



**Warren Swensen**  
**ROBS History Project**  
**June 23, 1999      53**

Warren Joseph Swensen agreed to sit as a participant in ROBS History Project and be interviewed on June 23, 1999 just prior to retirement at the end of June that year. He got his first and second names from his mother and father, Carl and Margaret Swensen. Married to Gail Swensen, whose maiden name was Gail LaGrand, they're the parents of four children; two grandchildren with another baby on the way. According to their birth order they are Eric, Kurt, Krista and Leslie. The granddaughters are children of Eric and Michele and their names are Kayla and Paige.

Eric is the oldest of the Swensen family children. Warren wouldn't speak about Eric without also speaking of Kurt because he said they grew up so closely together. For the most part during their earliest years they fought constantly. Warren remembers every time he brought Eric to the hospital because Kurt had beaten him again Kurt would say "Why me?" He seemed always to be the one that was bleeding because Kurt had a habit of picking up objects to throw them.

They both went to school in Sachem. They tried college a couple of times. After college Eric went into carpentry, did some home improvements, and decided that work was a little tough so he went back to school and got his degree at Nassau Community College and became a respiratory therapist. He then met his wife Michele. She now works at Mather Hospital and Eric is at St. Charles Hospital. They're both doing quite well. Eric is continuing his education and wants to become a perfusionist. He seems motivated toward that end. A per fusionist is a technician in the operating room who during a cardiac event will control the blood and the oxygen level of the patient. It's similar to an anesthesiologist

except he's handling all the circulatory and respiratory events perfusionist is an impressive profession.

Kurt right now is down in Florida. He married a lovely girl; Elizabeth and is working with Pepsi Cola toward becoming one of their District Managers. He's also doing very well.

Krista went to Fordham University. She continued her education after Fordham and now holds an MBA Degree and is employed by Chase Manhattan Bank in the Credit Department.

Leslie is at Duquesne University having just graduated and continuing her education. Within the year she will be a physician's assistant (PA). Warren said, *"There's a lot of medicine between all the kids."*

Asked to identify the qualities or traits that he has seen beginning to emerge in each member of the next generation of family, he responded by saying *"each of the grandchildren have their own strong personalities; their own identities. They're very thoughtful youngsters; they think. You can see them actively contemplating solutions to problems. They have a good time together. Kayla and Paige play nicely together. They are very good friends for each other."*

Warren was born in Brooklyn, New York. Originally he came from Avenue C and 5<sup>th</sup> Street when they moved to Flatbush. Thereafter, he married his first wife eventually moving to Ronkonkoma, in Suffolk County Long Island.

Born on July 18, 1944, Warren was an FDR baby who has quite a number of fond memories of his old neighborhood. He has a bouquet of memories of his older brother helping out and his father being the Building Superintendent of the apartment house where they all lived. He remembers his family being rather poor. His older brother Johnnie who worked for National City Bank at that time had to help out with family finances while also contributing work around the home. Johnnie was about eighteen years older than he and almost eight years older than Charles, his next oldest brother. He recalls one event taking place right before Christmas when he and his mother had been out shopping. It was only the previous day that he had heard her talking with his father about the insurance bill coming due and he remembers her at the store asking him what he wanted for

Christmas. That was when he remembers suggesting, *“Why don’t you use that money to pay the insurance? As a kid that was the kind of memory that most of us might retain. At that point in my life near the end of the month we would be tight for money and eating Spam”*. Whereas I had suspected that the Swensen family had probably been financially affected by the Great Depression, he explained that his father had been a rather unique individual whose circumstances had not been like that of the average American of the time. His father was born in Norway. He left Norway when he was about fourteen years of age. His family couldn’t take him anymore and he couldn’t stand his family anymore so he went to sea. He became a merchant sailor and learned to be a fisherman and stayed at sea for quite a while. Then during the Depression after he married Warren’s mother and because there was no money he would go back to Norway and he would fish and maybe in about six weeks he would earn almost two to three thousand dollars and come back to America. That was quite a bit of money. It would almost have been enough to get him through the rest of the year. That memory aside he otherwise always associated Christmas as a time of year he associated with a great degree of family joy.

