



**Kristina Susan Dougherty**  
**ROBS History Project**  
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My full name is Kristina Susan Dougherty. Kristina is spelled with a 'K', and my *Confirmation* name, which is also my middle name, is Susan. When I was a southern Belle my name was *Krissy*, but when I came north I became Kris. I was born in Cincinnati, Ohio during an eclipse of the moon on January 25<sup>th</sup> 1944. My family soon moved to Florida when I was five. My parents both came from Morning, Kentucky, and we moved to Ocala Florida because my mother loved the horse farms and it reminded her of Lexington, her own home town. We had a Catholic elementary school nearby which was pretty rare at that time in Central Florida, so we settled in Ocala. We lived there up until the age of thirteen when I completed my parochial education and graduated from the eighth grade. Then we transferred to the local Junior High School and subsequently to Ocala High School where I graduated from their college preparatory academic program. I think the entire graduating class was two hundred people. Although I should add, I was not sure if I was going to college because I always wanted to be a dancer. I did tap, ballet, modern dance, jazz, all the way through high school and college. I did some choreography and performed. I thought that was what I was going to do until I received a call. When I graduated my first grade teacher's sister *Dischanto* called me, a beautiful little Benedictine Nun about so high, and she arranged a work scholarship for me at St Leo's College. It was a full two year work scholarship at that time. So that was how I began. When I completed my two years I decided to take a little break. I had met my husband at St. Leo's and he was from Bayside, Queens. My two roommates and I decided to take a break and come up to New York and go to work for TWA in Reservations for her uncle.

It coincided with the opening of the New York World's Fair. Everyone I knew was up here working at the World's Fair, including my brother, my sister, my college friends and my husband - to be, and the three of us lived in Woodside. Our first apartment; and we did go to work for the Airlines. My other friends worked for the World's Fair. It was a fun time but, I didn't work at the World's Fair. I worked in and commuted to Manhattan. I went to the Fair Grounds for fun and to meet my future husband but we worked in the city at the West Side Terminal which is no longer there. That was also at a time when TWA had a state of the Art World Class futuristic new Terminal at Idlewild designed by Eero Saarinen. And that was where we trained. We were out at the field training right there.

This is very strange because my mother said I was about three years old when it happened. We were in Cincinnati and I remember going sledding with my brother. We were on the church grounds and when you looked up I remember seeing the flickering candles behind the stained glass windows and it looked like the figures were moving. I remember that clearly.

My father was a very handsome, charming salesman for Earl and Marge Schott who owned the Cincinnati Reds. He was a car salesman and he was funny. He was very paternal and he really enjoyed his children. He was a character; he really had a great sense of humor and unlike a lot of other people he could laugh at himself. For fun, he especially loved to fresh water fish. He was not a sportsman really, but he loved watching baseball. His team was the Cincinnati Reds. He played basketball in high school but he quit playing because his dad died suddenly and he had to leave school to go to work during the depression. I never met him. I only met one grandmother; my mother's mom. My mom was the youngest of eight children. So, she was the end of the line. I did not know my maternal grandparents. I did know my paternal grandmother. She was wonderful. Well, my grandmother was quite a character. She loved to square dance; she was

very gregarious and loved to laugh. She outlived three of her husband's. The last time she married she was in her seventies. She liked to be married. She only had two sons; my father, and eleven years later, his brother. My father's name was Charles and his brother's name was Floyd. She was widowed very early. I think she was in her thirties when my grandfather died of a heart attack. She was just a very up, happy and unconditionally loving grandmother and she lived to the age of ninety seven. When my father died and her other son died, they died very young. They suffered from serious heart conditions in that family. She moved herself into a nursing home with her sister and she became the '*belle of the ball*'. They came to film her for the local TV station. She was square dancing and having a ball; in her ninety's. She was quite a lady; quite a lady.

