

Johnny Cappa's Market

by Mel Montemerlo

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Kids growing up in downtown Windsor Locks in the 1950s, 60s and early 1970s knew Johnny Cappa and frequented "Johnny's Market" on Chestnut St., across from St. Mary's Church. "Johnny's" was a place where you could get the normal things you would get in a small market, but it was far more than that. Every time you passed Johnny's, you saw a number of bicycles lying on the sidewalk in front of his shop. It was where kids stopped in for penny candy or for a Coke. He also had a stand with comic books. You could get comic books without covers for a nickel.



Johnny Cappa's Market, Chestnut St, Windsor Locks, CT

In front of his counter, he had a Coca Cola cooler in which the bottles sat in very cold water. The door was on the top, and you had to pull it up. Then you saw the bottles sitting in the water and you also saw a stream of extremely cold water coming out of a pump. Boys would try to hold their hand in the stream of cold water as long as they could. It was a mark of "strength and power".

Kids stopped at Johnny's on the way to or from school, on the way to Pesci Park, on the way to Union School for basketball practice, and on the way to St. Mary's school for catechism class or choir practice.

Adults frequented Johnny's too, although for different reasons. Let's look at some of those reasons. Johnny made fresh grinders for you. You could get a salami, cheese, lettuce and tomato grinder for 50 cents. Johnny's Market was a single small room, but

it was a very tall room, and there were shelves all the way up to the ceiling. Those shelves were packed. He had a few each of lots of items, and he would get them down with a long stick with a claw on the end. Johnny operated that device with great skill. Nothing ever fell.

The Italian community in Windsor Locks loved a brand of bread made in Hartford. It was made by the Moon Bakery. They made the classic round loaf of Italian bread with a thick crust. It came in a white bag. The only problem with this delicious bread was that if you didn't eat it in about a day, it got as very hard. Of course, even then you could toast it, or dip it in various things like milk or wine. Moon Bakery also made grinder rolls. These might have been the best grinder rolls ever made. You could buy them at Aldo's, Maria's, the A&P, and Johnny's. Those Moon Bakery grinder rolls cost 5 cents apiece.

There was one more thing which made Johnny's really special, and way ahead of his time. Johnny's was one of the first grocery stores anywhere to make deliveries. His brother, Eddie, had a pickup truck and he made deliveries all day. That gave Johnny's an advantage over the other markets. Back then, not everyone owned a car. The deliveries were something many people depended on.

Johnny Cappa was born in 1912 and died in 1983. He ran his Market for 28 years, from 1947 to 1975, when he retired. While no photo of Johnny could be found, here is a photo of his brother, Eddie, who worked closely with Johnny. This photo was taken in Umberto Pesci's shoe repair store, which preceded Tony Basile's shoe repair shop which was just around the corner from Johnny's.



*Umberto Pesci, Fidelio Giannuzzi, Eddie Cappa, Leo Montemerlo (age 12)
Windsor Locks, Connecticut 1927*

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