



Michael (Mike) Campanile
ROBS History Project
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He identified himself as Charles Michael Campanile, but was more familiarly known in school on a daily basis by almost everyone as “Mike”. I for one didn’t know his name was Charlie. He said, it wasn’t uncommon for friends to ask, “*Who’s Charles?*” It turned out Charles was the most popular name in his family on both his mother’s and his father’s side. His Father’s name was Charles. He had two uncles named Charles and a cousin Charles. When he was about two years old his Aunt Rose began to call him Charles Michael but there were so many Charles’s in his family that his name just evolved into Michael simply to avoid confusion. Given the frequent number of large family gatherings taking place during those years it only seemed logical that confusion would occur. He was comfortable with that. An Italian tradition was to name new family members after grandfathers. He knew both his grandfathers’, but his mother’s father not that well because he never learned to speak English. He was always there but the grandchildren didn’t become close to him. His father’s father on the other hand, he knew quite well, although he was still very much a patriarchal figure and he would kiss the grandchildren as they came in and then after that spend most of his time with the adults. All four of his grandparents were born in Italy but his parents were born in America.

Until he was in the eighth grade he lived in the same town Beacon, in southern Dutchess County in the Hudson Valley, across from Newburgh, as did his paternal grandparents. His sister was two years his junior. His mother’s family came from New Jersey, in the Plainfield, Scotch Plains area and weren’t too far from NYC. Although they visited their New Jersey relatives on a monthly basis, he would spend more time with his paternal grandparents. His father was transferred to a little village in Massachusetts about thirty miles from Boston when Mike was in eighth grade and his sister was in the sixth grade. That was where he spent his High

School and College years, in Massachusetts. His father had worked for Kartiganer and Company, one of the largest manufacturers of lady's hats in the world. They were in the millenary business. His grandmother had a small exclusive hat shop of her own on the ground floor of their two story house on Bath Avenue in Brooklyn. Mike's grandfather had loaned Mr. Kartiganer some of the money to start the business. Mike's father worked for them until he went into the army in 1942. He was an aviation mechanic in the Army Air Corps Division. After the war, some people thought it might be a good idea for him to go to work for IBM in Poughkeepsie when he left the armed services but he didn't make that move and just stayed in the millenary business.

His paternal grandfather had been involved in hats and haberdashery and the millenary industry before they left Italy and had already achieved a degree of success there. His grandmother was the artist and major source of inspiration and talent in the family. She built up and owned an exclusive hat shop in Bari, Italy before the war. His grandfather came first then his grandmother with his father and one sister and one brother. When war broke out his grandmother took the children back to Bari to be with her family and waited until the end of the war to return to Bath Avenue Brooklyn. Mike's father remembered a visit by the Kaiser to Bari, coming down one of the major boulevards of the city during a celebration in the early part of the war. Mike told us how he visited Ellis Island and saw photos of the ship on which his family had arrived.

Mike is married to Martha. She's a music teacher who lives in Patchogue with him on the same street in East Patchogue on which Bob Frankel, John Callan and Ron Guzas all once lived. Their daughter Christine is planning to be married at the end of the month. She's working for IBM in Essex Junction in Northern Vermont. Their son Michael tragically passed away close to five years ago and there was only the four of them. Martha is now retired as well. She began teaching in 1967 in South East Elementary and taught elementary music in Brentwood for seven years until the children came then took four years off before she returned to teaching. Her first choice was to come back to Brentwood. But it was the end of the '70's and there weren't many jobs available so she found a job in Sachem about fifteen minutes from their home and retired from Sachem last year.

They met at college. Martha was a waitress in the dining room and being one of the prettier waitresses, he and his dorm mates made it a point to sit themselves at her table. Even though he didn't know it at the time, he was lactose intolerant, but kept ordering and drinking milk. He couldn't understand why he had so many stomach issues causing him great discomfort each time he finished a meal. The school was Eastern Nazarene College in Quincy Massachusetts, south of Boston and that was how and where they met. They both did undergraduate work there. Mike received a National Science Foundation Grant in 1969 to earn his Masters Degree at Western Michigan University. They spent three summers there and the tuition was so inexpensive that Martha got her Masters in Music and Performance and Music Education at the same time. Her forte is voice instruction and choral conducting. She is an excellent an excellent pianist as well. Martha has conducted their church choir for fifteen or twenty years and has conducted a couple of other community choirs in Suffolk County.

