

TONY'S SOUTHSIDE NEIGHBORHOOD PEOPLE AND PLACES

The Places

Interfaith Council of Churches

Originally begun as a cooperative effort between two Catholic churches and a synagogue to raise money for a local cause, it has grown over the year to over thirty churches and synagogues citywide. In cooperation with the University Medical Center, its main focus now is to raise money to help provide medical care for those who can't afford it. The council sponsors a number of events, particularly a twice yearly three day yard sale, flea market, and carnival, along with several other social functions. The Council is the engine behind the friendship and cooperation among many of the clergymen and women of various denominations throughout the city.

Spinelli's Restaurant

Owned and run by the Spinelli brothers, Carmine, Vito, and Nunzio, Spinelli's is a third generation family restaurant offering the finest Italian food on the Southside, and probably in the whole city. Their sausage lasagna is my favorite; it's to die for. Spinelli's backroom is enormous and the site of many a wedding reception, community social event, and the ever present autumn Sunday afternoon 'tailgate' party when the 'Boys in Black' play their away games.

Southside Fire Company #5

The local city fire station, Company Five is located next to a small city park down at the river's edge. Run by Chief "Crazy Pat" Flanagan and overseen by its mascot, a Dalmatian named Ranger, it is the unofficial Southside community center and neighborhood 'bulletin board' and meeting place. And it is the site of numerous community events in addition to the spontaneous Saturday afternoon parties that occur when Pat's famous bottomless pot of chili bubbles on the kitchen stove, and a great game is on the big screen in the community room.

Sam's Bistro

A combination coffee house, bakery, and sandwich shop, Sam's is owned by a tall, beautiful strawberry blonde named Samantha Bates and her seven year old little girl, Emily Ann. Serving up the finest coffee, pastries, and deli sandwiches in the

neighborhood, it's the morning and lunchtime gathering place for the many of neighborhood gang.

Sebastian's Bookstore

The best independent bookseller in the city, Sebastian's is a favorite of the neighborhood gang, especially the various clergymen. A second generation family business, it is owned by Thomas Sebastian, a man who has a passion for good books, particularly classics and scholarly tomes. Always looking out for his regular customers, Thomas has an uncanny knack for knowing his customer's tastes and often has a particular book in stock he knows the local clergymen will be asking for.

The Boys in Black

Originally the unofficial nickname give to the city's professional football team, its usage has spread to the other professional sports teams in the city. Why, because all the teams are outfitted in the same team colors; something that may be unique to this city. Owned by the O'Grady family, they are particularly generous to the residents of the city, participating in, and co-sponsoring any number of charitable efforts.

The Bowl

The city's sports stadium, home to the city's professional sports teams. Section 136 is 'home' to the neighborhood gang.

St. Katherine's Roman Catholic Church

The oldest Catholic Church in the city, it was the first church, along with Temple Beth El, to found the Interfaith Council of churches. It's pastor, Father Bob Scanlon is one interesting character, and his associate, Father John O'Malley is one of the finest speakers in the city. St. Katies, as she's called by her parishioners, is home to many of the neighborhood gang, as they all attended the same Jesuit college, an hour or so east of the city.

St. Edwards College

An hour or so east of the city, St. Ed's, as she's called by so many of her alumni, is a small but very fine college run by the Jesuit Fathers. Having several outstanding departments, particularly its business, education, and fine arts schools, it has graduated many of the city and state's leaders in the fields of business, government, and education. Included are several of the neighborhood gang, even some of the guys who aren't Catholic.

University Medical Center

Just what its name says, UMC is the teaching hospital affiliated with the city University. Renowned for its work in cancer research, transplantation, and children's diseases, its reputation for the finest in patient care is known and recognized worldwide, and its trauma care center is the anchor for critical emergency care in the region.

Mike's Place

The best nightclub on the Southside, and maybe in the entire city, Mike's is owned and run by one of the neighborhood gang, Mike, "Mike the Russian" Rust. Originally a department store that went belly-up in the 70's, Mike's dad bought the place and helped Mike build his dream business. Sitting on a hill overlooking the skyscrapers of the city, Mike's is renowned for its food, great view, great dance floor, an incredible sound system, and killer carrot cake. I'd tell you the recipe for the carrot cake but Mike would kill me.

Joey Baggz Gems and Jewels

A custom jewelry shop, it is owned by "Uncle" Joey. A professional gem cutter and master jewelry designer and craftsman, Joey's work has won any number of awards and his shop is recognized as the finest business of its kind on the Southside, and maybe in the entire city. And not only is Joey known for the quality of his work, he famous for explaining it's hidden meanings.

Gino's

Family clothing store owned by Vinnie "Bullets" Baldachino. The store has been in the family since the 1920's, passing from generation to generation. A custom tailor shop, Vince is an excellent tailor himself, although he employs two old world tailors who've worked for Vince and his dad before him, for over thirty years. Everyone knows that if you want to look sharp, Gino's is the place to go.

Bill Morgan Park

A city run park, it is named for one of the city's most illustrious citizens. Having all the amenities of a city park, it is unique in one way. Within the park is a domed indoor stadium. Originally home to the city's baseball team, it was saved when the club moved to its current home, and is now available to the city residents year round. Used by kids, teen, and adult leagues, high schools, and colleges, it hosts all kinds of sporting events, and is one of the most popular municipal parks in all the country.

