



**Elizabeth (Betty) De Long**  
**ROBS History Project**  
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My given name is Elizabeth (Betty) Martha DeLong. My Great Grandmother on my father's side of the family was Martha Elizabeth and when I was named they turned my name around and called me Elizabeth Martha. My maiden name was Bearins. Betty was my nickname because my dad didn't want me to be called Lizzy or something else and I was the only one of the children that had a name that wasn't my legal name.

I'm still a resident of Brentwood and I live with my daughter Lois who is my youngest child. She is the youngest of three. I had a son Paul, who lived in Oklahoma and passed away several years ago. I have a daughter Ruth who lives in East Islip and of course Lois, who as I've told you lives with me. Ruth is a dietician and sometimes also works in a doctor's office. My son was a Presbyterian Minister who looked forward to teaching on the college level and was working on his doctorate when he passed away in his forties. His family is still living in Oklahoma at the time of this interview. My husband passed away in 1977 at the age of fifty-two.

I met my husband shortly after the time he came out of the service having volunteered for duty with General Patton in Germany during World War II and after which started to attend our church. Then for whatever reason he and my dad developed a friendship and he was constantly coming to the house and I came home from college and we met. All this took place when we lived in the Bushwick section of Brooklyn. Like many returning soldiers, he had problems adjusting. He worked in a radio factory making radios

because even in the service he did communications work. One of the companies he worked for was Fedor Radio but I forget the other one. Shortly after we met he felt as if he'd been called into the Ministry. I had just graduated from the Philadelphia College of the Bible because I had been interested in doing missionary work. So it was a natural fit that we met. Eventually he had a church in Brooklyn which he had for many years.

I want to talk a little more about my children. All three are different as everybody knows, no two children are alike. Paul was a great tease to his two sisters and some of the things the girls tell me now had I known the tricks he would play on them I would have reacted differently. Mostly, they got along very well; a very tight knit family that cared for one another and helped one another when they could. But as I said, they were each different and each had different likes and when it came to the high school all three participated with Maurie Burns in the Drama Group. That was a similarity they had. Paul and Lois remained in the Band right throughout school. Ruth was in the West Junior High Band but didn't follow it through when she came to the High School. They all showed an interest in drama and music. Lois is still active on her job where she is editor of a couple of magazines in the city for the American Institute of Chemical Engineers and still has a love for drama. She has a drama group that meets in the Presbyterian Church in Brentwood. Each year they perform a musical that she helps write and my daughter helps her with that to some extent.

I have seven grandchildren. My son had three children out in Oklahoma. He had two girls, Candice and Kaitlin and a boy Christopher. My daughter Ruth had a daughter Amy who is now twenty-six years old. She has three step-children who all consider me their grandmother even though they are not blood relatives but they asked me to do it. They said "*Can I call you grandma?*". I didn't ask for it. That's Melissa, and Melissa is a senior at East Islip High School, and the second granddaughter in that group is Christina, and she's a sophomore. The youngest one in that family is in Junior High School and that's Stephanie. They each have their own personality and things they like to do. It's true there's not a lot of contact between us these days because of the distance. In the

beginning I used to go our west to see my son and his children quite a bit but my health doesn't permit me to get out quite as often as I once did. But we speak on the phone and we are close that way.

I was born on October 4, 1923 in St. John's Hospital in the Bushwick section of Brooklyn. One of my earliest childhood memories is of the old coal stove that we had in the kitchen that my mother sometimes cooked on. She didn't have television. We had radio and no central heating in most of the houses I remember enjoying a very happy childhood. I was the oldest of seven children who were very close and my mom used to say we might fight with one another but don't anyone pick a fight with one or you fight with all seven. We had a very close knit family as I grew up.

I was growing up in the late twenties and thirties during the height of the Great Depression. I remember that. My dad had a job so I thought we were rich. When I look back now I don't think he made even twenty dollars a week and I often wonder how mom stretched it because so many people were out of work and he was working. We were lucky. In those days twenty dollars went a lot further than it does today.

My mother's maiden name was Mann. That's very interesting because I come from an early American family. The Mann's came to the New World in 1620 and we have been here in this country ever since. We've been told that we have a Mayflower connection but up to this point I have never been able to firmly establish that our lineage comes directly from the Mayflower, though I have tried. My cousins and I have had an interest in genealogy ever since we were very young including up until today for we're still searching for our background. Some of my cousins have used the internet to establish out links to the past. I personally haven't but they certainly have.

