



Michael Garramone
ROBS History Project
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Michael Anthony Garramone was born in England. His mother was English and his father American. When he was born, they did not have a name picked out for him. His father asked his mother what he thought of the name Leonard, because his father's name was Leonardo, and he thought they would follow the Italian tradition of naming the first son after the child's grandfather. Michael's mother, not being aware of this custom, said, "No way!" She didn't like the name. They then agreed upon the name Michael, and his middle name Anthony was some form of compromise for the Italian side.

Michael is married for 29 years with 2 daughters. His older daughter, Sherry who is 38 years old, is his stepdaughter. She is his wife's daughter from a previous marriage. Sherry is a single mom right now with a daughter, Michaela who is 7, in first grade and a very good reader with an extensive vocabulary. Sherry works for a company that makes specialized software for large companies. Michael's second daughter, Marisa works for Sotheby's as an assistant and secretary to 3 of the executives: the CFO, the Operational Manager and the Manager of Special Projects. She was an art major in college and had studied in England.

Michael's wife, Sandy, who's maiden name is Southard, is related to the original settlers of Babylon and Seaford. On her mother's side her ancestors trace back to F. D. Roosevelt. Michael said. "She is perfect, understanding, intelligent and beautiful." She was a manager at Macy's when they first married. She was offered to be the shoe buyer, but she gave that up, because it involved traveling to Europe and being away from home for long periods of time. They met in the

70's when she was one of Michael's student teachers. She had also taken over one of his classes when he was out for 2 months recovering from an automobile accident. She was divorced and had a 7-year old daughter when they met.

Michael was born in November 1945 in Macclesfield, England, a small town outside of Manchester, after the war had ended. His father was stationed in Manchester, the town his mother came from, and they met on a double date. When his father was discharged from the Army in January, he returned to the United States to Bushwick, Brooklyn to live with his family. Michael and his mother followed shortly after when he was about 4 months old. According to Michael, his mother was very "English".

As a child, Michael lived in Brooklyn on Evergreen Avenue. It was an interesting ethnic neighborhood. They lived on top of a drugstore, and the owner took a liking to Michael. He let him play in the back of the store, and at the age of 8 or 9, Michael remembers working for him delivering insulin to his customers. Michael has a brother nine years younger than him who's name is Larry. He is in management in Con Edison.

Michael's paternal grandfather was born in Italy and was a barber. He opened his own business in Wilkes-Barre, PA. He became a barber for many of the state Senators and traveled to Harrisburg to cut their hair. He was well off having 7 kids, a car and a chauffeur during the depression.

There were a few teachers who influenced him in life. He especially remembers his teacher, Mrs. Manion, who he had for first and second grade. She was a wonderful teacher. Michael couldn't wait to go to school each day. She was very motivating and challenged her students. He also remembered his 7th grade English teacher, Mrs. Woods who did a lot of interesting things. He was in a special program in which she was one of the teachers. At this time he was the Sports Reporter for his school Newspaper. Michael said that he was smart, but didn't always work up to his potential. He felt that 7th grade was his best year, especially for having had this teacher.

What made him decide to be a teacher? When Michael was in college during the Vietnam War, he majored in anthropology at NY State University at New Paltz and wanted to be an archeologist. He always had an interest in

science. In his junior year, he went on an archeological dig in Upstate New York and realized it wasn't that glamorous. He thought it would be exciting, like discovering King Tut's Tomb. A friend then suggested to him that he consider becoming a teacher. He then registered for some education courses and did his student teaching under professor Dr. Levine. It was when he did his first demonstration lesson that made him realize that teaching was for him. It was so gratifying to see the students engaged in the lesson. He then did his second student teaching on Long Island in a 4th grade class in the East Northport School District. He then returned to New Paltz for his senior year and decided he would look for a teaching job Upstate but instead applied for a teaching job on Long Island where the pay was better, and he could be close to where he currently lived in Commack. He then scheduled 4 interviews on Long Island all in one day, and Brentwood was one of them. He met with Charlie Black on his last interview of the day and was offered a job teaching at Northeast where Mr. Black was the principal. He accepted the offer. Michael then worked there for 34 years until his retirement in 2001. Shortly after he was hired, Michael was called by the Draft to go for a physical and was classified 1A. He let the Brentwood School District know of his status, and without his asking, Mr. Jack Finan drew up a deferral letter, because Charlie Black said that Michael was a promising teacher, and he didn't want to lose him.

Michael had a good first impression of the Brentwood School District, because they had a lot of innovative ideas. He said he met some really great experienced teachers. He really liked the interesting mix of students. Over the years, he taught kids from so many different classes and ethnic groups. He really enjoyed it.