My mom was an *Auntie Mame*. My mother was a very tall, very good looking Irish woman who had two years of college which was rare at that time. She was a writer. She worked for a newspaper, was very much interested in the arts. She took us to opera and the ballet which was hard to find in Central Florida back in the sixties but she did it. We had no TV in my house growing up. She was very cultured and even Progressive for her time. She made us meet her after work in the Library because she knew we'd be reading. So we all are very much into reading. I have an older brother John and a younger sister Caroline and I'm a typical middle kid. Well, both my brother and my sister now live in Manhattan for forty years because we all moved north since there were no jobs to be had in Florida in the mid sixties after college or high school. My sister was divorced at this time and they were both single. She's a jet setter and she worked in television for many, many, years and my brother is your typical kind of Irish confirmed bachelor but he's very much interested in the arts. They both enjoy New York and everything that New York has to offer. My brother is four years older than me. He just turned sixty five. My sister is three years younger than I am. My husband and

I am still married today but we now have four children; two boys and two girls. One of our daughters lives in Denver and she also has four children. I have two married children here on Long Island, and three grandchildren, four grandchildren in Denver and I followed my grandmother with a son who came to us after eleven years.

We are a very close family with many ongoing visits back and forth from NY to Denver and vice versa. I almost feel justified in saying that singlehandedly this family is doing everything possible to keep United Airlines solvent and in operation.

Talking about visible family traits in the generations I failed to mention musicians and that my mother was an accomplished pianist. My brothers, musicians, good writers, we're all actors, good students – my mother was very, very, smart. All of us have A Type personalities. I explain it by saying, we're all chiefs. There are no Indians. Very strong personalities, all of them and I laugh because I see it in my grandchildren. Poetic justice; and with such intensity, it's great when everybody is together. My daughter-in-law said, *"It's so great that you can all just argue and have differences of opinion and then it's all just forgotten"*. It's done. We're very strong. Yeah! That's the way to do it.

We know how to have fun. We've always known how to have fun when we're together. I had cousins that lived in Daytona Beach. We got together with them very often. The reason we moved is that my two aunts had moved there previously, for jobs. There were a lot of interesting loud discussions, differences of opinion. A lot of fashion was going on. My mother's people were very good looking people and they were very much into the current things that were going on, fashion, hair, but they do that anyway, southern women do that I've noticed kinds of eccentricities and flamboyant personalities.

During the Civil War our family was neutral even as Kentucky was a Southern State. The German branch of the family left farming, to become railroad men during the golden age of railroading in the U.S. The other half of the family was Irish and yes, I once did *“make a visit to the old sod.”*

The music teacher in my building -Twin Pines, is also a Travel Agent. She and my friend Lynn, have traveled extensively and researched to find the best places for your buck in the winter to break up the winter doldrums here. We first went to Paris for four days and did our own little tour which was wonderful, but three of the women had already been there so it was very, very nice. Then we backtracked to Dublin. In Paris I felt I had to be proper and watch myself and not be loud and in Ireland it was like, *“ahhh I’m home”*. We went from Dublin all the way across...it was just beautiful, in January of last year, and it snowed the first day and we went to a stud farm – a horse farm. It was just magnificent. It was just outside of Dublin and we saw the fold, the babies that had just been born and then the farmer’s wife brought us into a thatched cottage and we had tea, and we had.....what are the tea biscuits called – scones, it was wonderful, really wonderful. Then for the rest of the time it was in the fifties and sunny; which was unheard of in Ireland. Then we went all the way across to the Cliffs of More and Tipperary, Waterford and the bottom half of the Republic of Ireland. It was just, fantastic there ----I want to go back and research the family because Roscommon is a big place there is really no town mentioned and I want to research it and go back to the Shrine of Our Lady of Knock in County Mayo. I was a Hibernian and my husband was a Hibernian, I want to do that and visit Donegal which is where my husband’s family was from in the north, and which reminds me.....