Musically, both of their children were talented. Their daughter was an All State Cellist and their son an All State Cellist Alternate. Both children held first chair cello in the high school orchestra. Michael's father was a math wiz. He was able to compute things mathematically in his head that Mike admits he still can't do. Martha's mother took care of them when Martha first went back to work and his son used to be the banker when they played *Monopoly* or the *Game of Life* when he was just three and four years old. This did not make his German American grandmother very happy. She once tried to trick him when he was still in his booster seat at the kitchen table, by asking him " *I've got you, Michael John, How much is fifty four times six*"? He paused, rolled his eyes and said, "*Three hundred twenty four Grandma*". She was flabbergasted by that. Mike thought his son had inherited it from his grandfather and not from his father.

One of the fondest memories Mike retains from the time when he was a child is living with and enjoying six or eight acres of open land around their house in Dutchess County, New York. Even though they didn't own the land they treated it as if it was theirs, by playing little league baseball and being carefree simply enjoying the outdoors. As we reminisced he recalled the infamous blizzard of '47 and one additional flashback that stuck in memory. It was during the time when the *Mad Bomber* was tried and convicted for his reign of terror in NYC during the fifties. Mike was playing little league

baseball in a field adjacent to the grounds of *Mattawan State Hospital* for the criminally insane. He never actually saw the *Mad Bomber* as the convoy of escorting State Troopers transporting him passed along side but the memory of that moment seared itself into his mind.

Mike's mother was a Naturalist, a person who loved the outdoors. He believes he inherited his love of nature from her. She was a lover of natural foods. She shunned technology and as a matter of fact, they didn't have a television set at home until Mike was in either the tenth or eleventh grade. He watched plenty of television on his friend's set. He and his dad had to do a lot of persuading before they got a television set at home. She loved her family, she gardened and she loved to clean up the yard. When asked what his sister had taught him, Mike answered, *perseverance*.

I asked Michael if there any adults other than his parents who had a strong influence on his life growing up. He said there was one couple, Rev. Bob Goslaw and his wife who were neighbors and parents of three brothers who were his good friends and with whom he spent a lot of time with while growing up in Beacon. At that time his dad was working long, hard hours. He'd become manager of the hat factory in Beacon. With that came the responsibility for being first person in the factory and last person out. Still, his mom was the person who took him to see his very first baseball game at Yankee Stadium. He was then and remains today, a Yankee fan, but hastened to add that he's more of a baseball fan than a Yankee fan having spent eight or nine years in Massachusetts. He likes the Mets as well because both his children are avid fans.

Mr. Albert "Chick" Sayles was his High School Math teacher for three years. They moved to a little community in Massachusetts where there was only forty-four students in his graduating class. He had one Math teacher in eighth grade, one for ninth grade and Mr. Sayles for grades ten, eleven and twelve.. Mr. Sayles was the best, in his opinion. *"Students in general think their teachers don't have lives; they're teachers and if they bump into them in the supermarket or at the movies they don't know how to handle it"*. He said, *"I've watched little children's reaction when they see my wife in a supermarket – it's as if Mrs. Campanile is somehow out of place. She shouldn't be there. She ought to be in the music room."*

Mike saw Mr. Sayles as being a regular person. He was very bright. He never talked down to his students, he spoke clearly and directly to them. He was also a basketball referee and had the audacity to call off what would have been the winning basket in a Christmas tournament. All of them knew he was right for calling it. They weren't happy with the call but he had demonstrated the integrity to make that call anyway. Albert Sayles was the reason Mike became a Math teacher.

I asked if he thought there was a positive correlation between being a sports coach and becoming a better teacher. Mike concurred and cited two examples from among his own good friends: John Durant and Paul Koretski. We spoke briefly about the importance of having one or two good teachers in your life at just the right time. Such examples have blessed us with finding the path we needed to be on in life.

