



Alex Werner
ROBS History Project
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Alexander Frederick Werner, Jr. got his name from his father who was Alexander Senior. His father's father, Julius, came from Russia in 1904-05 and met his wife in Poland on a stopover. They came to the United States in the early 1900's and got married there. Alex's father was born in 1912 and his mother in 1915. They both passed away in 1997. His mother was 80 and his father 85. His maternal grandparents came from Poland. They all resided in the South Bronx on 167th Street and Webster Avenue. Alex's sister, Alexandra (Sandra), who passed away in 1995, was born in 1944, and Alex was born in 1947. Alex and his sister Sandra had a sister who was born in 1941 who died of Polio before they were both born.

Alex was asked if his parents continued to speak their native languages. They spoke Polish, German and Russian. Alex said that his parents tried to get him to speak Polish when he was in elementary school where the nuns at his school were from a Polish order. He said he didn't learn Polish, explaining that he had enough difficulty learning Latin during the 9 years as an altar boy in church. He did learn a few Russian expressions.

Alex was then asked to speak about his parents. His father was a New York City fireman stationed in the Bronx on Willis Avenue. His mother was a bookkeeper working for Wallachs and did some work for Hart, Shafter and Marks. Working for Wallach's, Alex's mother was able to get part time jobs there for her nieces and nephews. Alex also worked in the credit department of Wallachs in 1964 at the age of 17. He enjoyed working with numbers, and the experience working in Wallachs gave him an interest in the business field, a direction his parents were pushing him towards. While in high school he enjoyed reading

science fiction and history, thinking of possibly becoming a history teacher but changed his mind. While at St. Johns, he majored in Business Management and received a Masters Degree in Finance. While attending St. Johns he arranged his schedule to have days off so he could work part time at Wallachs. He also worked with the Long Island Press supervising circulation routes. He especially enjoyed working with the kids he supervised. This made him think about possibly going into teaching.

Through a friend, Alex was made aware of a program through the City of New York to obtain a permanent subbing certificate by taking 9 teaching credits. He obtained the teaching certificate and decided to look into getting a teaching position. He was told that they were hiring teachers on Long Island and found Brentwood School District in the directory. In July 1968 he went for an interview at the Administration Building in Brentwood. Alex was interviewed by Tom Hastings, who then sent him to Twin Pines to be interviewed by the principal, Carmine Puleo. Alex was hired and given a position as a third grade teacher, so he then returned to the Administration Building to sign a contract. Tom Hastings then introduced him to Art Brieger, Jerry Smith, and the superintendent, Dr. Nannini.

Alex started teaching at Twin Pines in September 1968. He remembers working with Doug Lennen, Charly Smith, Mary White, and Karen Bloomfield, all who gave Alex help and support in his new position. The secretary, Angie Valente, was also a big help. He got a lot of help and support from the faculty at Twin Pines. At the time there were about 600 students, and there weren't many of the special programs that the district later had. There were no reading labs, math labs or Resource Room. There was a Bilingual Program at the time headed by Nicki Brasch. Ellie Bishofberger was the Bilingual Consultant in the building. They did have Title I funding, because Twin Pines was one of 3 target schools with a high rate of minority kids and poverty level. The other two schools were South Elementary and Northwest Elementary.

In 1969 Alex joined the B.T.A., and in his second year teaching became an Alternate Union Representative. At the time Shirley Siden was President, and Joe Piombo was Chief Delegate for Twin Pines. During this time Alex spoke of changes that were made to the teachers' schedules. When they began hiring aids, they could be used as cafeteria monitors in place of the teachers. This gave the

teachers more instructional time. They also improved the scheduling of the special area teachers like Art, PE and Music etc. In 1970 Alex was given the position of Reading Consultant, and he remembered Glass Analysis and Distar for reading. As Reading Consultant, he was in charge of managing the 12 aids that were hired to help the students who were identified as below level in reading. At the same time they also made him the math consultant, and he was influential in starting the B.E.S.T. math testing which evolved into the CAM program in math. In the summer of 1971 Alex was one of 6 people sent up to the University of Massachusetts for 6 weeks to learn about a new criteria-testing program that they could use in Brentwood in reading and math. They were three principals Pete DeMento, Chuck Puleo, Lou Lotito and three reading Consultants Ed Harris, Tony Spitznagel and Alex.

From 1974 to 1977 Alex became the Assistant Principal of Northeast where Bill Cowen was Principle and in the 1977-78 school year became assistant principal at West Junior High School. In 1984 Alex became Assistant Principal at Southwest Elementary where Austin Harney was Principal. Alex was in charge of the grades K-2 in the Annex of the building. In 1992 Alex had the opportunity to go back to Twin Pines as Principal. Many of the teachers he previously worked with were still there, and there were more programs and services like Resource Room, ESL, Bilingual, Speech and Psychology. Alex had a total of 34 years in teaching and remembers his first year's salary to be \$6800 and 2nd year \$6900.