I was a sophomore in college. My roommate Paula and I had just gone to Tampa to take a test to join the Peacecorps because we had decided not to go to school for the next year and we had just come back to school and they had what they call a street dance in the little town of Dade City. That was where I met my husband, at a street dance in college. He’s a very quiet man. He was watching,

and then his cousin who lived in my dorm introduced him to me and he said he'd like to go out so that's how we got started. His cousin and I are still friends to this day. It's amazing how our college friends have stayed close with us for forty years. I have old friends that go further back than that, even to the First Grade like my friend Donna Leffert and she went back to Saint Leo's, and came to live with me in New York. My Godmother was Loretta, but I couldn't pronounce Loretta, so she became "Ga Ga" and that was her name forever. She was an amazing woman. She was my mother's oldest sister who had no children. She really molded us and was the glue that held family together. She was the matriarch. My mom's mom, my maternal grandmother, who came from Kentucky, was college educated, as was her sister, she was a teacher, my grandmother was a teacher, my mom was a teacher just naturally, teaching us all – passing along all that she knew.

I taught dancing all through high school and college; aerobics, I taught when I got married, girl scout leader, boy scout leader, teaching reading at St Mary's school just went to work as a teacher's aide and they pushed me into getting my degree. So, people saw things in me they wanted to encourage. I always say God brings me to where He wants me to be because I had gone to East Islip Secretarial School to sign up for Secretarial Courses when my kids were in High School and that was where I first saw the ad for Reading Teacher's aide and I applied for the job and got it. She pushed me and I went to school where Mr. Brodsky was my teacher and the rest is history.

I think my decision to come to New York when I was nineteen was one of the most difficult decisions that I've ever had to make thus far in my life. I wanted it but I was scared to death. I was a Southern lady and I had an accent too. It wasn't just getting used to the cold weather. There was and is an entirely different culture to contend with as well. The pace of life was different for sure. I was living in Manhattan don't forget, but I loved it and I loved New Yorker's right away, because they were honest. I found them to be honest. People don't pull punches or play games if they don't care for you, you'll know it right away and I think that's great. Down South they're too polite to tell you the absolute truth.

I like the up-front attitude of New Yorker's and their variety of interests. I worked at TWA where I worked with people from all over the world. I liked not being a member of the minority. In Florida as a Roman Catholic I was in the minority. You were not liked or accepted if you were a Catholic in Florida. My first day at TWA, my first Good Friday, when everybody got up and went to Mass I thought, "*Oh my goodness!*" That was a shock. That was a culture shock to be among so many Catholics. It was different. I wasn't so alone anymore and I didn't need to defend my religion all the time.

Sister Dischano was my first and second grade teacher. It was a little country school and we had thirteen kids in First Grade and thirteen kids in Second Grade and one teacher and then we switched when we went to Fifth and Sixth Grade. So she was my teacher for four of those years and she loved us unconditionally. She was a wonderful little teacher because she brought out the inner child which was my goal when I became a teacher. To know that you can learn and you can do things. I had a brilliant High School teacher. I'm trying to think of their name but I can't think of it. I had a few brilliant High School teachers in Central Florida, It was pretty rare but in College, Fr. Peter Sweizgood; brilliant, he was like Monsignor Fulton Sheen, brilliant, Saintly, pretty rare but in college, CW Post, a Dr Romero, a Dr. Moreno. I was really blessed to have good teachers. Dance was my life. No time for sports. My favorite subjects were English and writing. My least favorite subject was Math.

When I was in High School I went to work for my mother's friend and I worked in a jewelry store. It was an interesting job and he was a nice man; very nurturing.

I think fall is my favorite season now. We never had fall in Florida really, and fall in the northeast is so very beautiful. An aroma that brings me back to my childhood would be that of Southern Fried Chicken. My children and Grandchildren give me a feeling of personal pride that cannot be replicated by any other means.

When I was a sophomore at St Leo's on a full scholarship, I got my Grades and I was certain I'd lost my scholarship. It was a very scary time and I was devastated.

