



**Robert Leiterman**  
**ROBS History Project**  
**July 16, 1999      47**

Once he got comfortable he introduced himself as Robert Jay Leiterman and confessed not only to *not knowing* the derivation of his first and middle names, but since he lacked interest in knowing about them acknowledged how little he actually knew about his father's whole side of the family. He'd never met his paternal grandfather nor had his father ever spoken of him. His father was the patriarch of his own side of their family where Bob was the elder of two brothers. But it was he who had stepped up to care for his aging mother after he was married. He was the first of his siblings to marry.

He remembered visiting his grandmother in Coney Island. It was there where her family was raised. He remembered them living on the third floor of an apartment on First Street. They had to walk up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor because the building lacked elevators.

As he recalled she was a quiet person but retained the demeanor of an independent, strong woman. She worked for as long as he could remember, well into her nineties but Bob didn't remember if by that time his grandfather was dead or alive. He was sure it had never been discussed. He certainly didn't know what happened to him. He was also unaware of what his paternal grandmother's maiden name was before she married his father's father. His knowledge base of his father's side of the family was indeed meager at best.

His mother's parents were also from Brooklyn. They were from Boro Park, and were a Jewish family who was very religious. They had 6 girls and no boys. That was very tough for a Jewish family who were extremely orthodox. They were financially comfortable though not considered wealthy. He was in the garment

business and active in his Temple. He raised lots of money for the Temple and was its President in Boro Park for years. The most he remembered about that time was feeling honored when he used be able to sit next to his grandfather in the front row of the Temple. That was when he and his family had already moved to Long Island and were living in East Meadow where he grew up. It was when they used to travel into Brooklyn on weekends sometimes to visit them that he remembered. What they did was go to visit one set of grandparents on one weekend and on the next weekend go to visit the other. Almost everyone in the family still lived in Brooklyn. They were the only ones who moved out.

He never had a knick-name growing up. As a young man his Aunts sometimes called him Bobby but that didn't stick as he got older. At school where I met him, he was known as Bob but responded to whatever name people used. Names, he said, were never important to him.

I asked where he was living and to describe his family situation. He said he and his wife were living in a condominium in Baiting Hollow, in the Town of Riverhead on Long Island's eastern north shore by the bluffs overlooking a golf course, the L.I. Sound and the Connecticut shoreline. He lives with his wife who's also a teacher. His children are both grown and married. His son Jason Ivan Leiterman, bought Bob's former house in Coram almost one year ago and is currently a NYC police officer in Yankee Stadium which is his Precinct. According to Bob, Jason's a quiet guy who, like his father holds everything close to the vest. He tends to not show his emotions. Bob acknowledges Jason takes after him, is a private person who doesn't often let people get too close. They have a dog but no children.

His daughter's name is Erin Irene Leiterman. She is a Social Worker who lives in Baltimore MD and works for Head Start. She also takes very much after Bob yet expresses his polar opposites. She is extremely outgoing and social. Bob described himself as also being able to walk into a room full of strangers and get to know everyone there, while withholding talking about himself. He is as outgoing and jovial as is his daughter Erin when he chooses to be. She's married and presently has no children.

Bob's wife whose name is Jana comes from a Sephardic Jewish background. Her family was from Turkey but they spoke Spanish at home. Her father was an

exceptionally bright engineer. He worked on the Space Shuttle and other major federally funded programs. Because of that he was required to do a lot of travel. Bob remembers him from when he and his wife were dating. He was seldom home and only came home on weekends. He remembers at that time he only worked in Connecticut. Jana's mother was an interior designer and very outgoing. She seemed to run the family. Sadly Jana's parents both died young. Her mother died at about forty-seven and her father at close to sixty two. Each of them from cancer but it was in his opinion because they had both been involved in the same severe automobile accident one night on Northern State Parkway. An intoxicated driver jumped the divider hitting them head on. They recuperated in the hospital for six months following which they both developed late stage cancer and died within a year. Her mother died first within six months from pancreatic cancer having never smoked a day or had one drink.

