



Arthur Freed
ROBS History Project
May 15, 2002 76

Arthur's middle name is Phillip, which he said his mother took from the label on a pack of Phillip Morris cigarettes she saw in the hospital. He believes that his first name came from an uncle in the family. Arthur has an older sister and is the youngest of all the grandchildren in the family. His mother was the youngest of seven children, so she even had a nephew who was the same age as she. His father came from a small family having a brother and a sister. His grandfather on his father's side came to the USA from Russia, and opened a stable when he came here. He later converted it to a gas station garage when the automobile came in. His mother's parents came from Austria, and her father was a master stair builder. He initially made a small fortune in the business but lost it all in the depression.

Arthur is currently living in Stony Brook and has one son. Arthur's wife Marlene passed away three years ago at the age of fifty-four from cancer. Arthur said that the Brentwood school family gave him a lot of support to help cope with the passing of his wife. He refers to his coworkers as "an amazing group of people". Arthur believes that perhaps he and his wife were distant cousins, because her last name, Drucker, was the same as his mother's maiden name. When Art's mother's family left Austria, part of the family went to England where Marlene's father came from England.

Art says that his son, Seth, is a very unique individual, "one of the best people you will ever meet". Seth was adopted twice. Art's wife adopted Seth in her first marriage, and then Arthur adopted him when they got married. When Seth appeared before the judge during his second adoption, he was asked what his middle name was. He didn't have a middle name, so the judge asked what name he would like. He responded, "Batman". Needless to say, he still doesn't have a middle name. Growing up Art said that his son was a handful and a bit self destructive, but that his "eight years" in college were very fruitful, because he is currently quite successful. He is in the entertainment field and is the manager for the famous Blue Man Group.

Arthur was born in the Bedford Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn in 1945. Jokingly Arthur said that he should have been named B. F. Goodrich, because at the time of his birth, instead of paying the doctor with money, he was given 4 new automobile tires that came from Art's father's gas station. Jokingly Art said that apparently the doctor needed tires more than he

needed money. Arthur's father was a pharmacist and a Columbia University graduate, but when his father got sick, he went to work for him at his gas station.

What were some of the earliest memories of family? Art's family moved from Brooklyn to Flushing, Queens in when he was in Kindergarten. While growing up, he said his mother, who is currently 91 yrs. old, was a good cook. He said she is an amazing person. He was told that as a young woman she was very active horseback riding, playing tennis and even driving her own car. This was not the norm for women in the early 1920's. In fact, she met Art's father while getting gas at his father's gas station. She came from a large family, and Art was close to them. He was especially close to his maternal grandmother who lived with them. Art was also very close to his next door neighbors, the Klein's, who were also their friends when they lived in Brooklyn. He was also close with his Uncle Harry whom he referred to as the "family millionaire", because he bought a new Cadillac every year and went down to Miami every winter. He was the patriarch of the family.

Arthur was asked if he got his sense of humor from a family member, but he just replied that he was the class clown in high school, and that the teachers hated him. He remembers his 5th grade teacher Mrs. Quinlan who used to check behind her students' ears to see if they were clean. Mr. Vaccio was a teacher of his in high school who was the leader of the UFT. He remembered his 7th grade social studies teacher, Miss Star and thinks that she is the reason he became a social studies teacher himself. One of his other 7th grade teachers later became a colleague of his in Brentwood. He recalled one day while teaching in Brentwood they were three generations of teachers chatting. It was Art, Nick Geraci, who was his student, and Arthur's former art teacher.

Did Art keep in touch with any of his high school friends? He said that coincidentally he recently got in touch with his first girlfriend from junior high school on the internet and renewed their friendship.

What was his first paying job? While in high school during the summers, Art worked part time for LILCO for \$4 or \$5 an hour.

When asked who his heroes in life were, Arthur jokingly named Hopalong Cassidy and "the greatest hero of all, Howdy Doody". In fact Art said he cried when he went down to the Smithsonian and saw Howdy Doody hanging there.

Were there any favorite holidays growing up? Art said they celebrated all of the Jewish holidays. For Passover they always had the Seder at his house. He was very active in the Jewish religion. When he lived in Queens, his parents started the synagogue in the basement of their house, and today in the current synagogue there is a room dedicated to his father. When Art's wife was alive, she was the vice president of the synagogue in Stony Brook where they live.

