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[January 30 at 11:16 AM](https://www.facebook.com/groups/1721305394799249/permalink/2201574076772376/%22%20%5Ct%20%22)

I wrote this a few years ago after reading a piece that Ed Zindel had written about growing up in the old neighborhood. I thought I could add a few of my own remembrances and maybe others would do the same. But as so often happens, real life got in the way of this project and this is as far as I got. Anyway, here it is.

Reading Ed Zindel’s remembrances of growing up in Pleasureland brought back a lot of memories and also reminded me of a few things I had forgotten, like The Sand Pit. I had completely forgotten about that. I remember sleigh riding on the hill behind it; it was steep but not that long. Later we would sled on the upper part of Acorn. It was just a dirt road back then and had no traffic, plus it was longer than the hill. Then they built some houses along that part of Acorn and before long the town paved it. Cars began using the road and that messed up the sledding. Local people would usually go down to Jerome and leave the hill to the kids, but non-locals using the road as a shortcut to 202 would sometimes honk or yell at us to get out of the way. That would often result in a barrage of snowballs pelting their cars. Some took it well and went on their way, but others got mad and got out to chase us. Hah, they had no chance. We would take off along the ridge by the big oak tree, then down the hill, onto the swamp and down toward the lake. We didn’t usually have to go far. They gave up quickly and went back to their cars, which because it was such a nice, safe, crime-free neighborhood, were still there.

Oakland was a great town to grow up in, and still is, and for me at least, Pleasureland was the perfect place to be a kid. I had a boat, a fishing pole, a bicycle, a bat and a glove and a lot of other kids to play with. What more does a boy need. Kids didn’t need a lot to be happy then; we made our own fun.
I have so many memories of growing up in Oakland, and especially in Pleasureland, that I want to share, yet I know that they are just personal anecdotes and nothing special or earth shattering, but just memories of a childhood spent at a time far removed from that experienced by kids today. But we all live in our own time, and this was mine.

The swamp, as it was known, ran along Lakeview Terrace from Acorn Ave down to the end of the street, where it drained into the river. In the winter it froze early and we could skate on it before anything else froze solid enough. Most of us accessed it through the yard of Dot and Tom Seedyk’s house, but there were plenty of places along Lakeview to get onto the ice. The widest area was near Acorn and it got narrower as you went down toward the lake. That was where the boys set up our hockey rink, which consisted of two rocks set about four feet apart to serve as a goal, and two more about fifty yards away for the other goal. We didn’t have equipment other than sticks and a puck so the rules were that the puck had to stay on the ice. I played goalie a lot, and there was no way I was going to try to stop an airborne puck with my body, let alone my teeth. We played some intense games over the years and no one ever lost a tooth.

One year we got this great idea. We could gather up all the Christmas trees people in the neighborhood were throwing out after the holidays and make a big pile of them on the ice in the middle of the swamp, and then one night everyone could gather around and we could light it. So we did, and made a mountain of trees on the ice. On a Saturday night with everyone around to enjoy the event we lit it. For about five minutes it was awesome; flames roared into the nighttime sky in a very impressive display. Then it was over. The next day we learned about the law of unintended consequences. The ice in that area, where we used to play hockey, was ruined for the rest of the winter. Oops! We moved the hockey and most of the skating to the cove down at the Doty Road end of Lakeview and life went on.

Global warming, at least in Oakland, is a fact. Winters just don’t get as cold as they did when we were kids. Some winters the river would freeze hard enough to skate on from below the Doty Road bridge all the way to Pompton Dam. I only skated all the way down to the dam and back once. My ankles hurt just thinking about it. We played hockey on the river behind our house on weekends. When we got cold or tired we came inside and Mom made cocoa for us. When we warmed up it was back out for more hockey. Those days are gone; the river doesn’t freeze any more.

We made it through childhood and adolescence with only the usual assortment of injuries, but one event I remember could have been a disaster. I guess it was a mild winter because the river hadn’t frozen and we were playing hockey on the cove. The puck, probably our only puck, got deflected and went sliding out toward the river and open water. Jackie Grosser went after it but it kept going toward the river. We yelled at him to stop, the ice was too thin, and then it broke out from under him and in he went. We were in shock, wondering what to do. Jackie kept his head about him and, wearing winter clothes and ice skates, swam to the ice and onto it, slithered and crawled forward until the ice was thick enough to hold him, then got up and skated back to the rest of us. He took off his skates, put on his shoes, and went home. A short time later he was back, but hockey was over for that day. The whole thing was over in a minute, maybe half that, but it left a lasting impression on me.

One of the nicest things about living in Pleasureland was the return of the “summer kids”. More and more houses were being turned into year-round homes, but there were still a lot of houses available for rent for the summer, and many families would rent the same house every year, so every summer we had an extra group of kids to play with. Most lived in one of the cities along the Hudson and their families liked the more rural environment for themselves and their kids to spend the summer, and came back every year. We looked forward to them coming in the summer and hated to see them go home in September.

Well, that's it. If anyone has memories to add please do.