When Alex's family lived in the Bronx, he attended St. Alberts Elementary School and then St. Michaels Academy. He then enrolled at St. John's University in Queens. As a result of that, in 1965 his parents decided to move from the Bronx and bought a house in Whitestone so Alex could commute from there to St. John's University. In 1974, his parents moved to Cape Coral, Florida.

Alex attended several colleges including Hunter College, C.W. Post College, Hofstra University and St. Johns to complete 36 graduate credits giving him 3 certifications: N-6 (Nursery , Grades K- 6), SAS (School Administrator and Supervisor) and SDA (School District Administrator)

Alex and his wife, Karen enjoy driving into the city to visit the Museum of Natural History or Museum of Art and on their return home like to stop in City Island for some lunch. On one of these occasions Alex took his wife and some

mutual friends for a joy ride to Orchard Beach, which was one of his hangouts while living in the Bronx. He took them to his old neighborhood that had become all rundown. Alex said that when they lived there it was really nice, because everyone was together, and the families were tight. Everybody looked after the kids, and he remembers playing stickball in the street.

In 1969 he met his first wife, Kathleen Newman, who was a teacher at Twin Pines. They had two children, a son Peter in 1971, and a daughter Alexandra in 1973. He divorced and then married Karen Storjohann in 1978 and had a son Alexander who was born in 1983. His son, Alex, is also interested in business and possibly teaching like him. His son Peter majored in economics. His daughter Alexandra recently got married and is living in Richmond.

Alex was then asked several questions by the interviewer:

Besides your mother and father who were the strong adult influences in your life?

His maternal grandmother was his response. Alex often spent the weekends at her apartment, which was in the same tenement building as his. He said she was “cool” and very kind. She let him do a lot of things. He said she was very kind and considerate always accepting of all his friends and whomever he brought to her apartment.

Growing up were there any educators or teachers who had an influence on your life?

There weren't any that stood out, but he did like his high school social studies teacher.

What was your favorite family holiday?

Alex said Thanksgiving, which was spent at his grandmother's house. He got to see several members of the family that they hadn't seen during the year. After Alex's grandmother had passed away in 1962, Christmas became the favorite holiday.

Are you a morning person or an evening person?

Alex is a morning person.

Is there a particular aroma that triggers a certain memory?

The aroma of sauce reminds him of his Aunt Louise's home, and the aroma of Turkey reminds him of his grandmother on Thanksgiving.

What do you see as the most remarkable thing about Brentwood Schools?

"With all the diverse background and all the experience and egos, that everybody works together when push comes to shove in the final analysis to get the job done, and they know that our work is really not getting any easier especially with the baggage that a lot of our clientele are bringing in". Alex told his teachers that the families in Brentwood are needy, and that the parents want their children to be happy. They "need the teachers' love and dedication". "The teachers should make the students happy, do something kind for them, but still teach, guide and correct them."

What accomplishments are you the most proud of?

The accomplishment that he was most proud of was putting together a really good staff at Twin Pines. He was also proud of having the honor and being allowed to pick his successor with the blessings of the Superintendent and School Board.

Was there any one thing that gave you the most pleasure?

Teaching kids to read and making the road for parents easier gave him pleasure. "As a principal you have the power to do that". To accomplish this, he made home visits in the evenings and on weekends to help the parents. This gave them a positive view of their child's teachers and administrator to see how much they cared. Alex was seen as a "hero" by several of his students. Alex said that the feeling that you have helped someone and accomplished that is as good as helping someone to read.

Did you have heroes while growing up?

A lot of his heroes were in history books. His father was a hero in terms of the line of work he was in when he was in the fire department. On Friday afternoons his father would take him down to the station when he was put in charge by the captain. His father had to supervise the men on a drill in the middle of the blocked off streets. This made Alex proud that his father had this

responsibility. His father also helped many of the family members when they were in need. This was a trait that Alex admired in his father.

What are you going to miss when you retire and move?

Alex said that he would miss the people, the experiences and the memories.

What is one of the best books you have read?

The Art of War

Is there anything that you would have liked to have accomplished and didn't?

There wasn't anything specific. He felt that he had accomplished everything he set out to. However, he did say that if he were still working now he would volunteer time to go up to the State Education Department and lobby to whoever is in charge of the scoring in reading with reference to the levels 1,2,3,and 4. The way the scores are reported to the public makes it appear that level 2 is considered failing, when it isn't.

What do you see as the future of public education?

In New York State the future is predicated on how long Mills will be around. With the new regime, hopefully the testing programs will change to take into consideration all of the students coming in from 3rd world countries who don't speak English and are illiterate.

What are your plans for retirement?

He and his wife are going down to Florida and plan to join a volunteer society for the four-legged wildlife taking care of them. He's also going to play a lot of golf.

What lead you into a career in education?

As far as teaching, he wanted to convey information, in his case about history, to other people. Teachers are the bearer of all of the information that civilization knows.