The topic of family behavioral traits happened once again to come back into focus. To what had already been said Bob added this thought about his daughter Erin. *"He thought she wasn't as educationally gifted as his son. She is however an exceedingly gifted people person. His son is not and being a cop in New York City and not a people person is sometimes scary but he has learned to survive and to do what he had to do. He's a likable guy who never says no and always does what he has to do to pull his own share. You have to ask him what he's doing this weekend because if you don't he won't ever tell you. He won't tell you if he arrests somebody or if there's a problem. That's a quality police learn on the job. They may not want to burden other people or... sometimes you'd want to know. Like this weekend he was barbecuing, he was in charge of barbecuing. Barbecuing in the police department? Yeah. He was the only one who knew how to barbecue because we used to barbeque in the summers and that's how he was picked in his Precinct. After that he did all the barbecuing and he made friends and that's how he ended up in Yankee Stadium. Now he is the man outside of Yankee Stadium that knows all the people who sign the tickets, the limo drivers, and he knows what he can get away with and what he can't, who to talk to and who not to talk to and he does his job. Whereas, if he's told that, okay, this week we're going to push off the scalpers, as soon as they come near him they say ""Okay. I'm leaving"". Nobody talks back to him and he's not a big fellow either. He knows what to say and how to say it. He's street-wise. That's what you come to pretty fast, working in the Bronx.*

Bob was born June 25<sup>th</sup> 1944 in Boro Park Brooklyn in Maimonides Hospital. The earliest memories he had from those years were moving from Brooklyn to Staten Island. He was born while his father was in the Army. He remembered his family living in a Quonset hut in Staten Island where they were built of wood as barracks and were situated on a golf course in a very nice area. The kind of Quonset hut he's referring to is best described by saying that it looked like an airplane hangar that had all apartments around the outside, upstairs and downstairs and they lived in an end apartment. They had 3 rooms in theirs with a porch on the outside. It was one of the bigger ones. The porch was important because then everyone would meet at the porch. It was intended for anyone whose family was in the service and it was for the spouse and children. It served as transitional housing as well for service men and women when they came home from service after the war once his father was able to rejoin the family to live with them until they moved to Sheep's Head Bay. He still remembers walking up a hill there and watching all the ocean liners and other big ships as they came through New York Harbor and up the Hudson River before docking. The facilities were all very new. Almost nobody lived in Staten Island at the time. He started school there when he wasn't quite four years old because there were few people to fill the classes. When he finished that first year they saw that a lot of people had moved in and they had no room in the first grade so they made him take kindergarten twice. He remembered entering school there when he was almost eight years old. His parents moved to Sheep's head Bay in Brooklyn because when his father left the service he had a job in advertising that he went back to and his mother became a teacher in the NY City's school system. Prior to his volunteering to serve in the military Bob's father had worked in a printing company. When he returned he continued doing what he had done with linotype work and then he got involved with advertising and working with people creating ads. When he returned from the Army they offered him a job.

His two brothers had volunteered for the service with him and served at the same time. While in the U.S. Army, Bob's father was promoted through the ranks. He came to be in charge of the radar installation and when he left was the chief bookkeeper for his base. He was the only enlisted man in his platoon to have a college education. He had already graduated before entering the service. His mother had also graduated from college by the time the war ended in 1945.

He told us that his mother loved dealing with people and particularly loved to entertain. She loved the beach and enjoyed travel. Once when they moved to Sheep's Head Bay Bob remembered having difficulties in the school he was attending. He remembers going to see his mother in the school where she worked to help him with his schoolwork. She was working then in a Spanish neighborhood down near the docks. He was probably the only person there that didn't speak Spanish. It was PS 2. He remembered getting there from the Belt Parkway to the Staten Island Ferry where the terminal was. That's where she started off. His brother, who was three years younger than he, followed him and stayed for three or four years. His brother has always been self-employed. He was a born salesperson. He can talk and loves to talk and to travel. He has probably owned about ten different businesses. Where Bob stayed in one place his brother was always a risk taker; a true entrepreneur. He'll wager his last penny to stay in business, whereas Bob always wanted the security. He learned over time that he should have given more thought to saving money rather than expanding his credit. His mother who was still living told him she never bought anything on credit. Her first credit card was activated when she retired and moved down to Florida. She bought everything with cash. His folks learned those lessons well having lived through the Great Depression of the thirties. His mother was the Manager of Kent Cleaners during that time. She was a District Supervisor. Her territory extended all the way to Patchogue. She graduated with a Masters degree in Science and decided after that to pursue a career in Education It was tough on their family being all girls because their parents wanted them all to be able to go out on their own and earn a living. That was how his mother earned her living working for Kent Cleaners.

