



John Marius Sherin
ROBS History Project
October 3, 2002 78

Right from day one following initial retirees Florence Koehler and David Martz, I'd been hosting ROBS History Project interviews. Consequently, when invited I readily agreed to step aside and give Karen Storjohann a chance to host and to interview me. I wanted to experience what any one of the seventy-seven previous subjects may have felt as they told their stories. Right away I discovered that my 'butterflies' did disappear the instant I opened my mouth.

"My name is John Marius Sherin. I was born August 11, 1937 in Victory Memorial Hospital on Fort Hamilton Parkway in the Bay Ridge Section of Brooklyn. The Parkway is also known as 7th Avenue. I remember it as the approach to Fort Hamilton, a very active military base during World War II and in the years following. Adjacent to an eighteen green golf course known as the Dyker Beach Golf Club it all felt familiar when I returned recently feeling comfortable to be back".

My mother often related the story of how I entered the world on a stormy summer night at the end of a punishing heat wave in the years before air conditioning became the new norm. The thunder storm that arrived on the night of my birth, broke the heat and ushered me into a turbulent pre-war world as history was being written.

"I was named John Marius, a name found on both sides of the family. A paternal Irish uncle Justin Marius carried it as did my mother's father, Hans Christian Marius Andersen, an immigrant of

Danish origin who arrived here in the first decade of the last century (1905) and was the primary reason my mother chose the name”.

I grew up feeling close to that Grandfather. I was proud of my name because of him. I have great memories of Grandpa and Nana from the time I was little. I can almost hear them reading to each other from their Danish family bible as I lay in bed in the upstairs bedroom as they ended their day in the living room of their summer home in Connecticut once other family members had retired. I can remember sitting on Grandpa’s lap when I was even younger, and examining his large, strong hands. Grandpa’s spirit was strong but gentle like the loving hand of God fashioning even the smallest of nature’s gifts to his children. *As a very young child I loved my name. I would use it in full on tests and important papers whenever asked. When I was in college I researched Marius only to discover - ‘Marius the Epicurean’ a Roman Emperor. I found Marius the Centurion, who’d been ordered by a superior officer to pierce the side of Christ through the heart with his lance to insure Christ’s death prior to his being removed from the cross. I felt power in my name. While its root was in Mary the mother of God by way of Marian to Marius, I was never embarrassed by it. Unlike the Johnny Cash lyric from ‘A Girl Named Sue’ I loved talking about it at every opportunity I got.*

We lived in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn during my earliest years. It was there that most of our relatives and closest first cousins lived.

Initially, we lived at 529-79th Street off Seventh Ave, temporarily living with maternal grandparents at 656 - 77th St. between 6th and 7th Avenues. Our first move out of the city was to Floral Park in Nassau County, Long Island on the outskirts of NYC. In 1948 my folks could finally afford to purchase their first pre-owned home in the suburbs for which they paid seven thousand dollars. We also lived on 86th street between 14th and 15th Avenues in 1951 after returning to Brooklyn for three years prior to them buying their Hicksville house in 1954 in the Town of Oyster Bay, Nassau County, where we remained until my brother Mike, sister Betty Ann and I each married during the next decade. After that we moved out and away from our parents’ home and began building and supporting our own individual families.

It was at about that time that Robert Moses and the powers that be in New York City and Washington DC, were investing in infrastructure and bridge approaches like those to the Verrazano Bridge and major arteries like the Belt Parkway in Brooklyn and Staten Island Expressway. My Grandparents' home on 77th street was the last structure left standing on the block. All others were targets of eminent domain and razed to clear access to the bridge. Our early memories remained tied up in that chunk of brownstone when Nana released it to the market for \$60,000 in the sixties. Grandpa didn't live to see it. He died before the home he bought for his family was sold.

Christian Marius Andersen was born in Jutland, Denmark on April 13, 1884. He was employed at the age of 18 years in a woodworking factory and apprenticed as a carpenter and cabinet maker before coming to America. He arrived in New York City through Castle Garden before Ellis Island was our Port of Entry.

He had all of five pounds Sterling to his person assuring customs he would not pose a financial burden to the good people of New York. Traveling steerage he had had the good luck to meet an acquaintance on board travelling First Class to N.Y. and had extended him an opportunity to share in his considerably more comfortable accommodations for the balance of their crossing.

My Grandmother, Jorgine (Gina) Jensen arrived in N.Y from Denmark soon thereafter as a single young woman. She sought and secured employment as a domestic and Nanny to a mid western family summering in Sea Cliff, Long Island. They were heirs to the Carson Pirie Scott Department Store in Chicago, the façade of which had been famously influenced by the movement known as Art Nouveau and designed by the world famous 20th-century American architect Louis Sullivan.

Gina and Marius met after becoming members of the Danish Lutheran Church on 9th Street in Brooklyn. There they were married, and as his business grew in a modest factory behind the alley and residential homes in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, Marius

Andersen Stair Builders Corp. soon employed a cadre of dedicated employees including foreman and future son-in-law Halvor Jensen, an uncle to be, who married my mother's sister Jean (Jorgine) and was a member of a carpenters union. They had three children, Allen, Paul and Jean. They were first cousins, and we were close. As Grandpa's business grew, so did his own offspring of three boys, and five girls. In time he was blessed with sixteen grandchildren. His reputation as successful entrepreneur earned him the exaggerated publicity in the Brooklyn Daily Eagle as the "*Millionaire Dane of Brooklyn*". While headlines of the day followed the story of the Lindberg baby's kidnapping, my grandmother was terrified of losing my mother, then her youngest, to copycat kidnapers in search of a handsome ransom from an easy mark.

Many were the happy hours I spent as a boy in "*the shop*" where I was given busywork sorting cuttings and scraps of waste pieces of wood, from white oak, red oak, pin oak, birch, white pine, knotty pine, walnut, black walnut, mahogany, poplar, ebony, and rosewood as I learned to identify and separate the different categories of lumber.

Sawdust was everywhere. I came to love the aroma and texture of wood. Uncle Hal and my father taught me to identify trees that grew on Nana and Grandpa's property in Connecticut, and I felt pain of loss when a hurricane claimed any of them during countless storms experienced over decades of visiting Grandparents in their summer place beginning in 1938.

