WHERE'S THE WEST END? DON'T ASK

By Jack Thomas

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At Davio's on Newbury Street the other night, a middle-aged man arrived for dinner. "You look frozen," said his son. "I just walked over from the West End." There was a pause. "Where's the West End?"

Well it's a reference that distinguishes older Bostonians. People rarely speak of the West End any more, but once upon a time, it was a big, bustling neighborhood that once was in brick and mortar a gateway to North End, thought it was a place where people who lived in the 60's, Boston got into urban renewal, and within months, the West End was razed. Today, it's Charles River Park, a complex of towers with 2,200 apartments, offices, a movie theatre, stores, taverns. 320.

The Boston Redevelopment Authority, Simonian has seen it all. At a meeting with the Mayor's Board, Real Estate, and Ray's, the former West Enders could gather and generally kabitz about the old days.

Butts his argument that it was elimination of the West End that triggered a generation of development that redesigns Boston for the next century.

After more than 80 years at the Boston Redevelopment Authority, Simonian has seen a lot, not all of it. He begins lunch with whiskey and water and a warning. "You're not going to be able to print everything I say" And he was right, for his conversation was flavored with biting slander and spicy expletives.

"People forget," said Simonian, sketching the Charles River, "that the neighborhood was knocked down, an aerial photograph from 1960 shows a clear path from the Museum of Science to Bowdoin Square. Part of the site was taken up by Charles River Park, the luxury apartment complex you see from Storrow Drive behind the signs that read, "If you lived there, you'd be homeless now."

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The Federal Government admits what it did in the West End was illegal and immoral and used the West End as an example of how not to conduct Urban Renewal but just as the Jackels have no concern about the dead animal they killed, Rappaport and the City of Boston have no concern about what is left of the West End except making money. The city could make amends by turning part of the land over for a West End center where former West Enders could gather and generally kabitz about the old days.

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