While I'm very proud of the name and our family origins I'm still aware that I pay the same subway fare on the New York Transit System that everyone else who rides the subway is required to pay. I can trace my dad's family origins back for five generations from Germany. Again, we're a very large and loving family and I have lots

of cousins and aunts and uncles which always made life very interesting. I think my dad's family originated from that part of Germany near the Black Forest. I have his birth certificate but I can't remember the exact town from which he came.

My mother's father who is from the Anomian family line worked for the Fairbanks Scale Company and I think he worked in their mailroom. My father's people had a farm for a while and my father's father (my grandfather), was an artist and the person who painted the Eagles on the Brooklyn Daily Eagle Newspaper building which were eventually auctioned off when the Brooklyn Eagle was forced to shut down as were so many newspapers in those days. We probably couldn't have afforded to buy them anyway but it was nice to imagine owning them. My grandfather did sign paintings as well as artistic work and one time he did the window of a Chinese Laundry and got so confused that he signed his name backwards and the family always made a joke out of that.

I have many memories of my mother from when I was a little girl. She was a very good mother. She loved to walk and we would sometimes walk until we felt like our legs were about to fall off. Those walks were very good for us. Growing up as children, she was always interested in everything we did. She was an old fashioned homemaker who never did too much outside the home because her mother passed away when she was fourteen and she became a mother to her brothers and sisters. Her life for the most part became devoted to raising them and she became a nurturer for the rest of her life. Yet she was always there for us even after we were all married, if we needed help, we needed a baby sitter, the kids were sick, just call mama. I had a great role model.

My dad was an exceptional father because he had been an orphan and didn't have that nurturing. There wasn't anything he couldn't do for us. My father had lost both his mother and father within six months, so while he was brought up by family members it wasn't the same as having a parent. He loved being a father. He loved being a grandfather. When there was a baby around there would just be a perpetual smile on his face that you couldn't picture. It's difficult to express the degree of love and care that he

had for us. And this from a man who did not have the role modeling from biological parents but chose instead to pick his role models from other people and internalize those values and still instill in us the love for family because we did everything together. He was a great baseball fan and the way he would get us to....he was a Brooklyn Dodger fan coming from Brooklyn of course. Saturday he'd say, "*Well if everyone helps mom get the chores done, I'm going to the ball game and you can come with me.*" So the chores got done in a hurry. And again he had limited money. I can remember we would take the trolley to go down to Ebbitt's Field and coming home (I didn't realize it at the time), he would say, Oh, come on let's walk. The trolleys are so crowded. Normally we'd walk all the way home. And then as I got older I'd realize he was using his lunch money even to take us kids. By walking home, he knew we really had to. There was no other way. But he made it fun. All the way home we'd discuss the ball game. It really made a family of us. It bothers me to hear people say, "*I'm the way I am because of the way I grew up*".

My dad had every right to be angry with the world, but he wasn't. He made the best of life and decided his family was going to have what he didn't have. And because I was the oldest of the seven of us I suspect I probably became the role model for the rest. I became like a second mother to all the younger brothers and sisters. The youngest were born when I was only sixteen years old. There was a set of twins and I just had to be my mother's helper. As I said it was just like being a second mother because those boys still look to me for certain of their needs.

Just about two years ago, the youngest brother and the youngest sister passed away. There are five of us still living and we remain extremely close. While we don't travel as much to see one another there are plenty of phone calls and many cards.

The youngest is semi-retired. He was a teacher in Smithtown and then he went upstate to Schuylerville where he was a Principal. When he retired from there he's still not retired because he went to another school district where he still works.

I have another brother who was a security guard at Syosset Hospital and is now retired. My brother William worked for an aircraft plant in Massachusetts. He went back to where the family originally came from; the Douglaston-Blackstone area and down into Providence. We have a reunion every year and every fifth year we go back to Massachusetts where we go to the cemeteries where the different Revolutionary war soldiers in our family are buried. Since we've traced our history we really worked at it and we've had several reunions. We've even had the American Legion come and hold a ceremony at the gravesites and we've put wreathes on the graves. We're very much into that.