Copperhead Run

Located in the mountains, just a little over an hour east of the city, Copperhead run is a high mountain freestone stream noted for its abundance of trout. It's a popular destination of a good number of the neighborhood gang who enjoy, not only the fly fishing, but also the view from the various overlooks of the valley below and the skyscrapers of the city, about fifty miles west. Come on up and enjoy the beauties of nature, but when you do, walk heavy on the paths and the rock outcroppings. This stream didn't get its name for nothing.

Interfaith Council Financial Meeting

Okay, you got me ... this is just a euphemism for a floating poker game that wanders from house to house, depending on the previous weeks winner. Occasionally, it occurs in the home of one of the clergymen, because a number of the players are men of the cloth. Now don't go getting a bee in your bonnet. It's a nickel and dime game; winning "five large" is maybe five bucks although generally it's more like fifty cents, and the winner has to host the next game and provide the food and drinks. It's sort of like making a hole in one in golf, winner buys. It's all in good fun, and the guys look forward to it, more for the camaraderie than anything else.

Ladowski's Funeral Home

The local funeral home, Ladowski's is the last gathering place for saying goodbye to an old friend, and bringing a sense of love and community to a family at a sad time. Tasteful and always elegant in a subdued way, the Ladowski brothers bring a sense of joy and cheer to what otherwise, and in other places, is an overly sad and somber event.

The People

Joey

Otherwise known as "Uncle" Joey, Joey's a former golf professional, a lifelong bachelor, and owns maybe the best jewelry shop in the city. An avid sport's fan of all the city's teams, Joey also enjoys golf, fly fishing and is willing to try, at least once anyway, anything else that strikes his fancy. He's a bit of an enigma in a way. As a younger man, he lived a somewhat dissolute life of endless partying and chasing skirts. So much so that he is a perfect example of the law of cause and effect. When he talks about those days, he likes to kid that he should be named, Augustine. And yet, about ten years ago, he had what he likes to call a "Damascus Road Moment" and life changed. Now, of all the neighborhood "gang", Joey's the

quiet sage, the avid observer of all that transpires in his corner of the world. A graduate of St. Ed's, Joey studied business, allowing himself to be exposed to the fine arts offerings while in undergrad. Having extensively studied philosophy, theology, and political science, Joey often has the last answer in some of the discussions among the gang. Exuding a quiet wisdom, he prefers to allow everyone else to offer their thoughts and waits till the discussion is winding down to go to the heart of the issue. He teaches RCIA and leads adult education classes at St. Kate's, and, respected by the clergymen he interacts with in the neighborhood, is often asked to participate in education programs at several of the other churches, providing his viewpoint on any number of issues and topics.

Father Bob Scanlon

Pastor St. Katherine's Catholic Church. Nickname is "Riff" after a character in the stage play, "West Side Story." A gang member when he was a teenager in the 60's, he came to the priesthood after indulging in the sex, drugs, and rock and roll culture of the 60's. He became a priest because, as he is fond of saying, where he grew up the only people who were 'stand up guys' were priests, cops, and school teachers and he hated the thought of teaching school or walking a beat. In his earlier days in New York he was as an advocate for the homeless and the poor and saw the seamier side of law enforcement and the sometimes crooked, graft ridden nature of city government. He asked for and received a transfer from the Diocese of New York and came to the neighborhood over twenty years ago. He enjoys poker, learned to play golf after seminary, and has become an avid 'Boys in Black' fan. Obviously he doesn't have a wife and it's a good thing too because she'd be a sports widow. Through his time as a priest he has become quiet and perceptive in nature. Doesn't consider himself an intellectual, but rather a man with street smarts. Conservative in his views, he's a good listener, not afraid to ask the opinion of his friends in the neighborhood clergy with whom has become close friends. Father Bob sees the good in others, even if they sometimes don't see it themselves, and looks to put good competent people in positions of authority and help them succeed.

Father John O'Malley

Assistant pastor at St. Katherine's. He's the Principle of the grade school, is in charge of the youth ministry and works with teenagers at the church. Enjoys sports and is an avid movie buff. A second career priest, Father John was married for twelve years and lost his wife to a disease about ten years ago. He was very active in Knights of Columbus all through his marriage and it was that affiliation that led to his becoming a priest. Together with the local Bishop, the Knights financially made it possible for him to become a priest. You see, Father John has a seventeen year old son named Matthew and a fifteen year old teenage daughter named Stephanie, so, in addition to the duties of running a number of the parish and school functions, he has the normal problems of any parent. He lives in a home that the church rents for the purpose of giving his kids a semblance of a normal family life. A powerful speaker, he collaborates with

Martin Williams, the pastor at Mt. Nemo Baptist Assembly, himself a dynamic speaker, on sermons and talks for their congregations. His son really likes Doc Roger's oldest daughter, and his daughter is fifteen and a normal teenage girl, so between the two of them, it brings up some humorous situations not normally encountered in a Catholic congregation.

Rabbi Joshua Green

Rabbi at Beth El Congregation. He has black curly hair and dark eyes that sparkle with a constant look of amusement. Liberal in his viewpoint, he does however listen to all sides of an issue before weighing in with his opinion. Very respectful of Christianity, especially Catholicism, Father Bob jokes that he sometimes believes Josh knows New Testament Scripture better than the rest of the gang. Loves the poker games, the Boys in Black, and is an avid reader, consuming anything that sparks his interest. His wife, Rachel, owns an antique shop a couple of doors down from Joey's jewelry shop. Rachel is a devoted mother, but not the quintessential Jewish mom, although occasionally she goes overboard spoiling her kids ... and any other kids in sight. They have two boys, Aaron a senior at West Virginia University studying law, and Seth, a music producer in the city.

