

# Memories | Frank Clarke





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# How did your parents pick your name?



The story I was told by (I think) my mother was that my father wanted to call me 'Roger Lewis Clarke', a mash-up of 'Rogers & Clark' and 'Lewis & Clark' (he liked history, I guess), and my sister objected: "Oh, Daddy, you can't do that to the poor kid!"

I imagine that by that time the parental units were running out of names, although 'John' and 'Joseph' were still available, and one of them, probably my father, responded with: "Fine. YOU name him, then", so Audrey is responsible for me being 'Francis Xavier'.

In high school, I gradually transitioned to 'Frank', much to my mother's consternation. She had a brother and a brother-in-law, both 'Frank', and one of them — I don't know which one — possibly both — my mother considered a bad influence. Frank

Clarke had been the ringleader of the Clarke boys when they escaped foster care while Granddad was in Panama, and Frank Fallon ran a saloon on 5th avenue at 39th street in Brooklyn not far from where we lived.

I don't mind being addressed as 'Francis X.', but I crack enamel off my teeth when someone uses 'Frank X.'. At Manhattan College, one of my classmates, David Brill, thought having 'X' as an initial was the coolest thing he had ever heard of, and always referred to me as simply 'X'.

*Geri*

Great story! I've always thought that "Francis Xavier" was a terrific name, and you'll always be Uncle Francis to me (but I respect your preference of "Frank")

# What were your favorite toys as a child?



**I**t's a long time ago, but I recall, now that I'm thinking about it, that most of my favorite toys were cap guns.

Most young people today may never have seen a cap gun. The 'ammunition' was a long rolled strip of paper, usually red, with small charges of gunpowder between the top ply and the bottom ply. When struck as by a hammer, the charge would 'POP' and produce a small wisp of gunsmoke.

Among others, I had a Mattel Burp Gun, modeled after the famous M3A1 of WW-II fame, and a 'Klondike 44' in the style of what we think of as 'cowboy guns'. Almost all toys of that style/era were tied in with TV programs.

The Burp Gun had a wind-up mechanism that would make it operate as a machine gun: when the trigger is pulled, the mechanism drags a fresh 'cap' into position and drops the

hammer on it, then repeats for as long as the trigger is held down: pop-pop-pop-pop-pop.

The Klondike was unique among cap guns because (a) it was finished in gunblue rather than chrome and was thus visually similar to real guns, and (b) it was strictly single action and so was almost identical in operation to real guns of the Old West. The hammer had to be cocked for each shot, and the cylinder held six (6) pull-apart 'bullets'. Each bullet had to be pre-loaded with a single cap and then 6 of them inserted one by one into the cylinder.



# What was your Dad like when you were a child?



I should start by noting that, physically, I am a near-perfect replica of my Dad: 5'9", 230-or-so pounds, heart problems... Emotionally, he was stern but kind.

As the youngest of my family, I saw very little of my father's interactions with my sibs. Jimmy, the oldest, married just after WW-II and I don't recall him living with us. Bobby was with the U.S.Army-of-occupation in Europe in my early years. That left Audrey, Kenny, and Jerry.

Dad worked two jobs to support the family and save for college for the kids: by day, he drove an asphalt truck for the Borough of Brooklyn; by night, he sold insurance for the Brooklyn Tavern Owner's Association (BTOA). The asphalt truck was HUGE for a shrimp like me, and to this day I love the smell of hot tar. Every now and then for reasons that aren't clear, I would do a

ride-along as Dad delivered a truckload of fresh asphalt from the Hamilton Ave yard to whichever road crew (somewhere in the wilds of Brooklyn) needed it, and we would pop into some little luncheonette to grab lunch or a snack. In the evenings, Mom and Dad would 'do the rounds' so Dad could explain to each of several tavern owners why it was so important for them to be adequately insured. Mom kept his business records in her meticulous hand. I stayed home with my sister and did my homework and watched TV.

The one thing that really stands out was that my father was a walker, and often I would accompany him. One of his favorite routes took us up to 5th avenue (we lived at 441 43rd st.), NE along 5th to 36th st. where there was a bus depot, SE on 36th (which was the edge of Greenwood Cemetery) to 9th avenue, SW on 9th to 41st st., NW on 41st to Sunset Park, through the park to 5th av., and then home, a total distance of about 2 miles. Along the way, 36th st. makes a sharp bend to connect with 37th st., and at that point you can look over a wall and see the subway tracks for the Culver line connecting to the 36th st. subway station. That wall had an expansion joint, a place where two slabs of stone meet. In cold weather, the joint will be quite wide, and as the weather warms, the joint becomes narrower. On one of our walks, Dad told me to stick my hand into the joint and, after some hesitation, I did. "Remember that," he commanded.

