



Walter M. Karp
ROBS History Project
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His full name is Walter M. Karp. He has three grown children, two boys and a girl. Two are married and live in New Jersey. His oldest son, with his wife and grandson live about five minutes from him on Long Island. He'd been widowed at the time of his interview for about ten and a half years. He'd unfortunately lost his wife back then in what had been a tragic automobile accident.

His two oldest boys are both CPA's. Larry was a Manager at Barkley's Bank and his son Scott was a Manager at Coopers and Lybrand at their Manhattan Office. His daughter and the youngest of his children was a manager at one of the Huntington Learning Centers in New Jersey. He was proud to be able to tell us they were all doing well. He had a three and a half year old grandson at the time whose name was Steven and Walter was looking forward to becoming a grandfather twice again in September when both sons wives were due to welcome additions to their families.

According to Walter his oldest son is a corporate type and for the most part laid back. His middle son looks as if he walked straight out of GQ Magazine and is extremely fashion conscious, whereas Walter frequently depended upon his daughter's assistance with wardrobe, until she moved away, due to partial color blindness.

She initially spent a short time being a classroom teacher but found she really enjoyed the benefits of managing a Huntington Learning Center in New Jersey where her husband is also a licensed practicing attorney.

His middle son Scott is an avid golfer. As he contemplates his retirement, Walter is thinking about following his son's example and learning to adopt the sport.

His oldest son Larry who has been interested in rare coins since he was about seven years of age has amassed a collection of 1909 pennies some of which are considered valuable.

We enquired about those familiar family traits that he had observed as evidenced in mannerisms and behaviors of his children and more recently grandchildren. He thought for a minute and responded by making reference to the family face that follows many of us through generations. "*Physically*", he said, he thought more than anyone else in his family *he most resembled his grandfather*. His oldest son looks like he used to look when he was younger and twenty pounds lighter with all muscle, while now "*he was twenty pounds heavier and all fat*" said he with a chuckle. Scott, his middle son, carries many of his mother's looks, traits and even her personality. They all take after her in so far as their intelligence is concerned, for he gratefully admits they have taken after her considerable intelligence. His older son takes after Walter with his easy going manner whereas his middle son is more of a pusher and a go getter in demeanor. His daughter tends to reflect both her parents in talent, trait and inclination. He has regular contact with his grandson Steven visiting with him on the average of once a week. His visits with other family members is less frequent, averaging once a month, although telephone visits occur with far greater frequency.

Walter was born according to his mother's account, in Manhattan in 1939. Most of his growing years took place in Queens Borough and the Community of Flushing. His earliest memory from childhood at two or three years was from a time before they moved to Queens. His mother was hanging out clothes to dry on the line, before there were dryers. Innocently, intending to help her he had tossed all the freshly washed clothes out the window instead of painstakingly hanging them on the line like she did. He thought he'd be helping. It seemed a lot quicker to do it all at once.

His grandmother's name was Ruth Greenbaum. She and Walter's father were born in this country as Walter had been. His maternal grandparents were born in Germany. He said they'd remained closer to the family on his mother's side. He had only recently become aware that he is now the oldest member of his family. He explained that being Jewish the family celebrates specific Holidays with a Seder. It was about two years previous at his house during such a Seder that he looked around the assembled family members when he realized he had become his Grandfather. He was startled to realize how unexpectedly he was becoming older.

He described his mother as a very loving person....but not physically. While there was a lot of love present in his family it was never physical in terms of touching or kissing or anything like that. He was amazed when he realized given what they had to work with what they were able to accomplish. They were really poor but he didn't realize it until he was about thirty five. The task of cleaning out his mother's house of all her belongings had fallen to him after her recent death and he found much that taught him she had collected everything including sheets of yellow paper as well as hundreds of old clothes hangers. Why she'd saved old clothes hangers could only be explained by the fact that poverty and living through the depression had taught her to value everything she might one day need thus avoiding the expense of replacing it.