Reverend Michael Daniels

Rector at St. Mark's Episcopalian Church, he is nicknamed "the professor" as he is very learned and dignified in his bearing. Works hard with the Interfaith Coalition, giving much of his time and energy to its various endeavors. Gets along very well with all the clergy as he shares the same trait they all do, an abiding respect for the sincerity of the beliefs of others. He does get into some adversarial discussions at times as beliefs do conflict, but always looks for the bridges, and not the walls. Married to Joan, avid gardener, he has a sixteen year old daughter named Jennifer. Hobbies are reading, golfing, baseball, and fly fishing. A graduate of Harvard Divinity School, he looks very hard for the truth in issues and is very adept at deeper theological discussions when it comes to traditional scholarship.

Reverend Paul Jacobsen

Pastor of Southside First Presbyterian Church. Nicknamed "Jake" for obviously reasons. Married to wife Ashley, a lawyer and city councilman. Have two grown sons, Ellis and Daniel and a teenage daughter, Ashley. The sons are husbands and fathers themselves, and work in city government. He's conservative, she's a moderately liberal democrat and they often don't see eye to eye on political issues, though each respects the others position. Ellis is conservative, Daniel is liberal, and Ashley is a handful. Spends a good bit of time commiserating with Father John. Ashley is the free spirit of the group but has wisdom beyond her years.

Reverend John Randall

Pastor of Christ the Redeemer Lutheran Church, John's nickname is "rail bird" as he loves watching horse racing. Doesn't gamble much beyond the two dollar wager on the Triple Crown as he believes it would set a bad example. A football fanatic, he is an avid fan of all the city's sports teams. He loves fishing and prefers bass fishing from a boat to fly fishing with the guys in the mountains, but is always ready to join the gang for a trip up to Copperhead Run. He is the resident hockey expert as he grew up in Canada and is a rabid fan. Also plays the occasional round of golf. Married to Beth who is a teacher in the Southside High School where she teaches math and science. He is occasionally condescending and is very liberal in outlook, especially when it comes to social issues. He often ends up the fall guy in the discussions where the conservative Christian outlook prevails, unless he teams up with Rabbi Josh. Together they can hold their own. However, as he sees the damage the permissive nature of society has allowed over the last couple generations, he has a tendency to waver in his belief in some of his liberal positions, and thus finds himself constantly reevaluating his positions.

Pastor Billy Swanson

Pastor of Liberty Street Assembly of God, his nickname is "Walk off" from his exploits in AAA major league baseball in the "Big Apple's" storied franchise's farm system. A very talented ball player, he almost made it to "the show", but tore up a knee and had to give his dream of playing major league baseball. Billy's single and would love to find a wife and start a family, but he won't date anyone in his congregation. Very committed to his life as a minister, he loves children and often works with Tommy McMichael in coaching pee wee baseball. And he coaches the neighborhood adult ladies team in the city women's softball league too. Enjoys the gang and never misses out on the social get togethers if possible. Active in the charity events of the Interfaith Council, he's calm, likeable, and even handed, he doesn't proselytize but respects people's choices of faith expression and tries very hard to live out the gospel daily.

Reverend Martin Williams

Pastor of the Mt. Nebo Baptist church, Martin is sometimes called "Darth Vader" by his friends due to his deep bass voice and powerful laugh. Dignified, he is reserved in public and around those who don't know him. A powerful speaker, he is noted for his inspiration addresses and often gets together with Father O'Malley to develop and refine their talks. Having a PhD in philosophy and theology, Martin enjoys the intellectual give and take of the clergy meetings. Very interested in both Jewish and Catholic doctrine and tradition, he is known to adapt many Jewish and Catholic positions in his homilies. Loves sports, attends the games with the gang as his time will allow, and is married to Diane. His oldest son, Mark, is a star basketball player at Southside High School and has many scholarship offers. His other three kids, Angela, Monica, and Robert are

good kids and attend St. Katherine's grade school. Pastor Williams and his wife were drawn to the group first to help with the events of the Interfaith Council, but also to influence his kids with the people they can meet through the group.

Samantha Bates

Owens Sam's Bistro. A combination coffee house, bakery, and sandwich shop, Sam is noted for three things; her cinnamon buns, a great cup of coffee, and the most beautiful green eyes you'll ever see. She and her husband Dave opened the bistro about five years ago, but just when they did, she lost him to cancer. She has an adorable seven year old daughter, Emily Ann. and her bistro is the morning and lunch meeting place for her many friends in the neighborhood, especially the clergymen.

“Crazy Pat” Flanagan

The chief at Southside Fire Company 5, Pat is a man's man, very strong in his faith, and very dedicated in defending the things he believes in, particularly God, family, country. Takes his coffee black and his whiskey straight. A type A personality, Pat is very hands on when fighting fires and won't ask his men to do anything he wouldn't do himself. Earned several commendations for bravery, including the city's highest honor for valor, having personally saved over a dozen lives in his twenty odd years in the department. A strong and dominant personality, he rules his house like he rules the firehouse. Married to his childhood sweetheart Sharon, she's a saint for putting up with him. He has three daughters Anna, Amanda, and Marcia. Pat is Tommy McMichael's boss and encourages Tommy in his pursuit of a medical degree. Watching him interact with Tommy, you get the impression that he sometimes considers Tommy the son he never had. Pat is a "player's coach" to use a sports analogy, and he does things by the book when the higher ups are looking, which isn't very often. So, in almost everything he does, his men come before the manual.