As a child, what were his interests? Arthur said he loved playing every type of sport, all the city games like baseball, punch ball, stick ball, stoop ball and football (without the helmets).

He attended PS 25 in Kindergarten in Brooklyn. PS 163 in Queens, Campbell Junior High School and Francis Lewis High School where he was in the first graduating class. In high school he liked history, and his worst subjects were math and Spanish. He attended the University of Bridgeport, Hofstra, Stony Brook and C. W. Post to complete his Bachelors Degree, Masters Degree and Professional Diploma.

How did he hear about Brentwood? There was a placement service at the University of Bridgeport for teachers where he heard about Brentwood. He applied for a position in the high school and had an interview with Fred Weaver who informed him that there were no openings in the high school, so he sent him to East Junior High School. There he was interviewed by George Pitman and then Ed Murphy, and without even an application he was hired on the spot. He started in 1967 with a salary of \$6300 a year. After one week Art resigned, but Ed Murphy convinced him to stay, which he did but then quit again after the first year. When Art went in to see the principal to hand in his resignation, there was a new principal, Steve Howland, who convinced him to stay, and Art was glad he did. Art said that Steve Howland was very professional and stood behind his teachers. East Junior High became like a family. There was laughter in the halls, and East Junior High became a joyous place to be according to Art. He remembered some of the people he worked with like Ivan Lazarus, Mark Rabin, Sue Campbell, Ed Frick, Rick Belvin, Gail Inzerillo-Latella, Frank Carnesi, Esther Klein, Martin Rieger, Chris Thorpe, and Moses Green. Art mentioned that there were several administrators who passed through East Junior High, mentioning Bob Marcus as one of them, who back then was a hippie. He mentioned John Quinlan and Alan Zimmerman, Peggy Del Bene. Art was there in 1983 during the hostage situation, and he volunteered to take that room after the incident, In fact, he said the bullet hole was still in the wall. Although it was a very grave incident, Art, with his sense of humor, could remember a few funny stories of things that occurred during that day.

Art was then asked how he would define his purpose as a teacher in Brentwood. He felt that he really couldn't define a purpose until about 8 or 9 years of teaching. In the earlier years he tried to be more of a friend to the students, but then realized that they didn't need a friend, they needed a teacher. He then always tried to maintain a line with the kids and for the kids and never lied to them. He said he was always honest with his students and felt that trust was very important. He established a trust with them. He was invited to the graduation of 3 of his students and still stays in contact with several of them through the internet.

When did Art first get involved with the BTA? At first he got involved with the union to protect his own job, then later, along with Karen Storjohann, got involved in order to protect the young teachers. He was a Building Representative, was on the Executive Council, and one time ran for BTA President. He said that he had his administrative degree and covered for Joe Comunale in the office when he was out on medical leave. This experience made him realize that his place was in the classroom. He was very active in many of the school activities. He coached lacrosse, football and girl's soccer. He organized the first stepping up ceremony at the middle school. He also taught summer school, which he continued doing even after retirement.

When did Art decide it was time to retire? Art taught for thirty-three years all in East

Junior High, which later became East Middle School. He decided to retire after his wife passed away. At that time N.Y. State was offering a good pension, he was getting tired of the time clock and it was a chance for him to do whatever he wanted to do. As a retiree, he now goes down to Fort Lauderdale, Florida to visit his mother and to play golf. On one occasion while playing golf there, he met a former student of his on the golf course. He also likes to travel and had the opportunity to take a trip to Cuba. He said in all his travels, this was the best trip he had ever taken. He also got to travel to Hungary.

Art was asked if there was book that he read that influenced him. He mentioned *The Power and the Glory* by William Manchester, Tom Brokaw's book *The Great Generation* and *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*.

Art then spoke about the changes that have taken place in his lifetime. He was the last generation to listen to stories on the radio. He was the first generation to have television. He remembers that his father wouldn't buy a TV until the large screens came out, so in 1949 he bought a 16" black and white set for \$700. He remembers when the teachers showed movies to the class with the 16mm projectors and had to splice the film. He spoke of the changes in technology. He spoke of several major events like the Twin Towers on 911 and the assassination of JFK, and through everything his observation was "life goes on."

Post Script

Art Freed passed away on Sunday, August 2, 2020 after contracting the coronavirus.