Then later, during warmer weather, he had me do the same thing, but now I couldn't get my hand in because the break between the walls was so much narrower. It was his way of imparting knowledge that someone my age simply wouldn't have been able to understand, but I remembered that.

On Thanksgiving, Dad and I would 'go get the pies'. We would walk to the Mrs. Smith's Baking Company that I always thought was around 2nd or 3rd street and 2nd avenue, but that others assure me was 3rd street and 4th avenue. Regardless, it was easily 2 miles in each direction. The purpose was two-fold: (a) to get me out of the house while Mom got dinner ready, and (b) to get my appetite in gear. I wrote a blog post about that and other such things at <https://dispatchesfromheck.blogspot.com/2017/02/growing-up-in-brooklyn.html>.

My father taught me to read. On summer nights, we would sit on the front steps of 473 43rd st. (before we moved to 441 in 1949) and watch the neon sign for the PARK theater across the street. The sign would blink P-A-R-K-PARK-P-A-R-K-PARK, and that may have been the first word I learned how to spell. By the time I got into 1st grade (no kindergarten or pre-K in those days), I was a proficient reader although my eyesight was just then beginning to show signs of failing. This actually got me into a little trouble since I could by then read much better than my peers.

Dad died of his second heart attack when I was a freshman in high school, March 6th, 1958. I got called to the Principal's office where waited Kenny, who gave me the bad news and drove me home.

I still miss him.



# Where did you go on vacations as a child?



Summer vacations were always an adventure for us.

My father, James, thought of vacations as learning experiences, so he went ‘all out’ for our annual road trip, and Mom... well, they didn’t call her “Mrs. Keep-The-Wheels-Rollin’ Clarke” for nothing, you know. As vacation approached, Dad would negotiate a loan from Beneficial or Household or some other small-loan vendor to fund the expedition. The loan itself was for what we would judge a ‘small amount’: \$500 or so. That was enough, in those days (the late 40s and early 50s) to pay for gas, food, lodging, and entertainment for the parents, me, Jerry, Kenny, and sometimes Audrey. Each year the parents would set a direction and, with little or no warning to me, we were off. I vividly recall being awakened at o-dark-thirty: “Get up. Get dressed. We’re going on vacation.”

We went to Cape Cod, and along the way we visited Paul Revere's house in Boston, climbed Bunker Hill, learned about the Salem Witch Trials, and toured The House of the Seven Gables (among many other things).

We went to Canada, saw Notre Dame de Montreal (wowza!), Mount Royal Park, and St. Joseph's Oratory, zipped up to Quebec City to see that 17th-century fortified town, drove out to Ste. Anne de Beaupre, ate dinner at the very impressive Chateau Frontenac, and watched horse-drawn carriages carrying tourists through the old town. Audrey may have been the only one of us with enough French to locate the ladies' room.

We went to Lake George, Fort Ticonderoga, Saratoga, Lake Placid, Saranac Lake, the Corning Glass Works in Corning NY, and Niagara Falls. That might have been the lead-in to, or the back-end of the Montreal-Quebec trip, but it's so far back I can't be sure.

We went to Detroit for Ford's 50th anniversary celebration. Ford had built a huge circular building, The Rotunda, for the occasion, and decorated it like a birthday cake! We watched '53 Fords coming off the assembly line one every few minutes, getting their first taste of gasoline, their first start-up, and their first trip... to the parking lot to await shipment to their first owner. Along the way, we rode the Pennsylvania Turnpike with its

impressive tunnels cut straight through mountains. It may not seem all that stunning today, but in 1953, it was magic!

We went to Williamsburg, Virginia, which was just beginning to be promoted as a tourist attraction. Hoop skirts, red coats, powdered wigs, and three-cornered hats galore! Re-enactors gave us what sounded like first-person op-eds on the ‘events of the day’. What fun! And it really brought American history to life.

None of these trips, you may imagine, were one-day affairs, and there were no interstate highways yet. AAA would map a route for its members via something called a Trip-Tik, a 5x8 ring-bound, portrait-format map booklet, custom-made for each trip, each page showing 150-300 miles of road, or high-resolution city insets, with notations on the back about food, gas, and lodging, rated by AAA for quality, and often available at a discount to AAA members. The helpful AAA agent would highlight with a colored marker the recommended route. GPS without a GPS.

Those days largely preceeded the era of large-chain lodgings. An overnight stay was at either a multi-story hotel in town, a motel at roadside (usually a string of clapboard cabins with nose-in parking in front), or a tourist home [<https://dispatchesfromheck.blogspot.com/2019/02/recalling-tourist-homes.html>]. The short-and-sweet of tourist homes is ‘that was Ma’s and Pa’s

place, but Pa died and Ma now rents rooms to travelers'. Tourist homes were, in almost every case, cheaper than a motel and more comfortable.

I still love road trips.

After vacation, Dad would methodically pay off the loan, \$10 or \$15 a week, and was always greeted with a smile when he went for next year's vacation loan.