Marius had been honored by the King of Denmark during the 1920's and knighted for his dedication to easing the plight of Danish Sailors and immigrants to New York from Denmark during a time when their numbers were great. He was proud until his death of the honor bestowed upon him. Tradition dictated the sash, medal and scroll be returned to the Crown upon the occasion of his death.

My sister Elizabeth (Betty) Anne was born four years after me on Dec. 27,1941, and my brother Michael Joseph followed, rounding our family after the War when he arrived April 29,1945.

I remember the day when something traumatic happened to my little sister when we were living above the Nelson's on 79th Street. A Hook and Ladder Company were housed further up the block on the same side of the street. My father was a NYC Fireman then so there was always great excitement in our home when we kids heard the equipment racing down the street in response to an alarm with bells ringing, whistles and sirens screaming as it sped past our address. My sister and I would race to see who could be first to reach the front windows and the better perch to observe apparatus as to our delight it sped past. Betty Anne had the unfortunate habit of holding her tongue between her teeth as she ran - everywhere. On this occasion running at full tilt she tripped and went down on her chin with the predictable result. She almost severed her tongue which was left hanging by a thread amidst screams and blood everywhere, and my hysterical mother who with the help of Mrs. Nelson "Tanta", our landlady, called a doctor she knew who fortuitously was also a surgeon and available. He arrived in minutes, and with all hands on deck the grown-ups carried a hysterical child to the kitchen table whereupon he sutured her tongue without anesthesia saving her life and preventing further loss of blood.

Our family also consisted in time of a younger brother Michael known then affectionately as '*Baby Michael*' distinguishing him from my dad, the man of the house. My brother became an excellent student in high school and college before matriculating from Iona with an Accounting Degree, to join the U.S. Army. Later in life he co-founded and became Chairman of the Board of the Garden City Group or G.C.C., a financial services corporation located in a Melville quad and eventually purchased by Crawford & Company from Atlanta Georgia. Mike continued with Crawford until his retirement.

At the time of my interview Betty Anne was married to Ron Trapani and was the mother of seven grown daughters. They were living on the Denver, Colorado outskirts. Given the many moves the family had made from Hicksville L.I. to Chagrin Falls Ohio, then to Minnesota before settling in Colorado in the suburbs of Denver, the

girls were spread out and living from east to west across the country.

When we were young, we saw ourselves as an extended loving family who enjoyed our close proximity and frequent contact. Living in Bay Ridge we were within walking distance of the homes and families of most first cousins – but not all.

One branch of the family lived in Point O Woods, South Lyme, Connecticut. My uncle Harold was an Engineer and Officer with the U.S. Coastguard assigned to teach engineering at the Submarine Base in Groton Ct. Prior to their relocation to South Lyme, they lived in Brooklyn, and he was assigned to the Brooklyn Navy Yard throughout WWII. They lived near Owls Heads Park. We visited them and our cousins David, Christopher (Kit) and Mark, who we loved dearly, and with whom we celebrated birthdays. Aunt Elsa was of German extraction. She was a bright woman who worked in Public Education as a Secretary to a Middle School Principal in East Lyme.

Uncle Eric and Aunt Evelyn moved to Bradenton, Florida where their two children Steven and Suzann grew up. Aunt Evelyn called Nana every Christmas Eve to wish her and the family a Merry Christmas and to tell us how much she missed us all.

Where possible we visited cousins regularly and stayed in touch with friends of our generation back when mom could walk with us behind the stroller or take a trolley. Our most favorite family holiday was Christmas Eve. It was more exciting by far than Christmas Day. The night before Christmas was when we celebrated by sharing our grandmother's home cooked fresh ham or turkey. We Catholics among our Protestant majority grudgingly gave-up meat back in the days of required abstinence. Aunt Isobel and Uncle Lester McGowan family would normally arrive late having enjoyed their own celebratory dinner of fish and all the trimmings with Uncle Lester's family of generations of NYPD public servants. Their children were Lester, Barbara and Patricia. We lived with them in Brooklyn on 86th Street, for over a year.

Meanwhile mom and the majority of her sisters and their mother prepared and served our dinner after my Grandpa said grace before meals and arranged Nana's dinner on her plate with the hand of an artist, as if it was a sculptured creation to be appreciated for its aesthetic appeal rather than as a meal to be consumed before it cooled. Our dessert was a traditional warm dish of Danish rice pudding with a concealed almond in it sprinkled with cinnamon to assure the recipient receipt of a coveted token surprise reward. Once, the table was cleared and dishes washed, members of the family assembled in the parlor where Grandpa read the Christmas Story aloud from the Gospel of Saint Luke, and Nana and Grandpa with all their children, aunts and uncles who were present sang first in Danish, a few Hymns from the Lutheran church to which they belonged.

Finally, on this day we had looked forward to all year, the family joined voices in singing "Oh Come All Ye Faithful", "Oh, Little Town of Bethlehem", "Hark, the Harold Angels Sing", "Silent Night and whatever else Nana wished to hear before signaling Grandpa to take his seat cross legged on the floor in front of the tree. There he was handed gifts, one at a time, some wrapped with ribbon from the pile of lovingly prepared gifts before him. His helpers' task often fell to the youngest of our generations who had joined him to assist passing to him each gift as he called the name aloud. Santa's helper always persevered until the room was ankle deep in large scraps of torn, crumpled wrappings and gifts large and small, once under the tree had all been distributed among kids and parents alike.

We eventually did move from Bay Ridge to the suburbs once my parents had saved to pay for the move and cover a down payment. Dad was a New York City Fireman with Engine Company 282 in Sunset Park. The policy required that he live within City limits. Floral Park was on the boundary of Queens and Nassau. He learned that a move was permissible given recent changes in the laws interpretation in the late 1940's. It was realized that if New York City ever became the target of a nuclear attack every Fireman within the city limits would be incinerated. A better idea was to have some of them living outside the city. Thus it was that mom

and dad were able to purchase their first house with basement on a modest plot of land in Floral Park in 1948 for \$7,000.

