



**June Dawson**  
**ROBS History Project**  
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June's full name is June Atte Dawson. Her middle name Atte is a French family name that she rarely uses except on official documents. June didn't have a nickname, because she said her name was too short for one.

June lives by herself in Holbrook in the same house she has owned for about 20 years. She comes from a family of five, where she was the oldest. She was asked if she had the traits of the older child and to describe her personality. She said she could be a take-charge person if she has to. Since she and her siblings were spread out in ages, she spent a lot of time working with children, making her very responsible. She's not afraid to go out and do things on her own and do different things she wants to do. If she decides she wants to do something she will work towards doing it.

June was born in Oyster Bay and while in first grade moved to Bayville where her father and his whole family were born. She said that next in line was a sister who lives in Wading River and is a secretary who works for a lawyer. Her siblings were all scattered around Long Island except for one of her brothers. Her brother Albert, who was next in line, lives in West Babylon and works for an engineering firm. Her other brother, Walter is in Florida and is a contractor. Her younger sister, Jenny lives in Oakdale and works with AHRC.

June's paternal grandfather and grandmother came over from England around 1910 and settled in Oyster Bay where they stayed. That's where her father was born. She used to stay with her grandmother in Oyster Bay for a few days. When she went to high school and wanted to stay after school, she would walk to her grandmother's house, which was close to school. There were no buses, and she lived in Bayville. She would have dinner at her grandmother's house, and then her father would pick her up there and take her back home. Her mother came from the Bronx. As a child June remembers her maternal grandparents taking her to the Bronx Botanical Gardens and the Bronx Zoo. She would spend a week or two with them in the summer. Bronx was most definitely a different place back then. It was like the country to her.

What were some of her earliest memories of her own childhood? She remembered the first day of school in kindergarten when she climbed a slide in the classroom that seemed huge to her and came down a fast way right over the side. She never forgot that. It stuck out more than anything she ever remembered about her early school days.

She was then asked to speak about her father. June said that he was a very likable person. Everyone seemed to like him. He was the oldest boy and was very close with his family. All of June's friends loved them.

June was then asked, "How would you describe growing up in your family? What was it like? Give us an idea, let us take a little look into see what it was like." June said that it was kind of an ordinary family. Her mother was home and was there when June came home from school. She was always there, because she didn't drive. June's father took the family different places when he was home. They generally took a vacation in the summer camping or something else for four or five days or a week. June learned a lot about camping from her father and her brothers.

What made June decide to be a teacher? June said that she was always very good in school, and it was something she always wanted to be. When she was about 10 or 12 years old, she knew pretty well that she wanted to be a teacher. She was always very interested in science and wanted to study it, so she decided to combine both interests. She said that it worked out very well for her.

June said she remembers many of her classmates from elementary school and high school and still keeps in touch with one or two.

June was then asked if she remembered and could describe the room where she slept as a child. She said that she shared the room with her sister up until she finished her first year in college and until they moved. Her sister was a senior in high school at the time. June said that the room was her favorite color blue. They each had their own bed, bureau and side of the room.

Where were family chores while growing up? June said that things were assigned. She and her sister alternated the jobs every week. For example if she washed the dishes, her sister would dry them, then the next day they were reversed. She said that her brothers also alternated jobs.

What was June's first job that she was paid for? She said she worked as a waitress in Bayville.

Was there a family holiday in particular that was more important than other holidays? June responded, "I think Christmas was always the number one holiday at least it's the one that has kids." Christmas Day was the big holiday.

When asked what she did on an average summer day when not in school, June replied, "Well, my love of water was way back then. There was our house and then a road like a dirt road and then the beach at the end of the street. So, I kind of stayed the

whole time at the beach. My friends did the same thing. We were at the beach. April 1st, we used to sneak in the water behind my parents back to get in and we spent the summer down there of course, and as you got older you'd sit at the beach, you put on two inches of lipstick as you got older, you know. But even as a kid, you know, I was always there. SUNY Stony Brook was being built and was not completed, so it's first campus was located on the grounds of the former Gold Coast estate in Oyster Bay. June said that she actually graduated out of what was called Long Island Center in Oyster Bay that was SUNY Stony Brook. Right after getting her Bachelor's degree in biology she went straight to graduate school at Hofstra University getting her Master's degree in secondary education. She had also completed her student teaching.