Mike made a conscious choice to forego following his own father's example of working in the traditional family business of hat making. His father had made sure that Michael worked in the hat factory during the summers of his junior and senior years in high school. Working in the hat factory doing all the repetitious actions of moving this item under construction from here to there required no convincing. He didn't even have to convince himself to realize that working in the factory was not something he aspired to. At the same time he had no particular idea of pursuing a college education. He spoke with his parents about going into the armed services because he wasn't really sure of what he wanted to do. He enjoyed High School and achieved good grades while he was there but wasn't sure he wanted to continue. He told us his father knew exactly what he was doing when he set him up for a job working in the factory during those summers. That experience and Mike's own high school experience of having Mr. Sayles as a teacher for three years was enough to convince him by age eighteen that becoming a math teacher was what he truly wanted to become. His thinking from that point on was focused upon achieving that singular objective. It was something he knew he enjoyed and Mr. Sayles had showed him how he could have fun with at the same time.

He's attended several High School Reunions and still considers many of his former high school mates his close friends. We remarked on how long standing relationships can provide us with an invaluable resource in that they are able to remind us of aspects

of ourselves and our lives that we might otherwise have long since forgotten but for their memories of us over the time we have known one another.

He thought his first paying job had been his paper route for the *Milford Daily News* which cost forty-five cents per week for home delivery. It was seven cents a day for six days and there was no Sunday Edition. The additional three cents was intended to go to the paper boy from each customer. Each customer except one old lady that left only forty-two cents in a plate on the front porch every collection day. Mike was told not to take offence because she had been doing the same thing to many paper boys before him. He did his route on foot and was fortunate because the town that he lived in only had about four thousand people and he happened to live in a cluster because it was the old mill town of Hopedale, MA. The mill built and previously owned most of the houses in town and they were relatively close together. In the middle of the town was an apartment building where about half of his eighty customers lived. He carried every one of those papers in a canvas bag on his shoulder. The building was about two and a half blocks from his home so he started at his house and walked north northwest and within a half hour he was down to about thirty papers. "*It wasn't too bad*" he said. He began after school and in the afternoon for six days a week. An entire generation of people today no longer have the opportunity to learn the values that were taught through that experience because you had to be responsible to perform those tasks every day but Sunday at the same hour no matter the weather or the temperature. Their paper was expected to be delivered right there on the porch or by the front door with no excuses.....and it was.

His good friends Jimmy "Bullet" Callery and Hank Cyr lived at the end of his paper route so after completing the paper route they would play basketball or football in the street with a few other fellows until dark. His typical day after the paper route involved sports. They had a little community center in Hopedale and he learned how to bowl there. You bowled *candlepins* which are like candle shaped pins and you throw three balls instead of two and the ball is about the size of a softball or maybe a grapefruit and when you knock some pins down early the pins that are on the ground don't get picked up and so that can become a hazard or an advantage. I volunteered in the bowling alley right around the corner from my house. There were five lanes in the basement of the

community center and the mechanic that was responsible allowed me to bowl just as often as I wanted even though it was only twenty cents a game for a resident. When in high school bowling became something of a passion, with the result that he became quite good at it.

Baseball had been an earlier passion when he was in elementary and junior high school in Beacon and he was pretty good at that too but out of a false sense of vanity he refused to wear his glasses. As the pitchers got stronger he stopped hitting; he just couldn't hit. He tried out for the varsity team in little Hopedale where he lived at 21 Peace Street. He realized after a short while that he wasn't going to make that team. He was among the first cuts. He decided he wanted to participate in some sport so he took some of his paper route money and bought a beginner set of golf clubs and tried out for the golf team and made the team as a 'scrub'. He also played a little JV basketball when he was in the tenth grade because their team was exceptionally good (they lost something like four games in five years). They were playing a school in their league called Blackstone High School which was down near the Rhode Island border. Sometimes he started and sometimes he didn't. He didn't start this game. They had a lead by the end of the first quarter so the coach put Mike in. It was one of those games where everything was going right for their team and nothing was going right for Blackstone. He played the rest of the game and ended with sixteen points only missing one shot and the other team only scored eleven. His claim to fame, although no one remembers it except Mike, was that he outscored the other team in a JV game in High School. It was a lot of fun. A great moment!

