



Peter Paul Vercillo Jr
ROBS History Project
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He introduced himself to us as Peter Paul Vercillo Jr. His parents named him after his father. His father who was Peter Paul Vercillo Sr. was born on June 29th 1917 which is St. Peter's and Paul's Day. His father died when Peter was seven in 1955. *"It was tough. I had a younger sister and an older sister and my mother was a widow with three young kids who, by circumstance, she was forced to raise singlehandedly."* His father was classified 4F by the US military in WWII because he suffered with ulcers. Peter's paternal Grandfather had a construction company called Welmix. It was very interesting, after WWII the business really took off and of course, his father's ulcers got worse, but he was still doing pretty well. The family moved out of Brooklyn. His business associate was a guy by the name of Fred Trump. Fred Trump went on to enjoy modest success. Peter's father had planned to move the family to Florida. He thought it would be a good idea to buy some land there. His partner Mr. Berlin moved there. The family recently read an article from a Florida paper saying he was eighty nine (he must be about 90 now), that claimed he was a multi-millionaire. Unfortunately, since his father had died in 1955, the Vercillo family didn't share in the new found fortune of the former business. *"But if he had lived and they moved to Florida for various reasons my two Grandsons wouldn't have been born. That was just the way it all worked out. It was very sad for my younger sister who was not even three and my older sister too, who was not yet thirteen. It was a tough situation. My father was a great guy. Everybody told us how wonderful he was."*

"It was interesting because I had had a brother who was born two years before me, and we think he died two years to the day I was born. I was born Sep. 3rd, 1947, he was buried Sep 5th, 1945 and lived about five months." He was born

on March 30th His name was Dominick, after my father's father. The second kid they decided to name after my father – and that was me.”

Some family members will still occasionally call him “Peter Boy”. His mother called him “Junior”. The dinner call when he was with friends could be embarrassing when she would shout for him to come home with “Juney, Juney!” That, he remembered was “just thrilling.” Several cousins still address him as Peter Boy.”

I asked about his family situation. He told me “I really wanted to have kids, but it didn't work out - so I adopted. I didn't think I could. I had a very long ‘pregnancy’ of two and a half years. I started in 1978 – We had a big winter storm. Schools were closed for two weeks and it coincided with a winter vacation. I had time to think about it,.. and I'd been thinking about it for years. In July of 1980 I adopted my sons, Jonathan and Michael, who later on went to the Brentwood Schools. They've gotten older and Jonathan now has two children, my twin grandsons Andre and Andrew and meanwhile my son Michael got married and he already has a child, a daughter by the name of Halle. I love Halle too, but I don't see her that often. I don't see my grandsons that often either, but they are like, the main reasons I'm alive. They are like the joy of my life; the best thing that ever happened to me. They are like a miracle. As I was saying earlier, if I had moved to Florida I don't think I would have... even if I would have adopted the same kids, the mother and father would never have met and my grandsons would never have been born, so it's kind of a strange situation. My adopted sons were eight and nine, and they had troubled childhoods. Jonathan was burned and beaten, had buckle marks on his face...he really had a lot of problems. Michael did to...they would be abandoned, eat dirt, just like a typical child abuse thing. They wouldn't give me younger kids as a single parent. This was one of the times when being a male was not an advantage, because they just felt that single males, white single males, (my sons and grandsons are African Americans). What I'm saying is that it was difficult to adopt. You know, I love them, but I knew it was going to be a tough road with both of them, and Jonathan had a lot of problems in school, in Brentwood Schools, tons and tons of problems. He eventually left the Brentwood Schools and was in group homes and stuff. Michael, he had some problems too, but he graduated from Brentwood High School, and he's doing rather well right now. He's a Manager at Friday's and he's got a house in Commack and all sorts of stuff”.

