



Wesley (Wes) Trutt
ROBS History Project
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When we spoke on June 19, 1996 his parents were both deceased as was his older sister. He didn't see his younger sister very often. He was divorced and was the proud father of two "*wonderful*" daughters; Vanessa who was twenty-one and Emily nineteen. They were, he said, '*two very bright and beautiful young ladies*'. Vanessa was in her third year at Hofstra and Emily an Art Major at Syracuse University. He enjoyed frequent contact with them both. Both single they were currently living with their mother, his former wife, in Smithtown a distance of five miles from where he was living.

Vanessa is very much like her mother; very organized and focused upon goals. She is a business major intent upon pursuing a career in business management aspiring to achieve success in that field before becoming much older. She's already made the Dean's list.

Emily is much more artistic and as an Art Major at Syracuse chooses instead to go with the flow, has a more easy going style while enjoying her process and her life as it comes while attaining between a 3.4 and 3.5 GPA. She's also doing well in school. Both girls attended Smithtown High School. They've continued their success in college. Emily is now completing her first year as an undergraduate.

Wesley Trutt was born in Elizabeth, New Jersey in 1943 in the middle of World War II. At two or three years of age his family moved to Williamsburg, Brooklyn, adjacent to Bedford Stuyvesant. His mother and father both descended from large families and they all lived in Brooklyn. If they didn't live in Brooklyn, then they came from the Bronx. They had a very connected relationship with aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, nephews on both sides. Weekends always became a question of where they were going or who was coming over....*"with big family celebrations or whatever"*. He remembered one family picnic when he was five, where everybody played cards, so of course he learned to play cards. This particular time they needed a player and of course, they bet all the time. So, at five Wes said to his uncle, *"What's the bet?"* They agreed the bet would be a pair of pants and *"I was this little kid and I won and he wouldn't pay off"*.

Knowing Wes had been a serious Bridge player while a teacher in the District, I asked him when it was that he fell in love with the game. He said it happened when he was in college at Hofstra. Hofstra according to what he told us, was a hot bed of interest in the game of bridge. He shared with us how he had distinguished himself as a competitor. *"We won the Huntington Cup one year. There was a two state tournament in New Jersey and New York that we won.* During the years he attended Hofstra there had been approximately twenty or thirty of the most proficient bridge players in the country that were also attending or teaching there at the same time. Since he enjoyed playing and found himself surrounded by others who also loved the game it was in 1962 that he immersed himself. *"It is a very complicated game"* he said, *"the ramifications, annoyances and inferences that you can make - there are books written on the subject. Yes, I enjoy bridge. Quite frankly becoming a top bridge player can be comparable to attaining a doctorate degree."*

Wes spoke of his mother who'd passed away ten years earlier. "*She was a lovely, wonderful person to me.*" He believed she was overly protective in her own loving way, advising him to walk, not run, "*if I wanted to climb a tree, she'd say - Get Down*". Her maiden name was Mary Levine. She was born in the United States, though her parents had been born in Europe. It was after arriving in America that she and his father met. Most of the family records and history of their heritage had been *obliterated* as a result of the War. His guess was that they had come from somewhere between the borders of Poland and Russia but exactly where he could not say. Wes referred to them as being a "*typical Jewish Brooklyn family.*" Domestically, she had been a homebody. His father had made enough income to support them relatively comfortably while his mother managed things at home, prepared meals raised her children and made sure everything ran in an orderly, responsible manner.

Wes described his father as "*an interesting person*". He told us he inherited his professional skill as card player from him. As a student his father had made it as far as the eighth grade when the Great Depression took hold of the nation pretty much forcing him, as it had many other people of his generation, to quit school, abandon his education to contribute to the family income if they were to continue eating. He was a self-taught man becoming a master machinist for Grumman Aviation, then the largest corporate employer on Long Island. The seminal project to which his father contributed during his career was the Lunar Module effort to put a man on the moon during the 1960's. He had a very methodical, engineering type of mind that served him and his family well. Of course, anything around their house that needed fixing was something he knew exactly what and how to do and he usually did. He remembers all the photographs his father came home with of various teams of workers

at all stages of the projects' completion and the discussions over dinner concerning that work. There had been thousands of people involved in the goal of putting the first man on the moon. Wes's father was one of them. He retired from Grumman with his pension and plaques. He had worked many long hour days, considerably more than the standard forty hour work week. Wes remembered missing his father a lot. Overtime was a constant, Saturdays were just another day and when he was home on weekends there were family visits and large groups of people he'd have to share him with. He didn't get to enjoy as much of his father as he would have liked.

