



Joseph Benjamin Palazollo, Jr.
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His full name is Joseph Benjamin Palazollo Jr. The name Joseph belonged to his father and his father's father. They were both Joseph. In reality, he said, he was Joseph III but for some reason, in Brooklyn they didn't believe in thirds and so they called him Junior. Benjamin was his Godfather but also his uncle. He did meet his father's parents but he was too young to remember the experience. He believes they both died when he was only about three or four years old. In the meantime, he met his mother's parents, but there again, his grandfather died when he was similarly too young to remember and consequently to be exact he thought he was only forty-nine. He knew his grandmother up until 1969 when she passed away. And you know, they knew their cousins from Italy, those who came here. Very nice people! Both sets of grandparents were native born Italians. Years ago there wasn't a belief in intermarriage. Now there may be a marriage even though you may be Catholic, but you marry someone who's German or Catholic or Irish because people who are of a similar heritage tended to remain together. *"I had several nick names, but I can't tell you what they are. Ha! Ha!"*

"I've enjoyed the opportunity of having traveled to Italy on about four different occasions already. Mind you, my daughter has gone about six times. My mother was born about an hour and a half outside Naples, in a province called Avellino, and when we went there my kids were very small they were like three and four or four and five. My kids were never big ice cream eaters, but my cousins grabbed the kids and walked them around while we walked around town arm in arm with all the relatives, just like you'd see in the old movies. My kids must have had six Galati's (ice creams), and then we had to call my mother to tell them we

were back. Being a baby in Italy, if you're a small child you can't go wrong. When I wanted to holler at my kids in Rome, because they were running on the grass, this old lady said to me, 'Leave them alone. They're children. Don't yell at them. Just enjoy them'. How enlightened it was. If you had little children, it was like having a key. They tell you to go ahead on line and make you do all these things. So that was nice."

"My mother was from Naples, from outside of Naples actually about an hour and a half outside, and my father was from Sicily, from Castellammare. If you see some of the old Mafia movies, that's where it originated. The name means 'small building' or 'small Palace.' Currently, both my mother and father are deceased. However both my wife and I are alone, because our kids are married. One of my daughters has been married five years, and she just had a new baby boy. I'm a grandfather, and I feel like an old man, and my other daughter was just divorced, and I guess she's on a search again. She just didn't believe in a simple divorce. She wanted to go through the Church, and she's getting an annulment."

"When he started working my father was a factory worker. When they first arrived in the United States, I think it was about 1939 or 1940, I'm not really sure, and then my father 'Graduated' and became a Doorman in NYC. At the time, that was considered to be a great job right before WWII. Well, it was funny, because politically, my mother was a Monarchist, and my father was a Socialist. It was kind of strained, that kind of thing. Then my mother and father both followed Socialism, but with a King. They met here." Was your mother, coming from that generation, a homemaker? "Exactly! At that time women didn't go out to work unless they were forced to work. My mother was at home, my father worked in the factory and my mother with her depression mentality managed never to throw out a stitch of food. She would recycle everything. My father was more modern than my mother. I think I follow my mother, being as I am more a conservative in tradition. My father worked in a fancy co-op building up town on Fifth Avenue on the East Side directly facing Central Park. There was a doorman on duty twenty-four hours a day and he loved it. He got along with the residents as well as the employees and his own boss. They always treated him very nicely. My father retired at sixty two but passed away at the age of seventy-six. I had talked with a couple of math teachers who lived in his building, Bob and Harry, and they

calculated that if he retired at 62 he would make more money in the long run, and that's what he did, and they were right. My mother died at seventy-five approximately three years after my father.

Joe's kids went to school in New York City and when they moved out to Long Island about twenty years prior to being interviewed, they started in Smithtown, and his children were shocked when they said, "Look Daddy, there are no dittos." Rather, "there are ditto's, and we don't have to copy everything off the board", that was totally different from New York City, which either they had no ditto's or they weren't able to afford ditto's. "My children were shocked that they didn't have to copy from the board anymore. My daughter Gina is the oldest and she was married to a doctor and low and behold, she walked out on him for reasons that she had given me and I promised I would never mention them, but they were good reasons. She has a Masters Degree and she's going to be an ESL Teacher, hopefully in Brentwood."

His daughter Claudia, who's been married five years, just had a baby. She's a Kindergarten Teacher, and she's right here in Brentwood. "So they're both following their father I guess. Being a Grandfather has made me feel old. I never felt old before. Age never meant anything to me except for this particular event. Becoming a grandfather is absolutely life changing. The personalities of my two daughters are absolutely different. My daughter Gina has ways about her that remind me of my brother. But at the same time she still has some of my ways. While my brother is rather reticent about a lot of things mysterious which we always attributed to being part Sicilian, but she's very interested in things, she has a lot of friends, she goes out quite a bit. I know she's an avid reader and I know she likes the beach. I know as a reader she subscribes to National Geographic, she likes to go to shows, to a disco and what have you. She has wide ranging interests. She likes to see Broadway Shows. I also think she's a very hard worker, and that to me is very important, because that was how we were brought up, to work hard to get whatever you're going to get. She's very independent and very much like my mother. Very much like my mother, in fact some of the ways she has she is similar to my mother. First of all, my daughter Gina looks very much like our family, because she has dark hair, dark complexion and dark eyes. My daughter Claudia has brownish blond hair, 'cause don't forget, my wife is Irish, English and