I asked Warren if he as a child had dreamed about what he wanted to do with his life. Yes, he said. He had always wanted to become a doctor and dreamed of following a career in medicine. He started out as a Pre-med student at St. John’s University and was doing pretty well but then developed a medical problem for a while and had to leave school. He lacked sufficient motivation to continue his pre-med vocation when he returned to school because he had lost his class and would have to wait the extra year so he decided to move on. It would seem today that his own dream was only a generation ahead of realizing his vision.

Warren’s mother was Dutch and her maiden name was Van Wart. His parents met for the first time in New York City when Warren’s father who was an eligible young bachelor at the time, sailed into New York Harbor as a *Port of Call* and subsequently met and was smitten by a certain beautiful unattached Dutch-American girl. The story according to Warren doesn’t end there but checks out. One day a small delegation from the Daughters of the American Revolution showed up at the Swensen residence wanting his mother Margaret to become a member of their Chapter. It seemed somewhat ludicrous at the time because of the money situation. Nevertheless, because he was the Building Superintendent,

Warren's father Carl, had always made it a point to barter for and insist upon being given a very nice apartment. He would even agree to a salary cut so long as his perk included an impressive six room apartment. They always enjoyed living in nice quarters. The ladies of the Daughters of the American Revolution came in and wanted Margaret to join their Chapter. They had done some research and found that she was related to Isaac Van Wart. He was one of the three volunteers who captured Major Andre'. Isaac was the fellow who had slit the boot to find plans to West Point. History suggests he was just looking for money. The three of them may also have been deserting. Being summer soldiers and on their way back they took the plans to a General and tried selling them to obtain money. They were thanked for their bravery. Isaac ended as a footnote to history. Yet, another footnote reveals John Paulding, David Williams, and Isaac Van Wart, three young volunteer militiamen of the State of New York, did, on the 23d day of September last, intercept Major John André, adjutant-general of the British Army, on his return from the American lines, in the character of a spy; and, notwithstanding the large bribes offered them for his release, nobly disdaining to sacrifice their country for the sake of gold, secured and conveyed him to the commanding officer of the district, whereby the dangerous and traitorous conspiracy of Benedict Arnold was brought to light, the insidious designs of the enemy baffled, and the United States rescued from impending danger: They were awarded the [Fidelity Medallion. Isaac Van Wart - Wikipedia](#)

Questioned further about other childhood memories of his mother Warren recalled she was remembered for always holding the family together. He said he'd been sickly as a child and in those days he'd survived Pneumonia, Scarlet fever, and Rheumatic Fever, from which he almost succumbed. He remembers her caring for him throughout. He retains the almost medieval memory of the mustard plaster torture application as he recalls his father approaching with steaming towel in hands upon which lay the pre-boiled odiferous instrument that was subsequently placed directly upon his bare chest for the good it was intended to render. He'd never met his grandparents though he had met several of his father's brothers (Olaf, and Joseph) and his Aunt, and father's sister. He learned that his father was appreciably more liberal than even members of his own Norwegian family when he recalled his father refusing to get out of the car to visit his relatives when he saw his own brother didn't know how to spell the family name. The RFD mailbox in front of their home spelled Swenson with an o instead of the e that would have been correct. It wasn't until the mailbox was taken down that he agreed to even venture into the house for a family visit and they agreed to do it for him. He'd never actually met his grandparents on his father's side of the family although he had met his Aunt (his father's sister) Augusta, who lived in the

Norwegian Scandinavian section in Bay Ridge in Brooklyn, New York. Then there had been that summer when they had gone up to New Hampshire to meet his family and met his father's brothers Olaf and Josef. That was when his father refused to get out of the car to go into the house because of the mailbox incident.

He was then asked to talk about his three older brothers; Johnny being the oldest and then came Charles and last, Edward. Being the oldest, a lot of responsibility fell on Johnny's shoulders. The family of a Superintendent was expected to help with a lot of the responsibilities for maintaining the property. It was about a forty- eight family apartment house they had to deal with. There were a number of problems. His father was meticulous about keeping the apartment house clean. So, three times a week all the landings on all six floors of their apartment house in Flatbush, Brooklyn had to be done. They had to put out the ash cans three times a week for the incinerators. They had to wash the steps once a week. The building is there to this day and it had brass push plates on all the doors that had to be polished once a week. That was when Warren became personally acquainted with *Noxon* Brass Polish. It was a full time job for the whole family and Johnny took much of all this responsibility upon himself. Johnny went into the service at the beginning of the War (WWII), entered the Navy and went through the entire War, was in every major campaign, Atlantic and Pacific, and came home with a chest full of Battle Ribbons. He was on the USS Texas, which was bombed twice. He had quite an interesting life. Once he came back from the War he got a job at Bankers Trust wthat became National City Bank, and is now known as CitiCorp. At the age of eighteen or nineteen he became a teller and moved up to Chief Teller and then became a Vice President when he moved to Wall Street and years later retired from the Bank.