*Jack*

Yes, Frank, those were the good ol' days when motels were so cheap, gas was a fraction of today's, and food was also seemingly low, but then you didn't remember how very low wages were, so it all balanced out, but all the sites were unforgettable. I was still searching out tourist houses into my thirties, and got some amazing deals, even then in the 1960's, in many places, like Mrs. Kennedy's in Charleston, SC, which was just as you described, a widow's small business renting to traveling salesmen mostly.

*Eileen*

What a wonderful story!

*Margaret*

Thank you for sharing this.

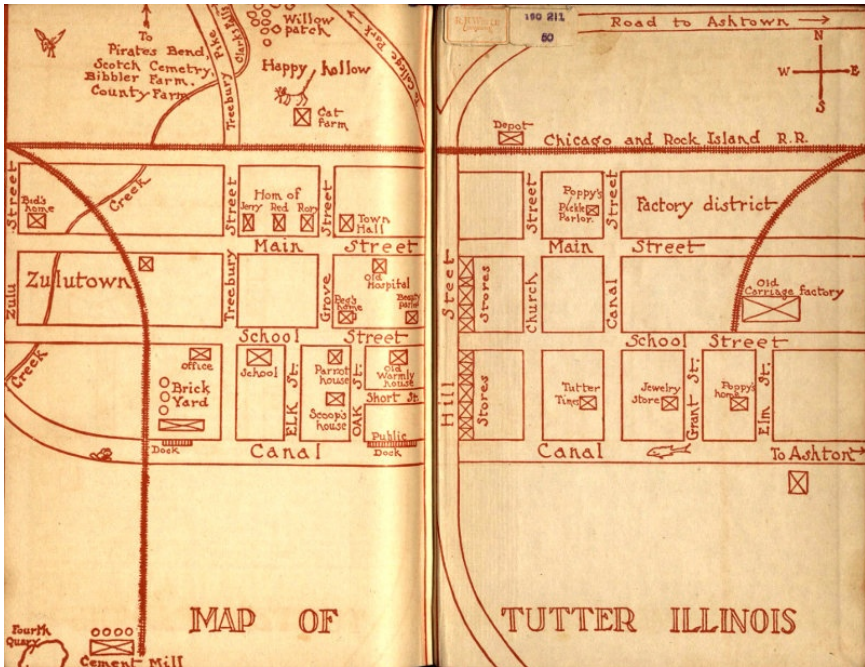
# What is one of your favorite children's stories?



ONE of my favorite children's stories? One?? That's funny.

I grew up reading several series of children's books, among which are the Jerry Todd series, the Tom Swift series, and The Hardy Boys.

Jerry Todd is a mid-teen (14? 16?) living in a fictional Midwestern river town, Tutter, Illinois. With his friends, he would solve mysteries and otherwise engage in typical 1930-ish rural adventures, including renovating an abandoned river barge in order to convert it to a theater for him and his buddies to put on shows and make a little cash. Very 'Horatio Alger' stuff.



When my brother Jerry was in college and studying engineering, that study included ‘draftmanship’, and I recall him seated at his drafting table in his room reproducing (for me) the street map of Tutter, IL, that decorated the flyleaf of every Jerry Todd book.

Tom Swift has passed into memehood because of the way the author, Victor Appleton, wrote. You may have heard of “Tom Swifties”, puns of the form <<some remark>> Tom said <<adverb>> where the adverb relates to the remark, for example: “I’m no good at playing darts,” Tom said aimlessly; or “I’ll have the lamb,” Tom said sheepishly.

Tom Swift is a boy inventor: Tom Swift and his Electric Rifle, Tom Swift and his Photo Telephone, and on and on. Often, his quest for advanced technology(!) is thwarted by this villain or that one, or his invention is stolen and used for nefarious purposes, forcing Tom into conflict with with dastards. Fun.

The Hardy Boys have survived even into the modern age. These stories are still being produced for the small screen. Frank and Joe Hardy are amateur sleuths and the scions of Detective Fenton Hardy, and often their adventures are related to some extent to cases Dad is linked to.

There may be a few books in each series that I haven't read, but I gobbled most of them down during my early teens and pre-teens. That early dose of fiction may be what gave me the urge to write my own.

Of these three authors, Leo Edwards (Jerry Todd) is the only real person. 'Victor Appleton' and 'Franklin W. Dixon' are pseudonyms for groups of ghost writers who were hired to crank out new books in the same way that 'Richard Castle' produces mystery novels.

Reading has always been great fun for me, and it's all thanks to Jerry Todd, Tom Swift, and Joe and Frank Hardy.





# Did you get along with your siblings as a child?



I was the youngest of six and eight years younger than my next oldest sib. I think — as a general impression — that I did get along with my sibs although with that kind of age-spread (Jimmy, the eldest, was in the Navy in WW-II when I was born) there wasn't much opportunity for meaningful interaction.