Norwegian, and she resembles more my wife's side, although people say she resembles me. I don't know about that, but she has my wife's personality, very easygoing, really nice, a lot of fun and not serious. I'll tell you the truth. When she decided she wanted to get serious about something, she knew what she wanted she had her goal and she never let anything stop her from getting what she wanted. It's the same thing with my daughter Gina, because Gina is the same way. She wanted her Masters in ESL. She got it. In that way they are definitely very similar. As I said, my daughter Gina is more serious, and she keeps more things to herself. I'd like to use the word, thoughtful. My daughter Gina was more like my father, everything would come out. There would be no secrets."

"My wife's name is Marianne, and we met in of all places, at Confraternity. We, in my family were never big Churchgoers. But, it was around the Viet Nam period, and we were losing our draft status, so I went down because I needed a Priests recommendation if I was going to get a job in the Catholic School. So I'm thinking about this and I said, 'I guess I better go down and do something.' So I go down and met her the first night, I walked her home, and I don't know if it was the following night we went out on a date, and I walked her home in the pouring rain at Coney Island, with my little portable radio. I knew right away. In fact I said to her, you know something, you're going to marry me at the wind-up. You just know sometimes, and we've been married for thirty years." And you didn't frighten her away? "Nope. Nope! It's been an interesting up and down situation, as all relationships should and would be, and I hate to say although I have to admit, I did learn things from her. I don't know if she learned from me, but I definitely learned from her. She taught me how to be more careful. She taught me how to be more thoughtful. She tries to teach me how not to just shoot off my mouth, get mad and lose my temper. Most of the times I still did, especially when I thought it was something extremely important, but she taught me to be more tolerant of people. I think she is the most tolerant person I've ever met. What I learned from her made me a better teacher. When we were first married I was first teaching, she would type up all my exams. She would take them to work and type up my exams. It was a joint effort to get things done that had to be done."

"At the very beginning when we first got married, and there were no children, I really wasn't happy with her working, because I really felt like, going

back to being an old traditionalist, I felt as if it was really an insult to my personality that my wife would have to work. So what I've tried to do, although I have not always succeeded, is I would never use the money. It was her money, she had her bank account, she would pay for trips, special trips that we would go on with the family and all, and she never was cheap about it. So it was a good situation."

"My grandchild is now four months old. His name is Douglas Junior. His father and I get along marvelously. In fact last night was my turn to take him for chimichangas in a Mexican Restaurant, and we go every couple of months. He pays one month and I pay one month. We sit and talk about the family. We talk about different things. He's a fine, fine, fine young man and talented. Not only in music. He's in a band also beside his regular job, but he's a marvelous carpenter. Absolutely marvelous! He wanted to build me a deck, but I said, 'No Thank you'. We have a good deal of contact with the kids, because my daughter Gina lives on the border between Kings Park and Smithtown, way north of Jericho Turnpike. My other daughter Claudia lives north of Jericho Turnpike, but she lives more toward St. Patrick's Catholic Church on Jericho Turnpike, so consequently we speak to the kids every day, and if we don't speak to them we see them. So in reality there's really nothing missing."

"I was born in the United States in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, New York, in February of 1944. In those days there were still such things as neighborhoods. I think now a day's what people call ghettos were really neighborhoods. Every neighborhood in Brooklyn would more or less be divided up and there'd be an Irish section, a Polish section, an Italian section, a Spanish section and we lived in the Italian section. We went to Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, and more or less we grew up around a lot of people who came either from our town or near our town. My brother always used to be a sickly guy. He had rheumatic fever. The doctor advised us to move from there, because the rooms were bad, and there was no central heat. We used to have a boiler in the middle of the kitchen. And, what we did was move to the City Projects in Astoria. And, my wife lived in Astoria. And, she went to St. Rita's Church, and so did we at the wind-up. I had just one brother who was married. He has a son about twelve years old. He's currently separated from his wife, and I think he's doing okay. At times he suffers from

bouts of depression, because of my mother and father dying – maybe, because of him and the wife. My brother went to school for radio and TV, however because my brother is a perfectionist, he never stayed with any job. For example, when he was with NBC Cable TV, he had a job, and he was a person who believed that every job should be done the way you're supposed to do it, and he wound up working in these high rise buildings on Fifth Avenue also like my father did. He does TV's, radios, but you know, things like that, and he's a handy person who knows how to do everything. Not like his brother who doesn't know how to do anything."