Charles went to St. Peter's College. From there he won a Fulbright Scholarship and went to Grenoble France where he spent a year. When he graduated he came back and went to Long Island where he took a job in Sachem. That school district didn't appreciate him too well and Warren thought he was asked to leave Sachem whereupon he applied to Brentwood and became very good friends with Dr Raymond Scheele, John Mrowka, Gretta and Hank Morian, Tom Dwyer and established himself well. He became a GIS (General Instructional Supervisor), at North Junior High School. After Warren came to Brentwood Charlie moved on and went to Hofstra University where he became a Supervisor of Student Teaching. Then he moved up to Jamestown and became the

Superintendent of the Jamestown School District. Then he moved back down here and became Superintendent of Westbury School District from which he retired. He is now at St Joseph's College as a Director of Student Teaching at the Elementary Level.

Edward came to Brentwood from St. Peter's College and started at West. He taught for about a year and was then promoted to GIS. From West he came to the Sonderling –Ross Buildings as a Vice Principal under John Mrowka. It was the first year they tried to computerize the High School and there was a lot of blame being thrown around and Edward, Warren believed, became a scapegoat for anyone from Stony Brook University to people working in his own office. At that point Edward decided to leave Brentwood and went to Central Islip as an Assistant Principal. He did very nice things over at Central Islip. Central Islip at that time was having a great deal of difficulty with student unrest and Edward devised a plan for the security that he now uses in his program. He has a business; District Schools Security Systems, of which he is President. From Central Islip he moved on to Rocky Point where he became Assistant Superintendent of Schools and retired from there.

By his own admission, the Swensen brother's had a strong influence on Warren and his choices along the career path he pursued. Johnny taught him discipline and modeled his work ethic. Also he learned a great deal of his loyalty from Johnny. Charles actually taught Warren how to become a teacher. His first year of teaching, Warren admitted, was not a very auspicious beginning to his profession. As a matter of fact, it was a time of very hard work for him. After his first year of teaching he wanted out of it so badly that when he started teaching his second year, he took two days off. He didn't go to school because he was in New York on Wall Street looking for a job. He then realized it was pretty difficult to get a job on Wall Street with just a degree in English, so he came back to Brentwood and buckled in again. It was still hard at the end of his second year. He was still making a number of serious mistakes in the classroom. He has come to believe that English is one of the hardest of all the disciplines to teach. Tom Campi used to talk about English being so amorphous. "And it is", Warren agreed". He has taught Social Studies and said he loved teaching Social Studies. When he was involved with the ACE Program he taught Social Studies for a year – for the ninth and tenth grade. He said, *"I loved it and I found the kids very responsive to it. There was something about it that was so empirical, but English, the preparation*

*was so difficult, it was always the judgment of the students that was so... Then after the third year something happened. I realized I could do certain things and that I really had control of what I wanted to do.”* He said he never had any problems as far as discipline was concerned but I was never satisfied with what I was doing for three or four years of being into it. The fifth year he thought was great, because by that time he was in total control of his own teaching process.

Warren loved high school. A teacher of his that he remembered was Mr. Casey. He was an English teacher and as a matter of fact he had borrowed a few of his lines that very day. When someone asked Mr. Casey what was up he'd often say *“the second floor”*. Warren finds himself doing the same thing. It feels to him like a universal response, the wry humor of it. He can remember his science teachers, he had so many good teachers, he went to St John's Prep during what for him, became the greatest four years of his life.

Warren remembered his first paying job. It was at Rubin's Delicatessen. He made twenty-five cents an hour delivering groceries and stocking shelves and cleaning out the basement that he hated to do because of all the critters waiting for him there. He couldn't stand bugs and the rodents.