Tommy McMichael

Tommy's a young fireman in Company 5. Originally hailing from Colorado, he came to the city to attend the University and is now in med school. Doc Rodgers is his sponsor, having helped him with scholarships and running interference with administration at the University Medical School. Tommy is really attracted to the group for the spiritual values he sees, although he admits that he is a lukewarm believer. For fun, he works on all the council events, especially the semi annual yard sale and kids' carnivals. Between you and me, I think it just as much because Aliana Kossarides works on them too. And he coaches a pee wee baseball team on weekends in the summer. Tall and strong, his nickname is "Mountain" although Sammy Bagels calls him "the Giant Gentile."

Carmine, Vito, and Nunzio Spinelli

Owners of Spinelli's, the best Italian restaurant on the South Side. The two older brothers are big guys with big beer guts while Nunzio is tall and thin and looks a little bit like Frank Sinatra. Their nicknames are 'one', 'two', and 'three', oldest to youngest, Carmine the oldest, Nunzio the youngest. Wives are Marie who is married to Carmine, Angela, married to Vito, and Tiffany, married to Nunzio. Marie and Angela are Italian and can cook with the best of them. Nunzio's wife, Tiffany, on the other hand comes from the Wasp section of the suburbs and can't remember the recipe for toast and ice cubes. But a more loving and dedicated mother you can't find anywhere, and she can tune the engine of a 62 Chevy, do a brake job, and align the front end in an hour. The whole family is big hearted, very generous to their friends and their community, and full of laughs. Between the three of them, they have so many kids we've lost track so we just kid them that their kids are their own class at St. Katherine's.

Vinnie "Bullets" Baldachino.

Goods friend of the Joey, the Spinelli brothers, and the gang who hangs in Samantha's in the mornings. Everyone thinks Vinnie might be a "wise-guy" or a "made man." Vince just smiles and says nothing and since all the guys get a kick out of the reaction of strangers, he really does nothing to dispel the idea. The nickname, though, came from his service in Vietnam as an ordinance officer with an artillery unit in the Marines. His job was to make sure everyone had plenty of bullets. Married to his college sweetheart, Nancy, he owns Gino's, the family's third generation men's clothing store. Has two grown kids and four grandkids.

Mike "Mike the Russian" Rust

Owner of the best nightclub on the Southside, and maybe in the whole city. Married to Marilyn since the week after college graduation, he has four grown kids, two boys and two girls, aged 21 to 29 living in four separate states. Marilyn works part time in the city symphony as head of administration. Her full time job though, at least according to Mike, is shopping.

Nick "the human tarantula" Kossarides

A graduate of St. Ed's along with Sammy "Bagels", "Mike the Russian," "Uncle" Joey, Vinnie "Bullets," and Bobby "Pretzels," Nick is married to his high school sweetheart, Andrea, and has four beautiful children. Aliana, 24, Alyssa, 19, Paul, 16, and Gregory, 12. Andrea makes the greatest Greek pastries on the Southside, something she learned from Nick's mother, and is constantly being urged to open her own bakery. Nick is a first rate finish carpenter, often working with Walt Robinson and Pete Bradkowski. Nick's also great at antique restoration and is often called on to refurbish the interior of many of the older churches

throughout the four state region. A more loving father you'll never meet and is very protective of his children, especially his two girls.

Jack “Gumshoe” Farrell

Another graduate of St. Ed's, he's a college buddy of many of the neighborhood gang, although he was a couple years ahead of them. A Navy Seal during Vietnam, he's now a private detective, hence the nickname. Married, Jack loves his wife, Suzanna, but has a wandering eye though he swears that he has never been unfaithful. He has three daughters, Danielle, Brittany, and Caroline, Jack is really a good husband and father and is often kidded by the guys who know him from his days in college that his three daughters are a 'gift' from God in "honor" of his youthful indiscretions. Had a full head of grey hair at 35. Jack loves to flirt with the ladies but he adores his wife.

Sammy “Bagels” Halperin,

Sammy is another graduate of St. Ed's and likes reveling in the fact that at his time there, he was the only Jewish kid in the school, and found Saturdays, a bit troublesome. And, that he came to greatly respect the Jesuit Fathers, as they showed great respect for his tradition and made sure to provide every opportunity for him to observe the holidays and feasts of the Jewish tradition. His parents have passed on and he is close to his brother David and his wife Judy. Married to Sondra, a local woman he met at Mike's place, Sammy owns a fast food franchise and is quite successful. Committed to his faith, he likes to kid that he is considered the radical in the family because he is a conservative Republican, His brother, David, on the other hand is an uncommitted agnostic who doubts everything. Between he and his brother they five kids, all grown with kids of their own.

