were prepared to deliver the coup-de-grâce with a series of well-directed heavy-booted kicks, they were suddenly jerked away and spun around to meet several head-twisting fists landed unerringly on their jaws.

Inevitably, because of the great crush of bodies at the outset of the battle, the mob of fighters started to fan out, with most of them punching and wrestling in a large snow covered cul-de-sac area at the rear of building 2.

Up to then, Wilf, Neeney, Peggy and I had not entered the fray. Instead, we just stood outside, off to one side of the main front doors of building 3. Events were just not progressing according to the scene we had previously visualized. For one thing, to witness at our ages fully grown men (most of whom were fathers, including Peg’s father and mine) entangled in a vicious battle right before our eyes, was extremely terrifying and almost heart stopping.

But we were not about to retreat to the sanctity of our apartments, as our parents had ordered beforehand. Also, we had not yet abandoned our original plan of engaging in hand-to-hand combat a

“pipsqueak” of our choice. Disappointingly from our vantage point, “pipsqueaks” among the gang definitely did not abound! We stood there in a close huddle, hearts pounding, keeping a safe distance between the closest group of battlers and us.

Stretching from building 16 on the west, to building 1 on the east, the men were now well spread out in a swath of desperately struggling bodies. By far, though, the preponderance of them, a few hundred, were grappling in the large cul-de-sac area at the rear of building 2, directly opposite the others and me across Civic Road.

It was a fact that most citizens of Geco, if they didn't know one another's names, could recognize at least visually, the other as a fellow Gecoite. If it were not for that, and with this awesome mob of frantic humanity, we would have surely inflicted severe damage on our own before realizing the error.

It was scarcely fifteen minutes into the battle, but already there was blood to be seen everywhere: Splattered in the snow, smeared on the faces of men (ours and theirs), on fists, and across jackets and trousers. It was a horrible sight and, up to then, far worse than any violence that I had ever seen on a theatre movie screen. Furthermore, these were not rehearsed fight scenes, executed by well-trained stuntmen. This was for real. It was ghastly!

Gloves, mittens, scarves, hats and some jackets were strewn about, up and down the road and amongst the feet of the fighters. Also, and already, there were several bloody-faced men lying prostrated on their backs, draped over snow banks or spread-eagled here and there on the road. They were either unconscious or injured to the point where they could not possibly continue.

Many of them were breathing, open-mouthed, in laboured heaves. Wafts of hot, steamy breath clouded the cold air above their faces. For the moment, it was impossible for me and the others to distinguish who among these injured were gang members, or who were Gecoites.

Whenever possible, several ladies from the surrounding buildings would dash out and drag or carry (one or two ladies on each arm and leg) the maimed, regardless of who they were, into the warmth of the building corridors or the large common laundry rooms.

The outcome of this conflict was far from being resolved; nor were there any indications of one side or the other being ready to call for a blood-saving truce. On the contrary, even those who were very wobbly on their feet, and to the point of sinking to their knees, showed no signs of a willingness to resign from this free-for-all battleground.

Since my arrival in Geco two-and-a-half years earlier, I had personally witnessed several brutal physical altercations on the streets of Geco, on one occasion it involved eight men. But compared to this,

they were mere idle spats. Here was mayhem, appalling and chaotic! And there were no police around for miles to break it up.

I don't know about Peggy, Wilf, and the many others who were too young to fight, watching and shivering both from the cold and fright, but I had expected my adult "heroes" to quickly pulverize the gang and to send them fleeing for their very lives, back to whence they came. However, this was just not happening.

If the gang were successful in gaining the upper hand over our men, would they then pounce on the women and children, forcing them to run for their very lives? If that were to happen, and it reared now as a distinct possibility, then doubtless they would loot and ransack every single one of the close to 450 apartments in the community. Following this, they'd probably set fire to the buildings, so enraged and determined did they appear to be. Our one fire truck would be but a useless toy against such a horrific conflagration. In huge billows of flame and smoke, Geco, at the peak of its growth, would cease to exist.

It seemed to me that we outnumbered the gang. However, because of the presence of dozens of very large, hulking members of the Black Diamond motorcyclists, who had arrived just before the outbreak of fighting to assist the Scarborough Junction Gang, the scales, it could be said, were more or less balanced.

There were some equally very large Geco men (several of whom were known to be former Army drill sergeants) fighting, giving their very best effort, but not sufficient thereof, as the battle progressed, to fully tip the scales in our favour. It was not unusual to see two average-sized Geco men trying with all their might to wrestle one of these Black Diamond behemoths to the ground.

I knew that somewhere out there in that mob of fighting men (numbering several hundred) my father, my two older brothers, and Peggy's dad were right in the thick of things, each doing his part. But since the wail of the siren, and the rush of bodies, I had lost sight of them.

Then, suddenly, there appeared on the outer fringe of the mob and just off to my right, two men violently swinging at each other. One of them was Peggy's father (Gord Wilkins).

Unfortunately, just as I drew Peg's attention to this, her dad took the full force of the man's fist solidly on his jaw. One hell of a sight for Peggy to have beheld! He just swooned backwards into a snow bank off to our right, arms out to his sides and legs apart. It was at once obvious that poor Mr. Wilkins had been rendered either completely unconscious, or was temporarily stunned. Nevertheless, for the moment, he could be considered "disqualified," and unable to continue.

His assailant, not content to leave his victim be and to seek out another Gecoite, stepped forward, raised his boot and ground the heel hard into Mr. Wilkins' solar plexus. Instantly, Mr. Wilkins emitted a

loud, drawn out pathetic groan as air gushed from his gaping, already bleeding mouth. In apparent excruciating pain, he reflexively drew up his legs into a protective fetal position, and then rolled over onto his side in the snow. He continued grunting and groaning and pumping his knees up and down.

Next, the victor, this very large human beast, still not satisfied, reached down and clutched a handful of Mr. Wilkins' hair, and yanked his head out free from the snow. Beast drew his arm well back, preparing to drive his massive fist straight into the middle of the face of defenseless Mr. Wilkins.

Peggy, watching her father about to be beaten to a pulp, frantically screamed:

“Dad ... oh ... dad!”

This was all taking place in a matter of seconds. Later, Neeney, Wilf and I would unanimously agree that we had never seen Peg move as fast as she did at that moment. When Beast had drawn his arm back ready to plow his fist into her dad's face, Peggy was standing beside us. But, before he hurtled it forward, she had travelled the intervening distance, perhaps fifteen feet, in the mere blink of an eye, impediment of snow notwithstanding.

As will be known by now, I had seen Peg in action before: Against Wilf on an otherwise quiet beautiful Easter morning, and against friend Marlene Reynolds in the dance hall, and on other numerous, non-documented occasions. Truly when the need so arose, my friend and lover Peggy Wilkins, could be a holy terror! But not since that late afternoon on this day when the existence of the entire community of Geco was in jeopardy have I seen any human in combat – male or female – perform the way she did in the next few seconds. She reminded me of Popeye the Sailor Man after he had gulped down a can of spinach just before another ongoing confrontation with his eternal nemesis Brutus.