Bob had a difficult time as a teenager. He had for the most part to learn how to survive on his own. Both his parents worked. He did what he had to do. He learned who to hang around with and who to avoid. What to do and what not to say to certain people. He became street smart. He learned when to keep his mouth shut and when not to answer a teacher back when and if he found himself in a losing or no-win situation and when not to push it.

During a period when we were growing up he thought most kids followed the example set by parents. They became our first teachers. He described himself as not being a great student and wasn't even sure he was going to attend college. He remembers his Guidance Counselor in high school telling him to quit school

because he was never going to succeed. That was in East Meadow High School where he graduated in 1962. He didn't do what he did because of her or in spite of her but did what he did because he saw all his friends going out and working hard; one friend was an Ice Cream Man, another worked in a Supermarket and he couldn't imagine himself doing that. He realized without a College Education he was going to be doing what they were doing and he didn't want that for himself. As he was leaving high school he told himself "*I better go to college.*" He wanted more.

Bob had an uncle he worked for during summers. He was a little on the weird side and owned his own business making huge industrial air conditioning units for business. He worked right alongside his uncle's employees on his factory floor in Jamaica Queens near the elevated L.I. Railroad but he couldn't see himself doing that for his entire life either. Finally, he did realize "*I have to go to school.*" He was running late and didn't have any applications so he went to see his Guidance Counselor. That counselor had a cousin who was a Guidance Counselor at Miami University which he already knew because he'd spent a lot of time in Florida with his parents with whom they used to go back and forth every summer and Christmas. It was between Miami and a school in Kansas and one in California that would accept him. He decided right away to eliminate Miami from his choices because he knew if he went there he would surely flunk out. He wanted to go there so badly but he knew he wouldn't have done any work. He had to get away and definitely had to get out of the house at that point so he went to Emporia State Teachers College in Kansas. He stayed for four years and almost flunked out the first year, thinking he knew everything – but he didn't.

He'd been an accounting major until he woke up. He had roomed with three other guys from Chicago. One was going to be a Science teacher, another was an accounting major and the other had a father who owned a whole bunch of gas stations and he used to gamble a lot on horses. He would go to the library every day and look at the results of all the tracks around the area. He was a business major. I think his plan was to take over all his father's gas stations. They were all really nice guys. I was an accounting major. I got through accounting. I got all A's and B's in Accounting my first year, second year I got all A's and B's until one day I realized I don't even know what I was talking about. I didn't know any accounting. I used my roommate to get me through by copying his work, not doing it and not knowing the basics. *Animal House* is probably the best way of

describing my fraternity and the manner in which we were conducting ourselves. We had a listing of all the tests so you knew what test we were going to get. A funny story about that happened when he was in his last accounting course. They had a copy of the final exam. Bob memorized everything on it. He knew he would give himself away if he got *everything* right so he intentionally made six of his answers wrong, just to pass. I wanted to get an A. but when he got the test back he got a B minus. Out of 100 questions he got 6 wrong and received a B minus. How was that possible? He asked his professor. *Yeah. I marked it on a curve. Everyone else got 100. Everybody had the test and they got the answers all right.* He was trying to be honest and got a B minus on a test for which he had all the answers. That really hit home. I decided not to be an accountant. First of all it's not my personality. I could not deal with that.

The next step from being a Business major was to go into Education. Now what could I do? Teach Business courses of course.

*So, for my last two years in college, I majored in Business. I did student teaching in Business. I thought of going into Special Education. My mother was a Special Education Teacher that's why. I figured I'd give it a try. There's my mother's influence again.*

He was the student in school who always sat in the back of the room and if you didn't know who he was you wouldn't even know he was there. He did just what he had to do to pass and he'd never volunteer or raise his hand unless he was called upon.

Similarly, when Bob was given chores that he was asked to do at home he admitted he probably didn't do them. He discovered rather quickly that if he didn't do them when he had to do them they were done for him because they didn't like how he did them, like vacuum his room. He used to vacuum his room much too fast. So his mother said, *"You couldn't have vacuumed that well"* So I used to go in my room, turn on the vacuum and read a book. Then I would turn off the vacuum and say, *"Okay. I'm finished now"*. And for years he was expected to make his bed, which he did. It was just done because he had to do it. He couldn't understand why he had to make his bed because he was going to sleep in it that night anyway. But he did have a job when he was going to school. He took a paper route one year. It didn't work out that well. He had a tough time asking for money from people that owed him money and at the time that didn't fit his

personality. So while he was making money he could probably have made more pan handling on the corner. Then there was another time when he took a job watching his neighbor's lawn when he went away for the summer. Bob messed that up to. He said he was good at doing as little as possible when he was that age.