"I'm still close with my mother who at this time is living in Florida, and I have a sister living in Florida and an older sister living out here in Mt. Sinai on Long Island. I live in Brentwood and I was born in Brooklyn. I spent my first three years in Brooklyn. Then we moved to Elmont in 1950, I lived in my mother's father's house in Bensonhurst for a little while, for about three years I lived in Canarsie, Brooklyn in a flat that my mother says was rat infested. She couldn't wait to move. My father was doing okay at that time in 1950 after the War...we had a house in Elmont. It was considered way out across the Queens border. I had a fantastic, tremendous, wonderful, Elementary School life in Dutch Broadway School in Elmont, which obviously influenced me to become a teacher. It was a great school. We were the first Kindergarten class, actually we were the first group to go from Kindergarten through sixth grade to graduate. I had wonderful teachers except for one. It was just an overall wonderful experience. I can remember all of my teachers. I can recite them for you. Miss Heir in Kindergarten who became Mrs. Rosenberg 1^s, Mrs. Fenton 2nd, Mrs. Hendricks 3rd, Miss Pierce, 4th, we called her Mrs. Pierce cause she could pierce your heart with an arrow, Miss Carolyn Volks was our absolute favorite teacher who inspired me as I said in my retirement speech. She saw an awkward not so little boy and befriended me. She knew I didn't have a father. They were all so very nice to me; the Gym Teacher, the Art Teacher, the Librarian and Mr. Johnson. It was a very creative school."

Peter continued telling us about his sons Jonathan and Michael. He told us how Jonathan had been abused. At five years old he was babysitting himself and three other little kids, and his mothers friend's kid, so he was in charge of five kids at five years old, the father had gone because he had started a new family, and the mothers were all gone so he was in charge of all these kids. He had a survival thing going. He would tell anything, any story, make any lie to survive. Dealing with Jonathan was difficult. Michael was different. He was more inward, he kept everything inside, to this day he still does. He was different. He told lies too. They were foster kids. Plus they have different fathers, so Jonathan was always thought to be younger than Michael, because Jonathan was smaller and heavier and Michael was taller and thinner, Michael was thought to be older. Actually they were ten months apart, they were very close in age. So it was difficult. *"We had some good times. I'd like to call them 'father knows best' moments...we did have that. We went on a lot of trips and stuff; I loved to travel, even before I adopted*

them. We did do that, and we had some good experiences I think. You know, it's hard for Jonathan to get over the hump. Hopefully, Michael has gotten over them but of course, I don't know what's in his head. I asked if he was now living alone and he said 'Yes', he was. Although, his grandsons come over on almost every vacation and every weekend although the weekends have gotten shorter as they've gotten older. I see them in the summer, you know, They're just great".

Where were some of his earliest memories formed? Were they from Brooklyn, I wanted to know? *"When I was three years old in Brooklyn, I remember a kid named Steven, who tried to kick me off my tricycle. I remember my cousin Cecilia and my sister cutting up worms in the rain, and I remember the day we moved from the place in Canarsie when I was three years old and we moved to Elmont. His father had a movie camera and from 1950 on he has home movies of watching them grow up".*

"You ask about my mother. Mom was one of eight kids. We were very close with the Esposito family. There had been six boys born before my mother that had lived there, and there had been a girl named Josephine that died when she was about two years old or something... so we don't consider her, but she was obviously part of the family. My mother was the first girl and my grandfather right away called her Dolly and she was a "Dolly", she was the girl and she was the head girl. There were two children after her, but my mother was considered to be the Princess, so to speak, and my father worshiped my mother – worshipped her and he pursued her. I don't think she wanted to get married, but he pursued her. What happened was they got married, and my father treated her very well, very well. She enjoyed it, she enjoyed her house and she enjoyed her family unfortunately until he died, which was very sad for everybody".

"My mother liked her friends. She had a canasta club. Those women, God Bless them they're still there. She's still friendly with two of them. They're still there, the rest of them have all passed away. She liked family. We're a very Italian family. Very Neapolitan; the Politano family comes from Naples. We're very into family, very into parties and since we lived in Elmont we had all these parties. My mother was always throwing New Years, Birthdays, Christmas Parties... everything. Wonderful! Hopefully, I've been doing that with my kids and grandkids. She liked that and she liked going out. She liked being around her brothers...being the center of attention. We knew that growing up with my

mother. I was the only boy and at twelve years old I'd had enough of mom telling me what to do. So we had some problems there. But she always says that I was the easiest of the three of us to raise, and believe me my sisters were easy, so I must have been real easy, because I'd do whatever she said to do. I was a good kid. Where was I in the birth order? I was in the middle. My older sister, she's great. She was kind of aloof. She'll kill me for this! There's a four and a half and five and a half year difference between us. So my older sister Lucile, she was very, very smart. She started Kindergarten at four or four and a half. No! Excuse me. She started First Grade at four and a half. She skipped Kindergarten. She was so smart she didn't have to go to Kindergarten. She was so smart she graduated High School early from Elmont Memorial. She married very young. She raised four great kids, supersmart kids, supersmart. Hopefully they'll stay that way. She divorced her husband after 31 years. They had some problems. But she's been married for about a year now to a great guy, and they are blissfully happy. She's doing really well. You know, she's a little like my mom. She's got some of the qualities of my mom. But she's a lot calmer. She's a good friend. She's a great friend. She's terrific and she's wise. She's a smart person. Then I came next in the birth order".