With still a couple of yards to go, Peggy “flew,” like Superwoman (since Popeye was never known to fly!) through the air, landing on the right side of Beast's head and shoulders. He never had the chance to bring his fist forward.

With the impact of Peggy slamming into him, he fell, rather sideways and face down, into the snow. Mounted astride him, Peggy screamed at the top of her lungs:

“You bastard ... you son-of-a-bitch! I'll scratch your fuckin' eyes out!”

That was the first time I had ever heard Peg use that most vile, multi-descriptive, known-to-all synonym for human intercourse (but “vile” only according to the standards of dignified English). Under the circumstances, though, it was tolerable, even appropriate, because that word could be heard yelled repeatedly, in uncountable contexts, throughout the hoard of fighting men behind her.

Furiously, Peggy kicked and kneed him in the back, while throwing a flurry of punches to his head and

ears. Then, like a wildcat, she reached forward and began scratching at his face.

With Peggy “glued” to his back, Beast, in an awesome demonstration of his power, stood easily fully erect. He then twirled around and shook himself vigorously in an attempt to dislodge her. But Peg held tight. Beast yelled:

“Holy ... shit! Get the hell off my back you young cunt! I don’t wanna hurt ya!”

In return, Peggy screamed her own obscenities at Beast. Then, gripping his hair in both hands, she began biting and gnawing at the top of his scalp. She was down to her last “weapon!” Nothing else seemed to have any effect on this brute.

“What the ... holy shit!” He yelled.

Beast, this hulking six-foot-plus man (possibly one of the Black Diamonders), stretched his long arms straight up above his head. Reaching over and behind him, he grabbed Peggy by the folds of her jacket. With one mighty jerk he dislodged her, sending her like a Rag-a-muffin, somersaulting through the air and, fortunately, into a snow bank for a softer than otherwise hard landing.

With the pesky “kid” out of the way, Beast returned his interests to Mr. Wilkins, who was still lying dazed and injured, moaning and groaning in the snow.

But Peg, just slightly ruffled and suffering damage only to her pride, sat up in the snow, pausing to look about her only long enough to get her bearings after such a disorienting flight. Off in a bound, high stepping and jumping through the snow, she streaked toward Beast, who was once again reaching down to grab his helpless victim, hapless Mr. Wilkins.

Now, at that very moment when Beast had ejected Peggy from his back and she had soared, tumbling through the air and into that snow bank, my sister Neeney had hollered:

“Holy cow! Look at that! C’mon guys ... we gotta help!” At that exact moment when Peggy again hurled herself in a tackle onto Beast, we were there.

Racing up from the rear, stockily built Wilf (who could have passed for a Black Diamond in somewhat miniature form) rammed his body, back first, against Beast’s legs, just behind the knees. Simultaneously, Peggy, on her stomach, had her arms locked around Beast’s ankles, and he fell violently forward over her, making a deep impression in the snow. He landed only a couple of feet from Mr. Wilkins, who seemed to be dazedly aware of what was happening, and who was valiantly struggling to regain his feet. But he collapsed back again. Wilf and Peggy scrambled to their feet.

In the next split second, sister Neeney leaped as high into the air as her short stature would allow, slamming both her hard-soled boots into the middle of the man’s wide back. She had made the right move

and, of course, her intentions were honourable. But Neeney was only a featherweight. This was no more than a bee sting to Beast. He emitted a barely audible low grunt sound.

To disable this giant, we would have to sustain an attack on him from all sides, and at the same time. Certainly, with a desperate need to protect Mr. Wilkins from a severe beating and possible permanent disfigurement, we were not lacking in incentive. But we could use some luck. For the moment, we had a slight advantage. Beast was still face down in the snow. He had not finished his “grunt” from Neeney’s follow up, pint-sized stomp, and we were all over him.

Among us, in total, we had eight fists and now, like pistons, we drove them in a fury into every part of the man’s backside torso we deemed vulnerable. However, we were wasting our time – more or less! It was not only because of his muscle-bulk, but also and equally so because of his heavy winter jacket that our flurry of body punches seemed to be utterly ineffective. Somewhere, and soon, we had to find Beast’s “Achilles’ heel” (if he had one), or we could be joining the side of Mr. Wilkins, swooned out in a snowdrift.

Doing a push up, Beast began to slowly free himself clear from the snow, sending Neeney (who was punching furiously sitting astride the small of his back) tumbling to the ground. By the time Beast had fully raised his head, Wilf and I had already moved around to his front, our fists clenched, poised and at the ready:

“Blood brothers!” Wilf yelled at me.

“Blood brothers!” I shouted back, in a panic.

Wasting no time (Beast was down, and we just had to keep him there), I threw the first punch with every ounce of body weight behind it I could muster. Perfectly aimed! It landed point-on the left side of Beast’s chin.

That was the first time I had ever struck another human’s face (especially one which was so scratchy and rough from a several day’s growth of stubbly beard) with such bare-fisted, square-on force. Usually it was in the ring with the protection of amply padded gloves, or in a street fight with kids my own age with whom I exchanged teasing blows from an arm’s length distance. This time I felt as though I had slammed my fist into a concrete block! In an instant, the pain shot across my knuckles, radiated over my hand to my wrists and clean up to my elbow.

One important tactic which all four of us had learned (especially Wilf and me who had had considerable more bouts in the rec hall than the girls) was to punch, when the opportunity so arose, with all the force potential for one’s body weight. This, as mentioned, I had done. Beast’s head jerked to the

side. If I could have struck myself with that same blow, I'd have gotten a jump on my night's sleep ... out cold as a mackerel with a swollen hand and a busted jaw for the duration of that day and into the next. But not so Beast! He yelled:

“Oww! Shit ... you little fucker!”

Now on his knees, he drew back his arm and cuffed me hard with the back of his hand across the side of my head. I had been trained to avoid, or least attempt to avoid such blows. But I was in shock and for the moment totally inert from the pain in my hand.

A bear's paw could not have hit me with more force. I recalled neither the “getting there,” nor the landing, but I found myself lying on my back in the snow staring up at a dark and overcast sky which was suddenly replete with an array of multi-sized, flashing, brilliant yellow stars. However, because they were not of the wellspring of true celestial stuff, they could not be aptly described as “beautiful.” The pain in my hand was now superseded by a very unpleasant ache in my temple area, which pounded with a heart beat all of its own.

But there was scant time to luxuriate on my back in the downy soft snow waiting for the pain to recede. Furthermore, and fortunately, the intensity of any pain I experienced was lessened considerably by the increased flow of adrenalin and energy-producing glucose accelerating full-speed-ahead throughout my system.

Quickly, one by one, the “stars” twinkled out, and I jumped to my feet and returned, tramping as fast as I could through the snow toward Beast, only a few steps away. Time-wise, I would guess that only a few seconds or so had elapsed since I had been abruptly removed from the fray. At that precise moment when I had been walloped by a powerful backhand, Wilf had been right beside me preparing to throw his own punch at Beast's stubbly face.