What were his interests as a kid? Ironically he wasn't a reader. Living as he did and going to school in Brooklyn, the Yankees were his team. Brooklyn and Long Island had been worlds apart. It was so easy when he was in Brooklyn to get a couple of guys together to organize a game of stickball, punch ball, slap ball, you could play stoop ball, go down to the playground and get a game of baseball going, play football on the street – sewer to sewer, basketball, you could go into a playground and pick up a game of basketball. His interest in music was basically that of his peers, so he listened as they also did to mainstream rock n roll with the exception of several classical pieces he had been exposed to in music appreciation courses he enrolled in at St. John's Prep. That class had occurred once a week on Fridays.

He didn't own his first automobile until he came to Brentwood. His brother Johnny gave him a Comet. Ordinarily, he would drive the family's car because there was insufficient money to even dream of owning his own car at that time.

When asked about the parade of world events impacting this teenager's attention during his formative years, he nonchalantly exclaimed, that while he was growing up, *"We were always at war"*.

His earliest recollections of a war was euphemistically referred to on the evening NEWS as the *Korean Conflict* and, there was Joseph McCarthy and Communism. He was for Joseph McCarthy of course because he was against "the Red Peril", and one of his hero's was Douglas McArthur and he was against Harry Truman and how could he possibly think of firing Douglas McArthur. Then you were into Dwight D. Eisenhower. Eisenhower again was another war hero when he was a 4 Star General. But with Eisenhower you saw a weakness. During his presidency Nixon had to take over twice and then all of a sudden we were into Viet Nam and we were at war again and for the most part people were against the war. That was the very first time people started lining up against their country. It was a divisive time. Even with people who started out for the war, there was a turn around. Then there was that day that everyone who was alive at the time remembers exactly where they were and the very moment they heard that the young president John F. Kennedy had been assassinated. A lot of people cried on that day. Now when you go back in history and you see his life and perhaps what he accomplished, there wasn't much there. While people say you can't change history, you really can because as you learn more about what really happened you change your perception of what took place that you didn't know at the time.

Warren admitted to being a morning person. He said that even this past year – his last year of teaching – he was here every day at 6' o'clock, or a quarter of six getting ready for classes and he didn't expect that to change. He said, *"I think it was Francois Rabelais in Gargantua & his son Pantagruel who said this is when the mind is awake in the morning. He would take his student out and I think he even gives the time of about four or five in the morning and he would take them out to the river and they would bathe and then they would go back because by lunch time the mind begins to fade away"*.

Asked if he had a favorite season he replied no because Gail and he go to so many different places. They have a house up in the Adirondacks and it's such an interesting place. In the summer it's different and in the spring it's different and in the winter it's different so this year they went up with a couple of friends over



Thanksgiving and it was just incredible. The people didn't understand what the Adirondacks were like during the fall. They thought it was such a wasteland. He thought it was probably the Adirondacks that had taught him to appreciate all the seasons.

Warren met Gail when she first came to Brentwood. She was a young teacher and Tom Campi a good friend had always taught us to help the younger teachers whenever you could because teaching is so hard. You can't do it on your own. I had to do it on my own mostly because of my personality. Charles was for the most part the person who helped me. When Gail came to Brentwood she was such a sweet, innocent kid and she was so smart. She graduated Summa cum laude and she had all sorts of accolades from Long Island University. We became instant friends and we had a group that included Steve Krachel, Vince McDonough, Gail & Warren, you talk about eclectic grouping, this is the way Brentwood used to be like, and is returning to again. It's not nice to say but it was old, new, young - I had the best time. Vinnie was our Dean, our intelligencia. He would steer us to the right path no matter who it was, whether it was labor negotiations or Cicero.

Warren arrived in the district in 1966 because he said, it was easy to get a job here and his brother was already employed by the district and he knew people and they knew him. He knew only that it was a very creative place to work. At that time you had the Ford Foundation here, and Brentwood was known for being geared toward Education. When I arrived I found that it was all of those things and it was progressive. I fought that because I thought they were too progressive and that they were getting away from some of the rudiments of education, especially in English because they were talking about transformational grammar rather than staying with more of the traditional types of grammar.