Jerry taught me how to play chess, and enjoyed beating me at the game. When I started beating him, I think the luster went out of the game for him. When he was in college, Brooklyn Polytechnic, he was always doing some sort of project, often involving electronics which, in those days, meant 'vacuum tubes'. He would often send me on errands to the electronic boutiques on Cortlandt Street in Manhattan, a warren of little shops, mostly on the street level, but a few on upper floors. In those days before OSHA, it was completely normal to operate elevators by yourself. "What's odd about that?" you ask? Well, this was also

before the days of on-board computers that would stop your elevator within  $1/64$  of an inch of the floor level and open the door for you. Each car, back in those days, came equipped with a waist-level lever: pull to go up, push to go down, and pay attention lest you miss your floor and have to back up (or down) with quick little pulls or pushes. These elevators, I might add, were usually open cages. You could watch the walls of the elevator shaft go by through the metal lattice-work. When your car arrived where it needed to be, open the inner gate, open the outer door, step onto the floor, close the inner gate (so the car can be called from another floor), and let the outer door close. When the car moves away from this floor, the outer door locks to prevent people accidentally stepping into an empty elevator shaft.

Kenny wound up in the Army and stationed in Germany as part of the Army of Occupation and married soon after getting home from that and getting a job as an IBM salesman. Bobby was also part of the Army of Occupation, but earlier than Ken.

Audrey went to Hunter College. I learned later that she received a B.S. as a Physics major. Later, she worked at AT&T in NYC and in White Plains about 300 feet from where I would eventually work when I was with IBM. Between Hunter College and marrying Doug Vance, Audrey lived with Mom and Dad at 441 43rd street. While Mom and Dad were out evenings selling insurance for the

Brooklyn Tavern Owners' Association, Audrey and I stayed home, did homework, and watched TV. One day, Audrey asked me if I wanted to go to a concert with her. The concert was held in Lewisohn Stadium in upper Manhattan between 136th and 138th Streets and Amsterdam and Convent Avenues. On the program that night was Gershwin's Rhapsody In Blue and An American In Paris. I still recall how floored I was at the utter tunefulness of jazz. Whodathunk?

Jerry and Audrey, then, were the two of my sibs that I was closest to.


*Margaret*

Thank you for sharing your story.

*Geri*

I've so been enjoying "Uncle Francis' s Stories" (reminds me of the movie "Radio Days") it's amazing how much I didn't know about my dad before me) some of my fondest childhood memories are set in the house on 43rd St.

Frank is a wonderful writer.....I see a book in this!

Your niece, Geraldine 

*Jessica*

Hi everyone. Jason (my husband) and I purchased these subscriptions for my parents for Christmas last year and we have purchased 3 books, one for each of their children. If you're interested in a book with all of my dad's stories, let me know and I will find out the details.

If anyone is interested, Storyworth is a 1 year subscription and as you can see, is well worth it to keep all of these memories alive after we're gone.

Love,

# Did you have any nicknames as a child? How did you feel about them?



**B**ecause I wore glasses from about the age of six, "four-eyes" was, not surprisingly, an epithet, if not exactly a nickname.

When I went to college, I made the acquaintance of one David Brill who was very taken with knowing someone whose initials included 'X'. Dave constantly referred to me simply as 'X', which I suppose qualified as a nickname. It actually made me feel special in a world where there wasn't much of that going around.



# Do you have any particularly vivid memories of your grandparents?



Being the youngest of all my siblings, most of my grandparents had already died by the time I was able to remember such things. The one-and-only grandparent I can recall was James M Clarke, my father's father. He died in 1948 when I was 4. My paternal grandmother, Maryjane Holran, died in 1911 when my own father was 7 or 8. Grandpa's second wife, Maryann Holran, a cousin of Maryjane, died in 1942, before I was born.

The one vivid memory I have of Grandpa James was sitting on his lap at 473 43rd street. He told me, in a way that suggested he had just recalled an important thought: "Oh, I ran into the Easter Bunny a few days back and he told me to give you this," and he

handed me a dime. That's it. That's all I have.

Much genealogical information about the Clarke side of the family can be found at <https://meath-hill.tripod.com/>. I am descended from Francis (Frank) Clarke, 1837-1909. Note especially the sad little entries for Jane Clarke and Joseph Patrick Clarke.

*John*

Being 16 months younger than you, I have a similar story. But my memory is a little more cloudy. I have a vague memory of my father (your uncle) pulling me in a wagon or sled from our home on 13th Street to visit our grandfather on 43rd Street. But since I was three when he died I have no specific memory of him.



# What were your grandparents like?



On my maternal side, grandfather Michael Fallon passed in April 1944 before I was six months old. Grandmother Mary Fallon (I think) had already passed away at that point. I thus have no memory of either.

