



Preface

Two five-year-old boys pedaled their toy fire engine down the sidewalk lickety-split toward a pretend fire. It was the summer of 1933 in residential Ardmore, Pennsylvania, a west Philadelphia suburb. Little Talarico was at the wheel, pedaling with all his might. Young Emiddio held onto the back of the toy vehicle. Both laughed with delight at their speed and the wind in their faces. Neither saw the delivery truck edging directly into their path.

“That day, Mom had to go someplace and Mrs. Talarico was supposed to be watching the two of us,” Emiddio “Mead” Massa recalled. The minute she looked away, the boys took off at full speed. Then, suddenly, a big truck started backing out of the grocery store next to their house. “In those days, trucks didn’t have the ‘beep-beep-beep’ warning they have now. We didn’t see the truck, and ‘BOOM,’ we were hit!”

As were most of the people in the neighborhood, the truck driver was Italian – a *compadre*. So when bystanders started banging on his truck and shouting *Fermata!* (Stop!), he immediately slammed on the breaks. But it was too late – his rear wheels grazed the tiny fire engine. The child at the pedals managed to keep moving and got out

of harm's way, but the one in back was hurled to the pavement. When the big truck finally ground to a halt, Mead's head was tightly wedged between the tire and the curb. To this day, he has no recollection of this – it's what he was later told.

“I must have been knocked out,” Mead said. “The next thing I remember is I'm in the back seat of a car in the arms of the woman who had been taking care of me. We rushed to the hospital. Mom showed up shortly thereafter. It wouldn't be the first time I'd narrowly escape the Grim Reaper, but I suppose because it was the first time I could have been killed, it's one of my most vivid early memories.”

The following summarizes memories of Mead Massa, as told to Christina Cavitt in a series of interviews, informal talks and telephone conversations throughout 2008.