



Edyth Welch
ROBS History Project
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I'm Edyth Welch. I've been known in Brentwood by a variety of names. I started out as a single woman and my name was Edyth Mazza then. My family resided in Brentwood. I married early in my career and my name became Edyth. I was divorced about thirteen years later and then I married Michael Welch about twenty years ago and my name has been Edyth Welch ever since. My mother's name was Edyth and I was named after her. Her maiden name was Hall and her family was from Nottingham England. My father's family was from Calabria Italy. I have quite the International flavor to my family because my first husband was Chinese, my father Italian, my mom was from England and Mike my husband is first generation American with an Irish ancestry, quite a mixture.

Michael has three children, two girls and a boy and I have a daughter Jane. Mike's oldest is Karen. She's currently divorced and has a daughter of twelve, my granddaughter Shannon. His second daughter is Eileen who right now works in Brentwood and is the Department Head of Mathematics in the High School. His son Brendan is in property management right outside of Atlanta, Georgia, is married to Sherry and they have a son Nicholas who is going to be two in November and we're excited about going down to see him for his birthday.

Karen is in charge of all the computer programs at Three Village School District and has a really good technical education with respect to what's happening in areas of technology, computer programs and so forth. She's also a very warm, caring person and a dynamite mother. My granddaughter is just a charmer. In fact she was just in a production this summer. The school put on a theater production. It was the first time she had ever been on stage so it was really a very exciting event for her. Eileen is an assertive female and very bright and creative and has so far been very successful in her career. Her husband is an absolute gem of a man who is in the insurance business. He is Italian and we all love him dearly. Karen's new boyfriend is Italian also so it seems an Irish-Italian theme is beginning to emerge in this family. None of them have wound up so far living with the career they started out with. None of them wanted to be teachers because they have parents that became teachers and three out of the four are currently in education. My daughter just recently entered education. Last year was her first year. She worked in the business world for a number of years as a salesperson for *Sysco Foods*. She also did a lot of work in restaurants and hotel jobs and was really successful in everything she did but was not too sure what she wanted to do for the rest of her life. I think she has really found her niche now and it may be because this was what she was supposed to be doing from the very start. We spoke of Brendan who is in Georgia, who started out as a civil engineer and now is in property management. He started in New York and moved to Georgia, mainly because he and his wife wanted to buy a house and felt that the prices of houses in the New York area were such that they could never afford to have the home they wanted. They now own a gorgeous home in Georgia which they purchased at an affordable price.

I have a daughter Jane who is currently working at South Middle School as an English teacher. She's really enjoying working with Kevin McNicholas and having him as her Supervisor.

I was born in 1943 and my family lived in Wyandanch at the time and I went through school living in Wyandanch. I went to Wyandanch Elementary School and in those days it was K through 8. The hamlet didn't have a High School back then so every year they almost had to beg some neighboring district to take us on a tuition basis. That was how I wound up in West Babylon. It was interesting because the people who graduated two years before me went to Lindenhurst, my cousin who graduated a year after me went to Hauppauge. It was a little tough to maintain the relationships you had with people in Hauppauge because people were so spread out. We were bussed back and forth.

I was very active in sports at that time. Wyandanch was a strangely divided town back then. There was a cutoff point and a line beyond which half the town was white and half the town was black and the bus would drop us off at the beginning of the black section. I would have to walk through there to get home every day. There was a basketball player, a very nice man – Lenny, who used to walk me every day because he said he wanted to make sure I was safe. He would walk me from the bus to the white section to make sure I would get home safe. I was one of the only girls that went out for sports in Wyandanch and took the bus home in the afternoon.

My father was drafted into World War II when I was six months old so I didn't see him again until I was three years old. I lived in Wyandanch with my mom and my grandparents and I resented him quite a bit when he first came home. He was pretty well shell-shocked. He had really bad ulcers and a very short fuse. I used to get upset with him. He used to tell me what a brat I was. If he and my mother got into an argument I would tell him, "*Why don't you go back into the army?*" We had a very tough time of it but, they were married for fifty years and they got through it all.