"Then after that came my sister Ginny, Virginia. She's the baby, but you know, she's great. We used to hang out together. Lucile used to be talking on the phone while my mom was at work. My mom had to get a job at the doctor's office, Dr. Ferties office was down the street. Ginny was born four and a half years after me. We'd play together for hours. Ginny and I were really close. She's great. She lives in Florida now. She has a lovely daughter too; very smart. Ginny and I have a little more in common than Lucile and I because Ginny and I were both growing up in the sixties, while Lucile was already grown up. She was married by 1961."

Did you all know your grandparents? "Okay. Okay. I never knew my grandmother on my mother's side who was supposed to be wonderful. I knew my grandfather on my mother's side. He died in 1952. Everybody who came to our house started living there because we were the house in Elmont. Which was great. So, I knew my grandfather for a little while. Ginny didn't know him, but my older sister Lucile did. On my father's side I knew both my grandparents. We were very close, but then after my father died, for whatever reason, my grandparents did not see us anymore. They just didn't see us. They stopped seeing us. They were very close. We think it was....we had an aunt who never got married and we think

it was her doing. Although I can't understand how my grandparents would let her control them. But anyway when I got to be seventeen or eighteen, when I got a license, which was about ten or eleven years after my father had died, I said "Mom can I take the car and go visit them?" I did renew a relationship with them, with my grandparents and my mother had no problem with that. But my grandfather by that time had had a stroke and he could hardly talk and he sort of knew who I was but my grandmother did. My grandmother definitely did and Ginny, my younger sister, came with me. My older sister, she had invited my grandparents to her wedding and they didn't come and she was married at that time, it was 1965. What was interesting was that not long after my grandparents died two years apart in July on exactly the same day".

"It was very difficult not having a father. It was strange, because the kids in back of me (there were three boys), they were basically the same age as the three of us, and their father had died even before our father had died. It was that kind of situation and I knew that there were other people without fathers. But of course, I felt marked, and that it was unfair and all this other stuff, I felt embarrassed. Everybody else had a father except me. I did have my Uncle Frank who was my mother's brother in law, who was always there for us, and my Uncle Willy was always there for us. I will say that all my Uncles were great. I know that on my twelfth birthday they all knew I loved Wise potato chips. It was Labor Day and they all came to my mother's house in Elmont with double bags of Wise Potato chips for me. I always remember that. It was great! They were kin. My Uncle Jerry at one point, knew I was a Yankee fan, they were all Dodger fans, they were all losers, - took me to a New York Yankees game – I would say, an All Star Game in 1956, - 7 - 8 or whatever but it was wonderful. Nobody really that big. My mother did eventually marry three more times, and I was never really close to any of those guys".

The teacher that he'd talked about earlier, Carolyn Volts, had been a wonderful person. *When the kids go, "Oh Mr. Vercillo, Mr. Vercillo", they don't really know what I'm like. So I don't really know what she was like. I remember one time we went on a field trip. I think we were going to see the Mayflower, they must have recreated the Mayflower in the 1950's. She lit up a cigarette and started smoking, and I went up to her and I said, "You smoke?" And I remember saying it to her and she had this look on her face. That was like the worst thing I did for her I remember. But what had happened was I had been in the 'smart' class*