With this began the next chapter in our lives. My father hired a moving company consisting of a man, a truck, and helper. I remember how hard both men worked moving everything from Brooklyn to 57 DePan Avenue, a block from Jericho Turnpike and short walk from the Schenk Bus Company Depot on the Floral Park, New Hyde Park border.

There in front of the house I sat with my brother and sister waiting as the moving van pulled up and parked. The cab of the truck held a boy close to me in age, his father and helper. This was the first and only black boy I had ever met face to face. We chatted, exchanged names and immediately felt comfortable accepting my mother's invitation to come in and have lunch together. He asked his father for permission first, and we sat somewhere out of everybody's way. Mom had prepared sandwiches and iced tea for us. We were out of the way of the men working. We talked kids talk until they finished. It wasn't long before they had packed up their gear, and as quickly as they'd arrived got back into the truck and left.

What I remember most about that day was the boy I met waving to me from the passenger side window of the truck as it pulled slowly away from the house. The loss I felt was palpable; it was the kind of regret I'd yet to experience of finding something important only to lose it. I met someone I didn't know and felt immediately connected in a strange way to a boy my own age who I might otherwise have known as a *'friend.'* I knew it would very likely be the last time we'd ever set eyes on one another, and as the moving van turned the corner on Jericho Turnpike to head west in the direction of New York, I thought of him as I did many other times over the years that followed. My decision to teach in Brentwood was not unconnected to that life altering chance encounter made so very early in my life. What I thought was an end after all had really provided a kind of beginning to a story I was yet to live in real life.

My parents' first home was where we lived when I took a paying job earning fifty cents a day at a produce market bagging potatoes in five pound brown sacks for the elderly Italian gentleman who hired me. He would also give me a take home peck of various vegetables likely nearing the end of shelf life. He probably understood I was trying to contribute what I could at home.

We had a coal furnace in that house and a storage bin in the basement with a chute from a basement window that fed the coal bin. My parents would buy bituminous coal, because it was affordable, though it was consumed more quickly than anthracite, which burned hotter and lasted longer. I would occasionally pull my wagon to Jericho Turnpike where I'd load it up with wood scraps I was free to take from a cabinet maker's shop to burn in the home fire to make hot water for my mother when coal ran out. I would ride my Schwinn, a gift from dad, to the Long Island Railroad, Floral Park station siding where I'd help myself to unclaimed green lumber of eight-foot lengths that had been used in freight cars as dunnage and discarded. I'd drag one piece home at a time where it would either be used to construct something once my father had removed the nails, with great difficulty from the unseasoned lumber, or cut it up to be eventually burned to fuel the furnace.

I also took work from Mr. Land who owned 'Homecraft', a refrigerator and stove appliance business and showroom on Tulip Avenue in Floral Park. He lived out east on New Hyde Park Road in a fashionable home set back from the main road where he'd have me cut his grass with his conventional lawn mower. It was a large piece of property with an oversized vegetable garden desperately in need of weeding. I recall a lot of asparagus there. When I wasn't manicuring his lawn I was hired to sweep the rubber runners that stretched through the showroom in his place of business or clean two lavatories in the basement. One time after disinfecting the toilets I remember thinking my career trajectory "*can only get better than this.*" I was twelve or thirteen at the time.

Situated outside and behind the showroom was an enclosed parcel of fenced property that consisted of the company's inventory of prefabricated aluminum Van-Packer chimneys stacked in

corrugated cardboard containers and exposed to seasonal elements. I couldn't imagine how an owner could allow what was happening by ignoring removal of all the waste once a product was removed, installed and protective materials permitted to accumulate.

Our years in Floral Park also witnessed another chapter in my work history. It had become habitual for me over the years to look to my own family history for traits of inherited abilities or inborn talents to explain why I saw patterns of rewarded behavior reappearing in generations of my predecessors. Music ran in the family, as did teaching, writing, poetry, individuality and risk-taking.

I considered myself a part of a family of idiosyncratic thinkers and doers. Father Con, my uncle, a younger brother to my father, was in his prime a beloved local Roman Catholic parish priest in Kilkenny, Ireland. He was also a pianist and accomplished organist either gifted or cursed with perfect pitch and a passion for rebuilding antique church organs in various stages of dry rot all over his country. He was appointed to be Director of Sacred Music for the Diocese of Ossory and was renowned for the annual operas he produced as part of Waterford's ongoing music festivals.

Another female cousin of my father had served in the previous generation as an organist at St Patrick's Cathedral in New York. My dad taught himself to play piano by ear, and considering his lack of formal training, he was good. There were other examples of talented family members. Another first cousin of my father was Justin O'Brian, whose art is displayed in the Vatican and was celebrated when his sacred subject matter oils were permanently displayed in Australia's Brisbane National Gallery.

I was grateful for my own musical proclivities as a pre-teen when I would sit at my grandmother's upright Steinway grand player piano in her Brooklyn living room, and using both hands even at the age of five or six, emulated J.S. Bach by playing octaves. When we lived in Floral Park, with savings I bought a harmonica and learned to play it. I took to the ukulele when Arthur Godfrey introduced it to popular culture and accompanied myself singing.

My father was reluctant to fund guitar lessons. He thought I was too quick to abandon one instrument after another. Instead he introduced me to a Fireman friend, Danny Travani, a guitarist who began teaching me. I used savings to buy additional lessons and learned many more chords allowing me to perform almost forty country tunes and nurture my growing interest in and passion for music.

I expanded my taste by being introduced to examples from the American art form of jazz and introduced to such prodigies as Errol Gardiner, George Shearing, Johnnie Smith, The Four Freshmen and Hi-Lows. It was while attending School in New Utrecht living in Brooklyn that I met Michael Mattera and Billy Maloof, who just like me were learning guitar and playing with Tony Rinaldi on his accordion. In 1953 we formed our first ensemble.

The following year my parents moved us all again from Brooklyn to Hicksville, Long Island where I made more musical friends who also wanted to organize. Everyone seemed to want to play guitar back then. "*We can't all play guitar,*" I said. Since some of them were more advanced on the guitar than I, it occurred to me to volunteer to play a different instrument. "*OK, I'll play bass.*" I bought a copy of *Buy Lines*, found an upright three quarter acoustic concert Kay bass for sale in Queens for \$350, drove there to check it out and bought it. It belonged to a recent graduate who'd worked his way through Dental School and was about to open a practice. It came with canvass cover, a chunk of rosin, its own bow and a few extra strings. I taught myself to play and have it still where it accompanies me to all manner of engagements. When not being used it stands upright in the corner of our living room as a piece of revered family furniture.