Every Sunday I remember going to Grandma's for our pasta. That's what you did in an Italian family. My Grandmother on my father's side died when I was about ten and my Grandmother (my mother's mother from the English side of the family) moved in with us and she became my roommate. We shared a bedroom. It was probably one of the most wonderful experiences I had in my entire life. We were very close and I find that even today I'll say things that my husband will look at me and say, "*Where did you ever get that expression from?*" She always had a little saying for everything-unusual expressions like instead of saying I'm not feeling too good today, she might say "*I'm feeling logy today*". First time I said it, he heard me and he said, "*Logy?*" *That the heck is that?*" We were out someplace recently when I said to him, "What's the matter? You're not looking up to par." He replied, "*Yeah I know. I'm feeling a little logy*". He heard himself saying it out loud and surprised himself when he exclaimed to both of us, "*Where the heck did that come from?*"

I've been to England but I've never visited Nottingham. I haven't met my mother's family in England but I have met them in Australia. One of her cousins wound up going into the service in Australia and settled there. He was still alive. I didn't know anything about him until my mother died. My father asked me to do him a favor and write to his wife's (my mother's) cousins in Australia to tell them that your mother died. I said I didn't even know I had any relatives in Australia. So, I wrote to them and said, I don't know who you are or how you're related to me but I would like to know more about the family and he wrote and explained how we were related and so on. When Mike and I went to Australia I wrote to him and I said I'd really like to meet him. He wrote and explained how we were related etc. He met us in Melbourne and we spent one day together and it was really nice. I'm glad I had the opportunity because he died about three months later from cancer. My mother died when she was seventy-five and my grandmother (my mother's mother) died when she was eighty-six.

My mother was a people person. She loved to cook. My maternal grandmother had been a tailor. Out of all the daughters my mother was the only one that took to sewing and benefited from what she'd been taught by her mother in the way of sewing and dressmaking. She made lots of clothes such as coats and hats and dresses for us while we were growing up. She really enjoyed doing that and she was good at it too.

My memories of Wyandanch included going out in the afternoon to pick blueberries and then coming home and baking pies.

My father arrived from Italy first. He came with a friend. His name was Rocco. They started out with a pushcart business in the city for a short time until they learned that there was farm land out on Long Island. They went from the city out to Long Island where there was a gentleman for whom he worked for a number of years. Each year he was given a small piece of acreage, perhaps a quarter of an acre, and then the next year another small piece which eventually gave him enough land upon which to build his own house for his family. But Rocco had a sister and my grandfather had a sister and they each sent for the other ones sister so they could both marry each other's sisters. They never met but they married each other's sister. What's really funny is we've stayed very close on both sides of the family. I try to explain it to Mike but I give up trying because it just gets too complicated. They were my father's cousins. Now we're down four generations of family. I'll say *"That's my father's cousins son's son's little girl and we're going to the Christening."* And he'll say, *'How are they related to you?'* And I'll say, I don't know. They're just my cousins. We just had a party this summer and there were over eighty people there. Two families couldn't make it which was unfortunate, but there were 80 people to whom every person in attendance was related. One of the cousins invited everyone to their own house and that's where the reunion took place.

I remember my father building our house board by board when we were living in West Babylon. We would be going back and forth and I can remember him finishing one room and he kind of closed it off so that we could live in that one room as he progressed with building the rest of the house until it was finished. Once in a while I'll still drive by there in Wyandanch. He's still a member of the Fire Department there. He's been a member of the Fire Department for over sixty years. He's eighty-five years old today and he has a new girlfriend. He's still hunting and still playing golf.

I have two sisters. My sister Joanne is six years younger than I am. She's currently a Nurse in the East Kindergarten Center. She has two children that are grown. One of them is a speech therapist out in the Hamptons. My sister Nancy lives about a block from me. She's nine years younger than I am. My other sister has three girls. One is a Biologist for Suffolk County who's been researching Lyme Disease and is married to a teacher who works in the Three Village School District. Her second daughter is a nurse in East Northport Schools and she takes care of a handicapped child there. Her third daughter is currently in college studying to become a teacher.

Both from my father and my grandmother I learned important life lessons by the examples they set for me by being strong individuals and demonstrating an independence of mind with which I identified and fully embraced. They were both assertive. My grandmother spoke her mind at all times. She always encouraged other people to do the same. She had a great sense of humor and she enjoyed living the life that she had. I was very fortunate in that I had a great childhood that had an ample share of healthy role models. Family has always been a very important part of our lives and we've enjoyed a good deal of emotional close interaction and proximity.

I worked in the school Nurses office when I was in high school and Miss Dennis became a major influence on me during that period of my life and encouraged me to get into nursing. I was really floundering and my math teacher was trying very hard to get me to become something in Math. I liked math and I was good at it but I didn't see myself becoming a teacher which was interesting. Yet I wound up in education. Nursing did appeal to me and I wound up going to Adelphi.