June was then asked if she remembered any of her teachers from the early years in school, and if any of them had an impact on her. June said that her chemistry teacher had a lot of impact on her. She had her father and her father's aunt as students too. June's biology teacher, who was a young teacher at the time, had a lot of influence on her too. Mrs. Zexer was the chemistry teacher who is no longer alive. She was probably in her 60s when June had her. The biology teacher was Mr. Kumar. He had moved to another district in guidance, so June hadn't seen him in a lot of years.

What were June's least favorite subjects in school? She said definitely English, because she found it boring among other things.

When did June come to Brentwood and why? How did she hear about openings there at the time? June said she wanted something local. She was living at home and commuting, and Brentwood was advertising for teachers at the time. In 1961 she went and had an interview with Mike DeBellis at South Junior High, and that's where she got hired. For the second interview the GIS Supervisor, an older brother of Warren Swenson, was present at the interview. During the interview, there was one question that threw her when they said she might be teaching art or a science.

They asked what she thought of that. She wasn't sure how to respond at the time. The next year she asked what answer they had wanted for that question. They said it didn't matter, but that they just wanted to hear her talk.

When she was asked if she had any preconceived notions about Brentwood, she said not really. She just knew that it was a fairly new and growing school district. South Junior High had just opened. At the time she was living in Babylon, so she just had to take Southern State Parkway to work.

Who were some of the people she worked with? June mentioned Mike DeBellis, Ralph Schneider and his wife Sally, Bob Farina, Hiawatha Harris, Gilda Manton, Ed Palovchec, George Pittman and Roy Horn. June worked at South Junior High, the 10th Grade Center and the High School. Two of the principals she worked under were Mike DeBellis and Stan Yankowsky. She said that she and the students enjoyed Stan's interesting morning announcements. She also worked under Mike Welch and John Galaris.

June was certified to teach high school biology and general science and then took a test that gave her certification to teach health. She then attended CCNY and got the Administrative Supervision Certification.

Was June involved with any student activities? She said she had a lot of involvement especially in the junior high school. She was the yearbook advisor there for quite a few years. That kept her very busy. She was also involved with the Student Council. June said, "Just working with the kids was great." "We had most of the kids you kept for three years seven, eight and nine they stayed with us."

Did she think that the training that she had received both as an undergraduate and a graduate student at Hofstra prepared her for what she faced when she came to Brentwood? Because June

never went to a junior high herself and attended a K-8 school then right to a high school, a middle school of seventh and eighth graders was totally foreign to her. When she was in seventh and eighth grades, she didn't change classes. That didn't happen until high school. You didn't have a separate teacher for each subject. You worked mainly in workbooks, and there was no laboratory for science. You were in one classroom all day.

Looking back, how would she have defined the reason she was a teacher for so many years? What was her purpose? June responded, "Well, personally, because I enjoyed it. I got a lot out of it, but in terms of other things, I think I thought my purpose was to work with the very young teenagers. I mean, you know, they were mostly seventh grade, they were like 11 or 12, and it was very nice to work with them and to see them grow up, to channel their lives to become older and better teenagers. I mainly did a lot of work, especially with some kids after school. I did a lot of things like that." A lot of her former students used to come down from the high school to visit her, particularly the students on the yearbook staff. The first year that June was at the high school, they were on double session, so she used to go down in the morning and help the other yearbook advisor. She had missed working with the yearbook staff of students.

When she first retired, did she maintain contact with people that she used to work with? June does still keep in contact with former colleagues. She sometimes goes out to lunch with people who are still teaching at the ninth grade center and the high school. She does home teaching for the Ross H.S., Sonderling H.S. and the 9th Grade Center, so she is in contact with the teachers having to pick up the work from them for her lessons.