Aliana Kossarides

The strikingly beautiful oldest daughter of Nick "the human tarantula", she is 24 and an elementary schoolteacher. Very down to earth for so beautiful a woman she's dated any number of continental, playboy types, but many around the neighborhood thinks she's got a little bit of a thing for Tommy McMichael. I think she is impressed by his dedication to helping others through his work and the fact that he loves children and coaches pee wee baseball. She loves working on the charity events of the Interfaith Council, especially the kids carnivals ... the ones Tommy works on. She plays for Billy Swanson's softball team in the city adult league, being a very good third baseman who doesn't throw like a girl. A devoted Catholic young woman she is comfortable in both the Roman and Greek traditions.

Denise Stewart

Aliana's closest friend from childhood, they went through college together and have shared an apartment since graduating. Denise is different from Aliana in that she seems attracted to "bad boys" and her taste in men is in sharp contrast to her roommate. Makes for some interesting conversations. Currently she is dating a co-worker of Tommy's at Company 5; a fella named Paul. Denise is a buyer for a department store chain and travels extensively in her job, getting to see a little more of the world than just the Southside neighborhood. And from what she says, it makes her appreciate the neighborhood all the more.

Walt "Hammer" Robinson

A very successful home builder, Walt is married to a girl he met at St. Ed's sister school, St. Bridget College, named Cindy. Although a faithful parishioner at St. Kate's, Walt is the consummate businessman, ruthless, often overly materialistic, and lacking a certain degree of charity in his business dealings. Yet in his personal life he is generous to a fault. Cindy is a registered nurse who works part-time in the Medical Center's surgery recovery room and home-schools their five kids, Camryn, Mickey, Jason, Eddie, and Angela.

Norm Rodgers

He's the chief of Thoracic Surgery at the University medical center and Tommy McMichael's mentor, helping him navigate his way through medical school. Most of the guys think he sometimes sees Tommy as the son he never had. His wife Nancy's a stay at home mom who volunteers in a number of different areas of the catholic school system – teachers aid, fundraiser, all around help wherever needed. He's an avid sports fan who loves attending the games with the guys, plays the occasional game of poker, and can be found occasionally at guys movie night. Willing to try anything athletic he's currently taking up fly fishing under the tutelage of Mike Daniels. "Doc" and his wife Mary have three daughters, Christine, Diane, and Angela. They are terrific young ladies, although Diane is slightly handicapped which makes her more determined to excel.

Pete Dawson

A retired firefighter from Company 5, Pete was seriously injured fighting a fire about ten years ago, and is on permanent disability. A widower, Pete has one son, Andy, and is always welcome at the Stationhouse. His son Andy is in his early twenties and has Down Syndrome. Pete, along with Andy, is an avid sports fan of both his Alma Mater, Alabama's Crimson Tide and the 'Boys in Black.' The chief, Pat Flanagan looks out for Pete, and always makes sure he and Andy have tickets to just about any game they want to attend.

Andy Dawson

Pete Dawson's son, Andy is in his early twenties and is afflicted with Down syndrome. His nickname is "Alabama," probably because anytime a team scores a goal, a run, or a touchdown, Andy raises his arms and hollers, "Rooollll Tiiidde." Picked it up from his dad when he was little. That habit is always good for a laugh, especially at the hockey games, and especially when the teams from Canada are in town. Andy's best friend is Tommy McMichael as Tommy has made him an honorary firefighter at Company 5, and generally looks out for Andy whenever they're together. And despite his affliction, Andy sometimes has life figured out better than anyone else.

Nate Karlsen

Married to Ellen, they have one daughter, Megan. He's a private practice attorney, specializing in business law, and Ellen is a social worker in the city. Their daughter, Megan might be the happiest kid I've ever seen; she's a joy, full of life at 12. She loves music, and plays three instruments. First chair, violin in the city's symphony is everyone's guess in fifteen years. A generic protestant, Nate has a curious mind and like so many of the neighborhood gang has respect for all the traditions and can be seen at any of a number of churches on a Sunday (and occasionally the synagogue on Saturday). Enjoys guys movie night and the occasional poker game, he is a regular at the Interfaith Council events.

Darryl "Ace" Martinson

A former Air Force fighter pilot, having flown combat missions in Desert Storm, Darryl now flies corporate jets. His wife, Kristi is a sixth grade English and social studies/civics teacher at St. Katherine's school. They have three teenage sons, Dick, Eddy, and Johnny, known affectionately as the "Dalton Gang" for their tendency to get into innocent but very real teenage troubles. Dick is going to college and majoring in girls, Eddy has decided that he is so cool that he spells his name, E-d, with a hyphen and plays the drums in a rock n roll band he formed. Johnny is the youngest and an avid hockey player whose ambition is to play goalie for the "Boys in Black." There's never a dull moment around the Martinson household.

Bobby Prestelski

Known to the neighborhood as Bobby "Pretzels", he is a sergeant in the city police force. His wife, Linda, makes the best walnut fudge in a five state area. She is a retired social worker and Bobby has less than two years left till he retires from the force. They have one son, Jeff, an attorney out on the West Coast. Both Bobby and Linda are very active in various charitable events and Bobby can be found at the poker games, fishing trips, sporting events, and guys' movie night.