On the paternal side, grandmother Mary Jane (Holran) Clarke passed away in 1911, after which Grandfather James Madden Clarke married Mary Ann Holran, Mary Jane's cousin. Mary Ann passed away in 1942 before I was born. Grandpa James survived to 1948 and is the only grandparent I remember. The most vivid memory I have is sitting on his lap at our house at 473 43rd Street. Grandpa would say, as if just remembering something startling: "Oh, I ran into the Easter Bunny yesterday and he gave me this to give to you," and he presented me a shiny dime. Naturally, I was thrilled that the Easter Bunny was thinking of me, and suitably impressed that EB was a friend of my

grandpa's.

That's it. I can't even tell you what he looked like, but I bet a lot of money he looked like all the rest of the Clarke men.



# Did you have a special hiding place as a child?



I'm sure I didn't think of it in those terms at the time, and it certainly didn't do much 'hiding', but the basement of 441 43rd street constituted my lair during my growing-up years. It was poorly-lit and dusty — which probably had an operational connection — but it was filled with intriguing things. During that time when Jerry was at Brooklyn Polytechnic University, he was constantly building, generally from scrap, electronic gear of one sort or another. Naturally, there was a turntable, amplifier, and speakers, so it became the perfect place to indulge my new-found love of classical music, and since I was the only person in the family with that affliction, it was natural for everyone else to leave me to it.

In an earlier time when the house had a coal-fired furnace, that was located in the dusty, poorly-lit basement, with the coal bin filled through a hatch from the street, but in my day, the system

had been converted to gas-fired hot-water heat dispersed upward to cast-iron radiators in all rooms of the house above. In winter, the only heat in the basement emanated from the furnace itself, which barely sufficed to make the area tolerably warm. The unlit portions of the basement served as storage for this and that, most of which never interested me enough to investigate.

# What stories have you been told about yourself as a baby?



**T**he only story I can recall hearing about my early life involved me breaking my arm (I don't know which one). Apparently I leaped Superman-fashion from a dresser to a nearby bed and broke the arm on impact. I can't recall any high pieces of furniture in our house, so I have always assumed it was a jump from a chest-of-drawers or something similar.

Later in life, I was hit by a car — this wasn't a story told to me, I remember it — when I dashed out from between two parked cars directly into the path of an oncoming vehicle. It bounced me, I was told, into the air and several yards away, and I wound up taking a trip to the local ER to patch up the scrapes, but I didn't break any bones.

*Geri*

Wow! You're some tough monkey!

# Did you ever move as a child? What was that experience like?



I did. I was six.

For the first six years of my life, I lived at 473 43rd street, just steps away from the entrance to Sunset Park. Sometime in the Spring of 1950 (I think), we moved from 473, a brick two-storey, to 441, a 3 storey brownstone about halfway down the street.

The one memory I have of that was that the move happened while I was at school, St. Michael's at 4th avenue and 43rd street. When school let out, I walked home... to 473, and discovered that my whole family was GONE! I had been abandoned! I was homeless and destitute. And upset. Did I mention that I was upset?

There were tears galore until someone, perhaps May Stevenson, our neighbor, took pity on me and walked me back down 43rd street to my new home.



# How did you get to school as a child?



Commuting to grade school was easy: I just walked down 43rd street to St.Michael's. Getting to high school involved a bus ride. St. Augustine Diocesan High School was at 62 Park Place in Brooklyn, which is between 5th avenue and 6th avenue, so the 5th avenue bus would take me almost directly there. I usually caught the bus at the corner of 44th street and 5th avenue, and it was a 30 minute ride (if I recall correctly) to get to Park Place at 5th avenue. St.Augustine was one of those schools that you had to qualify for, so there were actually none of my classmates that rode that route. They came from all over Brooklyn and Queens.

There was a Catholic girls' high school, St.Savior Academy at 7th street and 8th avenue, and two girls who attended there usually rode the 5th avenue bus with me, Sally Tyszka and Denise Henik, both, obviously, from my neighborhood, although, being Polish, their church was Our Lady of Czestochowa on 25th street.

After high school, I spent a year (a calamitous year) at Manhattan College, 242nd street in Riverdale in upper Manhattan. Getting to Manhattan College was a chore, 90 minutes on the subway each way: 4th avenue local from the 45th street station to the 36th street station where I could change to the Sea Beach express that would take me to the Times Square station where I would connect to the 242nd street local, and the reverse trip after class. Modern changes to the subway routes (modern = since 1962) would allow me to shave (maybe) 15 minutes off that time, but it would still take over an hour. The fare in those days, by the way, was 15 cents for admission to the system, and you could ride all day — maybe all week — on one fare until you exited the system. Riding the subway today is very much more expensive than that. (Wayne says “\$2.75”.)