An important family holiday he remembered when he was young was one of the several important religious holidays that the family celebrated when everyone got together at his grandmother's house. That was when you got to see all your cousins and so on. This made him think about all his cousins that became teachers. There were 4 cousins that have become teachers in the city schools, and another one in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Bob loved the water when he was younger. When he was a senior in high school he had his own car and would drive with friends to Jones Beach where they'd spend the day by the water. He used to have a little boat that they'd race down in Merrick and Freeport; a little hydroplane. He learned how to water skii there. During the summer they'd spend time either on a boat or going to the Malibu beach Club in Middle Beach to which his parents belonged. His favorite time of year came as no surprise. It was summer that brought a smile to his face.

He remembers where he was in November of 1963 when he first heard that President John Kennedy had been shot and killed. He was living in a dorm that year. He remembers a TV room downstairs. He remembers hearing the news and thinking that someone must be kidding around. That hit home very personally when he realized that nobody was either too big or too important to one day no longer exist. He remembered how shocked he was to realize that such a thing was even possible and that someone would do such a thing.

He loves rising first thing in the morning and "*getting things going*". When he was working in Brentwood he didn't have to be here until 7:20 but he was here at 6:30 every morning. He's also a night person but requires a nap in between. He's also been known to stay up all night once he gets involved on the computer or working on something that has to be completed by the next day. Sleeping was not always that important to him. If he enjoys what he's doing he requires little sleep; spurts of a half hour here and there. He's been known to fall asleep on a dime, sometimes while he's driving and even miss his exit. The lack of sleep catches up with him after a while. It really depends on how his mind is working. If



he's working toward an end goal on something that's important to him, he can get away with an hour or two, but if he's in a mellow mood where he's just spacing out he would like to have more sleep time because sometimes his mind gets cluttered with too much direction and he can't figure out where he's going. Perhaps in retirement he'll begin to start giving himself more sleep.

He was speaking of something he had learned a long time ago when he said *"I have control over myself but only myself. If I need more sleep then I better make sure that I get more sleep because if I don't I'll be no good to anyone. It's he who has to figure out what he needs to be good for the people he works with."*

Bob's graduate work was done at Hofstra University while he was still single and working full time in Brentwood. He was living in East Meadow and used to travel back and forth to work and school. His least favorite subject while he was going to school was probably history. He said he never really knew a good history teacher and that was perhaps why he formed the dislike for the subject that he did. He believed his lack of motivation to learn history was mainly due to the manner in which the subject had been presented to him from the beginning.

When he was still a senior in college he decided to come back to New York. He decided he wasn't going to stay in Kansas. He came back to Long Island and his mother being the educator she was, provided Bob with a listing of all the Superintendents in all the school districts in Nassau and Suffolk Counties. Together they sent out a bulk mailing requesting applications. He filled out and mailed about twenty-five applications before Easter Vacation. He came home on one of the few times that he did that Easter because he usually traveled over his Easter break but this time had eight interviews scheduled, Brentwood being one of them and then came out to the District to have the interview. Two days before he was supposed to return to school he got the call from Fred Weaver asking if he would like to sign a contract. Bob said, *"I'll get back to you."* then talked it over with his parents, said yes to Mr. Weaver, knowing with certainty that at the very least when he came home he would already have a position waiting for him. He signed the contract before he went back to Kansas to finish his senior year. Once again he was feeling secure in his actions.

His interview in Brentwood was with Mat Fay, Chairman of the Business Department. He remembers the interview and driving to Brentwood and not

even knowing where it was. He didn't know of its' existence as a hamlet before he arrived. He was dressed in a suit and tie and arriving early not wanting to be late for his interview. He met and spoke with another teacher in the parking lot who was also coming to the high school for an interview and they talked, uncertain whether or not they had come to the correct building. Because they had time they went and found a place to have a cup of coffee before they returned to the parking lot of the school. There was this older person wearing a flannel shirt walking through the parking lot who might have looked like he hadn't shaved in a couple of days. He thought it was probably a local farmer because there were still a lot of small farms out here at the time. He pulled up to the building and got out of the car, walked into the front office and introduced himself. He told the receptionist that *"I'm here for an interview with Mr. Weaver at such and such time"*, and she said, *"Well, he's not here right now but he'll be back any minute."* Then all of a sudden that person who hadn't shaved with a flannel shirt walked in opened the door to his office, said *"Hello everyone"* walked into the office, Bob said to himself, *"Who the heck is that?"* Fred called out to his Secretary and said, *"Okay. The interview is ready."* That's when Bob walked in and he said, *"Hello Mr. Weaver"* just as Mr. Fay joined them. He said he was so nervous by then he didn't remember a single question he was asked during the interview. It was already his third one so he should have gotten better at them by then but he was so nervous he couldn't even remember if he told them his name.