in the fourth grade, and the fourth grade teacher that I didn't particularly like had gone to the fifth grade and took all the kids except me and this other girl with her, so we got kicked out of the 'smart class' and I ended up in Mrs. Volts class. She was wonderful. My friends are envious that I had her when they had to stick with this other teacher for two years in a row. She was very kind and I would visit her in High School. The last time I saw her I was student teaching in the Elmont School District and she was a Principal at Alden Terrace School in North Valley Stream, and I went to visit her. She remembered me, I think she remembered me. I don't think she could forget me. She was very kind and everything. The sad thing is, of course, she retired at age fifty five, she had a heart problem, she smoked and she died I think, within a month or two of her retirement in 1955. So that was very sad, and I had heard about it at my older sisters twenty-fifth anniversary party. One of her kid's friends had gone to her school and they told me that she had died. I specifically went to the Brentwood Library and looked up the article and made a copy of it. She was just a great teacher, and a very nice person, very kind, with me, I wasn't a bad kid, but I must have been....I think as a teacher, I attracted kids who were needy, I didn't necessarily attract the smartest kids, but I attracted kids who were needy. She must have felt that I was needy for whatever reason".

"I always thought that I was pretty smart. I was lazy, I guess. I didn't want to read, although I loved reading comics but I loved to escape. You know I loved to escape. I had this whole fantasy thing. I played baseball and stuff with the kids. There was a lot, Tommy Johnson's lot, and then it became Kenny Prices lot, it was owned by a Church, two houses down. I would always be picked last or next to last, you know my friend's brother who was two years younger than me would always be picked way ahead of me so that was enough of that. You know, I couldn't play that well so I had my own world. I loved the movies, loved, the movies, the Argo Theatre in Elmont that was just great. We had been to the movies a lot with my father. My father for two summers had rented places in Rocky Point, two summers before he died. We went there, and we went to the Coram Drive-In and the Brookhaven Theatre and had a great time seeing all these classic movies and then into the fifties I was into that, and that was what kept me going... that and the Mickey Mouse Club and Disney. I'm still a Disney freak".

Do you have any connections with friends you went to Elementary School with? *"Oh, I certainly do! Yes, in second grade I met my friend Buddy Tescone and in the third grade I met my friend Richard Willing. Buddy and Richie and I still go to*

dinner about once a month all the time. I have a friend that I haven't seen in many years, but I'm friendly with his mother. I do keep in touch with them. I have friends from High School, Commack High School and College".

Do you remember your first paying job? "Yes I do. I worked at Paul Bunyan Day Camp. The bus took us to Sunken Meadow but you didn't get paid every week; you got paid at the end of the summer. So that was kind of fun. I did that for two summers. I was a counselor working with the kids, it was great."

"Without a doubt Christmas was the most important family holiday we celebrated, but you understand we celebrated everything. Easter, Halloween, Thanksgiving; my mother was into it. She used to love parties, but you understand she didn't drink she didn't smoke, she just loved to have fun and my father went with it for as long as he lived".

Now that you're retired you may answer this question differently. Are you a morning person or a night person? "You know, I never knew. I can get up in the morning and just look at the trees. It's great! I can stay up at night doing stuff in my study or watching TV. I'm not a 3 am to 7 am person. That's the time that I usually attempt to sleep, in that area. I don't know. My favorite season used to be summer. I had a friend, Charlie Igaudi who used to say that spring was his favorite season. I thought that was sissy then, but now I like spring the best. We didn't get to this yet, but I have a home in Colorado. Colorado in the summer is great. You know. Just sayin'. I like all the seasons. Long Island spring is really the best. Guess that's why I used to live here."

Is there an aroma that triggers a memory for you? "Chocolate pudding"; "My mother cooking chocolate pudding in our house in Elmont. I remember that for sure. And my mother's sauce; she still does it for me. I still have frozen sauce in the refrigerator. She makes a great sauce. Says she doesn't do it as well today, but she does. The aroma of sauce on bread because we're all so thin, we'd take the bread and dip it in the sauce as it's being cooked. My mother's sauce and the macaroni and stuff are all so great. That kind of stuff I remember, the chicken and the onions and potato's she would make – the food smells. And Christmas; the smells of Christmas, the trees, we always had real trees –to this day".

“September 3rd 1969, was my twenty second birthday, and I was in room 22. I took a picture of my classroom door on that day which I also used in my retirement speech. It was a wonderful experience working in Northwest Elementary School. I taught there for nine years before it closed, when it later became the tenth grade center and the ninth grade center, but I loved the 9th Grade Center. It was great! I loved all the crazy things that we did. It was a sad time because the Vietnam War was really raging and I will say also, that a lot of the kids that left us at Northwest went on to the Middle School and the High School and got into crime and drugs and stuff so, the seventies were not really a great time for older kids, but for younger kids it was great! Northwest was a great school.”