When he first arrived he had a practice interview with Jeff Dwyer, he saw Fred Weaver, Manny Vega interviewed him as well and Joe Dionne. Then by the end of the day he had the job. Jeff Dwyer asked him what he would do if a student told him to go \_F\_ himself. He responded by asking Mr. Dwyer if that was the caliber of student you have here in Brentwood and he said "Oh no, not at all".

He still remembers some of his students from those first couple of years in Brentwood. He remembers Cathy Fogerty, for example, because at the end of

their period she would say something like, *"You know Mr. Swensen, you weren't that good today"*. And then he would ask her, "What was wrong?" and she would tell him more or less. Like some of the things he had said or done during class that she didn't like. And she was right!. He remembers during his first year he always thought he had a good rapport with his students but there was this one time that he was teaching first period, third row, first seat, he went down the row just checking the desks because Clem Stancik always used to come into the room the period after him and he wanted those desks right on the line and he would check them for graffiti and he remembered this girl had written on the desk, *"I hate Mr. Swensen"* and he remembered being so crushed by that. It was an important lesson. What had he done? He found out later that he had said something intended as a joke about her dress or her hair, something like that, and she allowed him to apologize later for it. Something that you don't always realize in a classroom is that you have thirty people in front of you and sometimes you can innocently say something really stupid.

Variously for several years he and Gail volunteered to help with the direction and execution of about seven or eight high school musical productions. They both found helping with those plays to be a wonderful experience. They worked with Maurice Burns who was just an incredible director. They collaborated on Pajama Game, Pippin, Oklahoma and Fiddler on the Roof where the son of Yvette Zimmerman (Secretary clerical in the department offices), played Tevia, in a lead role in what by all measurements was one of the best plays Brentwood ever did. Warren remembered being at the auditions when Eric Zimmerman got up there and was incredible. They didn't even have to bring anybody else up to audition for the role. They looked at each other and said, "That's it. This is Tevia". He was such a leader behind the stage. He was incredible and they had a lot of problems on the stage. Fiddler got drunk one night and he remembers Rob Walinchus having to hold on to the Fiddler on the Roof. He thinks it was the Friday night performance. It was, he said, pretty interesting up there.

Did the Education Courses he took in college prepare him for what he encountered once he arrived in the classroom? His answer, without hesitation was "No", he said. "They did not". There was one Ed course he talked about. It was taught by a woman, but he couldn't remember her name. She was from Hunter College, and she was a Department Head from one of the City schools and she was terrific. She prepared them like no one else. She would have them do

lessons in the classroom. And that was good. His student teaching assignment was, just, that... he received no supervision whatsoever. That was one of my problems. That's why whenever asked to take a student teacher he's always a little reluctant because --- some people wouldn't agree with this but I find taking a student teacher so difficult because of all the time involved. It's very demanding. Also, you have to turn your class over to that person and that's sometimes difficult, but I realized that as teachers we have that responsibility and when we take on that responsibility for student teachers we have to do an extremely good job with it.

Outside of the job description which is of course a matter of public record, what did he see as his mission; his purpose. Actually, being the Conservative he is, he never forgot he was being paid by a taxpayer to do this job. His first priority would be to make sure that that taxpayer always got their money's worth. Alright? Now, that's always ahead of all these speculative aspects of education, all the hypotheses about education. The taxpayer should get their money's worth for what they're paying... Then or course, he wanted education to be somewhat fun and he wanted to teach something. And sometimes you know the worst thing you hear in the classroom is a student telling you how boring something is but then you realize that this is a necessity. He remembered back when he started teaching in the sixties the worst thing you could be accused of doing in the classroom was to be inflexible. You never wanted to be accused of being rigid in the classroom. He could understand that to a point but it laid the groundwork for getting rid of grammar and deemphasizing spelling. We've all heard about education being cyclic and now all of a sudden we're back and on the Regents you see the word grammar being used as one of the criteria for judging good writing. Education can certainly be seen as cyclic.