The year was 1966. His first year was very interesting. He remembered his Homeroom very well. *"I guess I messed up homeroom a lot because we had no direction at all when we came here. There were no meetings and no Orientations the way they do now with new teachers. It probably makes it easier but I guess they had a big turnover at that time so they couldn't do it or didn't think it was all that important at that time. I remember going into homeroom and them saying, "How come you're not turning in your attendance cards." And I said, "What are attendance cards?" No one ever taught me what to do. I was lucky that I had a good student in homeroom and she took over the taking of attendance for me. The student ran the homeroom because I didn't know what I was doing"*. He didn't even remember the courses he taught that first year.

He remembers working with Bill Condon in his department. He began teaching as a substitute teacher the year before Bob started. Mat Fay had been a teacher as well as being the Department Chairman. He met Mary Baber and

Carole Bruno. He sees them occasionally today at retirement parties but believes we were all closer to one another back then. Perhaps it was because we were all in pretty much the same situation or they all had young kids. He referenced the picnics we used to have at the end of the year and the Christmas parties around the holidays but that stopped. Mat Fay was a big player in those picnics back then as was Reggie Poquette, Chuck Goehring and Gabe Gengler. We had it for years and everyone always looked forward to it but in time it just kind of fizzled out. That was when he said, *“the High School became two buildings, Ross and Sonderling.”* Bob said he was the only one as a Business Teacher that taught for all those years in both buildings. He became a Diversified Occupational Coordinator that allowed him to do Work Experience kinds of things providing graduating academic credit for students work experience. He was the only person in the district that had that authority and it was all brand new at the time. He came in on the ground floor of all that. We now have a couple of teachers that facilitate that today and Joe Fasano is one of them. He’s preparing to have another teacher take that over after completing all the requisite courses. Bob also started and ran the DECCA Club, (Distributive Education) or Marketing Club where you use some of the things you learn in the classroom by competing with other schools locally, state wide and then nationally. Through it teachers travel all over with their students. He remembered one such former student, Mary Anne Puleo, who was an average C Student when we had such differentiated groupings 1970, was in his DECCA Club who he convinced to do public speaking, which sent her off to achieve great things. She won the locals but she was such an over achiever that she was in five different contests and won every single one. At the state level she won public speaking – First Place, Student of the Year – First Place. Next they went to The National Competition in Chicago and she finished in Second Place but gave it up because she felt the more prestigious position was Student of the Year which she also won and gave up the Public Speaking award to another girl from New York. He still receives a Christmas card from her every year and they still speak to one another about two or three times a year. She is now Dr. Mary Anne Puleo, owns her own consultant business doing a lot of corporate business, Fire Departments (First Responders), and has become a successful motivational speaker who lives in Columbus, Ohio and travels extensively and owns a house in Florida. Bob also ran the school store and provided opportunities for students to develop their personal skills buying and selling until Joe Fasano took the store over. Then it went back and forth between them until now when thank goodness he said, it’ll be opening again and be run by Mr. Mackasell who was Bob’s student

teacher from two years prior to his interview and will also be teaching a new course that they started this year called *Sports Marketing: Changing with the Times*. Bob was also a member of the Board of Directors for Cooperative Extension for four years including the Suffolk County Farm that at that time was a Work Release Program until he got on the Board and it was changed to an Educational Facility where students go on tours and visit the petting zoo. They developed the educational part of it and he remained working on that Board.