Thanksgiving was his family's biggest Holiday. When they lived in Massachusetts no one else in their family lived near them so they always traveled to be with family. They always had large gatherings but it was never at Mike's family's house because they always lived the furthest away from the rest of the family.

His mother was very religious. She was involved not with a mainstream group but one called *Unity* out of the mid-west. He thought they might have come from Kansas. His dad respected the Catholic Church and attended infrequently. He considered himself to be somewhat religious. The parents of his three best friends when he was living in Beacon had a degree of influence on him. That was why he attended Eastern Nazarene College. Their father

sat on the Board of Directors. Mike really had two or three possible choices to make as far as colleges were concerned. April of his senior year came around and he hadn't made a decision about where to attend college. He travelled from Massachusetts to Staten Island to visit his friends from Beacon over April vacation. They asked him, "*Where are you going to college*"? So he said, '*Well I could really go here, or there or there but I'm really not sure*'. Then Mr. Goslaw said, '*Well why don't you go to Eastern Nazarene College and you could room with Glenn*'. And that's why he went there.

That conversation took place on the Staten Island Ferry. They were driving back to Grand Central where he could take the train back to his home in Massachusetts. Isn't it strange the way life opens doors for us at certain times of our lives?

We asked if Mike had a favorite season of the year. Fall was his answer, probably because one can count on the weather in the Fall of the year. There is a certain consistency to weather in the fall. Admittedly, he loved Spring with all its new growth and all the flowers and the anticipation of summer to follow. He said *fall* is dependable and for that reason he loves it best of all the seasons, remembering how on Long Island it can last all the way up to and through Thanksgiving.

Michael was never a night person. He never wanted to teach afternoon session when we could choose a preference for the morning or afternoon sessions when we were on split sessions. He considers himself very much a morning person. However his wife has conditioned him to think differently about his definition of morning since she is up every day at about six fifteen to six thirty and therefore he is. He's cancelled all his newspaper deliveries like NEWSDAY and The New York Times. He purposely gets dressed and gets out to pick up the NY Times and NEWSDAY around seven or seven fifteen, so his day gets started and he can enjoy a nice long breakfast while reading the papers. He is undoubtedly a morning person.

We asked him if there were any aromas with which he has a special association from a time and place early in his life whereby he's transported and remembers fondly. He said yes, and cited two for us. One was a tomato sauce slow cooking and simmering on the stove. That was something he grew up with, whether it was grandma A or grandma B, his aunt Louise or Aunt Rose and of

course his own Mom, His wife he said, makes a great sauce. We agreed it is what so many people associate immediately with the aroma of love and home.

The other aroma is one we don't often get a chance to experience any longer. It used to be the characteristic aroma of the annual kickoff of the fall football season; the familiar aroma of burning leaves. What it was like to be a kid and smell burning leaves knowing it was that time of year again. Gone but not forgotten, the memory of it remains.

Michael first came to Brentwood in 1967. His wife had been a lifelong Long Islander from Nassau County. She was living in Bellmore. They graduated at the same time and both wanted to be teachers. When it was time for them to send out applications they'd made the decision that it was on Long Island where they wanted to work, - he could not remember the circumstances for the choices that had made - they'd selected Middle Island, Sayville, Brentwood and maybe one or two others and had an interview during spring break in Brentwood.