Wes's higher education began at Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute where he briefly attended coming quickly to despise his experience there. His grades there had been poor to mediocre. He next moved to Hofstra College in 1962 where he loved the social life and beautiful women he found there. His class rank continued to be what he called *unsatisfactory*.

About that time he met Ellen Feeley, who he acknowledged was extremely bright. She went to the New College and completed her degree as a Math Teacher in only three years. He told us how she was an extremely beautiful woman and a marvelous dancer. "*I was in love*", he said. They became engaged. Shortly thereafter Hofstra told him his grades were so poor that it was time for him to leave school. Ellen confronted him and said she was breaking off their engagement. Here she was on her way to attaining a degree and he was about to become a drop-out. It was simply not going to work for them. His response was to fume and fret, got angry and pushing back against her rejection said, "*All right! All right! I'll go back to school*". He asked

her –“*What are you going to be?* She said, “*Well, I’m going to become a Math Teacher.*” He said, “*Okay, We’ll make it two.*” *Buy two sets of books, Sign us up for the same courses, you take the notes and I’ll be making money playing cards to put us through school.*” And that was the way it went. They both graduated in 1966 from Hofstra with teaching Degrees in Math. They had no intention of coming to Brentwood but applied for the positions nevertheless because they wanted to see what the interviews would be like. Mr. Weaver interviewed and hired them both thirty-two years ago when they were Mr. and Mrs. Trutt who would be teaching at Brentwood High School.

We talked about World War II, the Cold War, the Korean War, duck & cover, getting kids through NY State Regents, inculcating the love of Mathematics, public education from the industrial revolution, Criminal Justice and incarceration rates since the sixties, the social and cultural revolution that had been taking place since then.

We spoke of his own time as a high school student. “*I was a bit of a wild hair in eighth and ninth grade. My teachers wanted to kill me. I was running with a pretty bad crowd*”. . Then all of a sudden he met a new group of guys who were all doing very well with the ladies, which was what he wanted to do. They were athletes. So, he became an athlete. Did he remember them and their names? Yes. every one of them. “*Bud Hilton who threw the shot and was also Captain of the Football Team, Dick Shapiro, Ed Kelly, Bob Glickstein, Dave Seuer, Rich Copeland.*” This was a memory from 1960 in High School. He has maintained his connection with many of them. He is Godfather to one of Ed’s children, Bud became a doctor and moved to California so

they don't speak very often, Dick Shapiro became a Vice President of JC Penny though most of the people Wes hangs out with today are from Brentwood High School, either past teachers or (he continued)*"friends are like gold"*, he said, *"they should not be let go of."*

He remembered his bedroom growing up in their small house in New Hyde Park which was purchased by his folks as a kind of handyman special which his father and his many talents whipped into shape. It was a small room and that was all he said. Their neighbors were Polish as was a large percentage of New Hyde Park at that time.

When asked about his chores he replied by saying *"it wasn't really that way in a Jewish household."* It was the job of the oldest male child in the family to study. Chores would be taken care of but his responsibility was to hit those books and study hard.

His first paying job was as a caddy on a golf course....carrying the bag and for the longest time he hated it. That he did for quite a few years on weekends so he would have spending money... and he walked and he walked, something today he does for fun. His weight has stayed constant during his life weighing today what he did in college. He said he was an athlete but as an athlete he has paid the price for the knee to which he pointed as he told us it had already been operated on. The other knee which had not been operated on as he put it, *"didn't feel so hot"*, yet, he continues to play golf, being the only sport he can handle given his knees and has fun doing it.