One of the toughest decisions I ever had to make was my decision to file for divorce. It was traumatic for me but in the long run was better for me and for everyone else as painful as it was

Mr. Mauro was a teacher I had in Elementary school who encouraged me to speak out. Not that I ever had a problem with that but I think he enjoyed baiting me and getting me to stick to my guns in my arguments with him. He saw something in me.

A Phys Ed teacher that I just loved I almost saw last year but instead I wound up in the hospital. He insisted that we learn how to dance. He taught us how to do the Lindy, the Cha Cha Cha, all kinds of dances in his Phys Ed Class and I thought it was the greatest thing. I still love dancing.

There was also that math teacher who was a strong influence on me when I was younger but then again when I was a little girl my dream was to become a roller derby star. I used to put on my roller skates and skate all around the basement and go as fast as I could. In my head of course I was bumping into people and bouncing off the walls. I loved playing cowboys and Indians. I also wanted to be a Country singer. I'd buy the books with all the words and sit out on my swing singing all the country songs.

My first paying job was that of a sales girl in Penny's and thinking back, I was terrible. It was awful. I found it to be very frustrating because you had to fill time and make it look like you were busy all the time; like you were busy when you weren't busy. I'd have to refold the same sweaters. My boss would say, "*What are you doing? You're not busy*" and I'd say, "*Well I was busy and I just finished folding all those sweaters*", and he'd say, "*Well fold them again?*"

The most important family holiday that I remember celebrating was Christmas. Everybody got together for Christmas. It used to be at my house. My cousins and everybody always came over to our house and we'd exchange gifts. That was with my mother's family. And then at my father's family we went to Grandma's house. That's where we spent the holidays.

After school I was only interested in sports. I went out for every sport they had in school. I tried out for Volleyball, Basketball, Baseball. You name it. I liked Science and Math and I hated Social Studies and Geography I still don't know where everything else is in the world.

My favorite season is winter. I like the cold and I love the snow. Winter is just so beautiful. One of the reasons I like skiing is to be out on top of snow. I think nature in the winter is just so beautiful. One of the reasons I like skiing is being on top of the mountains and looking out and seeing the capped mountains and all the snow capped trees and icicles forming on trees. It's just beautiful.

The aroma that speaks family to me is the smell of a rose. It reminds me of my mom because she always loved roses. My dad moved out of the house when my mom died and I took all her rose bushes with me and planted them in my yard. I still like the smell of roses.

Speaking as a nurse you don't want to ask me what aroma I hate the most. The human body can give off a lot of unpleasant aromas. I think I've had to deal with them all.

The schools I attended chronologically were Wyandanch Elementary School, West Babylon High School, Adelphi University. What a culture shock it was going from Garden City to Wyandanch. Most of my graduate work was at Hofstra. Then I went to the University of Colorado to become a Nurse Practitioner.

I think the happiest day of my life was the day I brought my daughter home from the hospital because she was a *primi* and it was very touch and go as to whether or not she would survive. Conversely one of the worst days of my life was the day on which my mother died.

I moved from Wyandanch to Brentwood in 1963. When I graduated High School both my sisters went to Brentwood Schools. At the time I was dating my first husband and he was a teacher. My sister Joanne and I had a big difference in our ages, about a nine year difference. She was in North East Elementary School. I guess she was in about the fourth or fifth grade. My younger sister had just started Kindergarten. She went all the way through the Brentwood Schools.

I was working as a Nurse in Huntington Hospital. I really enjoyed hospital nursing. I was dating someone that was in education and he suggested that maybe if I looked for a job in education maybe we'd have the same time off and if we were raising a family we'd be able to be together more, so I only applied to two schools, West Babylon where I graduated and Brentwood where I

lived. I was really torn because I didn't know whether I wanted to leave hospital nursing or not. I really liked it. Back then Huntington Hospital had the reputation of being one of the best hospitals on Long Island and it still is. They offered me a full time position at a time when I was only working part time but it was on a floor that I liked but, there was a nurse on that floor that I felt was incompetent and I said I'd like to work here full time but I would like to have some say in who works under me because I would have been the charged nurse and they said, *"Well we don't do that. That happens through the nursing office and they determine that."* So I said, *"If I'm going to have responsibility for the nurses on the floor I want to be sure they're going to be getting good care and I know there's a nurse on that floor that doesn't belong either there or in the profession and I would not work there if she was going to be there"*. Then when I thought about school nursing it appealed to me even more because I knew, I'm in charge of myself. I'm on my own there and I can assume responsibility for what I do there, right or wrong and I don't have to worry about having somebody that's incompetent working with me.