Had he maintained contact with former students and were there some with whom he had kept in touch? *"No; not really. You know, the older you get the more students start cutting you off. When I was younger students used to come over to our house. They used to baby sit for us and I was a best man at one student's wedding. We used to be invited to weddings and engagements. Then at the same time students do come to you with more serious questions because they think you can, perhaps, answer them. There are more questions about life's experiences. You keep your contact that way."*

Warren, what makes you angry? As his slightly self conscious smile grew to cover his face he replied directly “Well, I haven’t been angry too many times in my life. As far as education, one thing that makes me angry is when people make judgments about other individuals based upon their own rigid values. One of the greatest problems Brentwood has is their supervision. There are presently very few supervisors in Brentwood. There are a hell of a lot of evaluators. They don’t understand the difference between supervision and evaluation. The two of them can exist together but they don’t have the time. It’s the fault of the Union many times because the Union has established its rules about evaluation and I can understand we’re protecting our members but sometimes the rules we have established as a labor policy you’ve got to remember that we’re also involved in this thing called education which is a sort of creative pursuit. And sometimes our goals collide and we blame the Administrators but as teachers we have to take the blame also because if administrators say something that could be construed as offensive or threatening all of a sudden goes to the Union Office. He does think that’s changing however with the new teachers who are coming in. There are a lot more good administrators being chosen.

He and I remembered a time, when a certain administrator from outside the District was picked to become the Brentwood High School Principal. Being unfamiliar with the normal process of education in the building he almost singlehandedly destroyed the continuity of the schools success. In so doing he alienated administrators, teachers, parents and students all while allowing a few individuals with political ambitions to take advantage of the disruption and taking competitive advantage by cutting in front of their colleagues. These few then positioned themselves for higher positions during the brief scramble that ensued. We’re speaking of only the few with political ambitions who enjoy the leadership role but were decidedly out of step with the majority for whom education is a mission of service to the greater good. The majority of colleagues have always been motivated not by self service but by the love and respect they hold for the youth and taxpaying public of this diverse community in whose service they’ve dedicated their careers.

Warren had served the Brentwood Teachers Association (BTA) in the past as a Building Representative but having three children he said he never had time to do more. It took him a while to complete his Masters Degree and there were

always extra jobs necessary to make family ends meet. Such positions were more easily handled back then he said, by a single person.

I asked if there had ever been a time when he was fearful of coming to work in Brentwood. He laughed as he answered the question, *"Oh sure! Are you kiddin? We were just talking about that. There were the riots in the seventies. We had three days of riots here. That was a very scary time. The first day of the riots I was sitting with Guy DiPietro. He was having lunch and I was sitting and talking as a student walked past with his shirt off and he was slit right down his chest and I said to Guy, "Guy, we've got a problem" and he said, "What do you mean? I said, "there's a boy walking out there who's bleeding pretty bad" and I remember that young fellow was as white as a ghost. I remember we ran out into the hall and the hall was absolute chaos. There was one young man that was being assisted down the hallway and they were holding his ear on and there was a lot of blood. Another time I remember being in a room with a kid and we had to disarm him as he was holding on to a very big knife. The next day I really didn't even want to come into this place because you really didn't know what was going to happen. And it did. Our Principal at that time was a fellow by the name of Alfred Miller. He lasted about a month. I remember being in his office. At the time I was the moderator for the National Honor Society and as we were talking about something having to do with the National Honor Society he asked me...oh, I was looking out his window and I saw all these students with bats and chains and tire irons and they started marching from the Ross Building to the Sonderling Building and he asked me, ..."Warren, why aren't those students in class?" This was about seventh period and I looked at him and to myself I said... OMG this is our leader? But to him I said, "tell you what Mr. Miller, I think they're about ready to riot". At that same time certain students were heading out the back and other students were approaching and the Police – thank God for the Police, the motorcycle patrol officers. They came screaming into the parking lot and they set up a cordon around the school and they arrested seventy or some odd number of students that day. Then on the third day we had more rioting. Following the fourth day things quieted down a little. This would have been about nineteen seventy-one or nineteen seventy-two.*

Of all the honors that he had been bestowed he thought that this year being voted Teacher of the Year by the National Honor Society touched him the most. There was another thing he found out just a couple of minutes ago that

back in April there was this one student that he really cared for and he had found out she wasn't graduating because she hadn't passed the RCT in reading and nothing was being done to help this child. So we started working together which really (of course it's my job as a teacher), this is a pet peeve of mine. The reading program that Brentwood High School has is non-existent. We used to have a person by the name of Kay McDevitt. And this person used to come around to our classes and ask us. Is there anyone who has reading problems? If there is I want to see them. I will set up a class for them. And this woman would teach kids how to read. She was a reading consultant and she believed that this was her job. Well anyway I found out about this young lady and we worked and worked. I didn't think she was going to do it. I speculated that she was going to fall about five questions short of passing the test. So my wife and I decided perhaps we'd have her take the new Regents Exam. And she did that. The Regents is in two parts and she took Part 1 and then she took the RCT and today she just took the second part of the Reading test and I got her Reading score from the Lab and she passed and to see the smile on that kid's face as she was taking the Regents knowing she was going to graduate.... That was a big thrill for me.