The Playboys became our musical signature for many years during college and well after performing for weddings, birthdays, corporate gatherings, family celebrations and an occasional jazz concert. We were a *Tribute* band before the term was coined, replicating the instrumental sounds and arrangements of pianist *George Shearing* and four and five part vocal styling's of *The Four Freshmen* and *The Hi-Lows*. We appeared as a group until the early

nineties when we lost Joseph Caruso, our talented pianist who tragically succumbed to prostate cancer.

On the occasion of my sixty-fifth birthday party my daughter Heather surprised me with a reunion of family and friends in her back yard. Joe was there with our music friends and family members to celebrate being together.

Karen asked for my back story behind my becoming a teacher. I explained that in my third year at Hofstra, I met Charles Calitri, who was an inspiration. A published author of several books by that time he had taught at NYU before coming to Hofstra. Upon his arrival he taught a class in Creative Writing that I took. As a result of watching, listening and learning from him I was changed. I had not taken any education courses until that time. I immediately decided, *“I want to be like this guy. I want to do what he does”*. I had never met anyone before who was so compassionate and so inclusive of everyone. At that time the prevailing philosophy in education was something of the Jean Paul Satre school of Existentialism. What Calitri modeled was something quite different.

I admired him so and was moved to sign up for Education Courses. I majored in the Foundations of Education and through that connection met and became friends with Dr. MaryAnn Raywid, my cooperating teacher and aspired to become a secondary educator. I met and got to know her husband to be, Dr Raymond Scheele, a Philosophy Professor at Hofstra who I later learned had also been hired by the Brentwood School District as part of a Ford Foundation Grant. He was the first person I remember pointing me in the direction of Brentwood when he advised, *“They’re doing marvelous things there and can assure you of having a wonderful future”*. That was what I wanted to hear. My father coincidentally, had early on offered his opinion that I should consider entering sales as a career, since years earlier I’d shown the skills enabling me to excel at door to door magazine subscription sales. Then more recently he was encouraging me to teach, seeing in me something I didn’t yet see in myself. *“I’ll never subject myself to the abuse I’ve seen teachers subject themselves to out here and in New York City”*.

"No thanks I thought, teaching's not for me." But then something happened that made me re-evaluate my father's advice and my entire perspective on education. It was Charles Calitri's example no doubt, but it was also the convergence of cumulative education, life experience, dad's advice and the intuitive self trust that opened me to yet another friend's influence and good example.

Peter DiNinno was an English teacher in Plainview Old Bethpage High School (later named John F. Kennedy Middle School) in memory of the late President). I met and became friendly with him while completing student teaching in that same building. He was an experienced sensitive and compassionate "*Mr. Chips*" much beloved by the great majority of students in his classes and his entire building. He had been around for years and had in the early days of this suburban district taught adult education in the One Room School House that still served essential administrative functions. Pete was known to be active as the Year Book Advisor and teaching courses in Drama and accompanying innumerable district sponsored student field trips to Broadway and off Broadway to experience live popular entertainment. On one occasion I decided to volunteer as a chaperone for a live performance of *A Man for All Seasons*, starring Paul Scofield, in the role of Sir. Thomas More.

It was while sitting in the theatre and following dialogue taking place between Sir Thomas More and a student struggling with what he wanted to do in the future as he contemplated becoming a teacher that in a somewhat dramatic fashion I came to my own epiphany.

The dialogue went something like this. *"I don't know what I want to do. Well why don't you become a teacher?"* He said, *"No, I don't want to become a teacher. No one will ever know me. No one will ever know who I am."* Sir Thomas said, "Oh, Is that right? Let's examine that for a minute". He said, "You'll know! Your wife will know. Your children will know. All Your friends will know. And God will know. Come to think of it", he said, "That's a pretty good following."

I thought to myself, I like his logic. My ego doesn't need the notoriety. I don't need stroking. Besides which, given the mentoring I was getting then, I thought if I do become a teacher, I can be a better teacher than most of the teachers I've had so far. That was about 1960.

I was offered a job in Plainview when I left. Dr. Donald Bragaw told me I had a Social Studies position waiting if I wanted it once I completed Student Teaching. I thanked him but declined. I wasn't comfortable teaching there or in North Babylon where I had also considered applying for a job. I had learned something by then about myself given the existence of tracking that was much in vogue. I was really comfortable teaching students in the bottom of the class. I'm speaking about C and D tracks. They were considered average and below average. The reason I found them comfortable to teach is that they were more street smart and compassionate than my kids in the Honors and AB classes. I felt a little intimidated by them too because I thought they were smarter than I was. I hadn't yet learned that because I was older and more life experienced than any of them I had the edge that they didn't. That made me wiser in the long run. The lower track kids would become our first responders, police and fire public servants. They volunteered life saving first aide when they were the difference between living and dying. They were in my opinion, more real than the book smart learners who didn't have the street smarts lower track students did.

I was interviewed in Brentwood by Principal, Frederick Weaver and Social Studies Department Chairperson, Milton K. Siler Jr. We talked a lot about the current author Jerome Bruner, whose book *The Process of Education* was on everyone's lips and who maintained that it was possible to teach any child any subject at any time. I was hired to begin teaching in the fall of 1962.

I was married in the fall of that year to Patricia Higgins. I expected that coming from an Irish Catholic background our values and philosophy would be similar and we'd have shared a great deal in common. I was 26 years old, and we knew each other for six months before we were married on November 30th. The marriage ushered two beautiful children into our world. Our daughter,

Heather Laura and our son John Marius Jr. Sadly, our marriage survived for thirteen years until 1975 when we separated and four years later in August of 1979 the marriage was legally dissolved. That experience was without exception the most painful, the most traumatic, and the most life altering of anything I've ever lived through. It took years of healing to restore a sense of worth and self-esteem.