"You know, I never really believed in fantasies. I was a very pragmatic person, I guess. I knew I wanted to improve and I remember my mother pushing education. Education didn't really matter to my father. My mother was really the one who pushed education. I went to high school, but before that I was thinking of (in the Junior High), going to a Technical School; Aviation High School, which was in Queens, I don't know which part. Then I thought of Thomas Edison High School that was in Brooklyn, and I was thinking about becoming an electrician. Then one of my friends said, 'Come on! Let's go to college. Let's go to regular academic high school', and another friend was going to the same place and another friend too, so I went too because I figured I'd have company. Thanks to them, my mother and my uncle Pasqualino, I went to college. While I was in college around the second year, I was thinking about dropping out and going into the service, and my uncle and my mother kept on hounding me, so finally I went back to school. It was called Queens College of the City of New York, and in those days you didn't pay. If you were lucky enough to get in, you didn't pay. And the first year I went to Queens College I didn't even pay for books. But by the second year the City got stingy and we had to pay."

"My mother's maiden name was Costaldi. My grandfather, her father was a baker in Italy, and some of his relatives still have a bakery in the next town. It was like they employed about forty people, and it was almost like a commercial bakery I would say, except they were in three or four towns around (inaudible). And then the way the story was told to me, he did something to someone – it seems that these people were called 'camarestas', sort of like the Mafia but they were in

Naples, and someone struck him, and there was some problem, and he had to (flee?), leave the country. That was why he and my grandmother came here."

Joe retains one dominant childhood memory of his mother. "She never wasted anything. I mean she was like a typical type of depression person. If she made macaroni on Thursday, she made spaghetti and egg pie on Friday, because they didn't eat meat. Her family, especially her children, gave her the most pleasure, because she was very close with her sisters as well. We all lived within about two blocks of one another when we lived in Brooklyn. Then two of my aunts moved to Queens Village, and then we moved there eventually, and then the aunt moved to Floral Park. So it was always more or less, my mother and father with my aunts and uncles most of the time. And it was a very strange thing, because their idea was that it was always the family, the family, the family was so important. They had outside friends and very good friends. It just seemed that our family was always the focal point. My own nuclear family was not large, but we always associated with my cousins, my aunts and my uncles, and we did have a large extended family. I think it's nice when you grow up that way."

"Two or three things come to mind when I think of very early memories associated with my father. I remember that my father was a rabid Yankee fan. He used to take me and my brother to night games at Yankee Stadium. And then when we came home we'd say to my mother, 'Let him sleep we don't want to go to school tomorrow and he's tired'. That would be one thing that was funny. He would be very strange when it came to certain things. Some time later he and I went to Las Vegas where he won a great deal of money. I went to borrow one of his stamps, and he almost chopped my hand off, while in the meantime, he was paying for my room, he was paying for the flight, it was funny. He was eccentric I guess, in that way. But my father was really like a family man. He naturally wanted us to walk the straight and narrow. He got me a job at eight years old, to give you an idea. I would help him clean halls. Where he used to work in a factory, the boss owned a couple of private homes. I wouldn't call them tenements, but they were very much like tenements. My father would sometimes go on a Saturday to wash all the floors, and he would take me with him. He would take me, and I would do the sweeping and he would wash."

“When my grandfather (father’s father), was in Italy, I think he was a day laborer. However according to what people say, he was involved with the Mafia, but at the time the Mafia wasn’t the way it is now. They would fight the ‘latifandista’, people who owned the big farm lands - and would cheat people for food,- and what have you. They tried like Robin Hood did, to help people ‘by taking from the rich to help the poor.’ They lived some times in the mountains. When he came to the United States he no longer wanted to be involved with the Mafia. Honestly, he wanted to work, and that would be that.”

“My family life experience has taught me one thing, to accept people for whom and for what they are. I know I wasn’t really ever affected by this, but I know my father was kind of like always – not mistrusting, but always having a second thought about something – but more or less they always taught us to treat people as you yourself wanted to be treated. They trained us never to steal or be dishonest, or what have you, and to stand up for what you know is right - no matter what, no matter what! - I think that carried on later into my life, because I did ‘cut my own throat’ a couple of times, but I don’t regret it.”

“As a teenager I felt okay. I never really felt anything really different. I always had one idea about doing the right thing, about working, because my father and mother were very big on the ‘work ethic.’ It was like you had to work. There were two people outside of his immediate family members, that both had a powerful effect on him becoming the person he eventually became. “My Uncle Ben, who was my mother’s brother-in-law, was an average man. He was a carpenter, and he loved to tend the garden and having a large family. He loved being with the family and with his children and just enjoyed himself. He never thought of himself in anything. That was one person. Then a Great Uncle (inaudible), because we always saw him, was a man who was very traditional, hard working, loved to tell stories, and from what I hear, he had an eye for women. I don’t know, but that’s what they claim anyway. When he was coming over on the boat he had a girl friend on the boat, as well while he was married, okay? But he was a very nice man, fun to be with you know? He just made you feel so much at home when you would go to his house. My great aunt as well as my great uncle! My great aunt was my grandmother’s sister. They were just a very laid back kind of people”.