I didn't know at the time if there were openings or not but I put in my Resume' and it turned out there were two positions, one in the high school and one at the elementary level. I'll never forget that Mr. Weaver interviewed me at the high school. I was only twenty at the time I had just graduated from college. One of his questions was, *"How can guarantee that you won't date the boys at the high school"*? I looked at him and I said, *"Do I look like I'm that desperate? I don't think I need to be going out with high school boys."* Because of my age he didn't want me at the high school. He thought I might be attracted to high school boys. I started at the elementary school and that worked out fine. I worked at the elementary school until 1970.

I was there during the Kennedy assassination. It was a terrible time and who couldn't remember the events of that week. It made me feel very vulnerable and nobody was able to avoid being hurt. I believe it traumatized everyone to a degree. It was a very dark time.

I also interviewed with John Meade and he accepted me as a nurse in his building. Fortunately, in the schools where I attended as part of my college preparation you'd have some experience in schools but not a lot. The Supervisor in Brentwood at the time was Tom Hastings. There was no nursing supervisor. You had no one to go to to ask a nursing question if you had one about what you should be doing in this job. I can remember Betsy Sinatra was the nurse over at Loretta Park and she had said to me Edye if you have any questions about what to do or about anything don't hesitate to call. I don't know if she regretted that. In the beginning I called her daily. She really was a tremendous help. What do I do in this case? What do I do in that case? She really was a big help. And I guess that was why I was so adamant that there should be a nursing supervisor. There are just so many things that are different in a school than any other setting. I found out even as a nursing supervisor I had people walk off the job after the first day. They'd say, *"I'm not accepting this responsibility."*

The first year the kids themselves were the source of my greatest pleasure. It was just such a great experience being with little kids. Also the process of making new friends; meeting new people and making friends and many of them are still my friends today. I also think that Brentwood is very different from other school districts. I have felt over the years that Brentwood has attracted a certain kind of teacher. The difference as I saw it has been the teachers in Brentwood taught kids and in other districts they taught subjects. Brentwood teachers are caring. I always felt that they were people who were prepared to give *"above and beyond"* They didn't beat the busses out of the parking lot. They

were willing to stay around and help kids and get involved with their families. It was as if the whole community was a family.

You were a nurse teacher so you also taught. At the elementary school I used to give them some health lessons in the classroom. I would go into the little kids and teach them how to brush their teeth, talk to them about hygiene and of course I always talked to them about head lice. We did growth and development programs for the girls and boys, growing up at the elementary level. And then I did health education as well at the high school.

At Maslow Toffler I had a very different experience teaching. I taught health there but I also taught a class on marriage and the family, I did a physical education class one year and I brought in a federal grant to fund teaching a course called *Preparation for Parenthood*. Some of the programs have continued and others have unfortunately been phased out when funding expired. The Growth and Development Program we eventually developed curriculum for and that is still going on in all the elementary schools. I worked on the AIDS committee to develop a curriculum for AIDS education and that curriculum is still being taught. I'm sure it's been adjusted somewhat. Over the years but that is still going on. I was involved with finding a grant for the Drug Counselors Program and we do still have drug counselors. I was involved with writing a program for the after school program with Grace DiRiggi and the person who was doing the drug program for the district for a while was Dana Gutierrez and Vinnie (?) who is still doing it. I started a program for pregnant students to have teachers working with the girls and I can remember a time when teachers who were pregnant were not allowed to remain in school whether we wanted to or not. My preparation for teaching came in my nursing program but most of it was as a result of the experience I eventually got working in the classroom. Mine was geared more to teaching young mothers and

hospitals and taking care of their babies. I had to do lesson preparation but in the high school I mostly wound up writing my own curriculum as I went along and getting my *on the job training*.

I liked what I did. I felt I was making a contribution. I felt that there were lots of very needy children and there was a lot that I had to give to all those children and I could also find other people who were willing to give.