In Geco's boxing ring, Wilf Matheson had the reputation (in his weight category) of being able to terminate a match with one single blow. The coach called him a “one-fisted junior powerhouse.” Unfortunately, Wilf's reflexes were, overall, somewhat slower than his opponent's, and seldom was he able to land his “specialty” blow. But now here was this lumbering man, Beast, on his knees, lower than eye-level to Wilf: A convenient, tempting target indeed! No sooner had Beast launched me on my way to “star gazing,” then Wilf, driving his own fat fist up from an angle well down behind him, landed a haymaker of such perfection that it might have had Joe Louis lining up for lessons.

This time, Beast didn't yell “little fucker.” He fell quietly over sideways, his face again sinking into the snow. However, as encouraging as this appeared to be, it would have been most dangerous for us to consider him down ... and out!

By the time I arrived back on the scene, Beast was slowly raising his head, shaking it, presumably to clear away his own set of stars videoed amongst the drift of billions of snowflakes. With the force of that blow, and in Geco's ring, Wilf would have sent his opponent sailing backwards and insensible over the ropes and into the laps of the spectators. But Wilf and the rest of us were dealing with a hulk of a man more animal than human.

While Beast was still shaking his head, Peggy balled-up her fist, raised her left leg from the ground, bent back on her right, and threw an awesome punch (for a "lady"), using the full follow-through force of her body. She whopped Beast hard onto the side of his left eye.

If, like me, Peg felt any immobilizing pain in her hand, she didn't at once show it. Unlike Wilf, a "mutant," her hand and mine were plumb normal.

Again, his face fell forward into the snow, only now to the opposite side. Meanwhile, sister Neeney had returned to his backside and resumed pummeling him, rather ineffectually (she had the tiniest fists of our group), about his kidney area. But Neeney, prone to boredom, always liked to keep busy.

In a "dirty fight" when a man is down, he would be savagely kicked into oblivion. However, we had been taught to fight "clean," in spite of the fact that we were now in a desperate brawl with, by our standards of weights and measures, a veritable giant, and that this "giant" (Beast) had been on the verge of using his own boots on Mr. Wilkins. We had always viewed "kicking" as a reprehensible act, never to be used unless we were unquestionably involved in a very life-threatening situation. For the moment, only, Beast was at our mercy. But we never considered booting him in the face. Frantically, Wilf yelled at me:

"Cork ... quick! Grab his hair! Lift his head up! Hurry Cork!"

In an instant, I straddled Beast's upper back (taking care not to step on sister Neeney, puffing, panting and punching behind me), grabbed him by the hair and raised his face toward Wilf. Once again, Wilf struck him on the chin with a downward blow of such power that it made a horrible bone crunching sound, audible to us even over the din of the mob of fighters behind us. Beast's head wrenched from my grip and splatted face down into the snow.

Next, enter Peggy: She leaned over Beast. Clasping her fingers on both hands together to form one large fist, she "hammered" him several times across the nape of his neck, crunching his face further into the cold, fluffy white stuff.

We didn't presume Beast to be fully unconscious, but finally, at least, he was lying still and groaning. Unbelievably, slowly, he began to move his hands to the side of his shoulders, preparing to push himself

up free from the snow.

“Damn, son-of-a-bitch!” Wilf hollered, as if finding it difficult to accept that Beast had not yet resigned from this fight, especially after taking my best shot, two of his own formidable power punches, and several from Peggy (and, I must not fail to mention, a token contribution from huffing and puffing sister Neeney).

“Get the hell off his back!” Wilf ordered to Neeney, who was near exhaustion, futilely but gamely punching Beast on the small of his back.

Incredibly, Beast had managed to raise his head and torso clear from the snow, and was now on his knees just at the point where the snow and the road met. In the preceding few seconds if we had thought that our punches were having minimal effect on him, there was now evidence to the contrary.

Blood was pouring from gashes at the right and left sides of his mouth, in the centre of his stubbly-haired, snow-patched chin, and from a break in his skin beside his left eye. Damned if Beast wasn’t “coming back to life!” There was no time to lose now. It was up to Wilf. My fist had thrown in the towel.

Wilf took a few quick steps backwards. He drew his left arm well back, clenched his fist firmly, ran a couple of short steps forward and literally dove through the air toward Beast. This time when Wilf’s “indestructible” fist rammed Beast’s jaw, it carried with it the total sum of every gram of weight in his sturdy, stocky body. Of course, at that precise moment when Wilf’s fist smashed into Beast’s thick Neanderthal-like mandible, he had no “air brakes” with which to halt the rest of his body trailing behind. Wilf landed flat down on the road, breaking his fall with his arms. Not knowing if this was the punch that would finally send Beast to the land of Nod, he scrambled to his feet and scurried back to a frontal position.

From the force of the blow, Beast slammed sideways on to the left side of his face and into the snow, just off the edge of the road. By all the ravaging laws of nature, that should have done it! But no! Incredibly, almost supernaturally, he was still functional! Striving to pull his head up from the snow, he moaned through his swelling lips:

“Jesus ... H ... Kee ... rist! Gonna kill ... gonna kill you mother fuckers!”

“Holy shee ... it!” Wilf yelled, disbelieving and now totally incensed. “I’ll knock your fuckin’ ugly head clean off your goddamn shoulders ... you ugly big bastard!”

Of course, it will be understood by now that Wilf was offhandedly referring to quite a substantial head, supported by an ultra-thick neck, atop very wide shoulders. In fact, Beast had no neck ... per se! But at this moment, exaggeration with profanity was necessary for a burst of unusual strength, and for added

impetus to strained courage.

Pound for pound, and notwithstanding the previous powerful “flying punch,” Wilf would surely never again in his own lifetime strike anything with as much power as he was about to in the next instant. Not wishing to glorify or condone violence (these were unusual and stressful circumstances), I must say that in the fleeting second following Wilf’s tirade, he landed the most perfectly placed uppercut (for a juvenile) I had ever seen in or out of Geco’s boxing ring. In fact, holding his fist down alongside his boot, Wilf hurtled it so swiftly upwards toward the underside of Beast’s jaw that the punch itself was scarcely visible. But not so the results thereof!

Beast’s head snapped back (although, contrary to Wilf’s proclamation, it remained attached to the bulky neck). His head lolled to the side and his eyes glazed over, before slowly closing. He keeled over onto his calves, the back of his head smacking onto a bare patch on the road behind him. Beast lay very still, knees stuck up into the air, his massive chest heaving, and with blood trickling and steaming about his face.

Thanks only to Wilf (and just perhaps that bare patch on the road), Beast was finally out cold, and all outward indications were that it would be for well past the standard ring count of ten. The rest of us, Peggy, I and, to a lesser degree, my sister Neeney, as well intentioned as we had been, had served only to soften him up. Undeniably, it was Wilf’s innate natural strength and “abnormal” hands that saved our skins.

By proportion, we had liquidated (removed from the battle) the equivalent, in our unanimous opinion, four “pipsqueaks.” But we were not eager to go out of our way to seek out another. For the moment, we were quite content to remain at the sidelines and gloat over our recent victory.

We assisted a groggy Mr. Wilkins to his feet. His wife, Peggy’s mom, ran from her outside apartment door to help. With her taking his one arm over her shoulder and Peg the other, they supported his weight while he hobbled back to his apartment. Peggy then returned to join us.