I'm sure there were other adults who had a strong influence on my ideas, likes and dislikes besides my immediate family when I was a child. Some of my teachers, I can remember feeling strongly about. We've always been very active in church work. I always had the role models of Sunday school teachers and pastors. I'm sure they had an influence on me.

I lost touch with most of my grade school and high school friends and our friendships. I went to Washington Irving High School in the City and we were close when we were in school. There was a group of us that was like a League of Nations. One Jewish girl got on the Subway in East New York and we always planned to be on the same car and I'd get on when we got into the Bushwick section when we went down, two Negro sisters got on with us, one American Indian girl and an Italian girl got on the train on the last stop. We were a very close knit bunch going back and forth to school. Sorry to say, after school we lost touch with one another. I think Washington Irving High School was down around 15<sup>th</sup> St. and Third Avenue. The Second World War started just when I was a senior and everything changed.

Growing up mom assigned us all different chores to be responsible for. One was given the kitchen, another had to clean the bathrooms, the boys had to bring the coal in for the coal stoves, take the garbage out – everyone had their own jobs to do. My brothers even had to do dishes. I believe all that built character. We were trusted to do what we were assigned to do by my mom. In fact

we often laugh, now that we're older, at how even my brother had to take his turn, one week washing the dishes one week drying and that finally stopped because I think he put some of his friends up to a call in, "*Peter, are you done with the dishes yet?*" My mother was a little embarrassed. She decided he had to do more manly chores.

I remember my first paying job. I worked for Singer Sewing Machine Company at Prince St. and Broadway in their parts department where the mechanics who went out to the factories in the morning to repair the machines came to get their parts to do the repairs. I worked there for the first time after High School. I worked full time for eighteen months before I left to go to college and then I came back for one summer and they used me for a replacement when people went on vacation.

I loved rollerskating. There was one place around the corner from us that had very small sidewalks and to us that was like a skating rink and we'd all meet up there and of course we'd do the usual things; play ringolevio and hide and seek. We were always within calling distance if my mother wanted to get to us, but it was a great place to skate. The city was a great place in which to grow up. You didn't have to worry about a car. You could take a trolley car or a bus or the subway and go wherever you wanted and it was safe. All the neighbors would watch out for you and even the policeman on the beat we all knew and he knew each of our mothers' so you knew if you were caught doing anything you weren't supposed to mama heard about it from him. He knew us all by name and he knew whose mother was who. You watched out for yourself. It was a happy time growing up and a time of simplicity and innocence that makes me feel almost like I've slipped from one time zone into another. Even though I grew up in a depression, we made do with what we had. We didn't say "*Gimme, gimme, gimme, because my parents couldn't give it to us*". I was just saying to somebody recently, if I didn't have a doll carriage I took a shoe box, put a string on it and pulled it behind me with my doll in it. We used our imagination. Kids today don't use their imagination. We made our own toys. Our brothers took a board, took a skate apart,

put a peach crate on it and we had a scooter or we made rubber band guns that we used to shoot a piece of linoleum or cardboard and it didn't cost us a thing.

I've always been a morning person but I'm a night owl too. I always had dolls and loved to play with them but I can't remember a particular doll that I played with more often than any other one.

I used to enjoy summer as my favorite season of the year. There was no school and it was safe to stay outside even after you had dinner and play till it got dark and beyond.

Living in the city and in an apartment house I remember having an ice cream cone during summer evenings and the aromas of dinner being cooked in all the neighbor's apartments and if you smell it today you think of that neighbor.

I remember my early years and attending grammar school; the same ones my children began attending because we still lived in Brooklyn, in fact, when my son started first grade the teacher that had been my sixth grade teacher was then the principal. She was a very favorite teacher of mine. Yes, I do remember my first grade. In those early years you didn't change classes, you came in the morning and you were there all day. Later on you changed classes I remember when you had an hour for lunch and you went home, ate your lunch and came back. I had a Miss Frankel for 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades and she was just what you pictured a teacher should be. She was very sweet and nice to us and had ways to encourage us to study. All my teachers influenced me to one degree or another. I can picture them all in my mind and even picture the school I went to. I liked math. I was always good in math although we didn't have all the mathematics kids do today. I've always been a reader so I guess English was a favorite subject of mine in school as well.