Walter's father's life was unusual in that he usually worked nights while he often slept during the day. He would have been considered a laborer until late in his life when he and his son operated a small family business repairing washing machines and dryers. That was until Walter left their home and his father could no longer carry the business by himself. It was then he accepted a job with the transit authority in New York City and did very well there. He was with the subway. Aware his father had been born in America Walter was not acquainted with his father's family heritage. He thought his paternal grandfather had been born on the border between Poland and Russia but of this he was not certain. Likewise he thought his paternal grandmother might have been of Irish lineage raised in England considering how the reverse seemed less likely in that London would have offered more employment opportunities to Irish immigrants than Dublin might have extended to less likely immigrants from Great Britain. She met Walter's father while attending high school but times being what they were the young couple were unable to complete their studies beyond ninth grade when their circumstances required them both to find work to assist their families with living expenses.

Walter told us his mother was probably one of the most astute women he had ever met in his life. Even though she left high school before graduating she continued to read and to educate herself. His minor in school had been Psychology but he said his mother was more knowledgeable in that field than anyone he had ever met. He was obviously impressed by her intelligence. In another poignant instance of a childhood memory associated with his father he recalled his dad lying on the couch and Walter snuggling up next to him.

Walter spoke to us of one brother who was then an OBGYN in Westchester County in New York State. His family included two children of his own who he continued to work to support. He told us early on how he learned he wasn't nearly as bright as his brother.

His maternal grandfather was probably the person he most admired in the family. He tried very hard to model himself after the example provided by his mother's father. His grandfather had come to the United States as a stowaway on a ship. He eventually became one of the primary forces behind the union movement to organize Motion Picture Operators in this country. A real character, he loved gadgets and would take Walter everywhere with him on his travels. Walter remembers he was able to buy a brand new car every other year. The first thing he would do then was get a cardboard box and drive to Albany or Liberty, New York, to look for a chicken farm, where he would fill the box with chickens that made his new car stink like you know what. He did this to obtain fertilizer for his garden but it would take six months to rid his car of the aroma of those chickens.

Walter's mother believed teaching was a noble profession but initially he didn't intend to pursue teaching. He started off as an accounting and business major who when faced with adding up countless rows of numbers he realized, "*I don't want to do this for the rest of my life*". He didn't. Instead his psychology minor suddenly took on new importance and he began to think more seriously about the profession of teaching as a better career opportunity.

He remembered the room where he slept as a youngster. His folks allowed him to decorate it anyway he chose and so he filled the *Florida Room* or porch in Flushing where he slept with his collection of World War II paraphernalia. The first school he attended was P.S. 107 in Flushing. He remembered being the target of repeated

examples of religious discrimination since he and his cousin were probably the only Jewish kids in the entire school populated for the most part with Irish and German first and second generation kids. He remembered being repeatedly picked on and beat up because of his religion. His parents were not particularly religious in the practice. They were more cultural Jews than strictly observant. Following P.S 107 he attended Bay Side High School. He was one of the second full graduating classes at CW Post College which became affiliated with Long Island University. It had previously been the estate home of Marjorie Merriweather Post, heir to the Post family fortune.

He came to Brentwood exactly thirty six years before the interview. He had completed college with all his course work behind him and had only to finish the Masters Degree Thesis. This was during a period when many Korean War vets were returning home and looking for employment on Long Island. As former enlisted men they received first preference and teacher openings in the Business area were becoming increasingly scarce. He ended up looking for a position upstate in a small town called Dryden in Tompkins County in the Finger Lakes region. While he was there he got married having convinced the wife he met in Brooklyn to join him. There they encountered a kind of culture shock, not so much him because he remembered Flushing as a child when there were many small farms. His wife didn't like it at all so he began looking for other openings. They took a ride out to Moriches where he was interviewed and offered a teaching position by the Superintendent, Stanley Abrams, only to have the offer rescinded later that week with an apology because the Board of Education there had reversed their earlier plan to expand the Department. This came after Walter and his life had already gone to dinner to celebrate his hiring in Moriches.