Chanukah was fun. However the holiday he remembers the most was also the most traumatic. Over the years he discovered that he was decidedly gifted in matters related to math and science. Other

challenges like anything musical or related to foreign languages he found to be difficult if not impossible. When it was time at twelve or thirteen years of age for his Bar Mitzvah he was in big trouble. The language was Hebrew and he was terrified having to make a speech in that tongue before his entire family. Nevertheless, he got through it to the satisfaction of himself, his parents and the Rabbi. He described himself as being hyper as a young person. The first school he attended was P.S. 24 in Brooklyn. When he was twelve the family moved to New Hyde Park where he attended Hillside Grade School followed by New Hyde Park High School. As he had recently married Ellen, by 1966 the cost of a private college education being what it was in graduate school he decided to take all his credits from Hofstra which had then become a University transferring them to Stony Brook University where he eventually completed a Masters Degree in Math.

Wes remembered his seventh grade Social Studies teacher, Mr. Sweeney. He said *“He hated me and I hated him. The feeling was mutual.”* Then there was Mr. Goldman my Chemistry teacher. He was a wiz. I enjoyed Chemistry. It just made sense to me. He did a lot of Math and that was fun too.”

What was the most important book he remembered reading? In his case and as an admitted and fairly voracious reader it was not so much about specific book titles that answers the question as it was about authors. James Michener for example; he'd read every single one of his works, as he had for Leon Uris. His favorite author though not necessarily the one who had had the greatest impact on him was the Science Fiction writer Robert A. Heinline, ie. *Stranger in a Strange Land*.

Wes told us about Dr. William Mc Keogh, Professor Emeritus at Hofstra University. He had been his supervising teacher when Student Teaching. Wes described him as a superb Teacher's Teacher of Mathematics. *"He took Ellen and I under his wing. We did our Student Teaching in Forest Hills High School and he kept us up to date with regard to who was doing what and where and as a matter of fact became Best Man at our wedding"*.

We asked around and what we heard was, *"If you can teach in Brentwood, you can be successful anywhere"*. Brentwood it was said had the best ideas and they were trying new things. Jerome Bruner was big in the District back then as was Jean Piaget. Brentwood was known for the quality of its teachers. It was known far and wide for exemplary teachers and a very good staff. Those who weren't too good simply disappeared. They would stay for a year or two and then they were gone. There was a time when it was very difficult to get teachers. The starting salary was low and raises before the union was voted in were uniformly \$200 per year in Brentwood before taxes. The very idea of making \$10,000 annually was reserved for people with a Master's Degree in other professions and in the corporate world. Mr. and Mrs. Trutt were interviewed and offered Contracts to teach by Fred Weaver and Gerry Coates.

He remembered Shirley Hodges with fondness. He described her as a southern woman who was a dynamic teacher of English. Dot and Jack Zuckerman were among the people he most admired and stayed connected with throughout his years in Brentwood. Ken Moss was a teacher of English who loved Math and who remained a close personal friend and fellow bridge player throughout their time in the District.

We talked about the coming changes to public education and how students today can be expected to react to new professionals as they fill roles left by those who've passed batons to the newly arrived wave of spirited, youthful teachers. Wes paused for several long seconds to contemplate his response. *"Each class is different. Each student in every class is a unique individual and they are our clients. Approach each and every day and every class with an abiding sense of purpose. Know that you are in control and are there for a reason: to share all you might be capable of sharing of your subject with them. Some days you will feel them and enter as a lion tamer with whip and a gun. Those days are challenging and will test what you are made of. The others, will be magical even wonderful. Remember always, these are teenagers who will act as teenagers. They are capable of great respect and will be anxious to give it freely when they respect you for dispensing to them what comes from your heart. Some days they are really great and on other days you will feel like quitting. That's the nature of teenagers. It's like parenting in a way. Remember some days can be very difficult."* He has been intermittently in touch with a few former students and since leaving the classroom regularly keeps in touch with colleague friends from Brentwood.

When our conversation turned to union activity Wes immediately referred to his father's strong affiliation with the union movement in his life. A member of BTA from the very beginning and an early joiner once the union arrived in Brentwood, *"Why wouldn't I join the Union"*, He posed, *"They were there to protect me"*. His commitment made of him an active participating member. He became an Elected Delegate and served for ten or twelve years. He praised the work of G. Guy DiPietro for his contribution to both sides (Labor & Management) challenging the Board of Education and the School District and those that had threatened the economic security and professionalism of the

teaching staff. He referred to one time he remembered walking a picket line around the Administration Building and how Dr. Naninni and the Board resolved the issue with teachers peacefully.