I arrived in Brentwood for the first time about 1982. I did that because I'd decided to go back to school as an adult, and because my in-laws had foster children, and they'd just adopted a multi-handicapped son. I wanted Special Education, and we applied to Dowling; Noreen O'Conner, a friend and I, who had known each other for years and decided to go back to school together because we were afraid. Mr. Brodsky was our teacher. He was very, very practical and he would say, *"well, the book says this, but in real life this is the way it is"*, and I liked that. I respected him because of all the fostering and adopting work he had done. I was familiar with his wife and him and family and I wanted to learn more and I knew Brentwood had it. I knew Brentwood would teach me all I needed to know about Special Ed. It was interesting because during the period we are discussing, Brentwood had built a reputation far and wide on Long Island and in New York State for being a place that paid particular attention to the needs of Special Ed. The numbers of kids there was growing exponentially. So the need was great and Mr. Brodsky was in a place to do some recruiting. All of my friends from Dowling came; all the middle age housewives that went to Dowling he hired; there were five of us. I remember Marie Popper, Noreen La Conti, Diane Hemmer; Peckerel is her married name, Noreen just retired, and two other women that I lost track of and don't remember their names. The first person in the District that I met was Howard Brodsky. My interview was another thing. In my senior year of college I became pregnant again for the fourth time, and I told Mr. Brodsky. *"Look, I'm having this baby and I need a year and I don't want to start working until I can do a good job"*. So he said, *"Okay Kris, that's fine. So, about a year and a half later I get a phone call from Mr. Perlow at the Secondary level. We need someone to fill in for ten months for a subbing job, one of the teacher's had gotten injured – Are you willing to take it on? And in the background can I hear Mr. Brodsky saying, "Is she ready to do a good job"?"* That was my job interview. Mr. Perlow and all of them in Special Ed. knew me, because I had done all three parts of my student teaching here in Brentwood and they were aware of what I was capable of in the classroom.



I'll say this to you about a few lasting impressions of the District after devoting twenty years of my life here. *"The teachers in Brentwood to me are the most accommodating and they automatically mentor young teachers. They make you feel welcome when I came from the Junior High to Twin Pines, a teacher came in and welcomed me, even though I was overwhelmed with work – and said, "We want to see you in the Faculty Room when you're able to pull yourself away from all this fun" .They made me feel like I was part of a team. I was in Twin Pines for seventeen of those twenty years as a Resource Teacher for Twin Pines and Pine Park right next door. "We were a team. We worked together in the building and I think that's why our kids did as well as they did. We were united and everyone demanded respect for themselves and we respected the children". I've always said, "You kind of have to have the heart of a Social Worker to work with some of these kids."* Unquestionably, there is a *"kind of esprit de corps here"* that's unique. We are here with the common purpose of trying to help these kids who need so very much.

When I first came to Brentwood I took over for a Resource Teacher who had been injured. I was the Resource Room teacher for North Junior High at the time. Basically I taught reading, writing and arithmetic in the Resource Room but we were also trying to be congruent with what the State was demanding of the other children. We were trying to find our way there. The second year, we were departmentalized in the Junior High and then in the third year the teachers (undecipherable) and I was self contained with learning disabled and emotionally disturbed children. You have to be a very special human being as well as a teacher to do the kind of work that teachers of Special Ed are expected to provide to their youngsters every moment of the day while continuing to believe that you can make a difference for each and every one of them. You must know that you have to be a different kind of teacher to keep faith in yourself and your kids even when you have those days when you believe you can't give any more. *Didn't I have days when I was very, very tired?* Honestly, not until the very end. I really believed that I could help the kids and give them what they needed and help them to function in this world. I was working toward getting my Masters after school at St Joseph's

Campus in Brentwood and I had itinerant teachers who were giving me what I needed in the classroom but of course experience teaches you better than whatever you bring with you. I don't think you ever know enough so you always have to keep going to school and learning new techniques. I like the clinical approach to teaching I liked teaching one on one, or multi-sensory, I liked all that. I guess I learned that I am a multitasker because I can teach five different things at one time. It suited my personality. My purpose was to help the children know they could learn and to feel good about themselves, preparing them to do it all on their own, independent of the teacher, who may or may not any longer be required to facilitate additional learning.

The contacts I maintain with students once they leave school makes the effort all worthwhile; all the letters and chance encounters on the street and in the community reinforce the belief that we are making a difference in their lives.