Mr. Orville Krankus

Former Army colonel, tall, proud bearing, agnostic, who lost his wife several years ago. He lives next door to the elementary school at St. Katherine's. Generally antagonistic toward religion in general, he will occasionally say or do something extremely Christian and actually says things that make the clergymen think and reflect. He acts as a mirror for many, although not necessarily always a flattering one. He is kind to children in his own way, and they call him "the colonel." Doesn't let children in his yard, never decorates for Christmas, or party on New Year's Eve, yet gives out the best Halloween candy, and generously tips the paperboy. An enigma and a conundrum, he is the dark and sometimes light side of all of us ... a Jekyll and Hyde character. He has no children, donates to causes but doesn't make the people too happy that he does. Can be very unfeeling, and very generous. Enjoys the activities of the neighboring Catholic Church and is friendly with both the priests there and tolerates the children at the adjacent Church grade school, although the baseballs and soccer balls that land in his prized garden are sometimes a source of friction.

John Morton

A retired high school principal, John is a widower who lost his wife Alice a little while ago. A quiet man, John is a scholar and has the ability to speak very knowledgeably on a wide variety of subjects. A welcome guest at all the neighborhood functions, John enjoys the activities of the guys, particularly the "financial meetings" and "movie night." To fill his time, he substitute teaches at the city schools, but gravitates to teaching on a part time basis at St. Katherine's elementary. He professes to enjoy the atmosphere of the private school, even though the money is a lot less. Still trying to come to terms with his late wife's passing, he misses her terribly and is still having trouble understanding why she passed away so young. Active in John Randall's congregation, he is a quiet and welcome presence at all the neighborhood gatherings.

Don and Ron Johnson

Don and Ron Johnson, run a bar and nightclub in the South Side named Knuckles a couple of doors down from Spinellis. It's the best sports bar in the city, and is famous for its karaoke nights. Known for the knuckle sandwich made of ham, crab salad, bacon, mozzarella and a special sauce, and grilled on homemade crusty roll, it's reputed to be the best sandwich on the South side. Kind of non-practicing generic Protestants, neither of the guys are very observant though the Pastor Danielson is determined to keep them in the fold. Twins, they are in their early thirties, friends with Mike the Russian's oldest son, Bobby, and are unmarried and looking, which is strange because of all the young women they meet coming into their bar. A couple of playboys, both are very good looking and constantly buzzing from "flower to flower" with the idea that one day they can just pick one and settle down. Let's just say they have the single lifestyle down pat.

Jerry “fog” Gordon.

Jerry's wife's name is Holly and they have no children "Fog" is one of Joey's closest friend from college. Both were tortured as freshman and have great memories which they often share when they get together. And that's good for a dozen laughs at least. He's an executive with a large computer software company and Holly is an assistant editor for the city's evening newspaper. He's a lifelong Catholic and her father is a strict Baptist minister, and it causes some tension in the marriage. Her father is very old school in his prejudice against faith traditions other than his own and believes it is his mission to convert anyone who doesn't agree with him. And that starts with Jerry. Unfortunately for Fog, daddy-in-law lives close by and meddles a little too much.

Judge Richard Zaleski,

Of Polish ancestry, Judge "Z" is a native of the area, having grown up in a little town about an hour north of the city. Married to Martina he has two grown kids who work in the city. A judge in Family Court in the city he is witness to all the trauma that the destruction of the family has wreaked on society and is very antagonistic to the mentality of the last two generations; often railing at the damage it has caused. He admits privately that it affects his decision when handing down rulings. Member of the Billy Swanson's Liberty Street Assembly of God, he is very open minded about the tenets of all the Judeo Christian traditions and works to find the truth in any position. A very welcome addition to the various functions of the Interfaith Council, he is often sought out for his expertise.

Mark Jenkins

A former assistant commissioner of Revenue for the city, Mark is married to his college sweetheart, Mary. They have a married daughter who has a PhD in neurobiology, and a son who can make computers stand up and whistle Dixie. When asked about his kids, he and Mary laugh because both are simply high school graduates, and he admits even that was a struggle. She's a real estate agent and a good one. They are great examples of people who quietly raised their kids and work hard, believing in themselves, and pulling themselves up by their bootstraps. He's a quiet strong father and husband who is the head of the household, but defers to his wife in most matters of hearth and home. As the head of the household, his decision on matters is final and that is fine with Mary as he doesn't use the veto power only when he strongly feels one way. Wife totally supports him and his position as husband. They have a good, strong, traditional, and happy marriage. Mary's passion is shopping at Victoria's secrets, and Mark, often with a sly smile, complains that he doesn't get enough sleep. Enjoys the occasional poker game and movie night with the guys, and his indulgence in those activities gives Mary, and the other wives, a reason to go shopping. Where? ... I'll let you guess.

Dan Gregory

An attorney and former state's Attorney General, he has one grown son and one grown daughter living in other states. His wife Sally is a hospital volunteer, and their marriage is on the rocks. She caught him having an affair with a younger woman, a junior attorney at the firm and is considering filing for divorce. The weight of the marital problems colors Dan's entire outlook and he has turned back to his faith in an effort to try to find some answers.

Lech "Stasch" Woldowski

Polish, Lech is a steelworker and a labor union official, His wife, Anna is a teacher at St. Peter's Catholic High School on the North side of the city. The family has very old world sensibilities and he and Anna have five kids; Michael, Martin, Teresa, Mary, and Peter, all very quiet and obedient, and the pride of their parents. The oldest two boys attend St. Peter's and are star football players with numerous scholarship offers. The family can be counted on the support the Interfaith Council's events, working with Hammer and the guys constructing the booths and other physical facilities needed.