During the several minutes that we had been on a desperate rescue mission to save Peg’s dad from a severe, disfiguring beating at the hands of Beast, we were temporarily oblivious to the main battle which raged behind us in the cul-de-sac area at the rear of building 2, and up and down Civic Road. To the four of us, Peggy, Wilf, Neeney and me, again standing back, breathing heavily and adrenalin-pumped, there appeared to be no signs of any let up.

Grown men everywhere continued smashing at one another with all the power they could muster, or they were on the road rolling back and forth as one tried to gain the advantage over the other. For as many men that could be seen wrestling on the road, there were at least as many (several dozen) grappling and

thrashing about half buried in the snow along the sides of Civic.

Some of the injured, Gecoites and gang members, staggered about alone, with a few collapsing to the road surface or into snowdrifts. Whenever possible, the women would dash out and carry or drag them into the buildings. Blood was everywhere, contrasting starkly with all that winter whiteness.

This was a war of attrition! Whichever side was the more successful in expeditiously reducing the ranks of the other would surely emerge the victor. To save the community, we citizens of Geco just had to win, for to contemplate our possible extinction was out of the question. Our beloved community was worth drawing blood over! We knew what was at stake, and we fought with all our hearts. Unfortunately, so did the others.

At this point, a dozen or so of the gang members had forced their way into the twisting and turning corridors of building 2, entering through those doors in the cul-de-sac area. They were on the hunt for any possible “cowardly” Geco men taking refuge in the warmth and sanctity of the building. On that late Saturday afternoon, only terrified mothers and teenage girls occupied building 2. The youngest children were locked in the rec halls, under the care of several guardian parents armed (just in case!) with baseball bats.

Immediately, these several gang members set about kicking and punching holes through the walls, smashing in apartment doors and shoving those mothers who dared to stand in their way down hard onto the corridor floors.

Only minutes after the gang had entered the building 2 to wreak further destruction, a police officer (one only) on a motorcycle pulled up in front of building. From here, the main battle which was well underway in the cul-de-sac area at the rear of the building was not visible to this officer, although he must have been mildly curious about the roar of male voices carrying over the roof tops.

Apparently, some Gecoite, panicking at the sound of the wailing siren that had signalled the start of the fight, placed an urgent phone call to the closest headquarters of the Toronto Police Force. But their reaction must have been very oh-hum: They sent one cop on a solo peace mission to end a major civilian war. How could he have known what was in store for himself? It was just his misfortune to have been on duty that afternoon. He was simply following orders.

In no hurry, he leaned his heavy machine onto its kick stand, shoved his thumbs into his belt and swaggered slowly toward the main front doors of building 2, presumably to ask the closest occupant within if he or she knew what all the fuss was about in this nuisance remote place. His attitude changed the moment he stepped into the building. He was at once confronted with a scene of wild pandemonium.

Gang members were violently slamming screaming mothers and their teenage daughters into the walls, caving them in, and throwing others onto the floor (as bestial as some of these guys were, they stopped short of using the full force of their fists on the ladies). The officer yelled:

“What the ... hell’s going on here?”

If this protector of law and order had taken the time, on his arrival, to steer his machine a few hundred feet around the corner of building 2 and south to Civic, then of course he wouldn’t have asked such a ludicrous question. Little time would he have wasted in radioing for reinforcements. But he stood there flabbergasted, rather frozen in his tracks, watching dozens of women screaming, scratching, kicking and cursing at several quite large men who were quickly gaining the upper hand.

One lady, carrying in both hands a very large pot heaping full of overcooked, steaming spaghetti, emerged from her apartment just to the side of the bewildered officer. She immediately dumped the entire gooey mess over the heads of two of the gang members. They were in the process of attempting to subdue a few of the more obstinate ladies who cursed, kicked and generally thrashed about on the floor.

With the sudden, intense pain of the sticky hot pasta clinging to their heads and necks, the men let loose with a volley of shrieks, bolted from the building and dove headlong into the cool relief of the closest deep snow bank. In their rush to get out, they had body-checked the officer who blocked their way, hard against the wall. For weeks to come, the outline of his form in the gypsum material would be a conversation piece of some note.

At least two of the gang members bullying the ladies in the corridors had been eliminated. But it was scarcely noticeable. There were many more men to take their place.

Holding the now empty pot, the lady, upon seeing this recently arrived representative of peace, law and order, frantically screamed:

“For Christ’s sake, draw your gun! Shoot them in the legs ... or somewhere! Do somethin’ ... shoot ... help us!”

“Too many!” He yelled back. “Have to radio for backup!”

Of course, this lowly officer from Toronto could not be faulted for his sudden streak of cowardice, and his reluctance to start firing his 38-special at the gang members strewn down the corridor before him. Not only might some of his shots have struck the women, but also there were more men than there were bullets in the cylinder. There would have been no time to re-load. What then?

These “hard rocks” of the Scarborough Junction Gang would not hold themselves back as they had up to now with the women. Under these war-like circumstances, it would not have been too drastic to assume

that this officer would be bludgeoned to death with the hard soles and heels of scads of boots. He turned to retreat through the doors from whence he just came to put out an urgent call to headquarters. But one in the gang shouted:

“Stop that prick! He’s going for his radio!”

These large men pounced on the officer (no squirt himself) and very quickly wrestled him to the ground. One of them snapped open the holster and removed the officer’s loaded revolver. He then dashed outside and blasted off six shots at the police radio mounted on the motorcycle. Riddled beyond repair, that radio would never function again! The gun was hurled through the air, disappearing in the snow, at least a hundred feet away.

By now, a few other men had joined in, totally subduing the officer, holding him flat on the corridor floor. Then, while one of them held open the front doors, the others jerked him from the floor and threw him bodily several feet through the air. He landed face down, splat into the heaped up snow just outside the doors.

Without daring to look back, the vastly outnumbered, disarmed, snow-covered, terrified officer scrambled to his feet, sprinted and slid toward his motorcycle. In one motion, he kick-started the engine, gunned it and roared away, the rear wheel skidding back and forth on the ice-patched snow.

As he zoomed off, he glanced to his left toward Geco’s main street, glimpsing now the mass of parked motorcycles and the unbelievable hoards of fighting men just beyond.

Most definitely, that officer returned to Toronto with far greater dispatch than he had departed; that is, if in his haste he didn’t skid out on one of the numerous icy patches along the way.

Meanwhile, back in the corridors of building 2, this isolated battle of the sexes raged on. No formal law-enforcement agency would soon be breaking up this conflict. Someone had alerted the women in the adjoining building, number 1. A couple dozen of them raced up from the east end of the corridor, shouting and swearing at the men, whom they now considerably outnumbered.

As they ran down the hall toward the gang, a few of the ladies grabbed fire extinguisher tanks from the walls (every building had extinguishers strategically placed along the walls of the corridors). Then, while on the run and straining to hold the cumbersome tanks, the women twisted open the valves, inverted the tanks, pointed the nozzle hose ends at the men and began to spray them with its soda-and-acid contents. All those fire drills and equipment demonstrations previously foisted upon Geco’s citizens now paid off!

Howling and holding their hands atop their heads, a few in the gang made a beeline from the building to the snow outside. Very soon, though, the remaining men gained the upper hand. Superior in sheer

physical strength, they wrenched the metal cylinders from the women, dashed through any open doors of the nearest apartments and flung them, sending them clanging and smashing through the front living room windows. It would be a while before there would once again be warmth within these apartments.

