

Joey

by Wayne Power

It began like any regular school day, Wednesday, one week before our school would break for Christmas holidays.

Mom had packed my lunch as usual, but I discovered I had an extra treat, two “jap oranges”. We called them that with no bias or prejudice towards the people of that Asian country. Every November my family would pick up a wooden pine crate of mandarin oranges shipped from Japan to add to our Canadian Christmas traditions. Each orange was individually hand wrapped in green tissue paper, packed for overseas export. The citrus fragrance always ushered in the holiday season in my childhood. With 2 oranges for recess and lunch, I was excited with my extra discovery. They would be the first of the season.

That morning recess was slow to come. I anxiously thought about recess, as I walked 3 city blocks up hill to my Elementary school. Every day was the same routine. By recess, I reached into my bag and pulled out one of my oranges. I easily peeled it, and segmented it. I savoured the juices from each segment. I almost ate the second one, but 15 minutes prohibited further savourings. I looked forward to lunch. That second orange was going to be well worth the wait. But time had other plans. At lunch, Volleyball practice was called just before noon over the PA system. My lunch bag was never opened. I thought about that uneaten orange all afternoon. It would be my delayed treat, as I walked back home. But, once again, distractions happen. A group of us started down the hill, chattering, laughing and reviewing the day’s activities. That orange never made it to my mouth.

By the time I reached my 3rd block, the group had dispersed. Each of us returned to our own homes. I was alone daydreaming, slowly surveying my neighbourhood. I knew a family had moved in across the street from my apartment building home, on the previous Monday. I waved at a boy balancing on crutches, standing on his lawn of his new house. I raised one hand to acknowledge him. My other hand clutched at my lunch bag. I called my name over to him. He responded with a clumsy wave and with,

“I’m Joey!” “Do you go to school?” I asked. He said...”Next Friday I register,” “...in Grade 5. Excitedly, I told him that I too was in Grade 5. “Maybe we might be in the same class.”

Before I said “Goodbye”, I asked him if he liked “jap oranges”. He looked puzzled. He did not know what they were. I reached into my lunch bag, pulled out my extra one and held it high. He said “Oh!” Without thinking about it further, I knelt down and rolled it across the street to him. He stopped it with one of his poles, struggled to bend over, but retrieved his treasure. I saw him raise it to his face. “Wow!” he yelled, before he turned around and hobbled to his front porch. “Thanks, seeya Wayne”. It was the beginning of a very unique, but short friendship. In the last week before school break, I asked my mother to make sure I had 2 oranges – one for me, and one for Joey.

Although Joey could never walk downhill with me to our end of the neighbourhood, we would always wait for each other across the street. I always had a spare orange to roll across to him. He gladly expected it.

We were never in the same class. He was registered in a special class for pupils with disabilities. He had polio. But, he loved “jap oranges” too, especially the free ones I rolled across the road to him that last week of school.

During one of our lunchtimes, before we broke for holidays, Joey and I had our classes merged. He opened his bag. It contained 2 oranges wrapped in green tissue. He struggled to bend down, but rolled one across the aisle to me. We winked at each other and savoured our oranges together. That Christmas, “jap oranges” seemed to taste the best. After the holidays, I missed Joey. He never returned to our school. I never saw him again in our neighbourhood. A “For Sale” sign had been erected in the very spot where I first saw him. One day, I walked over and laid an orange at the foot of the sign, just for Joey.