The Department of Labor where he became a liaison had almost become a second home to Bob over the years. He didn't get paid for his time there but he had a desk in their office. The Department of Labor was a funding institution that funneled money down from the State Education Department also the Federal Government and all the money used to come into the Department of Labor and then into the School Districts. He found that if he made some friends there and had some contacts there and kept them going then Brentwood would have an opportunity to participate in a lot of activities. There were summers when he had over 500 Brentwood students working at one time. There were times when it was so overwhelming he would end up working the whole summer and not even getting a vacation or having any time off because at that time I wasn't teaching any classes. My entire salary for all those years had been state funded. I wrote myself into some grants and the state funded my salary. We had a program going on for about five years for kids on probation and we hired some district residents to supervise the students. We had a program over at Entenmanns where we had internships, as a matter of fact we still do have them much of the time. We actually had some of my marketing students sit on the board of their marketing department and one of our students created one of the packages you see from Entenmann's. She created the package design for some of their Christmas Cookies. Through Bob's efforts there were quite a few students from the Maslow Toffler School that received work experience credit from New York State for their required Community Service opportunities as part of MT's Performing Arts Center requirement. That work experience program through the school district still exists today. You can receive one credit of work experience for three hundred hours of voluntary supervised work experience that counts toward your graduation and a maximum of two full credits over the course of your high school career.

Every time I changed my jobs and had a new assignment it became like a new awakening for me. When I became a little too comfortable in the position I

was in I learned from experience to say to myself, *“No matter how hard it might seem to do I still believe that the extra work you put in is sort of like waking up and saying to yourself, Okay, now I’m starting off new again so what else can I do to create some novelty here so I never get to a point when I might have hated coming to work because of what I was doing. It provides you with that drive and enthusiasm you had when in your first year you embarked upon teaching.”*

He said he was never afraid to come to work. He always enjoyed what he did. There were classes during some years that he didn’t enjoy teaching but in the long run he thought his students often enjoyed his classes more than he did. As he was driving to the studio in BHS today to record this interview he spotted a student at the RR crossing from one of the most difficult classes he had all last year and one who was one the biggest troublemaker. It was a sixth period class and Bob said he felt as if someone had *“...gathered up all the most troublesome kids in the school no one else wanted in their class and put them all together in his class in that particular time of the day”....*The student shouted and waved to him as he drove over the railroad crossing on fifth avenue as the gates went up” He shouted *“We’re all going to miss you next year”*.

The first day of class last year at the beginning of his last year of teaching he remembered another student who gave him the once over saying, *“You don’t like us very much do you,* to which he replied, *“It’s not that I don’t like you, I’d like very much to be able to teach you something.”*

Education is more than learning from a book. It’s more than remembering and repeating facts and getting grades. Education is growing every single day and learning something from whomever you can. Education is inspiring students with an understanding of how the person next to you has something to teach you just as you have something to give them that they can learn from you. The teacher’s role is that of a facilitator. The books are there, the facts are there but that’s not all there is. There’s more to it than that. Education is getting people to think; to look past the obvious, to imagine and ask what if. It’s getting students to talk with one another, to question, to listen, to reflect, to temporarily suspend judgment, and to measure results.

There has never been any doubt in my mind of Bob’s loyalty and support to the cause of unionism in Brentwood. He values his membership in BTA and

supports the role of BPSO in their negotiation efforts. While he has never been an active participant in the union his professionalism has been demonstrated along different lines. His belief is that each of us has our own way of participating in the collective effort by using our own skills and unique gifts and talents in the cause of *“one for all and all for one.”*

The very fact that others have stepped up to lead the union while allowing Bob and others to work tirelessly with students for thirty three years to make this district a better place speaks volumes to the successes we’ve achieved academically as well as systemically. Everyone has his own unique talents to contribute. Bob listened to his heart and gave his full measure to make of Brentwood the place that it is. Others have done it their way and that’s just as it should be.

We agreed that one of the central missions of a union is to be there for its members at the very moment of crisis in their lives and according to what he told us, they were. Several members of the high school faculty were there for him in his hour of need to provide him with the support he needed at the time. Our late friend and colleague Tom Dwyer was mentioned in that connection as was our friend and talented colleague Jeff Goldschmidt.

Many of us including Bob have discovered the upside and the downside of political affiliation and have allowed ourselves to only get involved with issues when and if we felt it was important enough or when comfortable taking our seat at the table when controversy was going to be on the agenda. Some of our personalities are a poor match in such matters while others who are quite comfortable with competitive positions when they are the only way forward. Thank goodness we have different strokes for different folks in our organization in Brentwood. We are all here for the kids but there are times when some of us may lose their way and that’s when a reminder of why we are here is essential to put us back on track for or against the issues at hand.