“I personally started to attend school, as I said earlier, in Elmont at the Dutch Broadway Elementary School in Kindergarten and First Grade. The school was so crowded that we had half days for Kindergarten and first grade, and I was in Kindergarten A for both groups because I was in the June to December group being born in September. I had morning Kindergarten, I guess they felt that the immature kids had to go in the morning, but I had a great time. It was a really good school. I remember a couple of things, my sister, even though we were only five years apart, she was six years ahead of me. She had been skipped when she was little. The last day of Kindergarten I thought my sister was going to pick me up. So I waited and waited, and everybody left the school, and she didn't pick me up. So my teacher Miss (inaudible) called my house, or somebody called my house, and then my sister came and picked me up. We had a lot of good times. I remember the only fight I ever won was when I was going to the bathroom and this kid, Joey Owens was his last name, he tried to get into the bathroom –I can't believe I even wanted to fight – but I got to stay in the bathroom. I remember that. I remember playing with the big blocks and I remember the great atmosphere in the school. Elmont has one high school that was seventh through 12th that was an unusual situation. They probably used to have more of them in those days, but they certainly don't have them anymore. I was there from seventh till after the first quarter of tenth grade in Elmont Memorial and then my mother re-married her second husband and we moved to Commack. I left Elmont when I was fifteen years old in 10th Grade, and I did not like the move. I did not like losing my friends. As it turned out, I met some great friends in Commack, you know, that I really love, but it was very difficult, 10th, 11th and 12th you know, it was a different type of kid, a different set up, Commack was not as elite as it is now, you know,

but I did it. I used to write letters all the time. After 12th Grade I got accepted to SUNY New Paltz, it was away from home, but not too far. It was a 'Teachers School'."

"I spent four years there –hated it – but it was a means to an end. I was the only person who hated it, all my friends made friends there – I was the only person who hated SUNY New Paltz, but I graduated and quickly moved on. Although, I completed my graduate requirement as quickly as possible after finishing my BA Degree – (3 years), I drove all the way up to SUNY New Paltz and took a course each semester until I was finished. I did take one or two classes at Stony Brook University and several in-service courses in Brentwood, but by the end of my first three years I had completed the Masters degree."

He first came to Brentwood in 1969. He chose Brentwood because it was known to be an integrated community, and that was what he was looking for. *"I did not want to go to an all white school. I was a product of the sixties and wanted to work with all different types of kids. I might possibly have taken a job in Elmont - they did offer me a job after I'd already accepted Brentwood's offer, because it was my "Alma Mater," you know. I would possibly have done that, but I very much liked the Brentwood Schools, and I started there in 1969 under Louis Lotito, who was a very nice guy, a very nice man with a lovely wife, and besides it was a great school. There was an interview by Mr. Naninni, or was it Dr. Naninni? in New Paltz with a lot of other people, and I was invited to come down. I remember going to Northwest Elementary – it was a chaotic day, and I was as nervous as can be. The school was so crowded. There were over 1,100 kids in the building. Hard to believe, but you know, we had a lot of kids. Mr. Lotito made the interview easy. He was a very nice man, a very good person, and I think he saw how interested I was, and he understood I wanted to be there"*.

Peter lived in Commack for a year and a half with his Mom. After his second year he moved into his own apartment in Brentwood. He really liked the kids. *"They were great. They were so enthusiastic. You always remember your first class – everybody says that, at least at the elementary level – high school I don't know. The kids were terrific. They were funny. There were a couple of discipline problems, one boy who wasn't a discipline problem but he was thirteen, and at the end of Fourth Grade, which was kind of – you're supposed to be ten. But it was a great collection of kids. It was a good year to start. These were very below level*

kids – very below level kids, but it was really great. I used to go to Church. Christ the king is the Church in Commack, but I would come sometimes to St. Luke’s, because that was the church where some of the kids went – I just wanted to see them – I didn’t like Friday so much, I liked Monday. I wanted to come back to school on Monday. That changed after a while, but I couldn’t wait to get back”.