Joe thanked his grandmother and his mother for having attributed to his eventual choice of career. He was studying Spanish and Italian when he was in high school. He was shocked when one day he asked his grandmother something, and she started spouting all the rules for language that he knew, and he said to her, " *Grandma, I didn't know you knew all that*". What he also didn't know was that they had both gone to finishing school but ended up leaving, and what have you. He was shocked and more or less, she said, "*Study. Be good. Marry someone that's Catholic*". That was really the basic thing. "*You know? She was a person who had a lot of little interests. She used to crochet. You know! She used to read. She used to watch television...she could read in Italian, but she could read in English as well. She was able to speak English, broken, but she spoke it in a way that she made herself understood. I think her push about education and my mother, certainly her push about education and my Uncle Pasqualino, these three people were the main thrust as far as studying goes. I ultimately made my decision when I was in high school, and people were applying to college and I felt, 'Well I really don't know about College. I don't know if I'm interested.'* Maybe I'll join the Navy. And then I found out a couple of friends of mine were going to college, and they said, 'Come on. Come on. Apply for it!' According to one of my friends, Tom Dwyer, he said we had to take the S.A.T. that must already have existed. Very truthfully I don't remember it. He must be right, but I don't remember taking that kind of examination. Anyway, just about mid year in my senior year I decided I'd apply. I said I didn't even know where to apply, and they said, 'Apply to Queens'. I took the Placement Exam and scored very high, because in the end, I didn't pay anything at all."

Joe had a good memory of several teachers over the years. There was a gentleman he identified as Mr.Glick. Okay? "*He was my Spanish teacher. He was also the Head of the Department. The nicest man I've ever met. Kind, thoughtful, pleasant – his name was Irving Glick. And Strangely enough, when I moved out to Smithtown I met a man, and I looked at this man and I said, 'Well, I know he's not Mr. Glick, but he sure looks like him'. And I asked the guy, 'What's your last name?' And he said, 'Glick.'* And I said, '*I knew it. I could just look at your face. You look just like your brother'. And his brother was doing fine in Florida, and what have you. And it was interesting. It was nice even talking to this man because of his brother. He was a nice man also. He was one of the...and I would say he was*

probably one of the most...and a woman named Miss. Lynch. She was an English Teacher. And she had me reading things out loud in the English class, which I didn't want to do. And she gave me a lot of encouragement. So between Mr. Glick and this lady, Miss. Lynch I got a great deal of encouragement. That's when I decided I wanted to become a teacher. I had thought about being an Astronomer, because I liked science. But my math skills were never up to par. But I liked being a language teacher even though it wasn't an English teacher like Miss Lynch. My choice in the end as a role model favored Mr. Glick, and I became a Teacher of Languages."

"I'll tell you the truth, growing up as I did and when I did, as a boy, you didn't have all that much to do. I think I may have, and it wasn't even a chore, throwing out the garbage. The boys in those days, in Italian families weren't allowed to do anything. Till this day I say, I don't know how to wash my clothes, I don't know how to iron, I don't know how to do anything. I feel like God forbid, if something happened I'd be dead. I love my mother dearly for it, but the reality of the situation is, I really should have learned. But I was happy my mother didn't force the issue."

"My first paying job was in a pizza place. But it was a strange kind of pizza place. It was a Bakery and a Pizza Place. Downstairs in the cellar they made Pizzas. They had this huge oven. I started working there for a really, really low wage, but I worked there. Then I used to get a bag of fresh rolls to bring home. And at the time Pizza was 15 cents, I don't have to tell you. It was a nice job. The man was nice, and the customers were nice. Right after that, I think I was about eight, I worked in a tailor where I swept and washed the floor and was waxing the counter window, the glass counter and what have you. I used to watch this man Saul, press (not that I ever liked him), not that he ever said anything to me because he didn't like my friends to come over to the house.

"Then when I was in High School I used to work in Key Foods. I used to work with this guy Sol. He used to ring up stuff and I used to pack things. And then I got promoted and I used to go out with carts and home deliver stuff. Then I got switched again and I used to work in the back with Benny...a very nice person.

That was all for the first two years. Then during my second two years in the high school I worked as a Page in a local Branch of the New York State Public Library.”

“One holiday that used to be very big – I think things have changed now. But one holiday that was very big was Holy Saturday. Okay? Now, as Catholics we used to break our fast on Holy Saturday at 12 o’clock, on Saturday afternoon. So, consequently, for us, Sunday was for going to Church. Saturday was the Holiday, sort of like the day before, and there’d be special pastas, special foods, strange foods that you’d never associate with being Italian, like white pasta, with ‘vodericata’, and I guess a little olive oil or something, peas with pea pie that was shaped like a triangle with peas and anchovies, and onions that was like a pastry and a thing we call ‘pizzagran’, it was a meat pie and it was almost like (the French have their name, but I can’t think of it right now), ours was much different, but it was similar to what we had, it was like, salami and egg, pepperoni and prosciutto, two different kinds of cheeses, we had that kind of situation. I think all our holidays, ...I think the way I was brought up at any rate, what was always most important was the food. My mother and father were not religious fanatics. They were believers but certainly were not religious fanatics and...while my aunts were...not fanatics, but they’d go to church and all of that - my Grandmother certainly was – but everything was surrounded by the aura of food. We’d wait for my father late on a Friday night, and we’d have spaghetti with him when he came home late at 11:30 from work. We waited on Sunday for something else. It was like this idea, when everybody was together. Maybe part of it was the food and part of it was everybody being together. It was a very nice situation. It made you feel wanted, and you didn’t feel alone when everything happens, because everything happens to people in life. But you felt protected because you had this family protection.”