The intrepid damsels from building 1 were forcefully relieved of the extinguishers, and then pushed violently to the floor. Dresses up exposing their buttocks, they sprawled over the other women already there. Others ran back into their kitchens and re-emerged holding heavy frying pans at arm's length above their heads.

There were several concussion "bong" sounds as the pans were slammed down, crunching onto the skull tops of those gang members who were unlucky enough to have had their backs turned to these determined female few. No skulls, however thick they may have been on some of those monsters, could withstand the wielded weight of these old-fashioned, heavy iron frying pans.

The instant they were bonged from the rear, some of them stopped cold in their tracks. For a moment, their eyes stared, unblinking, straight-ahead, and then rolled upwards out of sight, leaving only the whites visible. Their knees buckled under them and their hulking frames crumpled like a rag doll, ending up lying awkwardly and quite still, partly against the wall and partly on the floor. All had blood seeping through their hair.

Unfortunately, again, the remaining men (the "stronger sex") very quickly relieved the ladies of the iron pans. Choosing their targets well and with the use of the pans, they walloped the gals hard across their buttocks (some of them very ample and well-buttressed). This was immediately followed up by a heavy boot shoved into the small of their backs, sending them sprawling flat onto the kitchen floors just inside the apartment doors. More high-pitched screaming and cursing! Suddenly one of the gang members shouted:

"Let's get the hell out of here! Back outside ... everyone!" Leaving their wounded comrades behind, they returned to the cul-de-sac area at the rear-south of building 2 to re-join the main battle.

I would doubt that their prime motives for so suddenly abandoning building 2 were due to the close confinement of the narrow, winding corridors, or to the relentless fury of those brave mothers, but due only, in all likelihood, to their uneasy feeling that the main group of their comrades outside might not be faring too well. That possibility, much to the dismay of us onlookers, did not appear to be the case.

At this stage, the women (especially those from building 3) seemed to be dragging increasingly more of our wounded into the warmth and shelter of the corridors, than that of the enemy.

Although considerably weakened and exhausted, some of our boys, after a brief period of recovery,

courageously returned to the fight. Wounded gang members who were mildly capable and showed the same intentions, were held back (some of our women, to restrain them, used their husbands' ties to bind their hands and feet).

This ability of some wounded Gecoites to re-enter the fray, did give us an added advantage, but evidently not sufficient to earlier conclude the battle in our favour. They had lost their "physical edge."

Routinely now, more of our men were dragged, carried or were assisted bleeding and moaning from the street and the cul-de-sac area. No sense in deluding ourselves, it was rapidly becoming obvious that we, the entire community of Geco, were in serious trouble. We needed a miracle to save us. A Deliverance ... the immediate appearance of a super hero to turn the tide of the battle!

I tried to visualize "Superman" and, my favourite, "Captain Marvel" streaking at the speed of light across the sky from some far away place toward Geco. In their magnificently coloured costumes and their shoulder capes flapping behind them, they landed (in my imagination) smack dab into the centre of the fight. Then, magically and instantly sorting out the villains from the victims (Gecoites), they socked everyone of them once only, sending them faster than the eye could follow, soaring over building 2, north across Eglinton Avenue, eventually ending up in a tall pile of limp and broken bodies in the snow-laden fields north of Geco. Alas, my super heroes were restricted to carrying out their philanthropic deeds within the pages of my comic books tucked under my pillow back in apartment 317. My imagination would never turn the tide in this battle.

It was time to face reality. We were losing. It wouldn't be long now, I thought, before all remaining Gecoites (our fighting men, women tending the wounded, mothers with their small children and all onlookers) dropped to their knees in praying-stance, wailed and begged for mercy: Rather like standing, bound and helpless, facing a large firing squad, waiting for that final end-all order of "fire!" I could only hope that those in charge would commiserate us and issue a last moment order of reprieve.

If they chose instead to raze every building in the community, then that would be quite an acceptable alternative to their taking our lives. From its ashes, a similar structure can be rebuilt, a snuffed out life cannot. It is an irretrievable extinction of an individual.

I, personally, was on the verge of dropping to my knees. But not to beg for mercy (wasn't quite time), but to begin praying to God for divine intervention in whatever manner he deemed appropriate, so long as He would be on our side. His existence, to my satisfaction, I had not yet fully resolved. But this was no time for holding controversial repartees with myself: First, pray for the miracle, taking time only later when all would be well again, to ponder retrospectively the rationality of the act.

At one time or another, all of us in this world have experienced that difficult-to-define sensation

popularly known (in English) as “butterflies in the stomach.” This can be precipitated by great dread, or by great joy. To be sure, “joy” was the immediate cause for my butterflies with the sight, which I next beheld.

Looking to my right, in the distance, a few hundred yards east along Civic, I saw a group of six men rapidly approaching the main battle scene. They walked quickly, intermittently breaking into short bursts of running, while shouting and punching at the air above their heads:

“Hang on boys! Hang on!”

At first, there was a brief murmur of voices among the onlookers around me. Then a wild cheer broke out. Now, of course, the Geco men who still hung in there (gallantly fighting to their last breath), dared not to take the time to glance around to locate the cause of this sudden outburst of distant cheering. In fact, so busy were they in fending off this enemy (who were slowly and inexorably becoming the conquerors) that they were probably oblivious to everything, save the person (or persons) with whom they were locked in battle.

It was not until the moment when several women in the crowd of bystanders began loudly cheering that most of us recognized two of those six men approaching from the east: Danny and Jamie. Geco’s two “most deadliest fighters.”

Truly amazing this was! I had had no time to mentally formulate and silently expound any prayer. Someone else must have beaten me to it. Nevertheless, already, it seemed, it had been answered.

Up to this point in the battle, I (and most other Gecoites, to be sure) had presumed Danny and Jamie to be somewhere out there among the hoard of the original hundreds of combatants. But then we should have known better, because from the outset their presence would have been most obvious. Of course it was an open question as to their prior whereabouts, especially when the community was in such dire need of their pugilistic services. What kept them? More than any of the rest of us, they should have been aware of the impending battle. But this was no time for a period of questions and answers. In the jolly nick of time, they were here.

As they drew closer, almost within punch or be punched range, we were able to recognize another man: A very large man, trotting just behind Danny and Jamie and alongside the other three: “Killer Conroy.”

“Killer” (as he was affectionately called by Gecoites, in spite of the unsavoury connotation of the word) was a professional wrestler of some note from the Cabbagetown section of Toronto. For the past year or so, he had volunteered his services and had been teaching in Geco’s rec hall the art of wrestling to those boys interested. He was a massive man, weighing (a mean guess) between 400-450 pounds, and towered

at an impressive 6' 8". But he was of a gentle disposition, soft spoken (albeit with a very deep voice) and a friend to all, especially to the children. All of Geco's doors were open to this giant, but gentle "outsider."

I had seen him only in his role as an instructor and I used to imagine how he would fare in a traditional, no-holds-barred, street brawl. However, he was not naturally belligerent and he did all his scrapping in the ring (that was his livelihood). In any case, I was about to have my answer.