Ellen and I connected after my divorce when she came back into my life as much as a healer as she did a much needed friend. She'd ended the relationship that she'd been in and our timing couldn't have been better. We'd met years earlier when Chemico Corporation hired me; a NYC based independently owned air pollution and control engineering company. I was asked to play for their Christmas parties in advance of their being purchased by General Electric. Our relationship was pretty much, "Hello" and "Goodbye", because we were both committed to others and had no reason to take it further. After my divorce we met again at the Millerridge Cottage in Jericho, L.I. where once again I was playing for the wedding of one of Ellen's work colleagues. We spoke a little, I offered to drive her home to the city, but she declined saying she wanted to go with the person who had brought her. I agreed that it was the appropriate action to take, and we made plans to see each other again, which we did. Fast forward, we were married in Manhattan at the U.N. Chapel. in 1983.

Heather had been born almost nine months to the day of our honeymoon. I was playing music at a steady job in the Snapper Inn in Oakdale on the sixth of September when she was born. I knew her arrival was coming, but I had no idea it was so close or I would have hired a substitute for myself. I was therefore not a little surprised when I took an unexpected phone call about nine o'clock from my mother-in-law informing me I was now the father of a beautiful baby girl, and everyone was doing fine. I should come straight to Huntington Hospital as soon as possible. The Snapper Inn still retains an important place in my heart and memory.

John was born in April of 1968. His birth was a blessed event that gave our entire family great joy during a year and time

otherwise filled with national trauma; a war in South East Asia and one assassination after another; first that of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Junior in April and Bobby Kennedy, the President's brother a couple of months later in June.

Heather was working for International Lighting in a management role. She had attended Suffolk Community College where she attained an Associates' Degree and was commuting to Manhattan every day where she served in a key role doing estimates and attracting major contracts to her company. Her success continues to be a source of pride to her family. She was single and living in Bethpage where we visited one another on a regular basis.

John is a flight attendant with Continental Airlines. He lives in Scotch Plains, New Jersey. He is a Spanish speaker and travels to many South and Latin American countries where he can provide essential services of language to travelers to countries on his schedule including Puerto Rico, Mexico, Equator, Panama, Columbia, the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica. When he completed his education in Jericho, H.S. he decided on his own to build upon his formal language education in Spanish, and with the help of Latin American friends became proficient. When he was tested by Continental he was assigned a German instructor with whom he could only communicate in their common tongue, Spanish. He passed his test and given his fluency now flies exclusively to Spanish-speaking Countries in our hemisphere avoiding the challenges of time zone changes on his sleep cycle. John and Heather both struggled financially given the marital disruption in their lives and at some point independent of one another decided to leave school and go to work full time. After trying work with Chemical Bank, John decided to follow his early love of flying to apply to Continental that was hiring. Ellen and I flew to Houston to attend his graduation from flight training school. He never looked back.

Ellen and I don't have children of our own, a decision that both of us may have lived to regret to some degree. Ellen has expressed regrets as have her mother and father for the loss of beautiful grandchildren that might have been. We are all

nevertheless grateful for the support and presence of one another in our lives and accept that the past is the past and some things that happen do so for reasons that in time cannot yet be discerned.

I was asked a question during the interview for which Karen already knew the answer having once served as she did as member of the district Sabbatical Committee when I applied in the last year it was offered as an incentive to eligible teachers and administrators. The Salary Committee had long since negotiated away such perks in exchange for higher salaries. They'd been successful in retaining teachers at a time when the turnover each year among staff was high while people moved to higher paying teaching positions elsewhere. Eligible candidates were offered leaves of absence for six months at full pay or a half year at half pay. My proposal in 1970 was made before personal computers even existed. I said I would compile an inventory of every business operating within the boundaries of the Hamlet of Brentwood and gather a directory of essential data including names and addresses of local businesses with owner's names, number of employees, the nature of the business/industry with phone numbers and all contact information. A few years later anyone might have *Googled* the same information from home. My proposal was accepted, and I completed my directory and submitted it to the district within the allotted time frame. It was used successfully for years by Ralph Ruggerio to fundraise for Brentwood's athletic program during years of austerity and to bolster local scholarships. In my capacity working with Bob Leitermen in the Sonderling and me in Ross, we found considerable opportunities for part time employment for students at a time when the U.S. economy was flat and jobs were very hard to come by.

The sabbatical for me was a life changer. It allowed me get a full night's sleep for the first time in my teaching career. I got up when I wanted to, drove to Brentwood High School where I visited with colleagues and administrators I hadn't spoken to in a while and visited people in the community I had to speak to at the Bank, in the library or at Rotary or the Lions Club. In other words I experienced life as a professional, made my own schedule and controlled my own routine. I networked, expanded my contacts and

once the Directory was complete, lived a stress free professional life full of new experiences. I loved it.

It was then that I met and associated with a group of educators known to Andy Coccari, Brentwood's Athletic Director of Health Education. Through him I met and became affiliated with people from EDC - *Educational Dynamics Corporation*, on the Main Street in Patchogue, where I was named *Director of Group Dynamics and Leadership Training*. They had won a Grant from New York State under the Duryea Bill to fund community preparedness for the prevention of drug abuse among young people and conduct two intense one week residential workshops that summer at LIU C.W. Post Campus, for teams of six people each for a total of forty teams from Nassau County and the same number from Suffolk County. I along with others in related fields attended to those teams at Post and learned in a way I couldn't have imagined, the meaning and value of experiential education as we confronted real people and real challenges to come up with practical solutions to the problems of drugs, race relations and public education reform in diverse communities all over long island. Clay White was one such educator that I met from Brentwood that year. He had considerable previous experience in the field of experiential education and facilitation. He was married and had come to Brentwood by way of the South. I learned a lot by observing and listening to him with groups that year. Michael Koss, another educator from Stony Brook University was the Director of Health Sciences with extensive pharmacological background in the use and abuse associated with all the drugs with which we were expected to be familiar. He introduced me to a residential facility for addicted clients on the west side of Manhattan on 14th Street that was affiliated with Daytop Village, a rehab program that began on Staten Island. Like other familiar programs such as Odyssey House, they offered hope to increasing numbers of persons in need. Together we attended an off Broadway Show whose cast was solely comprised of first time amateurs who acted and performed as if they had been doing what they were doing forever. The ease and familiarity with which they presented themselves was nothing if not inspirational. Their courage, openness and honesty re addiction and dysfunction were disarming. The show changed me and my appreciation for that

which young people were capable if they were trusted to be responsible for telling their own story with honesty and in their own way.