“I remember my father had to be the first one on the block to buy a TV. I think it was in 1948, but I can’t swear to it, and I remember seeing the first election, I think it was Truman, if I’m not mistaken, winning the election. I remember a Yankee game with Boston, and I remember Al Rosen hit a shot to dead center and Joe DiMaggio just turned around, his number five facing the TV cameras, and he started running with his glove over his head, and he caught the shot, and that’s how the Yankees won the pennant. I remember that. It was not a

great political memory, but it was great for us, because we lived in Brooklyn and we had to drive the Dodger fans crazy. While we had a very interesting group of Brooklyn Dodger fans in our neighborhood who would carry caskets down the middle of the street when the Dodgers lost, and it was so typical, and you really couldn't say anything, because you knew if you did you were going to get beat up if you did. But I remember Sputnik, of course. But that was later. I remember seeing Bishop Sheen on TV. He was popular at the time. Oh, Jackie Gleason we used to watch all the time, and Art Carney of course, Milton Burl. They called it 'The Golden Age of Television', Sid Caesar and Imogene Cocoa, Red Skelton. There was a different form of popular comedy then. Those were days when the comedy would be for an entire family while now in order to evoke laughter they have to be sarcastic or vulgar what-have-you. It was a different time. I'll tell you the three people who make me laugh; actually, four people. Two of my very good friends; Dr. George Cavuto, who has been a friend since 1972 when I moved out here, a friend named Carmine Zito, who's a character; a funny guy. Both gentlemen have very little time because they both work two or three jobs, my cousin Joe Enguante, because even when I'm sad he can make me laugh, or if I was depressed and Joe Governale, one of our teachers, Joe Governale and Lou, when they got started, they used to make me cry. It was so bad they would make me cry. Bob Acker, different people who were tremendous."

"At first, I wasn't really thrilled about going to school on the first day of Kindergarten. It was an all boys school. I remember going in and wanting a particular chair. So I pushed the kid out of the chair and I took it. And to this day I still have that strange habit where I have to have that one particular seat. And some very embarrassing things from then until now have led all the way through my entire life. There was a teacher sitting in my chair in the teacher's room. He was a sub and I said, 'Hey! Get out of my seat. You're sitting in my chair!' And the person got up and left and I said, 'Oh, My God! I was kidding - only partially kidding, anyway'. It carried all the way through from Kindergarten. That happened in P.S. 23 in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. There were others like Mr. Glick I'd like to have thanked for being the role models that they were for me, without a doubt, because I felt he was such a good role model, and I wanted to be like him, because he seemed to know a lot, he seemed to have great empathy with the students, he seemed to have had a lot of understanding. It was the same thing

with Miss Lynch who was my English teacher. She was a marvelous teacher. Some people didn't like her, because she could be tough. But she was fair, and she was thoughtful about your feelings and she pushed you when she thought she could get more out of you."

"Math was not a particularly favorite subject of mine right from the very beginning. I remember one year in school; fourth Grade. The teacher put me under her desk as a punishment. And, she used to wear these shoes that looked like space shoes, and kids used to tease her and call her 'space shoes Bassa'. I couldn't even imagine that a teacher would put me under her desk, because they didn't know something. And, my first grade teacher Miss Wilkins put me for math in the 'dumb' seat. There was a chair in front of the room that was designated the 'dumb' seat. You wore a 'dunce' cap. I mean, talk about humiliation. Terrible!"

"After attending Queens College I matriculated to NYU where I completed a graduate degree. I had originally started at N.Y.U. in an M.A.-P.H.D. Program. They had accepted me for the program. I finished my M.A. I took the Comprehensive Exam, and I was all set to start taking PhD courses. Then I'd gotten married, and fourteen months later my first daughter was born. Fourteen months after that my second daughter was born. Then I bought a house."