His decision whether or not to retire came down to the wire on the last possible day to exercise his option to accept the New York State incentive that was offered. Principal, Tom O’Brien had left for the day, the signed papers were submitted by Bob to the office on a Friday, all with the understanding that they would be accepted when Tom signed them the following Monday. Had he not

decided to submit the papers when he did, Bob acknowledged he might very well have worked several years longer than the thirty-three he did.

We talked about all the second jobs Bob had during his early years simply to make ends meet. He got married his second year in Brentwood. His wife was then attending Queens College. They were both living in Queens. One afternoon on his way home he stopped off at Adelphi Business School. Thus began his writing of Business curriculum and a Marketing Program for them. He did that for the next three years while still residing in Queens and for two years after that when he moved to Coram, for a total of five years. Then he worked in Farmingdale Collage as an adjunct professor teaching at night. He began then working under the Work Experience umbrella but actually employed eleven months a year. He took a job at Suffolk Community College at night after that and has now been there as an adjunct for twenty-five years minus any benefits with money earned as part of his Retirement package. His first year in Brentwood before taxes earned him \$5,900 while taking home \$100 per/week. He thinks he had more money then than he does now, given still being able to eat out once per week and affording a new car. Plus his credit was good at that time.

His favorite time of year was the opening of school in September. It was a time of high excitement with the most positive energy. It was also a time of meeting new students and not knowing what to expect, of trying to get students off on a solid footing and of getting himself started on solid ground at the beginning of the year. His least favorite time of year was probably right after January and February before April, that slow period between waiting for the half year to end when it was hard to keep students motivated because they'd returned from vacation and were looking toward the end of the semester.

My next question raised what for many of us might have been seen as an impossible question to answer, when in characteristic form, Bob listened, took a deep breath, gradually exhaled, then sighed a deep sigh, smiled and chuckled as he told himself a private joke. I asked him if in hindsight there was anything in his three decade long career that given the opportunity he would have changed or at the least, done differently. As a beginning teacher many of us received the same piece of bad advice from old-timers on our first day when they told us - *"When you walk into your classroom you never smile for the first three months."* Bob quickly added, that that wasn't true. *"First of all,* he said, *"I couldn't go three*

*minutes without smiling*". He concluded that so much of a teacher's success has to do with their personality. Everybody brings their own personality with them into their classroom. He remembered how at the end of a given year when he reflected on his performance over the previous two semesters he would sometimes conclude that he didn't have as good a year as he thought it should have been. Right then he determined that the next year it was going to be different. He'd say, *'I'm going to change what I do next year'*". Then in spite of himself, he'd come in the following year and do exactly the same thing he did the year before. No matter how he tried he couldn't be any different. That was who he was and he was all right being the way he was. He couldn't change and he didn't have to. What he had to learn was to accept himself for who he was and be comfortable in his own skin. There was only one person exactly like him on the planet and once the kids learned to see him that way they'd be able to accept him for who he was. And they did. But he had to learn that first and be able to demonstrate he'd learned it was okay for him to be different – because we all are. Good bad or indifferent it's who we are. Yes, I might change when someone comes in to observe me, but otherwise when I close the door – this is my classroom and this is what I believe education can be – and I may not be right – but that's what I'm gonna have to do. Maybe that's the rebel in me saying, *"I'll have to do it my way"*. Because I don't think your way works either. It doesn't work for me. I could not do that. I'd have ended my teaching career much earlier in my life if I had had to do it someone else's way.

Bob didn't claim to be a reader. He said it was not something he liked to do. He tended to read only about subjects he was interested in knowing more about; like boating and things like that. He buys books and puts them on his shelf intending to read them. He even has books on his boat. His dock reminds him of a Book of the Month club meeting because everyone is out there on their decks reading a book. I walk by and they ask, *"What are you reading today"*? My mind doesn't allow me to block everything out so as to concentrate on what I'm reading. The only book I remember reading in the last few years happens to be about Long Island. It was called *Plum Island* and was the only book I could relate to because of the area in which I was living and it was easy reading. He joked about it on the dock speaking to people walking by when they said to him, *"I've got a great book for you. Oh, yeah? How many pictures does it have in it?"* He would jokingly tell them he needed pictures on every page to keep him interested.



Asked what he was going to miss about working in Brentwood, he replied, *“the students, some of the teachers, watching teachers grow, watching teachers turn out to be what they can be, and feeling good about themselves – getting more confident. He definitely was not going to miss the bells and the regimentation that imposed a response according to someone else’s timing outside his own control. It made him feel like a chicken that had to lay eggs according to a bell schedule, and perform when told how and when to contribute. That was why if he were teaching five classes all of the same subject not one of the classes would be exactly the same as the others. It can’t be”*.