“My best friend there later became the Godfather to my son Michael. ...and his wife Irene, Roy Frontierland. He started the same year I did and was a year older than me. He went to school in Idaho or Iowa or something. He had worked there and was a good friend and Mary Pat Lyon, great friend, was very supportive, she’d been there a couple of years before I was. We sort of became very good friends and eventually did a lot of things together. But, there are other people there that you would talk to; the late Janette Litz, a very nice person. She would always say something complementary to me; the Sustrins’, Sheila and Letty Sustrin, and on and on, there were just very nice people there, Frank Scavone, Carson Russell, Christie Tedaldi, I almost forgot about her, There were great people there.”

“I wanted to teach fifth grade. That’s what I wanted because Mrs. Volkes the teacher that I liked had taught fifth. So, they put me in fourth and they put me in sixth. It wasn’t until I got to Twin Pines later on that I finally, finally, finally taught fifth Grade, which I basically stayed in. I taught fourth and sixth. I liked fourth but I liked sixth better. I preferred working with the older kids”.

“There are two things that I am really, specifically proud of and I really am. We did a series of ten plays. These were big plays. They became known as the sixth grade plays. The first couple of years we had fourth, fifth and six graders in it. Eventually they became sixth grade plays when we were in Twin Pines. They were these big productions. Okay, When I was in Dutch Broadway School when I was a kid they had these big shows every year, so when I became a teacher I wanted to do it. So I would write these plays. For ten years in a row I’d write a play. And we used popular songs, and the kids would sing them and they would dance and there would be stories and there would be timely stories. One year we did the Bi-Centennial and one year we did Scrooge ‘77. We did a story about people blowing up plants and stuff that we thought was funny. We did all these fun things, you know, and this went on for ten years, and we were very proud. I worked with Mary Pat Lyons and Roy French was fantastic and the special effects he would do and I

would say, 'We need a balloon to rise up,' 'people in a balloon', and he would do that. 'We need a dinosaur to come out and shoot smoke out of his mouth', and he would do that. 'We need a superhero to fly across the stage', and he would do that. He was unbelievable. So that worked out. So for those ten years; those ten plays, the good feelings we had doing those plays were fantastic. We had all the kids in the play who wanted to be in it were in it. It was a great thing. It was hard choosing which kids would be in the lead roles, but anyone who wanted to be in it would be in it. It was just a great thing. The other thing that we did was these camping trips. These camping trips I am super proud of too, because it was fun and it was science and the kids were away from home. We went out to Camp Blue Bay, (unintelligible), and Camp Edey with Lenny Seiden, Art Hannah, Peggy Sheehan and other teachers too. We went out camping originally for four days, originally I think it was Wednesday to Friday but then it became Tuesday to Friday. The kids would plan everything. It would be scheduled. The kids would do all the cooking, the cleanup, the dittos, the packets and experiments, and we'd have great, great, great, great fun. Kids would come to me and say, 'I remember the camping trip,' and 'I remember the play'. So those two things are the things that I remember. Plus, in my class I love holidays, so every holiday had a meaning. After I bought my house in Brentwood, in 1975, for the first couple of years I had Christmas parties in my house in Brentwood, and in June I'd have class barbeques when parents would come too. So after a few years I began to say, 'You know, Christmas is bad enough for me as it is.' Then it became the Halloween Party with the Brentwood butcher coming to the house and scaring the blankity blank out of the kids. That was always the high light of the school year in October. So the kids would come over to the house in October, and we'd have fun and they'd come over in June with their parents. In the beginning I didn't have it chaperoned. It was kind of...when you think about it now...but then eventually I'd have to make sure there was a PTA parent there or somebody was there, whatever, we had a great time. Those were the things that.... We had a Christmas Party in the class, have a balloon pop game, where you'd have to act out what it says in the balloon, we'd have an Easter Party, plus a Valentines King and Queen Contest and we did education in between. I'm also proud of the books that we did. We did a lot of literature. When I was in the older grades especially, one year we did 'Up The Down Staircase', and we wrote to Belle Kaufman and she wrote back. You know, and things like that, the kids read "The Human Comedy" which I wouldn't have used with an ordinary group, but they were such a bright group that they could handle it. And then we saw the Mickey Rooney film and also one more thing that I

did that I was very proud of. I did this film study that was a joy for me. It was an enrichment thing. I would show films after school that the kids never would have seen. "The Human Comedy" one year, "It's a Beautiful Life", before it became popular on TV. It was just so great to show all these movies. We had a great time doing it. We had pop-corn and stuff so it was a lot of fun. But it was a lot of work; getting it all organized and everything".