"I remember I first came to Brentwood in 1966. Brentwood was a very interesting place. I remember driving my mother and grandmother out here. I remember them talking and my grandmother called it 'La Compagnia', country as compared to the City, because it was. It was a beautiful school, you know, we didn't see anything like it in the city. We drove by Entenmann's, and at that time it was like a mom and pop kind of place. It was very rural out here at the time. But, naturally, in thirty-three years, I've seen tremendous changes. The story of how I heard about Brentwood and how I came to be here is very strange. I originally had a job teaching in William Cullen Bryant High School in (LIC) Long Island City, Queens." One day he received a phone call from Dr. Apen, Chairman of the Language Department of Bryant HS in Queens. He had recommended Joe for the position but he said, "I don't know what happened, but NYC said we can't take any teachers. " "Now here I'm figuring, I just graduated, I didn't have my student deferment, and I was up in the air and ready to be drafted, okay? He then said to

himself, "Why would they draft me now? They should have drafted me while I was in college, this way if anything happened that would be that and I wouldn't have had to work so hard. My feeling was you should have drafted me before time before I went to college and whatever would happen, would happen. I couldn't get a job in the city and I had a NYC license. I said to myself, 'Oh, Oh, I'm really in trouble.' So I went down to Queens College, and at the same time I contacted the Priest about working in Confraternity, because I was thinking I needed a recommendation. I feel awful saying this, but I needed a recommendation. I went down to Queens College and just talking to one of the Secretaries, a very nice woman, she said, 'You're going to be a Spanish Teacher, Right?' I said, 'Yeah!' She said, 'You know, my son is trying to get out of a contract in Brentwood. Would you like to work there?' I said, 'I'd like to but I can't afford a car. I don't have a car.' She said, 'That's all right! You can take the train – LIRR.' Not realizing that the train would get here at 6:30 am and I would have to get to the High School by 7:25 am or whatever. All right, so I run out, I sent a note to Brentwood, and I believe I was contacted by Kay Aveni who wrote for the Principal. Two days later I had an appointment to meet the Principal, Fred Weaver. At the time, Bob Hickey interviewed me. Fred Weaver was a very interesting man. Some people said he was strange, and others said he used to help people in his own way. So how strange could you be? Mr. Weaver said we also have another candidate for the same job from Colombia University. Bob was interviewing him because Mr. Steber who was the Department Chair, was the Language Coordinator, wasn't there. I went in, and I started speaking, and Bob Hickey said, stop talking. You have the job. Then Mr. Weaver knowing that I had no car, drove me to the Administration Building, because, naturally, I didn't know where it was. He waited for me, he helped me fill out the papers, he gave me every idea possible so I wouldn't be fooled, he told me what I should put down X amount of percentage of everything you had to do, very nice man. And, from when I first met Bob Hickey, we became very fast friends. We just hit it off. And, for Mr. Weaver I have the utmost respect for him. Still, I've seen Mr. Weaver at Farmingdale teaching math when I was teaching Spanish there, I saw Mr. Weaver as the Head of Student Teachers at Dowling College while I was teaching there. Mr. Weaver made an extreme effort to help me get extra jobs, because he knew I was getting married. He got me a job at Entenmanns teaching Spanish to English managers and Vice Versa, and the next month when I started, Bob Hickey and his family became very friendly with

me and my family, I knew all his kids and watched them grow up, and it was a very pleasant situation. I'd heard absolutely nothing about Brentwood before arriving here, but I learned quickly."

"In fact, after I signed in Brentwood, they notified me in the City that I had the same job offered to me at Bryant High School that I was offered in the first place. It was about ten minutes by bus from where I was living at the time. Okay? But I felt, that I gave my word and I felt that I had to be honest in my word if they were willing to keep me...I'll probably give it up at the end of the year. But then the year extended to two and three...before you knew it."

"When I came here, it seemed that we were in the process of losing a lot of teachers. It seemed that jobs were plentiful. People were not really staying in Brentwood but going to different places. But those that I met were really fun. We used to go and have a couple of beers at Thompson's Station, the local watering hole. I got to meet different people involved in the union and what have you; really interesting people in different departments - when we went down to Thompsons, and you were made to feel welcomed and warm. I was asked to help out Mr. Camp as a wrestling coach. However, our personalities didn't quite complement one another, because I used to wrestle in college. He was a nice man and a great coach, but I had a feeling that he didn't like me and well, I didn't want to bother. I also did a Spanish Club, and an Italian Club, and we used to go to the Ross Nursing Home and play cards and keep the people entertained once every two weeks. But at the time, the District wouldn't come up with a bus, and Frank La Chicotte, who was one of the new early Administrators, came up with the money to pay for it out of his own pocket. It was amazing! I'm sure it was expensive. He was a very nice person, a very fun person. He understood men and he thought I was doing the right thing by having the kids go to the nursing home and deal with older people. At that time Advisors weren't paid, but all of a sudden they started paying us. They started switching me around, because they wanted Italian to be included, so I wrote the program, and I started teaching the Italian. So I started doing the same thing. I started an Italian Club and going to the Nursing Home with the kids. I wasn't too creative, but I thought that was a good idea to do. We had scholarships and managed to make some money. In those days before

Matilda Cuomo put her two cents in we used to sell candy in school and with that money, we used to give scholarships.”