Ben Foster

Single, Ben's a lifelong bachelor who owns what people used to call a "fix-it" shop. If it has a motor, be it gas or electric, Ben can fix it. He's in his mid thirties, struggles with his weight and has a mild case of diabetes. A workaholic, he spends all day working, never getting proper rest or exercise. Generous to a fault, Ben sometime can be a little too intense, and is given to taking off on a rant when something gets under his skin, which is fairly often. Don't even get his started on the current political situation in Washington. Ben's got a great sense of humor though, to counterbalance his outlook on things. Yesterday morning I walked into his shop and was greeted by Ben's revelation that "my computer beat me at chess last night. Five minutes later it lost to me at kickboxing." It brought a chuckle to my lips. Ben's an observant Catholic who loves his religion, hates the effects of permissive mentality on society, and rails against it on more than a couple of occasions. Along with Joey, he is on the RCIA team at St. Kates.

Rick Masters

Rick is an executive with a specialty steel manufacturer and his wife Danielle is a housewife and an avid volunteer for the Interfaith council's charity events. A staunch agnostic, he was baptized and raised Catholic as a boy, and she has returned to the practice of her faith, having been involved with the various clergymen in her charitable undertakings. They have one son, Jimmy who is contemplating the ministry, though Rick can't figure out where that came from as Danielle was never really observant when Jimmy was growing up, and Rick

discouraged any religious observation. Rick is a very generous man, though, and as Pastor Randall says he's the most Christian agnostic he's ever met.

Chad "floater" Gibbons

Married to his high school sweetheart Sandra, Chad is head of local stock brokerage firm and a committed capitalist and anti government and anti tax movement activist. Thus he gets into great arguments with Stash and some of the gang who are more "liberal" in their views. Sandra is a pediatrician who works primarily with poor children in the Southside's Free Clinic, sponsored in part by the Interfaith Council and the University Medical Center. They have two grown sons who are business professionals. Chad is also a full time college football referee he love the city's sports teams and has season tickets to everything in town. Like the gang says, if you need a ticket to a game, see Chad.

Michael Birnbaum

A rabbi at the conservative Synagogue in the heart of the downtown, he is married to Miriam, an interior decorator. They have three grown kids who have moved away. There is a sadness in family as daughter is marrying outside the Jewish faith, and one son is a committed atheist. They are greatly distressed at the loss of faith of the kids and occasionally gets together with the clergymen to find some perspective on family matters. Rabbi Birnbaum, like Rabbi Green, sees the good in Christianity but remains an observant Jews. Together, they provide much insight for the Christian clergymen.

Henri Belliveau

Married to Angela, they are displaced Cajuns from New Orleans who own a seafood restaurant named Celestine's down the street from Mike's Place. Henri named it for his oldest daughter. Henri's brother in law, John Pierre Gautreaux and his wife Bernadette own a Cajun restaurant on the north side of the city. Between the two of them they have five kids. The Council Mardi Gras dance is one of the great parties of the year and Henri and John Pierre together with their wives are the engine behind it.

Dominick Ferelli

Dom, as he's know to the neighborhood gang, is a Detective First Grade in the homicide division of the state police department. He and his wife, Elaine have no kids, and both are lapsed Catholics although Dom says it isn't for any other reason than he's just worn down by the daily grind of the job. Elaine is ten years younger than Dom, though she confides to her friends that she feels then years older than him just from worrying about him. Dom loves the various events of the Interfaith Council and he and Elaine work on as many of them as they

can. He enjoys fishing and is learning to take up fly fishing, finding the peace of the mountains up at Copperhead Run a welcome relief from the daily grind.

Jonathan and Arthur

Two members of Rev. Swanson's Assembly of God, they are familiar with many, if not most, of the people in the Southside neighbor for their evangelizing efforts. Basically the two of them are good people who sometimes go overboard in being overly judgmental of others. According to Billy Swanson, they attend various churches and are the self appointed watchdogs of Pentecostal orthodoxy.

Dave Robertson

Married for over forty years to his childhood sweetheart, Michelle, Dave is a permanent lay deacon at St. Katherine's. A lovable grandfather type, he's completely happy as a deacon being despite being overwhelmed with the tasks of ministry and finds the job far more fulfilling than when he worked for the state department of highways as a regional supervisor. A member of the local Knights of Columbus chapter, he is very involved in charity work. Michelle has a tolerance limit and every once in a while she has to drag him away from his work, but she understands how important it is to both of them. She sometimes questions the doctrine of male only priesthood. They have one grown son who is married and has abandoned his faith and constantly questions his father and his beliefs.

Matt Johnson

A professor of chemistry at the City University, is married to his second wife, Amanda who is a fervent but not overbearing member of Pastor Swanson's Baptist church. An ardent atheist he questions everything about religious belief, yet enjoys the company of the gang, and the intellectual give and take. He met the gang through neighborhood charity work with the catholic schools. He and his wife believe in the discipline and atmosphere found in both the grade school at St. Kate's and St. Peters Catholic High School where his oldest son is a student. A generous man, his very kind to everyone and according to Father Bob, is the most Christian atheist he's ever known. He and Rick Masters enjoy getting into the debate about religion with the clergymen, but the banter is always respectful, and much of the time, funny.