If there's one thing I strongly believe in education, it's democracy in education. We see so many programs and teachers who will only teach a certain type of student. ie. Warren teaches AP students (Advanced Placement). There are teachers who say I only teach the best students. Warren also insists on teaching the 9th Grade repeat classes. He therefore believes he also gets the most challenging students. The idea of having a teacher who will only teach a particular group can also work the other way. Sometimes those teachers don't work hard enough because you give them students who aren't challenged. I always enjoy seeing my students who are ninth grade repeats when they say, *"How come you're teaching us?" "You teach the AP classes?"* I think it helps them. Mike Bannon is a teacher like that. He insists on getting the lower performing classes as well. We then spoke of the success that Fred Weaver at his age (in his nineties) and with all his experience working with students who have failed the RCT several times and he has helped them succeed and graduate. Of him Warren said, *"Fred Weaver is indeed an amazing man. He's an ornery fellow but those kids do keep him going"* Warren never worked with George Cavuto but everything he has heard from colleagues who have, like Caster Howard and Betty Stosuy extolled his skill set as a Master Teacher of Reading.

The actual date of Warren's retirement will be June 25th of this year and rapidly approaching. There had been little doubt that he was going to retire before he submitted the actual documents this year. He'd known all along. Once submitted, had he felt any different about his decision to leave the profession? *"Nope, because I've been talking with other teachers.. It's interesting. Some teachers go out well and some teachers don't. It's almost like a Hemingway short story. John Boughal gave me some of the best advice. He said, 'It's your last year. Enjoy it! Don't get bitter about anything because if you go out bitter, that will be your memory and it will stay with you for the rest of your short life. I think he's absolutely right. I've seen teachers who have gone out and they were bitter. They've hated everything and they've hated the children and they weren't always that way. They wanted out.'"*

Warren had other things he wanted to accomplish. *"You have to go on"*, he said. *"It was becoming very difficult waking up in the morning."* Once a class started, it was interesting. I would never know what was going to happen in that class. You have your preparation all right, but then some things will work, some things will not, and as an experienced teacher okay, if they don't work you can save them somehow. Once I was in a classroom in front of a group of students, I would always have a good time, and while that's a great thing to be able to say, I did not like getting up in the morning to come here anymore. It became laborious.

After thirty-three years, his culminating assignment was as a Teacher of English in the Sonderling Building, working with students in the ninth grade and also with seniors. Did he remember when the High School offered Ten Week Classes? Yes he did, and it was too bad (they were discontinued) he said, because that was our fault. We could still have them, but as teachers we didn't work hard enough to generate them. It was all our fault.

Did he ever hold down second jobs? *"Oh sure! When I first started I worked up here at Hess on Second Avenue. I had summer jobs. I had night school jobs. When I was younger, there were some nights, Oh God, that was at least two or three nights a week I would only get four or five hours of sleep - and then we had Kurt, - and he was a colicky child- Kurt and I would sometimes end up in the living room in a green rocking chair and that's where I would frequently wake up in the morning with Kurt in my arms and then it was off to school"*.

In the very beginning he remembered earning \$5,900 annually before taxes that came down to \$80. Per/ week, and as you've heard from many other people, that was just fine. It was a comfortable salary. Gas was what, about 40 cents a gallon? That sort of drives the economy. It was a good time.

Did he have a favorite time of the school year? Not really. What about a least favorite time? He thought that maybe this time right now, about two weeks before the end of the semester when everyone seems to be fed up with it. This year he has had one of the finest closings because this year he really pushed his students to take the AP and they all worked pretty hard and so once the AP hit, they all wanted to know, *"We're finished now right?"* We'd arrived at about May 18th or something close, and I said, *"No! We're not finished. Well, what are we going to do?"* Well let's just enjoy ourselves. We can read a couple of plays and it was very comfortable finishing up."