“Then I had a new good, and bad situation, come up. We had a new Principal, and we didn’t really get along. We had a similar philosophy in some ways and a different philosophy in others. We both were family people. When he discussed his family and my family he was the most pleasant person you could ever hope to meet. However, because I was a union representative and I guess because I was somewhat pushy about it, we really didn’t get along. Okay? So, to be spiteful, I got rid of all my clubs, because I figured, that it would make him look good – never thinking, which I should have, who does it really hurt, but the kids? But at the time because I had such a bad temper, I decided, well, the hell with him. Let him get stuck. Let him get another advisor. Let them see if they could... We used to do interscholastic sports. For example, the Spanish Club would play the French Club in football or soccer, the Italian Club would play the French and Spanish...we’d go round robin sort of deal...We’d try to get all the kids that were in the Clubs together, get them to realize Hey! You’re taking a foreign language. This is the idea. You can play sports together. We had International Night, we had a few International Nights...and, as I look back at it now, I gave it all up and all for the wrong reasons.”

“From about 1967 to about 1984 and 1989 to about 1983 were really good years for me. That was when I had some really good kids in class. That was not to say that I didn’t have kids that also gave me a pain in the neck. I had a majority of kids that were thoughtful, who were very nice, well mannered, interested in learning. Some teachers might have said that teachers of languages are more apt to get the kids in the top of their class but with changing State guidelines you also began to see changing mandates and be given kids with Special Needs due to mainstreaming, and the old stereotypes no longer applied to student abilities. They weren’t academic but they gave 100% of what they had to offer and could therefore still achieve up to their own potential. None of us could ask for more.”

“The training to teach we received in college was very unrealistic, to say the least. You were never really presented with the reality of what it was going to be. I would say I only began to learn how to teach when I came to Brentwood, came

under the tutelage of Mr. Bernard Steber, who I continue to speak with and write to today. I always said he was my mentor. We'd fight. We'd argue every day. He would say, 'I don't want you to use the Castilian pronunciation. It sounds like you have a lisp'. And, I wouldn't when he would come to visit me, and he would say to me, 'I know you're doing it during class. I know you're doing it,' and he was right. But he said something that makes sense today. He said, 'Take the kids from where they are and go forward. You can't say they've already had Spanish I therefore they'll start in Spanish II. Take them from where they are, it doesn't matter where, and go as far as you can with them.' I think he had a tremendous amount of foresight in that sense. More or less what he embraced is the philosophy that we're embracing now."

Irrespective of the job description that our personal salaried position dictated, each of us had our own role or purpose for coming to work each day and doing what we did our entire professional life, for reasons known only to God and ourselves. We might even call that role, our mission. What was yours? *"I saw that I had a couple of different roles. My first role was to try to make these kids appreciative of their family, and to be appreciative of the things they've had, to treat all people equally, not hold petty prejudices, or not to be prejudice against everybody when it's only one person you don't like. Try to foster friendships among students and give a little bit of freedom not a lot because we were taught in those days, you come in and you don't smile until December and consequently I more or less follow that kind of situation." "There was one situation where Mr. Steber had told me that he heard through kids that they 'were having you for class, and that you were a bastard, but he's a good teacher. And that saved you!' But, Mr. Steber and I would go around and around but as I said, that was the first thing as far as my faults. My second thing was teaching them Spanish, but I knew in forty-two minutes five days a week when they had five other majors unless they were really interested weren't really going to become Spanish Teachers. I believe out of my thirty-three years there are only two girls who became Spanish Teachers, whom I still see. But teaching them Spanish was a secondary thing. I really wanted to make them good citizens and good human beings. That to me was the most important, because you went out and worked you had to know how to deal with people, treat people, understand feelings and what have you."*

“I’ll tell you the truth it’s dishonesty in all its forms that makes me angry. It’s not simply a matter of telling me a little white lies or something but dishonesty in all its forms and a stubborn lack of trying to improve yourself. I can feel myself lose my temper till this very moment.”

“I waited until I was tenured before becoming active with the union, but I did so because I felt that I had been mistreated by my Principal, David Martz. Not that Dave was mean to me, but he mistreated me in certain ways, because I had the President of the Board’s daughter in my class, and I failed her. I started having pressure, and I really wasn’t happy about that, and I decided I was going to get involved with the union. How I first started was Tom Tagle. Tom was the Grievance person in the Sonderling Building, and he was trying to get rid of it because he was going to go into Administration, and he said, ‘Would you want to take it?’ And I said, I don’t know anything about it. ‘Ah, try it. You’ll enjoy it. It’s a nice thing.’ And, sure enough, I got to be a Grievance Person. I met people like Tom Brush. I met people like Dot and Jack Zuckerman. The old fashion Socialists who really were looking out for the betterment of the worker. And every time I see Jack and Dot, which I still do I, say to them, ‘You know, you’re the old fashion Russian Socialists that have people in the middle of everything, those are the most important working conditions and what have you.’ I started to get involved, and before I knew it I was Chief Delegate of the Building, and I was Financial Secretary of the Union, where I ran against Jack Zuckerman as a handpicked person, there was an opposing slate for Financial Secretary and myself. Knowing my mathematical abilities, one would have to think – ‘What nerve!’ But, Thank God, they had a financial Secretary that was marvelous. She did all the math, okay? But, I really started getting involved, and I wanted to run for the Executive Council, because I felt I was going to be working in Brentwood, and I saw the conditions and, I felt I really wanted to get something done, not only for myself but for future teachers. And, I see that now that my daughter is here, the same thing. And as I said, I got to meet and work with Tom Brush, and Guy DiPietro.”