Carolyn Andrews

Divorced mother of three children Bobby age 11, Teddy age 9, and Cindy age 6. The guys look out for the boys, taking them to ball games, fishing, and other things, and little Cindy is best friends with Samantha Bates' little girl Emily Ann. She is very appreciative of that and loves the group. Her husband just walked away from the marriage as he couldn't hack the pressure and responsibility. They lived together for six years and he married her more out of obligation than true

love. Cindy has mild form of MS and she just gets by on sporadic support and whatever she can throw together part time. Works in both Joeys shop and the Rabbi's Green's wife Rachel's antique store part time. A kind woman, she lacks self-esteem and causes her problems in relating to others. Loves her children more than anything and has great faith but the grind wears her down. Doesn't complain much, and is looked out for by most of the people in the neighborhood, as the neighborhood loves her and her kids and rallies around them.

Paul Sommers

Owns a small insurance agency and has three teenage sons. His wife divorced him because he had an affair, but he got custody of his sons because he had the better financial situation. Caught between trying to get his wife back as he still loves her, and moving on. Still not sure what direction he wants to go. A member of Paul Jacobson's congregation, Paul occasionally works on the Council events when he can find the time, and is a sometimes card player when the wife has the boys.

Tom Bennett

Widower and semi-retired bench jeweler, he works for Joey on a part time basis doing general repair work. His wife Allison passed away from breast cancer three years ago and he never remarried. Loved his wife and constantly offers very deep and faith filled observations about the nature of marriage. Tom volunteers his time to work on marriage preparation team at St. Katherine's and gives of his time to the other ministers who want him to talk to their parishioners preparing for marriage. He'd give anything for just one more day with her. Play Larry Graham's "*One in a Million*" and you'll see him wipe away a tear.

Fay Kramer

President of local chapter of NOW, she is a corporate executive with the regional Power Company, and divorced. Highly critical of paternal nature of Catholicism and religion in general she has become increasingly pro abortion, pro gay marriage, and liberal in a way that is abrasive. Has a son and a daughter from her previous marriage, shares custody with her ex, although he seems to spend more time with them than she does. Seems they get in the way of her work. She is bitter about men, and as she has gotten older, she has become more of a radical feminist in her outlook on life, which most likely contributed to the divorce. Fay is a strikingly attractive woman who carries herself well and while she dates men, she can't make anything stick. She was raised Catholic but became very active in the women's movement in college and walked away from her faith. She does have a social conscience though, and works with the Interfaith Council to help raise money for the health care effort and other charitable functions. Watching her work with the others and interact with

the wives of the guys, you wonder if, although ostensibly she loathes organized religion, she longs for something to connect to.

Mickey Davidson

Married and divorced three times, he owns a string of car dealerships, belongs to finest country club and is very self-centered, narcissistic, and yet can be very generous to others, especially people in true need. Currently working on wife # 4, he has no children and freely admits he doesn't want any. Says raising kids gets in the way of business. Does business skirting conventional business ethics although he does obey the law, and looks down on everyone he doesn't consider his equal, at least in the business world. Has no use for organized religion, and is, by his own words, a "wavering" atheist. He finds himself drawn to the group because of the camaraderie, but resists changing his ways. The gang tolerates him because he can be generous at times and occasionally he gives a clue that all isn't well inside his little world, and maybe there is hope that he might see the light. At present though, Mickey's a good example of the statement, 'what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and lose his soul?'

Bill Andrews

He's a computer engineer and is married to his college sweetheart, Laura, a school psychologist in the local public school system. He's moderately conservative and she's a card carrying liberal. They have no children as, while neither would admit to it, they had no time for kids as they would have gotten in the way of their careers. At least, that's not hard to infer from her many statements on the traditional family. Neither has any deep seated religious convictions and attend several of the protestant churches whenever it strikes their fancy. She does some consulting work for private schools in her free time and that's how she relates to the neighborhood gang. A perceptive woman, she is gradually becoming more conflicted with the direction education and society itself is headed, and often gets into debates with the more conservative member of the neighborhood gang. From the questions she asks and the positions she takes, it sounds like she isn't so much defending her views as she is wondering about the validity and the value of them. Her generally liberal views about how to raise kids, conflicts with many of the rest of the guys' wives, and their discussions can be agitated and sometimes heated.

Pete Bradkowski

Married to Ann, they have four kids age 11 to 23, Dick age 11, Andrea age 14, Alicia age 16, and Allen age 23. Pete's an outstanding electrician who is an independent contractor and does a lot of work for the various churches. Often works with Walt Robinson and Nick Kossarides on various projects. Loves the events of the Interfaith Council, and is the first one to offer his talents in any way needed. Good honest businessman who loves his religion, family, and country.

Conservative and his wife is a moderate who isn't in touch with the reality of the faults of liberalism. Loves poker, the Boys in Black, and bass fishing. Oldest son Allen is mentally retarded and lives in a home for young adults. Doing fabulously and the younger kids love and protect their older brother.

Danny Spielman

Divorced father of two who is an area manager for the state dept of highways. Has one son in the military and one who is a high school senior who wants to join the Marines. Danny is a former marine himself who doesn't question the need for the military, but doesn't like the current situation. Worries constantly about his oldest son Josh who is an Army Ranger stationed in a hot zone.

“Southbound Willie”

A nickname sometimes used for both Father Bill and Pastor Billy Swanson. Both say they want to retire to the Florida Keys, lay back on the beach, get a tan, and listen to Jimmy Buffet songs."