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Reminiscences

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REMINISCENCES
OF
TONY PIZZO

The Sights, Sounds and Smells of Ybor City

I like to think of the days of my youth in Ybor City recall the sights, sounds and smells that enriched my childhood. Life was pleasant and carefree, often exciting. I can still hear the chatter in Spanish and Italian as the workers trudged light heartedly to long days of rolling cigars in the factories; the rumbling of wagons and the clump of horses’ hooves through the brick streets delivering milk and loaves of bread before sunrise. I can still hear the steam-whistles of the Tampa Box Factory and the Latin-American Laundry; the Regensberg Cigar Factory tower clock striking on the hour, and the bell of Our Lady of Mercy Catholic Church calling its parishioners to mass.

The exotic fragrances still tingle my nostrils. I can not forget the aroma of bread being baked by Italian housewives in their backyard-ovens permeating through the neighborhood -- (this was a Friday ritual); the roasting of coffee-beans in the coffeemills creating aromatic smoke perfuming the streets, and the pungent smell of Havana tobacco being blended. The guava processing plants brewed the exotic tropical fruit into jelly, paste, and *cascos de guayaba* -- guava shells. The surrounding neighborhoods were perfumed with a piquant aroma. Breathing the seductive fragrance of steaming guavas, when I was a mere boy, left a sweet memory.

The mellifluous Latin chatter along the sidewalks in the evenings was an enchantment. I can still hear the music from the clubhouse ballrooms wafting on the night air during festive occasions. Remembering the haunting wail of the train-whistle in the middle of the night, rumbling along Sixth Avenue, awakens a sad sensation of nostalgia. The old haunts and departed friends capture my memories. It was a way of life that will not return. It filled the summers of my childhood.