“One of the most important political struggles by your own definition was when Carmine Puleo was appointed Principal of Brentwood High School, I believe in 1985. I may be wrong but I’ve always felt that after he left his position and he retired, I think the school went down from that point as far as the loyalty of the

teachers were concerned. Teachers would always fight with Stan but they were always loyal to him. I mean Stan would do strange things sometimes like take a book off the shelf from the library, 'Double Witchcraft' or something and you would fight with him like crazy, but he was an honorable man. He was very fair and knew how to separate the individual from the human person. Like, I would go into Stan's office and start banging like a crazy person, banging his desk and come back the eighth period and say, 'Stan, I'm really sorry for the way I behaved with you,' and he'd laugh and say, 'Naw! You gave me a good chuckle.' While in this other situation, this person Mr. Puleo, was ... I believe he was sincere as far as what he wanted to do. I believe the manner in which he approached it was incorrect. And what happened from the very beginning, I believe he was an Elementary School Principal. Elementary School Principals have like a fief or fiefdom, where no one would dare question their authority. They would never say well, maybe this is the wrong way. Maybe we could approach it another way. I had known a couple of people who he'd made cry, a couple of Elementary School Teachers, and I felt from that point on, you can't do these things. I don't know if he meant or wanted them to cry, or it just happened, if he hadn't anticipated it or what. But at the wind-up, Mr. Puleo and myself locked horns over a variety of issues (Union vs. Administration). I think he felt that Administration had any prerogative they wanted. In the meantime, the contract laid out specifically what they could and couldn't do in specific cases."

"We had a terrible discussion with him. We discussed and discussed He was adamant and I was adamant. And so we decided upon another way of attacking. These were my advisors, because I wasn't really smart enough to write them on my own, and I had different teachers whose names would never be repeated write an article that would be sarcastic, that would be thinly veiled, and would be an attack against him personally. And I'd sign my name. Let's say Mr. X wrote the first article and Miss Y wrote the second article. It was never the same style. Some other teachers contributed some poetry. We were also informing the faculty what was going on, and sometimes I would say we took it to an extreme. Eventually the Superintendent sent me a note, saying, 'Joe, Stop calling Chuck Carmelo'. And you know, I thought it was funny. Obviously, he didn't. And I didn't know which way to go, because I really couldn't budge him, There were points that were terrible and at the time Les Black was President, and if I remember correctly, I believe Mike

Fasullo was Vice President, and they relayed messages to me from the Superintendent. But I think it was that period of time where after his being Principal he left, the teachers were never the same. The politics got better on the one hand, but it was never the same. There wasn't the same loyalty. Until that point, you never heard, 'Oh, I hate coming her', and what have you, I think this was not the situation before that."

I think that that I was Financial Secretary of the union, and the fact that I was able to help people who were in trouble was positive. Joe Palazollo retired June 30th of 1999. He had already begun living the rest of his life. He had made his decision to leave a year and a half earlier without any ambivalence, *"not yet anyway,"* he quipped. He knew at age fifty-five he would be entitled to receive (inaudible) and he had a couple of plans. He wanted to teach Summer School, which he was already doing. In September he was planning to go on a five or six country trip including Russia, if the problem in Kosovo didn't change. He was planning to teach again In Suffolk Community College in February. He planned to get involved with the Retired Teachers Organization in Brentwood. He thought that was important. He planned on taking a course at Stony Brook University on the Chinese Language that had always interested him. He was ready to start doing some volunteer work at St. John's Hospital, and he was contemplating teaching the GED in Spanish. His beginning salary in Brentwood was \$5,900. NYC teachers were starting at \$5,400 and gasoline was 23 cents a gallon.

What he will miss most of all is the interaction with some of his colleagues and the interaction with certain students that he has enjoyed encountering over time. He anticipated remaining in contact with colleagues for whom he kept phone numbers and contact information and with whom he has maintained a friendship for many years. There are other people he was looking forward to seeing socially by sharing commonalities and visiting one another's homes. *"There is a certain comfortable feeling when you get together with them that's nice"*. He told us that as teachers have gotten younger we have less and less in common with one another. That's why he looks forward to getting together with retired teachers. He felt he had a lot more in common with them, *"you all know the same people, you lived through the same era and beside it's always so much fun to reminisce."*

Five years from now, what do you see yourself doing? *“Well, I see myself doing what I had said before, doing all of those things.”* You’re not planning to take it easy then? *“Oh, no! Not at all, because I don’t believe in what retirement was for our parents. You sat home and you didn’t do much and this is a new age. And I still think I have the thoughts and I have the energy to transfer to other people, about behavior about a way of being, the way society is and my thought has always been to improve our situation, and I hope I can still contribute to that.”* One thing we heard from him loud and clear is that he planned to have a lot of fun. *“Absolutely, he said! Because the things I plan to do are all fun. - Nothing serious”.*