Milt Siler had taken a leave that year to gain Certification as a facilitator of humanistic education by an organization called Growth Institute. He'd been replaced by Dave Lavin as our Social Studies Chair for the remainder of that year. I became inspired by the sum total of my experiences to take all those bits and pieces to build an amalgam of everything in some unique form to bring their own kind of epiphany to kids and teachers, none of whom were at all involved in the drug scene, but all of whom could benefit by approaches to teaching and learning in which I found myself being immersed. The EQ or emotional intelligence outcome that resulted might not take a year, or a semester, or even more than a few seconds of awareness. As a teacher I'd seen it happen. I knew it was possible and I wanted to pass that along to as many people, young and old as I could.

Ken Moss had come to me months, maybe a year ago and asked if I would be willing to work with him to create an alternative school in and for the district. We both saw the need, but I was reluctant because I was fundamentally a conservative teacher back then, and I saw Ken as being something beyond the pale. He was too different. I was afraid. I couldn't see how I was already being changed and my work was becoming more radical with every passing day. I was taking chances that only a little while ago I would never have been comfortable risking. I was growing confident with risks and pushing to take even more. I wasn't breaking any rules, and I knew the limits beyond which I was unwilling to go. If I lost my job I could always support my family with music, in addition I reasoned I could probably teach anywhere. Anyhow, I was good at what I did, and I knew it. I also knew the hardware business. I could do that any day of the week if I wanted too. After all, I had done it before and could do it again. The knowledge I had and the experience I was gaining gave me a lot of confidence, and that may have explained why I was willing to take so many risks.

The year was 1973 and building on what I had already learned

I was experimenting with experiential education to a degree unusual even for me. Fall meant another back to school night was upon us. That was usually when a few parents of students in honors and AB classes would show up knowing their kids were doing well in class and expecting to hear the usual complementary reports from teachers. Meanwhile families with several students at different academic levels faced the usual conflict deciding what teachers to visit. Did they attend the high school, Middle School or Elementary school? Whose teacher did they pay a visit to in such limited time? On most evenings teachers' outnumbered parents and seldom was there a crowd of visitors waiting outside the classrooms of slower track students to hear from the teacher of their offspring struggling for a grade. What parent wanted to listen to such a depressing account of minimal success from their child's teacher? The evening was structured in such a way that gave each parent but a few minutes with their child's classroom teacher. The report was brief and to the point and focused upon grades, test scores, quarterly exams, pattern of attendance, attitude and overall performance. For the parents it was a predictable and boring exercise in repetition of last year and the year before. It was my intention to change the routine and give everyone something to think about. I had always believed from the time I began teaching that parental involvement was not only important but essential to the success of every child's education. Therefore I did something that to some of the parents and educators present seemed altogether crazy. I came to school that night dressed as usual in shirt and tie wearing a conventional suit jacket and seated behind my desk in front of the classroom while my head was covered with a black muslin hood. I had a clear view of the room through the material and of the person before me. At the same time they had no way of seeing what I looked like given that their vision of me was totally obscured by the black hood I had over my head. I sat down and greeted the first parent. *"Hello, Thank you for coming. My name is John Sherin and I am your son Angel's teacher in this class."* I made no mention of the hood but continued to conduct an otherwise routine parent-teacher conference, unless the parent asked me to address what had to have been for them the burning question ... WHY? Why was I wearing that hood over my head? In the course of the entire evening only one parent, the mother of a

student asked the question, straight out. *“Why are you wearing that thing over your head?”* I told her. *“I’ve never met any of the people in this room before tonight. I don’t know anyone who has come to see me. No parents here have ever met me. Why then should anyone want to leave tonight saying to themselves after talking with me for less than ten minutes, they know me. They won’t even know what I look like. How could they possibly know me, let alone what I think, what I believe or anything at all about me?”*

Truthfully, that will take some time and it’s an important investment to make considering that the education of a person they love is at stake, and it’s their very future that’s on the line. We have to talk, maybe not here, not now, but somewhere soon. We might make a date in town for coffee at *Friendly’s*, or I might come to your house on an afternoon if preferable. Maybe we should schedule an appointment to talk and get to know one another, at least *a little better* than we do now. There must be lots of questions they’d like to ask. Wouldn’t they like to know something about my values, my dreams, my aspirations, perhaps even my inspirations? Who were the major influences in my life? Where do I want to be in ten years?

In other words, I want everyone here to know that they must be more involved with their children’s education and *we need to work together to that end*. They are all essential to the success of their child’s educational experience. Meanwhile, people out in the hall were peeking into the room, pointing and giggling and all the while saying; *look at the ‘Masked Marvel’*. A parent reported me to the Principal and later that same night I was visited by the President of the Teachers Association who asked for my explanation of what I did. A Board of Education Trustee enquired of me as to the purpose of my mask in a formal reply in writing mandated the following week explaining and justifying my actions. I got more attention than I ever expected but I was not sorry. People had taken notice and they’d asked questions and sought answers. Given the events of more recent times and the tragic consequences in schools throughout the nation that we’ve become history’s witness to, I believe my actions and intentions of that night were wholly justified.

During that year (1973) and for the next couple of years, a few of us were busily engaged in planning for the opening of what would become a famously successful alternative school in Brentwood. We named it (M-T) the *Maslow Toffler School of Futuristic Education*. At the beginning of the school year 1977 we had our suspicions that there were still numbers of teachers in our system who didn't understand the changes taking place, and as often happens were feeling intimidated by what *they saw* as frightening disruptions in the routine order of things. Thus, as a further attempt to gain support and draw attention to what we were building, with the imprimatur of district leadership, I proceeded on Opening Day to the Sonderling auditorium with an unannounced experiential activity in mind for teachers in required attendance for what I hoped would lighten the mood and provide a different mindset for several hundred Brentwood teachers by means of sideway humor.