After Manhattan, I attended Pace College at 41 Park Place, Manhattan, at the foot of the Brooklyn Bridge and just yards away from City Hall. I generally just took the 4th avenue local all the way to the City Hall station and back home.

I was a student there on November 9th, 1965. That day, I had two things I didn't really want: a developing cold and a Biology Lab final exam. When we started the Lab final the instructor told us that as soon as we were finished we could leave, and as soon as I

was finished, I did. I recall swapping material at my locker in the basement, then heading straight for the subway. I felt terrible. My head was pounding and my nose was stuffy and I was developing a fever and all the other symptoms. I caught a 4th Avenue Local headed into Brooklyn, and got to the 45th Street station very close to 5:15.

I have always suspected that the train I was on might not have made it to 53rd Street, the next stop. The Great Northeast Power Blackout struck New York City — struck the whole Northeast, actually — at exactly 5:15pm, plunging all the affected areas into darkness until power was restored the following morning. Oddly, the section of Brooklyn that I called home was served, in an electrical sense, by a small independent generating company on Staten Island, probably under contract to Con Ed, and they never got hit by the blackout. Consequently, I had power all night long if I had wanted or needed it. All the TV and radio stations, however, were off the air all night.

My mother and her second husband, Eddie, were on a cruise to Bermuda at the time and I was left to my own devices. When I arrived home, I made something simple and small to eat for dinner and turned on the TV to catch the news. There was nothing but snow on the TV and none of the radio stations were broadcasting either. For some reason I didn't find this odd. It was just another reason not to stay up. I had a quick bite to eat

and went upstairs to bed, fell asleep, and awoke the next morning to a perfectly normal world.

*Ken*

Just fabulous Uncle!

In my mind's eye, I can still see your Sunset Park home, that wonderful backyard where we would eat our buffet feast for whatever gathering we were there for. I can see your neighbor's home with the gigantic Notary Public decal on the glass door, and not knowing what it was. And of course, walking up to Sunset Park with cousins.

When I worked in Bush Terminal as a quality control inspector at a paper laminating plant right after college (circa 1980), I would often walk up 43rd St to see your old neighborhood. A cool blast from the past!

# What is one of your earliest childhood memories?



We lived at 473 43rd street in Brooklyn, the first 2-family house down from 5th avenue and Sunset Park. There was an apartment building on the corner, and a sort-of-garage between us and that. The Italian man who owned the apartment building ('Fazio' I think his name was) used that sort-of-garage as a workspace for making wine, but I actually have an earlier memory than that.

Across the street from 473 was the back wall of the Park Theater, our local movie house, whose entrance was on 5th avenue close to 44th street. On that back wall was a huge neon sign that cycled P-A-R-K-PARK-P-A-R-K-PARK. On warm nights, we would all sit on the front steps enjoying the air, and I can recall my father teaching me my first word that I could recognize, read, and spell:

'park'.

My father taught me to read before I went into first grade in 1949, and that was both a blessing and a curse. The nuns who taught at St. Michael's School had us practice our reading by standing, each in turn, and reading aloud from a book while the rest followed along silently. Because I was by then a much more practised reader, it was easy for me to get far ahead of where everyone else was. When Sister Miriam finally called on me to stand and read, I began reading.

"Stop. From where are you reading?"

"Page 47."

"Well, we're all on page 43. Why don't you read from page 43..."

From my earliest years, I have always loved reading. It was the nicest thing my father could ever have done for me.

*Geri*

What a sweet memory, thanks for sharing 🙏

*Ann*

I love reading these answers. ❤️

# Who had the most positive influence on you as a child?



**M**y brother Jerry was closest to me in age, and I think he probably counts as the most significant of my childhood influencers because of that. Besides teaching me how to play chess and introducing me to classical music, Jerry also provided me with adventures that still to this day are fresh in my mind and that still engender a little thrill at experiencing those then-new things.

Jerry was 8+ years older than me. About the time I entered fifth grade (1953), Jerry was starting at Brooklyn Polytechnic University. Shortly after that, he began sending me on errands to the Chambers Street area in lower Manhattan. At the time, the area was a rabbit warren of all manner of shops including electronics boutiques. When Jerry needed a vacuum tube (look it

up) he would hand me a shopping list and a pile of cash and send me out to hunt and gather. Such trips invariably started with buying two subway tokens (15 cents each) at the 45th Street station, and taking the Fourth Avenue local to the City Hall or Chambers Street station, then working my way up and down the shopping streets. One of the suppliers, I recall, was located on an upper floor serviced by an elevator. In those days and in those places, elevators were not the modern sterile automated boxes we deal with today. They were often open cages. Slide open the outer door, slide open the inner door, close the outer door, close the inner door, operate the handle: push to make the elevator go up, pull to make it go down. Since the elevators were open cages, the operator got to see the floor numbers swoosh by, and it was the operator's task to stop the elevator at the right spot so that the inner door could be opened, then the outer door, then close the inner door and close the outer door. Only with both doors securely closed could the elevator be summoned remotely from another floor.