The remaining three men were of normal size, perhaps only slightly larger than Danny and Jamie, averaging six feet. But as they arrived together in the midst of the battlers, none of the six showed any fear or a reluctance to do battle.

At the top of his lungs to be heard above the roar of human voices, Danny yelled to Jamie, Killer Conroy and the other three:

"Okay boys! There ain't nothin' new here to us! Stick close together! Let's smash these bastards back to hell!"

No made-in-Hollywood movie I had ever seen staged a street brawl the likes of which the others and I witnessed in that next moment. A flurry of events, only later would I be able to relate, and more in order of marvel than in correct chronological sequence.

A battered Geco man who was barely able to any longer hold up his fists in front of him, was standing, knees slightly bent, facing a gang member. Throwing a powerful punch to the side of his head, this larger-than-average attacker (likely one of the Black Diamonders) hovered over his victim, preparing to deliver another very unnecessary fist to the centre of this unfortunate man's face. But before the fist had reached its target, Killer Conroy grabbed the brute by the coat collar and wheeled him around.

This husky Black Diamonder who stood, at the very least, a full six feet, stared straight ahead, astonished and directly into the Adam's apple area of Killer's neck. He slowly raised his head to make eye contact. I suppose at that very moment he wished he were anywhere in this world but in the boonies of snowy, war-ravaged Geco standing toe-to-toe with a veritable "grizzly bear."

Hoping to get the drop on him, the Black Diamonder drove his fist into Killer's stomach, a blow that would have immobilized any normal size man. But Killer was far from normal! (He used to let us kids, in jest, give him our best shot to just above his belly button. Not one of us could affect him, except Wilf who could at least make him grunt from the impact.) Killer's stomach was not smooth and flat like that of a Mr. Universe, but rather large and as hard as the planking on a whisky keg. All around, he was built like an Olympic weight lifter in the "super duper" class.

From the force of a blow that would have ruptured every organ in my own abdomen, Killer hardly flinched. Instead, and before the Black Diamond could withdraw his fist, Killer grabbed him by the waist, spun him full around and twisted his arm up behind his back. Then, grasping this larger-than-average gang member simultaneously by his coat collar and the seat of his pants, he hoisted him effortlessly up to arm's length above his head. Even though Killer was fighting on the side of Geco, it was still a most horrifying sight for me to witness a display of such prodigious brute human strength.

Meanwhile, a trio of other gang members (seeing that one of their own was suddenly in very dire straits) was running toward this "giant" who seemed to have popped up from the surface of Civic Road.

Placing one of his massive legs behind himself for support, Killer hurled the stunned and screaming man at the other three, sending all four of them together in a heap to the frozen road. Not one of them got up! Scratch four! And Killer was just getting started!

Whenever he spotted a nearby gang member straddling a beaten Gecoite, he would yank him away. Then, in one motion while spewing forth a heart-stopping war cry, he'd raise him aloft, tossing him like a doll, crashing into one or more of his fellow gang members.

Sometimes, someone would leap onto Killer's back, hoping to pull him off balance and get him, vulnerable, flat onto the road. For Killer, this was routine stuff. He had had this happen to him uncountable times in professional bouts, and by far more worthy opponents. One could not count to three before these back-jumping gang members were body-slammed to the road, unable to get up.

It did not take the gang long to realize that there had suddenly appeared in their midst a veritable Goliath, and that he had to be quickly dealt with – dispatched by whatever means possible.

In only the few minutes that Killer had been fighting, he was having a very deleterious effect on their numbers. Before the arrival of the "miracle six," the Scarborough Junction Gang and the huge mob of Black Diamond reinforcements were well on their way to winning this battle. A dozen or so of them now made themselves available to attack, en force, Killer Conroy, Danny, Jamie and the other three. One in the gang screamed to his closest comrades:

"Okay men ... let's get that big fucker before he takes out any more of our boys!"

They started closing in on Killer. However, because Danny, Jamie and those others were of "regular size," the gang paid little or no heed to them. But they should have!

Danny, Jamie and the three professional boxers from "Cabbagetown" quickly moved into a position close to Killer's side. Danny shouted above the roar of human voices:

"Okay guys, we're outnumbered! We have no choice ... pull 'em out!"

Excluding Killer, Danny and the others slid their “punching hand” into their front pant’s pocket and rolled a short cylindrical bar of solid steel into their palms, concealing it within clenched fists. Winded, he screamed to be heard above the mayhem:

“For Christ’s sakes ... don’t hold back ... gotta go for a knockout with every punch!”

If these tiny steel bars could be considered “weapons” (from the outset, and as was agreed by both sides, no weapons were to be used) then Danny and the others could be forgiven. They were not present when Captain Cook had made that verbal agreement with Butch, the gang leader.

For the moment, I was no longer able to see Danny, Jamie and the others (except for “Killer” who would only go unnoticed amid a tribe of African Watutsi). They were ringed by more gang members than I was able to count. Then, in the next instant, the scene resembled someone throwing a series of strikes at a five-pin bowling alley: Like bowling pins, gang members were tumbling backwards, falling and rolling over one another.

Some were seen somersaulting through the air (more of Killer’s handiwork), landing in nearby snow banks, or splat out on the road. As the ranks of the gang in the immediate area began to thin out, it was then that I was able to see for the first time the full and awesome fighting skills of Danny and Jamie. They stood back-to-back, their deadly fists flashing through the cold air, finding their marks and sending most of those struck, backwards and unconscious before they even hit the road.

A gang member would move forward and throw a savage roundhouse punch at Danny. Danny would duck, moving his head down and to the side. He’d then drive his left fist into the man’s solar plexus. While the man was bent over from the shock of the pain, Danny would follow through in the bat of eye with a solid right cross to the chin.

Jamie, behind Danny, was no less efficient, although he seemed to prefer a slightly different technique. When he ducked a thrown punch, he would slam both fists in an instant one after the other into the man’s gut. Heavy winter clothing offered only token protection against the pile-driver force of these blows. Then, while the guy was buckled over and winded from the shocking pain, Jamie struck him with an uppercut of such power that the man’s feet appeared to leave the ground before he landed senseless on his back.

As imposing as the punching power and physical stamina of Geco’s “two deadliest fighters” were, it was equalled or bettered by those other average-size men that had arrived with them. To be sure, whoever they were, they were also professional, highly experienced boxers, and had obviously been requisitioned exclusively for this very encounter.

Not one of the “miracle boys” – Killer Conroy, Danny, Jamie, and the other three professional fighters – would be able to sustain such a furious counter attack for much longer. Even if they were never struck, they would eventually exhaust themselves into total submission.

As the word flashed out among the remainder of the gang about the mysterious arrival of the “miracle six” (as I saw them), they would leave whomever it was they were fighting at the moment and make their way toward this more urgent and challenging brawl. Over a dozen additional gang members attacked ... full force! Again, several of them were hurled away or bashed “sound asleep” to the road or into the snow banks.

At this time, signs of fatigue were showing up on our heroes. Whereas not before, punches were now finding their marks on the faces of Danny, Jamie and the others, albeit that they instinctively knew how to turn their heads with the punch, so as to lessen the severity of the blow. Only a very solid square-on lucky punch indeed, would permanently disable any of these pros!