Today, I am a participating member of the Retirees of Brentwood Schools, ROBS. I volunteered this year with the Holiday Wrapping of Gifts we provide to the Community. There is also a travel group that I belong to where I'm able to maintain my contacts and make new friends. I also had contact with a lot of people from Brentwood because I sat on a committee for Special Ed frequently and I tested kids for disabilities all over the district and I shared a room with Brian Mangus. He was a teacher in North Junior High. He was just a love and very encouraging. I had no room my second year of teaching and I shared his English classroom and he really encouraged me because I expected a lot of myself. I was almost forty years old and I thought I knew it all but here I was as a brand new teacher and of course I didn't know it all. Noreen Aconti was my friend, and a brilliant Special Ed teacher. She's still working. She's in Virginia, Marie Poppo, Kim Fausti, I can't even think of all the wonderful teachers I've known.

The morning of September 11, 2001 I was in the office of Twin Pines Elementary School and a psychologist had come in from another building and said

a plane had hit the World Trade Center. So we all went into the library and turned on the television and watched in disbelief. I thought this has to be a science fiction movie. This can't be real. People were crying and people were praying. We were all shocked. It was awful. It was terrible; one of those defining moments. It was being part of a generational experience that none of us will ever forget. My brother and sister both live in Manhattan. I was trying to get them on the phone to speak with them. My husband was a steamfitter so he and his whole family work all over the city and we were trying but couldn't get in touch with anybody. It was awful. I don't think New York will ever recover from that tragedy. It's the kind of trauma that leaves a most pronounced emotional scar that we now know can be passed on and genetically inherited by a succeeding generation.

At some point I became aware that I was approaching the moment when I would step across the line into retirement. I was almost forty years old when I became a teacher and I had been thinking that a twenty year commitment to the profession felt possible for me to accomplish. My kids would be through with college and I was trying to help them with that and my two daughters did get married during that time and I was starting to have all these grandchildren. I really felt that I didn't have the energy that I had years before because I was a non-stop dynamo. I thought I should make the change when I was still useful and not neglectful of the kids. That was big in my mind. I had all sorts of plans for retirement; seeing my grandchildren in Denver and traveling and doing a lot of nice things with my grandkids here in Bayport, so it was about time for the next chapter of my life to commence. I live in East Islip. My son and his wife live in Bayport and my other daughter lives in Brookhaven.

I always took pride in my ability to successfully test children and find out where their disabilities were. I had an instinct for it. I took pride in that. It was not a small thing. I was confident in my ability of being able to pick up their disabilities and work toward their strengths. My last building assignment was Twin Pines. That first year I made \$14,000 and something before taxes. What gave me the

most fun teaching in Brentwood? *"I'd have to say it was the kids. I loved the kids. They were so funny and so refreshing; so honest. The teachers I worked with had a wonderful sense of humor. We had a lot of fun, a lot of humor. What would you do differently if you could? Nothing; Nothing at all. Did I have hero's growing up? Nope! I still don't have hero's. I just think they are wonderfully accomplished people who happened to get some lucky breaks. I think there are so many fabulous people in this world who go unrecognized. What will you miss? The camaraderie! I'll miss the kids and then I'll go out and get a little Grandchild fix and that's okay. What won't I miss? Spending my Easter's writing IP's and all the paper work. I don't miss the paper work. If you could wave a magic wand and make three things happen in the educational arena, what would those three things be? I think we need to get back to basics especially with the immigrant population. I think we need longer school hours or more school hours, the day is too fragmented. I don't think we're giving students enough time. I think scheduling and Resource Room is terribly fragmented during the child's time in the classroom. I would change specials to before or after school. I don't know how that would work but that's what I see as harmful to their ability to focus and learn. Each year was new and different. I enjoyed coming back. Until the last few years when I was getting tired, but we'd had a lot of deaths in the family and a lot of caretaking. I knew that when I didn't get excited about coming back it was time to close the book and move to the next chapter. I really loved and respected the kids that I've met and tried sincerely to help them to the best of my ability. To starting teachers I would suggest that you always stay true to yourself. Don't model yourself after anybody else. Let it go. Be who you are"*

*Thank you, Kris. It was a wonderful story. Thanks for sharing your experiences with all of us. It's been a privilege to be with you today.*