Michael said that being a good teacher had a lot to do with your personality. Some are nurturing and gentle, and others are very dynamic and inspiring. Some of the teachers he worked with over the years were Cathy Gerolomon, Ronny Burr, Rita Rosenthal, Karen Storjohann, Vincent Vuolo, Joe Rienzi, Joe Corless, Jack Goldstein and Joe Bisall. They were really good teachers and very experienced. Michael had a good rapport with them. The teachers would get together on Fridays at Rita Rosenthal's house. He still kept in contact with several of the teachers he worked with over the years after retirement. He felt that Brentwood was like a family.

In 1973, Michael became interested in outside learning and started working in the BOCES Environmental Education Program teaching teachers about Outdoor Education. He had gone to a workshop on Outdoor Education in Suffern, NY with a fellow Brentwood teacher, Bob Emerick, to be trained. Both he and Bob then taught some workshops to the Brentwood teachers. Michael always enjoyed “hands on” teaching and experiential learning. Part of his student teaching in SUNY New Paltz had been to teach at an education camp by the Ashokan Reservoir. This had sparked his interest in outside learning. He went out on a 3-year Sabbatical to northern Illinois to get his Masters Degree in Outside Learning. When he returned, he attended a conference in Saratoga, NY where he met some people he knew from BOCES who offered him the job with them. He and Ed Zero, the leader of the BOCES Project, wrote a summer course as part of the Summer Institute for gifted kids called “Long Island - Past, Present and Future”. It consisted of natural sciences and Long Island history. Michael taught this course for about 5 years. He also taught some SCOPE courses to teachers. Michael was instrumental in starting an outdoor center for learning at Northeast.

In 1975 he and Bob Emerick arranged for the students to go away to camp for a week at the camp Upstate at the Ashokan Reservoir where he had done his student teaching. They did this each summer for several years. The teachers went with their own students. Being an expensive camp, most of the students would not be able to afford to go, but Mike and his coworker Bob were determined to raise money to pay for them. They were able to raise money to pay for all of the students through many different types of fundraisers like paper drives, gardening, bicycle safety talks and a carnival.

Ashokan is a school-based camp that’s run and owned by New Paltz University. It’s mostly hands on learning. There are a variety of activities, and it is not just science. The teachers who are going can tailor the program with the help of the staff that is there to what they want. For example you can go all Naturalistic like, bird identification, plant identification, or pond ecology. They also had colonial crafts. For example the kids could go to a blacksmith shop and actually make something. There were a variety of projects they could work on at the shop. They also had tinsmithing, bird watching, canoeing and water safety.

Michael was asked if he was a morning or a night person. He quickly responded that he was a night person. He was then asked if there was a

particular aroma that brings him back to his childhood. Being Italian, he said it was his father's sauce. His father is an excellent cook. The smell of his sauce brings back memories of all the dishes he would prepare. Michael said that he thinks his father missed his calling. He should have been a chef or restaurant owner. He was very inventive with foods.

Michael said that he believes that the fact that he is very responsible came mostly from his mother. Responsibility to society and integrity were very important to his mother. Both his parents had old fashion values that were important to them.

When asked what was the accomplishment that he was most proud of in teaching, Michael said that it was starting and keeping the one-week summer camp at Ashokan running for 25 years. Every year, they had to continue with the fundraisers to be able to send each class to the camp for one week in the summer. Whenever he would run into former students, one of the first things they would say is, "I'll never forget Ashokan."

What made Michael decide that it was time to retire? He said he worked a long time and felt that he had accomplished most of the things that he wanted to do. During his teaching career, he had won several awards. He was inducted into Elementary School Teachers of America, Who's Who Among American Teachers and in 1994 was awarded the Elementary Science School Teacher of the Year in Suffolk County. When he retired, he also received letters from former students as adults thanking him for all that he had done for them. He said that to him, that was special. He heard from a student who had become a child psychologist and another who became a lawyer. They both thanked Michael and said that his teaching motivated them to continue in higher education and to pursue the careers they had chosen.

Michael also said that he decided to retire while he still liked what he was doing. He didn't want to reach the point where he felt burnt out and didn't enjoy going to work. There were things that he wanted to do once he retired like working out at the health club. He said he had several outside interests like mountain biking and traveling.

When asked if he had a particular book that he enjoyed reading, Michael

mentioned that he liked the works of John Updike and the Rabbit series. Reading the book *Teaching in the Outdoors* was a book that influenced him in the field of outdoor learning.

As a teacher with 34 years experience, what advice would Michael give to a teacher just starting out? He said that you should “go with your instincts”. *“Most people who want to be teachers do want to make a difference. When they come in they have fresh ideas. They always think that the people who have taught longer are so much better, but in a way they have enthusiasm. The enthusiasm that you have when you start is great. Learn the curriculum. Don’t be worried that you don’t know every aspect of the curriculum. Very few people do. Figure out what works for you. Watch different people’s techniques. Try it. Find out what works for you. Have your own little bag of tricks.”*