The good that came out of that disappointment was the recommendation from Dr. Abrams that Walter contact Brentwood

where he was advised there were openings. Walter followed the lead, was interviewed by John Moroka and hired to teach a class in Business at North Junior High for six or seven years before he was moved up to the High School. When arriving there, he said Brentwood, meaning the Faculty, Staff and Administration, was like a family. If you were found to have made a mistake, you were called to account and put on the right track. It was more of a paternal family structure.

Today at least as he saw it, it's become more like a business and operated less like a family, at the level of the High School. It is no longer seen as the cooperative, collaborative enterprise it once was. That being said he added, "*Central Administration has continued to bend over backward to preserve personnel and in that respect has looked out for family members*". He has been disenchanted by the "cutthroat" manner of decisions made at the high school level in more recent times. He continued to hold dual teaching certification in Business and Social Studies. Claiming not to have been unhappy to have been assigned classes of "*more difficult*" youngsters he is quick to acknowledge seeing himself likened very much to the sweat-hog students of Gabe Kaplan's celebrated *Welcome Back Kotter* TV fame. He confessed to doing well with them.

His former colleagues included the likes of John Moroka, Charlie Swenson, Steve Howland and Bob Tagner, He remembered initiating and advising a Judo Club and briefly holding the role of acting administrator in the Sonderling Building. He is still practices Kung Fu primarily as a means of relaxation.

His graduate work was done in several places. He'd attended NYU as well as Hofstra and C.W. Post but found Post to have been the most demanding even while having the weakest reputation overall among graduate programs. He told us that by way of answering whether or not he'd been adequately prepared for the challenges he met in Brentwood through his work at CW Post. His answer was unqualifiedly in the affirmative.

Walter was contacted a year ago by a former student by the name Maurice Mc Entire. Maurice was about six foot four inches in height. He was a young black man originally from the Island of Jamaica. Prior to leaving for a planned trip with his wife to the Caribbean Island, Walter unexpectedly received a hand written letter from Maurice following which they made a plan to connect. When the ship docked the young man was there to meet them. He spoke perfect Jamaican Patois, also referred to as Jamaican Creole or Patwa. While English remains the official language of the country Jamaican Patois is the one most widely spoken. Young Maurice became a personal guide for Walter and his wife, taking them to visit all the important touristy places on the Island even taking them to visit his own home. Interestingly, with two or three exceptions Maurice being one of them, Walter always tried to keep his personal life separate and apart from his professional life. He had not tried to maintain contacts with former students.

He felt differently about maintaining contact with former colleagues. He admitted to being socially friendly with Joseph Pallazollo, Barbara Britt and Harvey Brickman. Harvey had just been admitted to Gerwin Nursing Care in Commack and we learned from Walter that Harvey was not doing well. Joe, Sandy Chase and Walter had just visited him the preceding Monday and his prognosis, much to every ones regret, had been deemed poor at that time.

Had he been a union member from the time he arrived at Brentwood? No, he said, because there wasn't any. Brentwood Teachers had an Association; the (BTA). The union didn't yet exist. It was almost ten years before he moved up to the High School and then become active in the union that now was there. Meanwhile the Jeribik Bill had been introduced had received support from the new union when his job was on the line and he needed support in a new tenure area.

Walter thereafter became active in the union and for about a year was a member of the Executive Council. He also served as Grievance Chairman for the Union in the Sonderling Building and later for the last two years for the Ross Building. He has seen support for unions grow over the years due to their importance.

He was fortunate to have worked alongside Jack Zuckerman, Tom and Maddy Dwyer, Rachel Barr and Jeri Brophy among other colleagues known during his thirty five year tenure of service. He had always taught Night School and Summer School in addition to full time day school. His last assignment had been teaching Business Courses in the Ross Building. As second jobs he had gained experience as an apprentice butcher, shoe salesman and worked on washing machines and dryers with his father. He had also taught for a year upstate which in total amounted to thirty six years before he retired from the classroom in nineteen ninety eight. His first year's salary on the Masters level he remembered as \$5,200 before taxes. After considerable crunching of the numbers and thoughtful consideration of all options, part of him wished he had stayed in his appointed Administrative position longer than he had yet, upon still more reflection realized that that post would likely have changed over the years in ways not to his liking and requiring him to make unseen decisions not ethically compatible for him to have made as he ended his career. He decided after all he probably did what was best by remaining in the classroom.