Killer, too, was beginning to have his own share of problems. At times, he would have two men jump onto his back and, because he was otherwise quite busy disposing of gang members to his front, he began to stagger and falter. Then, two events occurred which changed, once and for all, the course of this battle and which would affect its ultimate outcome.

Increasingly, more of the gang abandoned their particular Geco opponent and plunged into the fight against the group of six pro’s (by this time, most of our Geco men were in a state of submission, lying battered and bloodied on the road or half sunk in snow banks). With such an overwhelming onslaught of fighters, our heroes couldn’t possibly last much longer.

But now those wounded Gecoites, several dozens who had been abandoned on the spot and who were still conscious, bravely regained their feet. They began to attack from the rear those gang members, the preponderance of whom were slugging it out with Killer Conroy, Danny, Jamie and the others. In most cases, these Gecoites, themselves only partially recovered from a recent battering, drove their fists hard into the back of the necks of the gang members, dropping them to their knees.

At the same time, some Geco women (at first only a few) raced from their apartments in building 2, threateningly holding aloft those heavy iron frying pans. Wasting no time, and at the risk of incurring serious injury, they set about belting gang members over the heads, knocking some of them clean out cold. They slumped quietly to the road or into the snow of the cul-de-sac area. This “brainstorm,” although it had recently been tried and proven in the corridors of building 2, caught on like wildfire!

In droves, these frying-pan-waving women dashed out from buildings 1, 2, and 3. Most had not taken the time to dress for the bitter cold. There was no time!

As if on cue, hundreds of additional frying pan-wielding ranting and raving women poured forth from within the remainder of the buildings at the west end of Civic Road. They dashed, slipping and sliding toward the main mob of the gang members. Like capes in the winter wind, their dresses flared up behind them. Most of them were moms of those young children ensconced in Geco's rec halls. Their "maternal instincts" had kicked in and there was no stopping them. Feminine fury at its best!

As they neared the main group of fighters, they had to nimbly side step or jump over unconscious men (ours and the gang's) to reach their targets. In a matter of minutes, amid the fighters, there was an uncountable hoard of Geco women, and as many black iron frying pans, or facsimiles close enough thereto. The scales were now tipped in our balance. We overwhelmed the enemy!

Next, those teenagers who had previously been deemed too young to fight, dashed into their parents' apartments, grabbed any pot of suitable size, and then expeditiously dispatched themselves into the thick of the battle.

Peggy, Wilf, Neeney and I followed suit. The original decree of "no weapons" did not apply here! For the much less physically strong women and children, these pots and pans could be deemed permissible. Hey ... we were handicapped and they were our equalizers!

Someone should have earlier promulgated this idea. A swarm of adult females and young teenagers of both sexes now vastly outnumbered the gang.

Not quite the stuff of which great symphonies are made, but in that cold January air, the sounds of pots and pans being whammed down onto heads, plus a mélange of hundreds of swear words of the highest order, had a primitive musical quality all of its own. It reverberated between buildings 2 and 3. Only those gang members still wearing their R.C.M.P.-style fur hats had the advantage of "cushioning" from the chorus of blows.

Throughout the "music," the remaining Geco men and Danny, Jamie, Killer Conroy and the three professional boxing recruits, never stopped punching. In no more than ten minutes following the arrival of the full onslaught of the "pots and pans," the gang, one after another, frantically began to plead for a truce:

"I give up! For God's sake ... knock it off!" Many of them yelled, falling to their knees, hands clasped to their heads.

In scant seconds, every member of the gang who was still able to stand (a couple of dozen or so were running around in circles to avoid the frying pans) surrendered. Their ranks were hopelessly depleted. Now that the fighting had totally ceased, only now could we assess the full extent and results of the

carnage.

Most of the gang who had been “bonged” (and they numbered in the dozens) lay on the road, either face down or on their backs. Some were semiconscious and struggling to kneel before attempting to stand. Others had staggered forward before collapsing into a deep drift or into a pile of plowed snow only feet from where they had been bonged. Moans and groans filled the air.

Those gang members who had had the terrible misfortune to have found themselves in the vice-like clutches of Killer’s huge hands, were on their backs or sides, out cold as a mackerel, or partly conscious and vainly trying to regain their feet. Several of them were just beginning to crawl out, slowly and painfully, from a snow bank into which they had been violently flung.

There was an entanglement of borderline conscious gang members in a circle, strewn about on the road, around Danny, Jamie and the other three professional boxers. Doubtless, some of them had broken jaws, cracked cheeks, busted noses, and might have been missing a front tooth or two.

Many of our men, who had been knocked out and lying in snow banks alongside Civic Road, had begun reviving before the women had a chance to carry them into the nearest warm building. They staggered about now, dazed and holding their bloodied faces, or with an open hand held against their bruised abdomens.

Almost every square foot of road and snow where the main battle had taken place was splattered and spotted with blood, mainly from damaged noses. Most of the men, in addition to any other injuries sustained, had blood dripping or copiously pouring from their swelling noses. A few of the women held handfuls of cold snow against some of these in an attempt to stem the flow.

Although it seemed to me to have occupied an entire afternoon, the battle, from the blast of the siren until it culminated with the arrival of the “miracle six” and the subsequent incursion of swinging pots and pans, had lasted little more than an hour.

Our own leader, Captain Cook and his adversary Butch, the collective principal leader of the invading gangs, were the first to do battle and were among the first to have been removed, injured from the scene.

Cook, as he would later relate, did manage to subdue Butch and to render him unconscious with a few lucky square-on punches. However, seconds thereafter, Cook, in turn, received a powerful blow (a “rabbit punch”) to the back of his neck. He woke up later just as the battle ended, with a damp cloth draped across his forehead, lying in the corridor within the warmth of building 3.

Slightly unsteady on his legs, Captain Cook now appeared just to the outside entrance of building 3. He was back in charge here! Standing tall at the top step, he pressed a hand to his rib cage and barked out a

clear order to all those gang members who were on their feet:

“I want some of you bastards to go down this road and bring your trucks and cars here. We’ll help you gather up your wounded!”

Then, with a sweeping wave of his hand, Cook added: “After that, I want every one of you to get the hell away from our community ... and don’t come back!”

Scrambling around to collect all the keys, some of the more ambulatory in the gang hustled off toward the vehicles parked at the west end of Civic Road at Warden Avenue.

In less than fifteen minutes, most of the wounded members of the Scarborough Junction Gang had been carried or assisted into the backs of the several stake trucks and into the cars. The Black Diamonders who were not too badly injured retrieved their motorcycles and roared away, disappearing in both directions along Eglinton Avenue. For the most part, they rode two per bike. A dozen or so of their abandoned motorcycles remained behind on Civic Road within our community. The trucks and cars, loaded to capacity (several of the injured were Black Diamonder bikers), chugged slowly away exiting by the eastern end of Civic Road.

Only minutes after the gang had departed, and while we were still tending our many wounded (all of whom now in the warmth of the buildings), we could hear the distant screams of sirens approaching Geco. Soon, a fleet of six Toronto police cars raced into the community, sliding and fishtailing to a halt just in front of the abandoned motorcycles. The cruisers were full of armed officers.