"While many teachers insist that they would never want to live in the community where they teach, I did just the opposite. I intentionally and purposively moved to live in the community where I taught. I did that because I liked the kids I worked with, met and knew many of their parents and sacrificed some privacy I may have lost in exchange for the convenience of being close to my work and close to home at the same time. It worked for me from the time I first bought my house in Brentwood".

"Clearly the death of my father at my early age affected me greatly. In that sense what I did was selfish to the degree that I liked kids better than I like adults, and I felt that I knew them well enough to be able to teach them successfully. True, I wanted also to provide a healthy adult male image and be available to them if and when they ever needed me. I was not intending to replace any male adult in their life but serve only as a positive male role image of the father I lost. But I don't really think that idea even occurred to me".

Somebody asked me, "If you were successful, what do you think the secret to your success was in teaching?" I think it was just being funny, all the time. There were times when you were serious. But just have humor with them and joke with them all the time. Just let them know if they do something wrong that I'll still love them, they're still good kids, they're still worthwhile. Sometimes the message didn't get across, but hopefully the message got across often enough".

"I was also an active member of BTA. My second year 1970-1971, Roy Sarantino, he was a Delegate, said, 'You know, I need a delegate. Do you want to be a Delegate?' I didn't say no, so I became a Delegate in 1971. Then Roy became Vice President of the Union, so I became Chief Delegate - the thankless job of being Chief Delegate. I was Chief Delegate for what, 1972 – off and on until 2001 with a couple of years off when Beverley Carpenter took over for me for a little bit at Twin Pines eventually Claire Geraci took over for me at Twin Pines also, so I was

a Delegate for thirty three of my thirty three years and I believe for twenty eight years I was Chief Delegate of the union. I believe in union, I believe very strongly in it. Yes, that was an interesting job. I worked with Les Black, Jack Zuckerman and Joe”.

“There were two times when I needed help from the union. During the late 1970’s while the war in Viet Nam was still being waged, the District decided that every employee of the Brentwood School District be required to sign a loyalty oath. You know, Roy and I didn’t think that was right. We just didn’t think that was right....and everybody in our building had signed it except for Roy Farentino and I. The Union and Jack Zuckerman said not to worry about it.. ‘They can’t make you sign this thing”, and we sort of thought that too.... We were both from the 1960’s ... nobody can tell you what to do...to a degree. So that was a little bit problematic, and then another time one Principal and I had a little disagreement. The day before my observation...foolish me....to have a disagreement with this Principal. The next day on my observation he didn’t like what I had done. It was my only negative classroom observation ever - what a coincidence. So what happened was I went to Les Black and he helped me respond to it. It was embarrassing, and it was hurtful, because I had never received a negative observation prior to this from any other Administrator. But the Union was always there. Jack and Les and Joe were always there in a pinch, because I never wanted to deceive anybody”.

“I love Len Sieden. As I speak, he’s in a nursing home in Silver Spring, Maryland. He was not what anyone would call a character but he was funny. He was a very good friend. He was a little older than I was and a little younger than my mom is now. We bonded so he would tell it like it is. He had diabetes and funny thing, shortly after that I was diagnosed with diabetes, and we commiserated about it. He was a good guy, and we had different religious backgrounds, but we saw eye to eye about many things and he cared about kids. There were a lot of people I was friendly with over the years and to pick one or two would be kind of hard to do, but truthfully I’ve known some really great people I worked with”.

Peter retired on June 27, 2003, just a few months ago. Had there been anything left undone by the time he left teaching that he was either unable to accomplish or would perhaps like to have completed. This is what he told us:

“You know, not really. I would like to have done another camping trip with the kids. I really would have liked that as an ‘old man’ as opposed to a younger man, but it wasn’t going to happen. So I would liked to have repeated.....that was one of the things when I got to my last year teaching, I didn’t goof off by any means, there was a lot less pressure on me the last year because I figured,....as a matter of fact the year before the last year, I did film study one more time, and I could have done it the last year and I said you know what, I made my last year as peaceful as possible; as stress-less as possible so, you know, I did everything. I went to all the new meetings, the new textbook meetings that I was supposed to do but I felt I accomplished a lot. I wasn’t planning to retire, but Mary Pat Lyons had said something to me, ‘Are you going to do this forever’, I thought I’d be up there in my sixties and seventies and you know, die at the chalk board. I really did, but then I started thinking about it and you know, I had a great class when I was forty-eight years old, it was a wonderful class, and I’m saying, but I’m not always going to have this and you know, there’s going to be stress and you know you don’t know how long you’re going to live (and I have diabetes and stuff), so in total I worked for the District for thirty-four years..... and like many others, I did other jobs. You know, I worked here and there; not much. I worked for Mr. Catandella for the Music Program one year, you know, chaperoning, but I mean little things, not much.