What advice would he like to offer to young beginning teachers? *“It’s not what you say, but how you say it.” “Follow through on your promises.” “Be true to yourself.”* He believed that this kind of advice could not be passed along in schools of education. It has to lived and passed along through experience. It comes to those who can learn how to live life. There’s more to a job than just coming to work and putting in the hours. It’s living that job. It’s going home and saying to one’s self – *“Okay,- How am I going to motivate my students tomorrow. How can I get them to think differently?” “How can I get them to see this picture differently? I know what makes me do it but what’s going to make the student’s do it? Education cannot be forced on anybody”*. All you can do is get them motivated enough to make them want to learn it by themselves. And that’s what we do. And that’s what I think a teacher does. *“Come to the party, I think you’ll enjoy it.”*

Borrowing a question from the renowned *Actors Studio*, Bob was asked his favorite word. Without hesitation he replied - *“Easy”*. What was his least favorite thing to do? ... Wait in line.

While he had officially left the Brentwood School District he had yet to retire and to experience life as a fully retired person. He was still working for and being employed by other regional and state and federal institutions where he maintained positions working with and on behalf of young people in the educational mission he had so long embraced. He felt needed by kids in the Riverhead District, exercising his role for the State of NY with the Work Experience program, a commitment to teach business courses at Suffolk Community College in an adjunct capacity, continuing his liaison position with the NYS Department of Labor, sitting as he continued to do as an active member of several executive advisory boards, he admitted to not having learned yet simply

how to say no, in other words to decline invitations to help young people when he might otherwise have done something that was good for Bob Leitermann instead. He won't leave anyone hanging in the lurch. He'd rather have it be he himself put out than watch someone else inconvenienced if he was able to make the difference. He knew well that it was a lesson that only he could learn by himself. He knows what he's doing but still hasn't learned to be able to say, *enough is enough* but then quickly added - when it comes to kids sometimes, enough isn't enough.

He took a break from Suffolk Community for six months. He didn't want to tie himself down by teaching two nights a week because he'd planned on going down to Florida with his boat. He had four people lined up to go with him, Warren Swensen, Ralph Reggerio and Carmen Pitnaro. But then he was invited to stay with Suffolk for the rest of the year with the same group of students he had been working with all along and I could hear how again he was conflicted. When asked about becoming a member of ROBS Retired Employees of Brentwood Schools he affirmed his support, said he would definitely join but explained his need to stay apart from active service, which I assured him would not be a problem for us.

He likes to travel to where he's already been and to which he'd enjoy returning. He loves Florida, the Keys, water, to snorkel and scuba and slowly but surely getting into fishing. "*One step at a time*", he said.

Looking ahead five years I asked if there was anything he might like to add to his life that right now wasn't present there. At some point along his retirement road he had thought to start his own business but then realized he was thinking along those lines for the wrong reason, one which would not have been good for him. When push came to shove he thought that he needed to keep busy in something other than what he had been doing and he'd been in education for thirty-two years and maybe that was enough. He could certainly do other things to make money the government would then be able to take from him. 😊 He considered going into business and thought – that's not me. That's my brother. My brother wants to go into business with me. I'd be doing it for him and not for me. He knows all the steps and he knows what to do. He teaches courses at Suffolk Community College in Business Planning and how to plan and start your own business and he's done a ton of research. He's been doing that over there for years. He's probably researched five different businesses in the last five years,

everything from a bagel shop to selling coffins, to opening an Enterprise Rent-A-Car agency and he did a lot of research on things like that and realized that he's still going to be an educator even if he works for nothing. That's when he thought, "*Wherever I go, there I am*". A little while ago, he was speaking with Moe Green and they were discussing setting up a meeting with the Department of Labor to see what they can do together. Bob said, he'd never turn his back on Brentwood in so far as his ability to get money into Brentwood through connections in the Department of Labor so long as there is money still available. He was still employed by the Riverhead Schools and his wife's Centereach School District. We agreed that Brentwood has been kind to all of us. We've been blessed.

As I bid him an appreciative final farewell we had no way of knowing we would never see each other again. I thanked him on behalf of us all for having been the kind, soft spoken, giving educator he has always been, having known him for so many years. He returned the compliment as we parted but not before his sense of humor surfaced, he smiled and asked –"*See you at the beach?*"