June was a member of the BTA from the time she started working in Brentwood. She became a delegate her second year. When she started, it was totally different. It was not a union. It consisted of teachers, school administrators and Central Administration. It was a professional organization. Bob Farina was

president twice. Marge Jones was Vice President. The meetings were held in the South Junior High School cafeteria. The evolvement from a professional organization to a union was gradual. Eventually they did have a vote to see if they were going to stay a professional organization, or were they going to become part of the New York State. It wasn't called United Teachers at that point, because they had not united with the NEA. They voted yes and became unionized, although it was very controversial at first. June was a chief delegate for South Junior High School at the time in charge of running the meetings and making announcements at the faculty meetings. If they needed any information, or polls or anything from the teachers, she did a lot of that kind of thing. She later became a NYSUT delegate. At the first NYSUT Convention that she attended was the merger with the AFT, NEA and NYSUT. She said the whole thing together was the most interesting convention she had ever seen in her life. Marian Gray, Joe Grabino, Jane Harris and possibly Shirley Hodges were also there from Brentwood. Brentwood had received a standing ovation at one of the first conventions, because it was only the second union on Long Island at the time. Back then Plainview and Old Bethpage were other very active unions on Long Island.

Why did she retire? June said that is was a good question, because she had not thought about it. She retired early, although she was planning on being there another five years. But then, in the beginning of June she heard about the State coming down with an incentive (the first one), where there was no age penalty and included the 3 years and everything else. June started thinking about it a little, did the numbers, and saw that it financially worked out well for her. At the time she was working at the 10th grade Center that was going to be closing the end of that year. She would be moving to the High School the following year. She thought about the change of assignments and decided she might as well retire since she was all ready packed up to move from the 10th Grade Center to the high school. So, on Thursday she made the decision to retire, and Friday was the last day of school. It was a very fast decision. She retired at age 52 in 1991 after 30 years of teaching.

After retirement June went back to Brentwood to do home teaching. Besides her regular teaching assignment, June taught summer school and adult education, and her first year's teaching salary was \$4800 a year.

Of all of the things that she did when she was actively engaged in the profession, was there something that gave her more pride than anything else, something that she felt most gave her a greater sense of accomplishment? She said it was as class advisor working with the officers. She got to see them get their scholarships and received letters from them when they were in college. She said that did a lot for her. She got to work with these students in 10th, 11th and 12th grades. Her last assignment before retirement was at the 10th grade center.

June was then asked to talk a little bit about what life has been like since she retired. She said that she did some traveling. June said, "Well, last summer I went to China for three and a half weeks, and then I spent a week in Thailand, a few days in Singapore and another three days in Hong Kong. So I kind of did the Orient. The year before I went to Australia. This summer, I think I'm in trouble. I was going to the Aegean Sea to see the eclipse aboard ship, and then I was going to Turkey for a week. I don't think the trip is on though. It's a little too politically active at the time, so I'll find something else to do." She had traveled to many other places like Mexico, South America and Tahiti and plans to do a lot more traveling.

One of the other things June has done during her retirement is work with ceramics. She likes creating different pieces of work. She also enjoys reading a lot. She likes to read about the history of other countries. June said that she is very busy now that she is retired. She is president of the Scuba Club, President of the Suffolk County Science Club running their Awards Dinner. June has done a lot of scuba diving on Long Island out East in the Hamptons, Greenport and Montauk Point. She also did some diving in the Bahamas and Tahiti.



June was then asked if she missed anything about teaching now that she is retired, and she said that she missed the people she worked with. June tries to keep in touch with many of the people she worked with and attends the Science Department Christmas party each year.

What advice would she give to new teachers starting out? “I would tell them to remember that their students are people. They are not children but are not always reasonable. You have to set some boundaries to help them to be reasonable.” She said that if you have respect for them, they would respect you back. She also spoke a little about how it was very different today from when she was in school.