To that end arriving incognito in full costume and make up, I furtively entered through the rear of the Sonderling auditorium once everyone had taken seats and slid unobtrusively into the last row slouching into position to assess the layout of the room and familiarizing myself with people I recognized already there. The idea had come to me after a reading from Corinthians. "*Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God*" 1 Corinthians 3:18-20. I willingly became the fool that I might become wise by assuming the character of Emmett Kelly from head to toe. With the experienced assistance of Ken Moss, I had transformed myself within the hour from my once familiar countenance of myself colleagues might otherwise have recognized and morphed into a circus clown in bowler hat, a bulbous ping-pong ball nose, facial makeup in a wrinkled ill fitting suit, garish tie and oversized shoes with their untied floppy white laces. For it is written, "*He catches the wise in their craftiness,*" and again, "*The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.*" We could see the future plainly in view and believed we were on the side of angels, though perceived by the world as engaged in foolishness. We knew different. It was necessary that we be prepared with our "*insight*" to help others respond sensibly to current unfolding events. I believed we could do that. After all,

didn't we all know that deep down public education was falling short of its possibilities? Shouldn't we be downsizing while increasing both the amount and degree of personal contact and interaction between students and teachers, teachers and teachers, students and students and all of us with parents and the wider community? We were about educating students not schooling them. We were intent upon engaging students holistically; body, mind and spirit.

At some point as various speakers took to the stage one at a time and spoke to the assembled educators, I stood up and reached into the shopping bag I was carrying and took out a fresh head of lettuce from which I peeled a leaf and passed it down the row of seated professionals as if it were a copy of printed material intended to nourish the recipient with the usual "important" data they would need. I came upon Gilda Mantin sitting with the English Department including Ed Hannan and Caster Howard. She looked at me and gave me the biggest smile and most loving expression of approval that I got from anyone all day. None of them knew it was I behind the disguise. That part of it so far had been successful. There were a few others who by their expression 'got it' and conveyed their appreciation with their eyes. However, given those exceptions, for me the endeavor had been the loneliest and most painfully disappointing investment of preparation I had ever had and couldn't wait for it to be over so I could *get the hell out*. Edmund Franchi, District Head of Security and Transportation had the mic and was speaking to the full room of passive listeners. My name tag was prominently displayed on my chest above the pocket in my jacket. It read Al Lofus or "*All of us*".

The next speaker to approach the mic was Stanley Yankowski, Brentwood's infamous High School Principal. I was descending the left isle again approaching the stage where his impressive six foot two inch self was holding the mic with two hands and preparing to receive the award he knew was coming. I reached into the shopping bag with both my hands and extracted the watermelon then extending it forward and over my head when, according to witnesses, I appeared to trip over the open shoe laces as *the 'trophy prize* went flying through space to crash on the asphalt tile covered

floor, not just breaking into pieces but unexpectedly crashing and splashing in a torrent of watermelon sugar water covering the floor in front of the auditorium. At no point previously had anyone yet acknowledged my presence. I'd been ignored until Edmund Franchi gave me a nod to acknowledge me. The gesture seemed to give everyone permission to laugh out loud. Until that moment but for the droning on of one speaker's voice after another there hadn't been a sound in the room, just like on every other year before this one. Suddenly, it was as if they'd received an okay to open a valve releasing every bit of tension held in check to free a laugh so explosive as to achieve collective relief. I handed up to Stan a couple of chunks of the watermelon I managed to collect. Then with bowed head and lowered back carried what I was sure had amounted to the failure of the plan to the back of the room as quickly as possible while a custodian who had miraculously appeared with dust pan, broom and pail struggled to clean up the mess I'd made.

I was never so happy to take leave of a situation as I was at that moment. I was as humiliated and embarrassed for conceiving of the experience as I have ever been for anything I've done. But I didn't regret having done it for it provided me with one of the most enduring insights into what we were doing with and to one another in our well intentioned efforts at reforming the process of public education. Ours was not an experience to be undertaken lightly or by sissies. It was terrifying, even painful. It was also exhilarating and revelatory; something you wouldn't want to miss for the sheer joy of it. It's difficult to put into words. I have never felt more alive; more courageous, more hopeful, more ignorant, more wise, more alone, more abandoned, more proud, more important, more trusting and more trusted. It was a binocular view through the balance of my professional life in fifteen minutes. I wanted to live more than ever. At times I wanted to die. I loved it all.

What was I going to miss leaving the classroom? Nothing, because I still had everything that I had before. The relationships I had with my former colleagues were still there. My students were now friends and still in my life. We continue to stay in touch. It's almost like family now and that's very much the way it seemed back then.

How many people that we had as students became teachers in Brentwood or elsewhere? There were quite a few, though I was unable on the spur of the moment to enumerate an accurate total. I could name about eight people off hand.

I was asked for the name of someone I'd spoken with recently and with whom I try to keep in touch. Judy Freilicher immediately came to mind. Her younger brother had also been an M-T graduate. She lives in the Albany area and has her own business building and maintaining websites for individuals and corporate entities. Judy has been very helpful personally and has been instrumental in helping M-T create and maintain virtual connections with former students and staff members at www.maslowtoffler.com. Until quite recently and for over twenty years she helped organize our annual reunions of graduates, friends and families from Long Island, every section of the country and countries around the globe. I was asked if we've tracked graduates. We have not, and neither do we record the schools they've attended or the professions they've pursued. They are doctors, lawyers, teachers, and government security administrators from every walk of life. They are gay and straight, married and single, divorced, separated and are grieving partners who've lost loved ones; husbands, wives and children, funeral directors and clergy, government employees, first responders and entrepreneurs reflecting every color of the rainbow just as they did when they attended classes here.