He had no plans of further employment at this time. He was looking forward to spending more time with his daughters, getting out on the golf course as frequently as possible, playing more bridge and making new friends while looking forward to the life-style time zone shift; saying up late, seeing the stars, sleeping in in the morning and attending to matters of housekeeping that needed his attention.

First and foremost he was proud of his daughters and what they'd accomplished, but when asked directly what in his life he'd been most proud of he pointed to the fact that in a classroom teachers are many things not the least of which on most days is being a gardener. *"Sitting right before me in that very seat is a potential Math teacher, even a rocket scientist. I've taught an awful lot of calculus in Brentwood. If I was a poor gardener those seedlings will wilt and shrivel and become completely turned off. But if I was clever, and applied the proper trace particles, perhaps even a sense of humor, then they might become Math teachers and that was what I am most proud of. Mathematics is so beautiful in itself, and so important that anybody who can propagate it to the future is doing a good thing."*

"This kid Bruce Bouching called me from Cape Canaveral and he said", - "You haven't heard from me in about ten years and he said, I just thought about you and here I am in Cape Canaveral working with the rest of the rocket scientists and I just wanted you to know that if it hadn't been for you, I wouldn't be here." You also get a lot of kids that come back to tell you that you changed their life. *"When that happens it really feels so good"*. Wes confessed to being happiest when he was doing puzzles and games. He enjoys doing crossword puzzles. He likes

card games because they are puzzles that he can solve. You know you got it right as soon as you finish it. *“We call it authentic assessment”*. *To me mathematics, especially calculus, is like a map. You start at point A and your job is to land in Pittsburg. You better get the machine from where you are to the end point of the problem and just like driving we measure aesthetics with say, have you gotten there in the minimum amount of time if that was your idea, or how well have you solved the problem.”*

If you had your whole life to live over again, is there anything you would like to have done differently? No. But he added this.

“I think that people who think like that are not well.” You must never get into coulda, woulda, shouldas. You are at a Nexus where you must make a decision, this way or that way. Some will be successful. Hopefully, it’s a small percentage that will not, but you can’t second guess yourself after you’ve made your decision. There is nothing that I’d say I’d look back at and change.”

“One of the things I’ve enjoyed the most about teaching is teenagers themselves; the way think and speak keeps me young”. On the other hand, he said, he’d had quite enough of adolescent teenage behavior and the way they can get “nutsy”. On the one hand, he’ll miss that, but on the other he won’t miss it at all.

His immediate goal is to learn all he can, about computers. This is the literacy of the next century. He could not stress enough, just how important computers are going to be. He knows he will have a lot to learn and will therefore be engaged in this effort for a long time to come. From his perspective the factory system of education that came

to us with the dawning of the industrial age has outlived its relevance and represents an anachronistic representation of thinking from another era. While teachers will always be with us, the manner in which education is conveyed has to change if the information age and advances in technology are any indication of what lies ahead.

He warns us of the undercurrent climate of violence in our culture already familiar to young people that has threatened schools and presents a challenge to the stability of civil society. Our prisons are full beyond capacity and our nations system of criminal justice and jurisprudence is in desperate need of reform. Many of our other institutions that are ill prepared to handle the changes in our culture as social systems try to adjust to Third Wave changes that are transforming the US and the world. Many of our children are troubled and in need of attention. Mental illness is everywhere. Fire arms are readily available and need to be child proofed. Kids have to be protected and feel safe in school. The disease of alcoholism threatens twenty-five percent of families in our society. Drinking and driving is an epidemic. If education is to be the hope of tomorrow we will need many more counselors to individualize and humanize the system by treating each and every young person as the uniquely valuable national resource they are. Meaningful structured time as well as abundant unstructured time for all students is one means by which tomorrows students can be reached by helping them discover a sense of purpose and passion in their lives.

We ended by thanking Wes for his generosity of time. He freely admitted to having enjoyed participating in his interview with us as part of Brentwood's History Project.