The bits and pieces I brought home from those expeditions became a crude stereo system Jerry kept in the basement, and I would often go down there, put a record on the turntable, and listen to enthralling music: Rimsky-Korsakov, Rossini, Dvorak, and others.



Around 1964, building commenced on what was to become the World Trade Center. All of the buildings in the Chambers Street area were condemned, leveled, and the ground prepared for WTC. Only memories remain of what went before, and now only memories remain of the WTC.

The other great influencer was my sister Audrey. My father often went out in the evenings to sell insurance for the Brooklyn Tavern Owners Association, and my mother usually accompanied him as note-taker and record-keeper. That meant that I was left at home with Audrey who was, early on, a student at Hunter College, and later employed by AT&T as (I think) an engineer. Both of us were addicted to 'chocolate frosties', milk shakes as thick as old mud, from DeBarrow's ice cream parlor on 4th Avenue near the subway station, and if I finished my homework early enough, Audrey would usually fund a frostie-run. We had an aluminum pitcher that held (perhaps) 3 or 4 pints, and my job, while Audrey stayed home, was to take the pitcher down to DeBarrow's and have it filled with chocolaty goodness that I could bring home and share with her. The test of a good frostie is that a spoon will stand up straight in it. Ah, Heaven!

I also fondly recall Audrey taking me to Lewisohn Stadium in the Bronx for a concert of Gershwin music featuring 'Rhapsody in Blue' and 'An American In Paris'. Like the ancient buildings of Chambers Street, Lewisohn Stadium no longer exists, either.



# Did you have any serious accidents as a child?



**R**emarkably few!

I'm told that at (maybe) age 4 or 5, I broke my arm — by jumping from the dresser onto my bed. I don't recall the incident and I have to take the word of others that it happened. I don't even know which arm.

I was struck by a car when I ran out from between two other cars on 43rd street at age 8 or 9. It popped me some distance down the road until I came to rest on the pavement, but I don't think I actually broke anything. I wish I were still that resilient. (Don't we all?)

*Margaret*

Uncle Frank, Thank you for sharing your story. Hugs, Margaret



# What was your favorite candy as a child?



The candy treats that were available in my youth are, surprisingly, mostly still around: Milky Way, Snickers, Mary Janes, Bit-O-Honey, Three Musketeers. Of these, my favorite was one called 'Forever Yours'. That one, as luck would have it, disappeared in the 80s, but has now reappeared with a different name.

What used to be 'Forever Yours' is now marketed as 'Milky Way Midnight', possibly because its architecture is superficially very similar to Milky Way. The milk chocolate outer covering of a MW is dark chocolate on a FY/MWM. The chocolate nougat interior of a MW is vanilla nougat in a FY/MWM, and the gooey caramel layer from the MW is missing. To my mind, FY/MWM beats MW coming and going, yet it's still remarkably difficult to find this tasty treat.

That's probably a good thing. I really don't need more calories.

*Geri*

Amen!

# Have you ever written a poem or a story, and if so, do you still have it?



The first 'story' I wrote is long gone. It was done in pencil in one of those notebooks with the black-and-white marbelized covers. I can't recall much detail beyond that it involved a submarine and a floating island and was heavy on the dialog. My cousin, Mary Susan, read the first few dozen pages and said she liked what she had read. It may simply have been that she thought "For a 12-year-old, this isn't half bad..."

I didn't get seriously down to writing until I began working for IBM and got transferred into 'programming'. Shortly after that happened, we got computer terminals and with them the ability to produce and print text. It wasn't exactly 'word processing', but it was close. IBM produced its manuals and other documentation using a package known as 'Script/VS' that was a

rudimentary mark-up language written by IBM. If you began a line with ".h1", the text on that line became a header-1, basically a headline; ".p" started a new paragraph; &c. Script/VS spawned a more robust language called "Generalized Markup Language" or GML. GML preceeds by a few years a clone called HTML. If you've ever written a GML document, HTML is a cinch. They are like fraternal twins.

I used IBM's computers and printers to bang out lots of letters-to-the-editor, mostly to the Danbury News-Times and the White Plains Reporter-Dispatch because such things are very transitory: they don't need to be kept for posterity, and in all but a few instances, I didn't.

When I began my second stint with IBM in 1984, I had a 3270PC, a device that looked like a green-screen terminal but which also functioned as a personal computer. Along with a gigantic 10Mb hard drive, it had a slot for a 3-1/2" floppy disc. That meant that I could write onto a storage device that I could remove and take with me. In my off-hours, I pumped text onto a series of floppy discs.