When I began college I went to the Philadelphia College of the Bible that was in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania because I felt that there was some mission work I was going to do. Soon thereafter I met my husband-to-be, we married and I became active with him in his Church. My background was perfectly suited for that work. He



in fact had gone to the same school but went further with his education and training than I had.

We moved out here in 1960. At that time my husband had left his position as a full time Pastor to his church's congregation to help out in churches where they really couldn't afford a pastor and needed someone to speak and he went to work for an electrical company in the city. He had a background in some drafting and he did that for one of the big firms in the city and we decided that it was time to get the children out of where they were and into the country. At the same time the real estate boom was going at full tilt in Brentwood. As far as we were concerned it was rural and felt a great deal to us like the country. We looked first in Nassau County but soon discovered that the prices closer to the city were too high for us so we looked further East and in the Bay Shore, Brentwood area we found a house that we could comfortably afford and I'm still in that house. That explains why we came to Brentwood.

When we lived in New York City I had been active in the PTA and the PTA there put a library in the school. There hadn't been a children's library in their local elementary school. I used to help out one or two days a week when the children came in to get books. Once we had settled into our new place in Brentwood I found myself in conversation one day with a teacher I had met who worked in Southwest. She said "*Betty, if you would ever want to go back to work, why don't you think about going to the Brentwood Schools and see if they have openings in the library?*" And I did, but at that time there weren't any openings and they said "*Go take the Civil Service Test*" and then they said, "*if you want to do some work, we could use you to substitute in the kitchen*". And I said, Okay, I need something to do with my time. So, I started at West Junior. I got several calls after I took the test but I didn't want to go too far away and finally I got one from Brentwood saying they needed someone at the Ross High School Library. I was interviewed by the District Business Manager who interviewed me and called Joseph Purcell and said "*Are you still there? I'd like to send this young lady over for you to interview.*" He was the one who actually hired me. He made me feel very comfortable and I was happy to accept the position.

Right from day one I loved it. It was a happy place to come. The kids were there to learn first of all, second of all they got along and we did a lot of fun things. I was just mentioning to someone today while I was waiting, how nice it was during the Holidays. The kids used to decorate their classroom door and they'd give awards out for the best floor, and nobody disturbed those things. They were never destroyed. Then, on Valentine's Day they would sell roses to see which girl in school got the most roses. There were fun things in addition to all the work.

Thinking about holidays I want to tell you that in my own family all the holidays were important. As we grew older and started to get married my mother knew there was going to be problems getting all seven of us together and she suggested that New Year's Day be our holiday because there might be conflicts over other dates, but we knew that New Years Day from then on was exclusively going to be our holiday and we would always look forward to it which we did. While we don't do it anymore I still think about all the fun that was.

I stayed in the Ross Building and in the Library until September 1969 when the school went back on part time and I was sent to work part time in the Sonderling Building in the afternoon session with Bill Greaney and I was there with him until the very last year he was alive when he spent most of his time in St. John's Hospital. I used to go each day to Smithtown after school and I would tell him what went on during the day and ask him what he wanted me to do. He passed away that May. That was when they were building the new library between the buildings and they brought Janet Gewirtzman in as the librarian in Sonderling and we combined the new addition to the library with the existing library. I was there for all the changes that took place as new systems of library science replaced the old. I was coming to the ROBS Meetings for a while but ever since I had the stroke I've been unable to drive and therefore have been unable to attend. The last ROBS Meeting I attended you showed an interview with Sally Andrews and I was glad to see that because Sally and I are friends.

I've always loved being around young people. Whether or not it's my mothering instinct, I've always wanted to mother them all. I found that by reaching out to them, many times they would come to me with their problems. But they used to get one stock answer if they complained about their moms. I'd say, "*I'm a mother and we all come from the same mold. So if your mother tells you something, you have to listen.*" But I think that's what made the job interesting and made me want to stay here and work. There is a need that all people have and that is often to talk with someone who you might not expect it to be when something in particular is bothering you. Sometimes it's your teacher but not always. It's whoever you make the connection with. Both Mr. Purcell and Mr. Greaney used to emphasize, "*Don't get so involved with the kids*". I couldn't help myself.