The day of the scheduled Brentwood interviews Long Island was in the midst of a blizzard and school was closed. They borrowed his wife's mother's car and drove to Brentwood to the old Administration Building but there wasn't a soul there and no one had called to give them a heads-up. They also had an appointment for an interview at Middle Country, so they proceeded to go there and found that the Administrators were present and they both had interviews. When they ultimately arrived back at his wife's mother's house, George Catandella called and was extremely apologetic. He asked that they please come back again the following day and allow themselves to be interviewed - both of them. They returned the next day and there was still no school. George and Lou Naninni interviewed Martha, Fred Weaver and Gerhardt Roberts interviewed Mike in two separate rooms of the old Administration Building. Mike's interview was proceeding satisfactorily while he tried as best he could to figure out what they wanted him to say, when all of a sudden George Catandella came through the door and put his hand on Fred's shoulder, interrupting Fred in mid sentence pointing at Mike, saying, "*He's hired*". Dr. Naninni explained by adding, "*Yes, we're offering her a contract and she'd already explained that they come as a package deal*". The look on Fred's face was one of

complete shock. It said that neither he nor Mr. Roberts had any idea what was going on.

Dr. Naninni confirmed her statement by adding “*Yes, we’re going to hire him.*” Fred and Dr. Roberts were both speechless. Mike expressed the same degree of surprise when he said, “*I’m not sure if Brentwood would ever have hired me or not.*” According to the way Mike saw it, he got into Brentwood on his wife’s coat tails.

That year we had a very large first day Orientation for teachers in the Sonderling Building auditorium. Wade Cummings did a hand stand before going to the microphone to offer his few words as an Assistant Administrator. There must have been a hundred or more new teachers starting their first year in the district that year and it felt good to be one of them knowing “*we can handle this*”.

Sid Jones was Michael’s first Department Chairperson. Paul Koretski became his mentor and taught in an adjacent room. Bob Wilcox and Harry Hayden started teaching in Brentwood around the same time. Both Bob and Harry had a big influence on his teaching. He arrived Certified as a Math Teacher but without having the skill sets of a professional teacher of Math. That would come over time. His piece of paper said Provisional Certification but as he told us, he still needed to learn what it was all about.

Our Brentwood students were a different kind of student back then. Mike has seen the changes in our student body take shape over the years. It went through what he called “*a dramatic change*” but remains a dynamic district nonetheless. Since 1967, it has changed quite a bit, he said. As of his last year, 1999 -2000, it has become decidedly urban in its makeup rather than reflecting as it once did the United States as a whole. While it could be that more students are coming here from more urban locations it could also be that as he suspected more and more of our students are arriving from different points around the globe. We have become the first stop on their way to a new life. We are the new world to them. Talking with ESL teachers as he has done, he suggests that many of our students seem to have arrived lacking a fundamental grasp of their native languages and cultures and come with limited exposure to the culture of the classroom in any previous formal educational system placing them immediately behind their contemporaries. In addition, their numbers are increasing. Mike added, “*I think we do a wonderful job with these children and I truly think they are lucky to*

be here, where small miracles are performed daily.” He said, “I really feel lucky to be here too”.

He had spent his entire career in the classroom on the secondary level. He started in the Sonderling Building and went from Sonderling to Ross up until the early eighties and at that point we created the two tenth grade centers; the East Tenth Grade Center and the North West Tenth Grade Center. He spent a year in each and then came back. The Ross Math Staff found themselves in the portables. It was where he said he spent some of the best years of his career teaching.

Mike taught just about every math class the district offered and all of the computer classes offered. Then 1996 through 1999 he was a computer consultant for the high school after Tony DiMarco retired and Rich Spina moved to a district wide position. Last year he filled in for John Durant as Math Department Chairman, when John was unable to continue as he battled and eventually lost his life to cancer.

Bob Wilcox and he were advisors to the Future Teachers of America. Ray Therrian and he were advisors to the Junior Class in the Seventies.

In addition he also moonlighted here in the high school where he taught Driver Education for a long time until that program was dropped by the district.

He's taught as an adjunct at SUNY Farmingdale and at CW Post and their Graduate School of Education and then at Dowling for about six years. He never taught in the Evening School but has taught consistently in Summer School from 1972 until the present, where it is his intention to teach once again in this summer.

There were just two years when he didn't do Summer School in the mid eighties. That was when he, John Durant and Ray Newcomb started a Computer Camp. They ran a Computer Camp for two summers and when they realized they weren't making any money (they barely cleared enough to pay off the equipment they purchased), he went back to teaching Summer School.