“I remember I began in Brentwood in 1969 and I was making \$7,300. Not knowing now, how much longer I had to live, I was thinking about how much time remained to me. He said, “If I retire at 60, that would be four and a half more years I couldn’t still be doing what I am now. I’m already jamming everything into everything. I think it’s a good time...I had a lot of sick days and the incentive so that would make my retirement incentive pretty good, plus....I want to say one other thing, I like the new kids coming in but I was the oldest classroom teacher in the school. I mean I was really older”.

“If I’d known more about myself earlier there are things about myself I would have changed. I like the idea that I traveled. My goal was to visit all fifty states, and I achieved that. I wanted to get to Europe, and I did that. Little things like that I did personally. In teaching, I just wish I would have had more patience I think. That’s a more general thing. I wish I would have gotten more sleep. Sometimes I go to school without enough sleep. That was a problem. I wish I had kept my temper a little bit better, something like that”.

“Yes, I did have heroes growing up. I liked sports figures. I liked Bob Pettit of the St. Louis Hawks, and I really loved Bobby Richardson. He was a religious guy, he was a Yankee but he wasn’t a Billy Martin Yankee. As a kid I liked Johnny Crawford, he was in the Mickey Mouse Club and then he was in “The Rifleman”. I really liked those kinds of guys. I liked John F. Kennedy until I knew what he was like. So forget that. You know. I liked the Popes on the religious side. I thought they were pretty good. Mother Theresa was terrific, you know”.

“I tried to share all the books with my students that had a profound influence on me as I was growing up”. ‘The Human Comedy’ was one such book I tried to share with students. An adult book ‘Crime and Punishment’ that I read was very important to me. People would say to me in college, ‘You read it’? You know in high school I didn’t want to read that much but, yeah, I really liked that. ‘Man child in the Promised Land,’ by Claude Brown, I mean that really wakes you up as a middle class Caucasian kid, not that it was a great book but as a waking up it influenced me. When I read the Sharon Creech book ‘Walk Two Moons’, it was a kids book, the kids loved that book so much and I got so much enjoyment out of teaching that book because (I’d always save it for the spring), because they loved that book so much.

To anyone even considering teaching Peter offered his advice: “It’s a great profession but (1.) You really have to really like the kids. If you’re doing it for the money, think again. Not that we were so wonderful, but today there are people who think they can do it for the money and be successful. That’s a problem. (2) If you have a good Administrator work for your Administrator. If you don’t have a good Administrator - it’s a totally different story. Remember, your Administrator will be required by the Board to do certain things - be aware of that. Stick with the Union. The Union is so important because it has given you your rights. Try to always to put humor in what you do. Laugh with the kids. Try not to talk down to them too often. Try to understand where they’re coming from, because they’re coming from many different places and they all have burdens and things they have to get through. It’s really difficult, and you can’t always succeed with that. Don’t forget that. Remember it. The other thing is that the low achieving kids need to be treated at least as well as bright kids. Treat everybody equally. There are some teachers who pamper certain kids. Don’t do that. Eventually you’ll pamper everybody. Rules, even if you don’t call them rules, should be set out right from

the beginning, and the kids should know the teacher is going to be fair to everybody!

I never dreamed retirement would be as good as it is. I have my home in Colorado. I fell in love with Colorado in 1967. I bought property there in 1974, and started building in 2002. I've been very fortunate. I have a beautiful home, a magnificent view of Pikes Peak through the clouds from 900 feet above sea level. I have that place, and it makes sense for me to use it. I'm 56 now. It was a good thing to do. I'd like to fill in a few gaps, but as Johnson Martin reminds us in that old Yiddish Story, "It Could Always Be Worse".