Once upon a time we were organizationally a part of the Brentwood Teachers Association with NYSUT. Prior to that we had joined CSEA and for a while were unaffiliated under our own Clerical Unit banner before ultimately joining the teachers with NYSUT where we are now. It was about 1989 when I began to realize that "*I'm not having as much fun here as I used to have*". I left after I had been in the district for twenty-five years. The last eighteen months prior I had begun to see it more as work. I found there was more confusion not quite as organized while I got along well with the two librarians but I just didn't feel it was worth coming in any more. What I may not have been fully aware of at the time, what I was feeling was the result of a period of rapid change in the system, there was a great deal of systemic change as roles were being redefined, jobs were being established, it felt confusing and disorganized because it was producing a great deal of stress and in fact it wasn't fun. I told Mr. Purcell that I was thinking of retiring but I don't think he believed me and then finally I said, I'm putting my papers in. In a way I'm sorry, I still could have worked a few more years and enjoyed some of the staff that I enjoyed being with but I haven't really regretted leaving. I still try to use my time well doing volunteer work.

For at least five, maybe six years I was the Chaplin at Southside hospital and I really enjoyed that. There were certain

things I didn't enjoy. They asked me to take the cancer floors and infectious diseases where all the HIV patients were and it used to be very sad when I would walk in and find one of the girls or boys I knew from Brentwood High knowing that it was the end for them again, it gave me a chance to try to encourage them and pray with them so there was a good side and a bad side to it. But I really did enjoy my time at Southside. Something I've known for quite some time I am reminded of every day. Brentwood really is an extended family. When I would look at them it wasn't just some kid I know. I knew them from school and I would remember things about them and I appreciated the opportunity to help them if I could. But it used to be sad. I volunteer two days a week at the Brentwood Presbyterian Church. I am the office Manager for want of a better title. I run the office and I make sure that the food pantry when people come in for food that I can give them food or vouchers and to some extent I operate as an assistant to the pastor. I bring Communion around to the sick with him. Someone told me that I am yet another example of a person who hasn't really retired. The year after I retired in fact I went with one of the teachers whose wife had died to the funeral parlor and one of the teachers came up to my daughter Lois and said, "*Lois, how is your mother enjoying retirement?*" and she said, my mother doesn't know she's retired.

You've asked a question that I've found impossible to answer. I have no idea how much my salary was when I began working in the district but then I don't even remember how much I was making when I retired. Like most other people you have interviewed we got the check, took it to the bank and deposited it, and we were lucky if it almost covered our outstanding bills for the period that the check covered. Then we went to our second job if you were a man so we could remain solvent. It was never about the money, because we always loved what we were doing and we enjoyed working with and for the people we served. It gave us pleasure knowing we were making a difference in their lives.

I loved to read. What better place to work than in the library. As soon as the books come in I could read them. I always derived great pleasure from the connections I made with the kids and some of that was because of my own children being here. If they were

involved with the drama the kids who were in the play ended up in the library and made me feel like I was part of what was going on.

I've been retired now for about eleven years. So many things have changed in our country and in Brentwood during those years. My feeling is that kids are not as serious about their education as they used to be. Whether the fault is theirs or in the education they are receiving I cannot say. A lot of the kids are just biding their time because they're too young to just quit school. I think many of them have no idea just how important the time they have really is to them. I wish they knew that the decisions they're making now will have profound consequences for them in the future they are creating. They expect that a job is going to be easy to find. If you can do something you really enjoy it will make your life worthwhile. I've heard it said that if you can do what you love, you'll never have to work a day in your life. At the present time eight out of ten people in this country are not enjoying their work. What does that say about the decisions they've made when they were in High School. My youngest daughter Lois often says to me, "*Mom, how many people get to do on their jobs what they've always wanted to do*"? From the time she was in first grade, she's always wanted to be a writer and here now she's getting paid for writing. If everybody would realize they have to get their education to do what they like it would make things a lot different. It's a path, an open door to whatever potential futures you might be wishing for. For what it's worth, I always wanted to be a dietician, while I never fulfilled that my daughter did. She has fulfilled my fantasy for myself for her own self. I'm so very proud to be her mom.

Careers can make a difference in the world. What we do with our life affects others. What we do for others changes them. People often do try to do what they can to help the people in their lives. It's a trickledown effect. There's an old saying, "Change one life, you change the whole world". I witnessed that process occurring almost every day I was in Brentwood.