Was there anything he might want to do differently if he were able to start his career over? He acknowledged that if it were possible for him to have begun his first few years better prepared for what he would face it could have changed everything that happened to him - but it was what it was, and he did the best he could under circumstances he faced given what he knew. Teachers today will be better prepared for what they come across. In the Brentwood of those days you'd be lucky if they handed you a book and a book list. Gratefully it was Charles who stepped in to help Warren through those difficult first few years. Manny Vega was also pretty influential in helping him make it as a teacher though Manny very possibly didn't even know that.

Was there a particular book that moved him, or that was important to him? He told me that he has always forced himself to try teaching something new, because his experience had taught him how easy it is to become content with the status quo doing the same stuff over and over again. Very early in his career he began to throw his lesson plans from the previous year away. He never started anything the same way he had in the past except for one book; Huck Finn. He kept everything but then, that file became so thick, that one year he gave out the books and said, *"I don't even know how to approach it."* But an important book for him, a new book by Toni Morrison, was *The Song of Solomon (and Sula)*. She's become such an important writer in American Literature. She's similar to another author he enjoys; F. Scott Fitzgerald. He enjoyed teaching *Gatsby*. Take a look at



The Gatzby and take a look at her writing style in Song of Solomon. You can juxtapose these two writing styles. They're just incredible. She's got the Nobel Prize but she's going to become such an important figure in American literature. We haven't had too many important figures. We've had Norman Mailer and John Updike who nobody understands. I think Toni Morrison is going to be a breath of fresh air for us.

What will he miss? Having fun with kids. The kids were incredible this year. I don't know if it was because they knew I was retiring, but I had some of the nicest kids that I can remember. The one thing I won't miss will be preparing for classes. I mean it's such a pain; to prepare all the time. It's such a constant thing. It even makes me angry when you come to school and see certain people who don't have to do anything during the day to do their job. They sit there and nothing happens. And it seems to be predominantly English teachers that are busting their hind ends getting ready for classes; trying to come up with ideas. How do I teach this? We seem to forget that ours is a twelve-month assignment, not ten months. We don't talk about that but a teacher is working 24/7 for 12 months a year for thirty years or so. You are never not thinking about stuff like, *"Can I use this or that in class this semester? Or, Where can I find more of this that I don't have to pay good money for?"* Let me make a copy of this poem for that lesson, or what a great handout this will make for my lesson on diversity I so enjoy teaching. I remember when Gail asked me to take on the AP when I had five years left and I said, *"No, please do not do this to me"* because I knew it was going to be the entire summer gone and I said, *"Go find someone else"* I tried to use the excuse that everyone will think it's just favoritism and you're just picking on me because I'm your husband and you want me to have the best classes. And she said, *"No, that's not true. It's because nobody wants to teach them"*. Because when Shirley Smith left nobody wanted to teach the AP classes. Not one English Teacher wanted to teach them because they don't want all of that preparation and I don't blame them. He notices so many people (whose skills are not being utilized) It's just one of the many ways in which available human resources in schools are wasted.

Another pet peeve is the High School Reading Program. We could get people to donate a period a week to go in and help in the Reading Lab. But nothing's happening. One of the things he'd like to see in the future is the BTA inviting retirees back into the school system. Herein the district has its greatest resource. There is a Program in Baltimore, Maryland called Roots and Wings. They

have successfully demonstrated that it can work. They've discovered through their research that a student must be able to read by the time they leave the third grade so that student can be a success. If the student cannot read at a third grade reading level by the time he reaches the fourth grade he or she will not be successful. That will snowball into a self-fulfilling-prophecy proving they will never become productive or successful. Whereas, if we create a program where teachers go routinely into the elementary schools and make contact on a one to one basis, 1 teacher to 1 student, it's been shown that the student cannot fail to read. *She or he doesn't learn as well unless taught by a teacher.* The grade level for this program has not been arbitrarily decided upon. These outcomes have been tested and verified by proven solid research over time.

Looking ahead five years, Warren was thinking of building a lighthouse on his and Gail's property. When completed it would be two stories high and Gail was convinced that given his passion, his ability and his practical know-how he was up to the challenge. Too often, I happened to think, dreams could have a way of falling down in midflight. Guess we'll all just have to wait and see what's going to happen.