I retired in July of 1992 following thirty years of service to the district. The first thing I did without recourse to a pc and the internet was to trace my family roots and origins by piecing together information about family that I had accumulated over the years, from grandparents, parents, relatives and close friends on both sides of the family. I went back as far as I could connecting one piece of information to another until I had arrived at the *Battle of Waterloo*, where my Great, Great, Grandfather Michael Reily fought against Wellington. He retired from the British Army in 1845. I have the retirement gift from his Superior Officer and his Regiment of a "stuff box", an engraved silver, gold inlaid gentleman's personal stuff box for cuff links, studs etc., that was presented to him on

occasion of his leaving active service. That's as far back as I was able to go with my father's ancestors. I will need more time and Ancestry.com to pursue the possibilities. Ireland was his country of origin. Family who left emigrated to the United States, England, Australia and Italy. My father once saw a copy of the family tree which he said was traced by a lawyer in Waterford, Ireland when he was still a little boy. Of interest to him at the time and the reason for remembering what he saw, was a name, "*Madcap, O'Driscall*", a sea captain who fired the imagination of a young lad. I'd love to know what happened to that legal record of family.

I went approximately as far back as that with my mother's family but got no further back than three generations. I made about eighty copies of everything and mailed each head of family a compiled copy of names, dates, of family members living and deceased for them to continue updating on their own because to have gone further would have been costly in terms of time and money, and there were other things that I wanted to do that were at least as important. What I did I did as a labor of love. I'd always wanted to trace my roots, and while I didn't do an extensive search, I cracked the surface by making a start. Lots still remain to be done.

After that I basically kicked back and enjoyed being a man of leisure. I enjoyed taking long walks and kicking leaves, and walking in the snow. I loved walking on the beach and finding treasures of seashells and driftwood. I especially enjoyed the peace and quiet of the public library in the early part of the day when it was almost empty of people. There were not a lot of people talking to you at one time and asking you to do something for them, reading what I wanted to read, catching up on books that I was anxious to finish, spending time in book stores just browsing now that I had time to do that, and I enjoyed the four seasons and I slept, I slept. My mother once told me I always needed eight hours of sleep a night even as a child. Seldom as a teacher did I ever get eight hours of sleep during my career. I might get four or five or six. I'd develop cold sores. I would catch colds easily and be susceptible to bronchitis. My immune system was completely shot by the time I retired so the sleeping and charging of my batteries was so very

important to me, and when I came back to the high school to visit people would say to me, “*You look great. What are you doing?*” What’s different? I’m sleeping and that was no lie, and the dark circles under the eyes had disappeared. They called it “the raccoon club”.

One of the more impactful books I read during my early teaching career was the *Art of Loving* by Eric Fromm. I went out and bought a stack of them and gave them away to all my friends at the time. I had a friend who was living here and whose name was John Slattery. He was attending Fordham University and commuting back and forth to work in the city. Eventually he decided to return to the land of his birth, marry a Dublin girl, who made an honest man of him (he was already an honest man), changed his career trajectory from accounting to become the equivalent of a Vocational Superintendent of Schools in Ireland. I gave him a book, and he would read it on the train going in and back from the city. First, he felt compelled enough to cover it with a brown paper bag, because the title suggested he was reading something pornographic. It was 1960, and that was the way it was.

There were many books I read that had an enormous impact on me. I would be remiss if I didn’t mention *Future Shock* by Alvin Toffler and *Transformation Theory /or Grow or Die* by George Lock Land, *Work and Motivation* by Abraham Maslow and the *Further Reaches of Human Nature* by the same author. They all had a profound effect on me and the direction I took as I moved ahead in my professional and educational life and career. If there was a top of the mountain, *The Maslow Toffler School of Futuristic Education* was the high point of my professional life. I wish that any teacher who would have wanted that experience could have had it. It would not have been for everyone, for there were many people who would not have been happy in such an environment. I say that because if you are the person who requires bells and a schedule that is prepared for you and a course of study that is prescribed that you must teach such and such in this way at this time and on this day, you wouldn’t have been comfortable writing your own curriculum, designing your own work week and being responsible for everything from soup to nuts including spending part of your day talking with

students and acting as guidance counselor when such counseling might have been in order, and getting to know their families and writing hand written evaluations for every single student you had every quarter and then a final evaluation at the end of every year. So much of our time was devoted to writing evaluations. Those evaluations have stood the test of time, and students who have saved them will say, *'look what you said to me back then, and how right you were'.* *And do you know what happened to me later on in life? This is what I did and this is what happened. And you saw it, but I didn't see it then. It wasn't for everybody, but it was the nearest thing that retirement is to teacher heaven. The joy has been indescribable knowing that you are effecting people's lives and seeing the result of that and getting that feedback not just from them but from their families and friends and then being embraced and taken in almost as part of the family, as an extended family. I think teachers know this hear about it but don't get to experience it in quite the way we did.*

I will never be able to thank Brentwood enough for enabling us to have the opportunity to experience what we did here. I retired in July of 1992 and to say I was tired would be an understatement. Seriously, though at that moment it wasn't fun anymore. I was getting sick a lot. I had pneumonia twice that year six months apart to the day. That's when I decided to take the State incentive and leave while I still could or accept the possibility of being carried out. I always thought I would be one of those people who would work until I dropped, but it was taking so much out of me. My health was suffering, and it was not turning out in the way I expected. I thought by the time we arrived in the future, in what was 1992, we would have been far and away much better off educationally than we were when we started. I'd always expected to make a big difference in the state of the art. Now I wasn't so sure any more. Instead, the feeling was as if someone had handed us a pair of binoculars and turned them around so that as we looked into them from the opposite side what we thought was the change we were anticipating was much further away than we had ever imagined it would be. The goal that I had set for myself when I started out was unattainable even in my lifetime. I might just as well take what was left of the time I had left, get some sleep, get to feel better and do

something with the talents and gifts I had been given while I still could. I signed the papers and then I went home and told my wife what I had done. I discovered then that I may have been ready but she wasn't. I had to talk to her for a little while to convince her that financially everything would be okay even if I didn't work. I had been involved for the previous decade in trying to promote a commercial idea to patent and register trade marks for *Mapzzles*, map jigsaw puzzles produced in limited editions in multiple localities for parents with children in need of learning their place in the world. I was also promoting a kit to teach collaborative skills to teams of people whose problem solving approaches were in dire need of assistance in an economy that increasingly demanded an emotionally intelligent work force. These were manipulative teaching aides I called www.CSquares.com, and they were now available for sale on line here in the U.S and abroad. I've been active with the BTA and more recently with ROBS, and I've invested considerable time with our Writers Group and our History Project, by doing these interviews. My life has been joyous and full and for that I remain eternally grateful.