He hoped his friends were going to remember him in a positive way and when all was said and done his students could say they'd learned something from him they'd remember for the remainder of their lives.

He was looking forward to reading more, something he lately missed. The thought of making an Alaskan river cruise appealed to him as did the opportunity for arranging such travel with former colleagues who were part of the union retiree organization of teachers he was contemplating joining. His personal decision to retire had been pushed up a year so he readily admitted to being unprepared for exactly what lay ahead. He was thinking of returning to Suffolk Community College to learn how to become an interpreter for deaf people or to study Optometry. In any event, for the next several months he was decided to do nothing at all by giving himself time to allow recent changes to fully sink in.

Looking to what he sees coming in education for students of the District as a consequence of NY State Regents Action Plan policies he was less than optimistic. He sees State standards becoming even more difficult for our students to achieve. Therefore for approximately four or five years he predicts increasing rates of failure among students until seeing policy makers reverse the error of their thinking to go back to the old way.

In addition he sees "*the cream of the crop*" being skimmed off public education by private schools, magnet and alternative schools that are attracting the better students away from public classrooms and leaving kids with lower I.Q.'s and more difficult learning challenges at "*the bottom of the barrel*". At that point he expects the critics of teacher unions and public policy to step forward pointing their fingers as they embrace tactics of blaming and fault finding to justify a growing public criticism of education. Ultimately he sees teachers as once again, bearing the brunt of criticism yet to come.

What it was that gave Walter the greatest amount of pleasure for all the years he was a teacher in Brentwood schools might actually surprise you. His answer did more to shine light on his true character and reveal the soul of a man than anything else he might have shared about himself. *"My family, he said, "My family life was the most important, my kids". One of the reasons I worked those many jobs during all those years was to give them the things I thought they needed."* Diverting momentarily from his personal code of privacy and concealing his feelings he openly admitted, that his previous revelation was something he would not have admitted even to his children. Would he have done anything differently if given the chance he said, *"I'll tell you the truth, as far as education goes, I had a lot of fun for a lot of years but it wasn't until the last couple of years that we actually made a living. I don't know if I would do it again because of the money. I had a lot of fun but I might have stayed with Accounting because of money.....it would have been a lot more lucrative."* He then mentioned some people who, although retired, had continued to teach the subject they loved referencing them as exemplars and mentors to the person he was still aspiring to become. He spoke of Henry Matais, and Carol Perchik.

He also told us what he would like to see happen in so far as the Education profession was concerned. *"I would like teachers to be able to limit the number of people who come into the profession, as physicians do, as attorneys do through such as Bar Exams. It's a matter of supply and demand and with that I believe we would do a lot better. For example who marks the exams that physicians take? Other physicians! The same thing with Accounting as with Law. They can limit their numbers. I do not see that happening any time soon. I see the idea of renewable certification as being a very dangerous idea because I don't really see it as a boon to people who really want to do a good job. I see it as a tool in the hands of an administrator who doesn't like what a teacher may say. Now not only have you lost your job but you quite possibly might have lost your career because you've lost your state license. I find that to be a very dangerous precedent".* Will it work out that way? He said, *"I hope not".*

Viewing the change from technology to communication as far as our work force is concerned he expressed concern with the large numbers of immigrants coming into the country and the impact upon the global nature of companies and our work force. He asked, *“How does an American worker who is looking for a decent wage compete against someone in China who is willing to work for pennies?”* He sees our standard of living being diminished which bothered him a lot. Changing patterns of immigration have been reflected by cultural dissimilarities seen in the hallways of Brentwood High School and during the change of classes. Behaviors of some Latin and South American youngsters reflect differing attitudes to violence among them and their American contemporaries. He believes through this interview he had opened himself up to a degree of transparency he was not usually accustomed. He felt genuinely pleased with the net result.