Even before the vehicles came to a full stop, the doors were opened and the police were out, hands on holsters, and ready to take whatever action they deemed necessary. Just a little tardy, they had arrived, excited and prepared to break up a major fight. It would seem that the motorcycle officer who had been bodily ejected from building 2 during the height of the battle, had made it safely back to his headquarters in Toronto, minus his radio and revolver.

Except for interviewing, taking notes and assisting in “mopping up,” the police had little else to do at this point. No charges would be laid on our territory. They were quick to realize that we Gecoites had taken only what action was necessary to protect ourselves, but at the same time to keep the fighting “clean.” They helped us tend to the many wounded.

Several ambulances were immediately summoned from the nearest hospital, Toronto East General. But when they arrived within the half hour, there were not sufficient of them to transport all those who required emergency medical treatment. The attendants, with their stretchers, loaded into the rear of the ambulances as many of the more seriously wounded as they could (some of whom were left-behind gang

members). The rest were eased into all available vehicles and police cars.

The Hollinger bus arrived on its punctual run into the community and “Harvey,” the regular driver, volunteered his services. When the ambulances and the other vehicles were full, Harvey’s bus was loaded with the remaining, less seriously injured.

With the ambulances leading the way, sirens screaming, followed by the police cruisers and Harvey’s bus, the dozens of injured Gecoites and the abandoned gang members were whisked away to the hospital. For a very good reason, one police car and two officers of rank remained behind.

Unfortunately, one of our men, an Ojibwa [or Chippewa] Indian who had recently moved to Geco with his family (the only Indian family in the community), was found dead and already stiff and partially frozen in the blood splatted snow at the side of Civic Road. He [will remain unnamed] had been stabbed in the stomach and had bled to death while the fighting raged around him. It was soon evident that at least one of the gang members had not given all his weapons to “fight clean.” Miraculously, though, this would be the only fatality among all those injured. But even one death is too many.

Over the next few days, the police would conduct a routine investigation. However, practically, they could not arrest and charge every single known member of the Scarborough Junction Gang and the Black Diamond Motorcyclists, the instigators of the battle. They numbered in the hundreds! Furthermore, to find the “murder weapon” would be like searching for the proverbial needle in a haystack.

Several flick-knives were found here and there in the snow among other weapons given up by the gang members just before the outbreak of fighting, but not one was found blood-stained, and in the “open position.”

The death, whether deemed murder, manslaughter or accident, was just a regrettable, but not wholly surprising consequence of a massive battle. That evening, only one of Geco’s fighting fathers would be heading to the morgue – Mr. Noah Kelly. The remainder, those many injured, would overwhelm the medical staff on call in the hospital’s emergency ward.

On the following day, only a very few Geco men (and some women and children) did not bear the scars of the previous day’s battle. Almost without exception, Gecoites, several bearing a toothless smile, had bandages on their heads, across their broken noses, patches over eyes, arms in slings, and some with frostbite, mostly to their hands.

A few hobbled about on crutches within the corridors of the buildings. Many others would remain in the hospital for several days, nursing such injuries as fractured skulls (more numerous among the gang members), concussions, ruptured spleens, bruised kidneys, traumatic injuries to the back, severe eye

damage, simple fractures (no compound) to arms, legs, cheeks and jaws.

Peggy and I had strained our right hands, and now sported bandages, exempting us from doing all written homework for the next few days.

Sister Neeney's hands, although not requiring bandages, were badly bruised (especially on the sides) and very tender and painful to the touch. Perhaps she could be smug with the thought that "Beast" might have sore kidneys for at least several days following the battle. With her tiny fists, she had flailed away, thumping him machine-gun fashion to his lower back area!

Wilf had survived the battle virtually unscathed, suffering only "burns" to his forearms and wrists from skidding face down onto the icy road while he was in the process of kayoing "Beast" But no surprise to us ... his hands were fine!

My father and my two older brothers sustained only minor scrapes and bruises. But unique to the other Geco father-and-son fighting families, they were adorned, as a "trio," with one black eye each (this injury was commonplace among Gecoites). In the weeks to follow, when at the dinner table, we would swap stories about the battle, "spicing them up" with the passage of time. Unlike me, they didn't keep diaries, secretly or overtly.

Insofar as I knew, no Gecoite had shirked his responsibility as a potential saviour of the community, hiding out for the duration of the fight. Every citizen could consider himself or herself a hero. But Geco's own Danny and Jamie, Killer Conroy and those other recruited professional boxers, were the heroes among heroes.

These men, the "miracle six", would remain very modest and reticent about their invaluable contribution to the battle. Without their timely appearance at a point when Gecoites were very definitely in a losing situation, it would be doubtful that the women and children, with their pots and pans, could have mustered the courage necessary to deliver the "coup-de-grâce" to the overwhelming masses of those fierce and determined gang members.

All six men expressed the same regret that they were not able to be there at the precise moment the fight broke out. On that Saturday morning, Danny and Jamie had driven to Cabbagetown to recruit some professional help. It took them several hours to locate Killer Conroy, and to recruit three willing volunteers (boxers). They jammed together into one car and headed back to Geco. But still a few miles from their destination, the car "conked out" on local Birchmount Road (east of the community) and proved impossible to restart.

For a while, they tried unsuccessfully to "thumb a ride." The sight of a "giant" (Killer Conroy) on the

road amid five other stocky men would have deterred most drivers from stopping. Only a truck could accommodate these guys. They had to hike the remaining distance in the freezing weather. Cold, somewhat weary, but eager to fight and defend, they arrived at the east end of our main street, Civic Road. None too soon!

In the evening, two days after the battle, a few cars packed full of members of the Black Diamonders arrived in Geco to retrieve their motorcycles. The entire community had been under strict orders from our leader Captain Cook “not to tamper” with any of the motorcycles or other vehicles that had been “abandoned by the enemy.”

In their own way, these Black Diamonders and members of the Scarborough Junction Gang might have been “heroes” on the previous Sunday, but not now. A police escort (one squad car with two armed officers) accompanied them. We paid them no heed as they spent some time starting the frozen engines. They putted away, trailed by the police car.

Never again would undesirable, belligerent “outsiders” harass us proud citizens of Geco. From the day of that major conflict forward, any visitor to Geco, especially those wishing to attend our dances, religiously abided by our rules and regulations. The Community of Geco, wholesome and thriving, would be around for a while yet.

When I was once again able to hold a pen and “write,” I made a several page entry in my secret diary. Another documented memory!

As I would always remember, Peggy’s deceased Uncle Jack Kuusik (a larger-than-life hero during the World War II Battle of Cassino) had written that one should “safeguard the good memories” and “learn from the others.”

What I learned in early 1949 was that not all humans (reputably the most intelligent and, as should follow, the most civilized of all Earthly life) are peace-loving. There will always be those people, and not in short numbers, who prefer to solve a disagreement by destroying their antagonists.

Conversely, those of us who are truly peace-loving and civilized, when forced to defend ourselves, our loved ones and our property, must exercise restraint and strive to subdue the enemy, short of destroying a life.

But then, I had learned much more.