While experience was responsible for most of it, listening topped out as being one of the most important skills he acquired.

Mike said he had the honor of having nine student teachers throughout his career. Following upon the first few of them he decided he wanted to leave the rest with an important discovery he'd made. It was - *"You have to look directly into the eyes of every student every day, and you have to figure out what they're thinking because they're not very good actors and actresses and you can tell how well you're explaining a particular concept, you can tell whether they're bored. You can tell whether you have to slow down or pick it up. Look into their eyes and pay attention to what they're saying"*.

What was his dedicated purpose for coming in to work every day and doing what he did, as well as he did it, for all those years? He explained it this way, *'It was always, every day, about my students, and about what their purpose was and helping them to discover it, hone it, embrace it and ultimately achieve it in their own time and in their own way when they were ready.'*

Mike is as old now as his teachers were when he was in high school. Most of his teachers are already deceased. He tried to keep in touch with a number of students. There is a young man he mentors, that he had in class nine years ago, who comes all the way out from Queens to be tutored to pass the Selective Service Exam for the NYPD.

Our conversation went back and forth at this point. I asked him if he had been active with the union back when he started. He said Dave Martz had been a part time President of the BTA then but early on Mike didn't have time to be active. There were so many wonderful people serving. He was active on several district wide committees like the Sabbatical leave committee. He had nothing but praise for BTA leadership.

We spoke of G. Guy DiPietro's rise through the ranks and his contribution of the formulae that from that time forward avoided annual conflicts surrounding contractual salary schedules. It was truly revolutionary. He remembered the strike that was averted when we picketed Central Administration and met at the Colony Hill. Teachers elsewhere, he told us, were envious over our labor/management relationship. We reminisced over memorable loveable characters we have known, traumatic local, regional and national political events we survived like 1968 and the MLK assassination, and Bobby Kennedy's visit to Brentwood High School by helicopter landing in the football field, the speech he made in

Sonderling Auditorium just days before he was shot and killed in Los Angeles. There were so many celebratory sports accomplishments over the years and things like the Westinghouse Scholarships and memories associated with a technology revolution telescoped into a single life time. Did he remember when calculators were outlawed in class? He did.

Then came the time in 2000 when he and his wife Martha had their retirement conversation; he was prepared to go at age fifty-five and she wanted to hold off until sixty two. He filed his papers one and a half years prior to retiring. She changed her mind and submitted papers eight weeks prior to leaving. Her decision was not incentive driven at Sachem but she left happy. She had about a dozen students to tutor and three choirs and it was time. Their daughter will be married in the fall and the incentive will help pay the bills.

Since Mike retired a year ago he has been busy with house chores and volunteering at church serving as Financial Secretary. He continues his almost lifelong hobby of horse racing which he has followed ever since falling in love with the grace and beautiful performance of Secretariat back in 1973. One year after that with \$20 of tutoring money he placed and lost several bets and was down to his last three dollars. He bet what was left and won \$176. Since then he and Martha and their children have been making annual summer pilgrimages to Saratoga with family and friends and enjoying every minute.

Though he did retire one year ago Mike comes in to help Dennis Bracco and Charlotte De Champs at the evening High School three or four times a week. He's beginning to think about having to get up at 5:15 AM for summer school this year.

The greatest source of his enjoyment for the past thirty three years has been that of being a husband and a dad. At the same time he had no idea thirty three years ago that his Brentwood family would become as important in his life as it has. Thinking of all those unforgettable individuals in his extended family of over 7,000 students who crossed his life make him feel proud he's never taken any of them for granted. And the colleagues, administrators, clericals, everyone was so very important to Brentwood High School's success. "*We're all in this together. So, let's be kind to one another*". The best things he ever heard students say to him were?

“This period is over already?” “Mr. Campanile, I never liked Math before.” An impossible dream? Everyone Passing the Regents. His advice: *“To thine own self be true, and it will follow as night the day, thou cans’t not then be false to any man.”* and he was at that. Mike, will be forever remembered as one of Brentwood’s Master Teachers.