Just recently, I was standing on line when we were on our way to Foxwood and this woman approaches me and said, “Mrs. Tom?” and I said, “Yes. *I was Mrs. Tom.*” She said, “Do you know who I am?” “Well if you tell me your name perhaps I’ll remember” and she told me her name and I did remember a girl who was my helper in the office who came from a very needy family. I used to make home visits. Her mother was limited intellectually, and I taught her mother how to iron and how to shop. I taught her everything. She wanted to be a good mom but she just didn’t know how to do it. We used to take over boxes of clothes for the kids. It was really an extensive involvement with the family and then the family moved. They moved to West Babylon where my husband at the time was working as a guidance counselor. He took her under his wing and helped her get through High School. So she had both of us and invited us to her wedding and I hadn’t seen her since. Now she’s a very successful woman and she introduced me to friends and said something to the effect that, “*This is probably one of the most influential people in my life when I was growing up and you wouldn’t believe how this lady helped our family.*” I really felt good when she said that because you really don’t know if you made an impact or not until somebody tells you.”

I’ve occasionally tried to keep in touch with my own former teachers. Last year I was supposed to meet up with an old teacher but I never did get to see him.

I was very active with the Brentwood Teachers Organization and my first year in Brentwood I was asked to volunteer to become Representative of my Building. In time I would eventually Chair the Grievance Committee for a couple of years. When I first became involved it was before the Taylor Law so we went into negotiation and begged for a two hundred dollar raise. We had all these meetings trying to get people out into the community to help them understand our difficulties. It was really tough to get a raise in those days because administration didn't even have to negotiate. You'd ask and the answer could be either yes or no. The law didn't require the Board or the District to negotiate. They could decide to do whatever they wanted before the State passed the Taylor Law.

I had chaired a committee with the BTA for many years and I loved my job and never had any desire to do anything else but when the person who was Supervising Nurse for the District had a falling out with the Superintendent and the district wasn't able to find anyone to replace her it appeared they might eliminate the very position of Supervising Nurse that we had fought for so long and so hard to see created. My nurses asked me to apply because it was so important that we retain the position. I did, and was appointed as Department Head of Nurses. I did that for a couple of years while I did some nursing and some teaching out of the Ross High School.

Then as people retired I became the person who got their job. When George Klein retired Guy decided to eliminate one of the two jobs he had held and he said to me basically we're going to combine the two jobs and if you apply for it you'll be given strong consideration but if you don't you're probably going to lose your job. At that point I said, *"Oh, I think I'll apply for that job."* And I did get the job. When Dr. Waldman was retiring, they were trying to decide what to do about his position and I knew that Moses Green and Frank Mauro were both certified in Attendance so I suggested to the

Superintendent maybe they could switch it around and give me the other job and let one of them take the job Supervising Psychiatric Social Workers. He was responsive to that so they both applied and were appointed to the new positions. I was in charge of Nurses, Psychologists, Social Workers, the AIDP Program and I was also hired as a liaison to the afterschool program. I had a lot of responsibility. I actually retired on January 6, 1997 and I left officially on my birthday. I was very proud to have been able to bring over a million dollars into the district and of hiring staff and programs about which I felt very good. I'd been with the District for thirty four plus years when I submitted my retirement papers to leave. My first year of employment with the Brentwood School District earned me a total of fifty two hundred dollars before taxes. I just made the decision that I didn't want to work anymore. I liked what I was doing but decided that if I didn't have to work there was nothing else that I would rather have been doing and this was the only thing that I wanted to be doing. But, I really don't want to work anymore. I'd like to be able to do other things in life that are fun, like travelling. I loved the social interaction and the fact of being able to interact with people and of course I loved being around kids. Given the opportunity to change something that I'd done I would choose not to alter a single decision I'd ever made. I felt very privileged to have been able to work in Brentwood for my entire career. My hero's growing up were *Hop-Along Cassidy* and because of her red hair, *Brenda Starr*. I don't miss the politics. That was always very stressful. I do miss my colleagues, I certainly miss the people. I do try to maintain contact with as many as I can because they were wonderful people. One of the best parts of working in Brentwood was that you always had the freedom to create new programs and develop new ideas. Brentwood teachers are great. I would advise new teachers to use every ounce of their creativity with kids because you will be given the opportunity. I don't believe I

ever had a bad year in all the thirty four years I spent here. I'd like to be remembered as someone who the kids thought of as being fun. What I remember most about G. Guy DiPietro, Superintendent Of Schools was this: He knew what he wanted and always had a plan for where he and his district would be going in the next few years. He never made decisions on the fly but always thought through any plan he was making. It was something I always respected about him.