

## **Sledding at the Bowl**

**By Bill Woolf**

I first met Pete Scheiner in 1938 – we were 3 years old. I had just moved into 3917 45<sup>th</sup> Street and Pete lived next door at 3919. Our parents had been friends for many years before that. Up the block at 3949 45<sup>th</sup> Street lived Danny DeLeon, grandson of another Daniel DeLeon – the founder of the Socialist labor Party of America, but that’s another story. Danny was about a year older than Pete and me.

The 3900 block on 45<sup>th</sup> Street was between Skillman Avenue and 39<sup>th</sup> Avenue. After 39<sup>th</sup> Avenue came the Long Island Railroad and between 48<sup>th</sup> Street and Queens Plaza was the Sunnyside Railroad Yard – the largest passenger yard in the east. For Danny, Pete and me, the Sunnyside Railroad Yard was our playground. Once when I questioned my father why I didn’t have an electric train set like other boys, he told me that I had the best train set one could have – right down the end of the block.

It was during the war years of the 40s. In winter, we would take our “Flexible Flyer” sleds through a hole in the fence and make our way through the rail yards to a huge asphalt “bowl”. The bowl was surrounded by broken fences and twisted wire. But once inside and with a decent snowpack, the bowl made for an exciting afternoon of tobogganing.

As the war progressed, our bowl was replaced by an Army postal center and in later years by a shopping center. It wasn’t until many years later that we learned what the bowl really was. In fact, it was featured in a movie: Cinderella Man. It had been a huge boxing arena called Madison Square Garden Bowl. Unfortunately, no boxing champion was ever able to successfully defend his championship at the arena. Soon people felt that the arena was “jinxed” and boxers refused to fight there. And so they tore it down. And so, instead of boxing, it became our home for “winter sports”.