I began and then abandoned storyline after storyline, looking for something that I could develop far enough that it began to look like 'a book'. One in particular, whose working title was "The Gate of Neverwhen", had potential but just wouldn't provide me



a way to bring it to a conclusion. A year or so after getting it 95% complete, I abandoned that, too (around 1992), and then I abandoned IBM.

Along came the Clinton years, followed by the equally disappointing Bush years as the nature of American politics degraded to the point that the only surprise each morning was that no one had been assassinated. I started writing a story about a gruesome school shooting in Texas, followed by the collapse of Congressional collegiality, followed by the inevitable and easily-predictable second war between the states. In 2011, I self-published it as "Tipping Point". It has enjoyed minor success since, producing a small but steady stream of royalty checks.

With "Tipping Point" launched and gone, and with nothing to do since being laid-off by Nielsen Media Research during their drive to make the company 'All Indian All The Time', I pulled that long-abandoned story off the shelf and restarted working on it. In two weeks, after trying and rejecting a half-dozen attempts to write the last chapter, I found the words that had been eluding me for twenty years. Satisfied, I wrapped a metaphorical ribbon around it and put it away, not intending to do anything with it. "Tipping Point" had cost me \$2,000 to get it into ink-on-paper and I wasn't interested in doing that again. But...

Before long, the abandoned book on the shelf began whispering: "You're not going to leave the story there, are you?" I began writing a sequel, and in about 4 months, finished it. Book one took me 23 years; book two, four months. I felt good. I now had two books with metaphorical ribbons wrapped around them! But...

Book two would occasionally call to me: "You do realize this story isn't finished, don't you?" it would chide. Reluctantly, I set to work on book three. 220-some-odd pages later, it joined its sisters on the shelf. Things were quiet for quite a long time until... "Nooooo!" they wailed, "not done! Not done!"

So there is a fourth book, and I had intended to leave it as a legacy to my children to either publish or not as they saw fit, but there is a channel called "Kindle Direct Publishing", and since it's effectively free to publish there, that's what I did. The series is called "The Farside Chronicles" and can be found by searching Amazon. I'm quite pleased with it.

# Are you still friends with any of your friends from high school? How have they changed since then?



From my actual high school? Yes, a few. One who was in my graduation year, Jack D'Angelo, actually worked with me at IBM in White Plains for a while at least until I moved from Accounting into Systems and he stayed behind doing debits and credits. We still exchange the occasional email. We both aspire to be writers. Jack is 'steady Eddie', largely unchanged (except for a few extra pounds, fewer hairs, and a few extra decades) from what he was in '61.

Another from my class/year is Courtenay Ettricks who, as a high schooler, was one of our track stars. We were FaceBook friends until I dropped my FB account. Courtenay went from 'quiet as a mouse' in school to 'rabid conservative activist' now if such can

be deduced from his FB postings.

If we expand the universe to 'contemporaries who went to different high schools and/or graduated in different years', I get to include John Gunn who was with me all through grade school, Joe Mallozzi, and (of course) his wife Cathy and my wife Norene.

Joe and Cathy, because of her sister-close connection to Norene, have been our closest friends now for six decades. We see them frequently, and often do weekends together. In 2008, we four toured Paris and the Loire Valley, chronicled at <http://frankclarke.dx.am/2008FR/index.html>.

Then there is Jack McFarland who attended St. Augustine but a year behind me. Jack was my best man and we stay in touch at Christmas... only. Jack and his wife Ann moved to St.Mary's, KS after Jack retired. St.Mary's is headquarters for the Society of Saint Pius X (SSPX or FSSPX), a sect of Catholicism that rejects most of the reforms of Vatican II.

I think all of us have gotten heavier, wiser, and richer in the years since.

# Did you have a job while you were in high school?



**Y**es, I did. I worked as a clerk at the Brooklyn Public Library branch at 51st street at 4th avenue. In the 60+ years since, this location was closed and sold and is now (according to Google Street View) a vacant lot. That tells me the spot was likely a library until very recently, since vacant lots in Brooklyn don't stay vacant for very long, especially lots that are within 2 blocks of a subway station (53rd street).

My job at the library involved taking returned books, sorting them by their catalog number, putting them back on the shelves in the proper place, and (very rarely) working the front desk where borrowers checked books out. I don't recall what the job paid, but it was certainly minimum wage or close to it (at the time, \$1.00/hr). Also working there were John Simpson and Ellen Finn who, much later, married.

The head librarian spot then was shared between two people, Edward Jervis and Dorothy somebody, and they were both Black which did not seem to me to be odd (which, now that I think about it, is itself odd). Both held degrees in Library Science. Jervis was, in retrospect, gay, but this became apparent only long after I had moved on to other things. Dorothy lived on Carroll Street in a section of Brooklyn called Park Slope because it was situated between Prospect Park and the bay and sloped, as you have probably guessed, downward toward the water. Park Slope was relatively posh compared to the Sunset Park area where I lived, granite-faced two- and three-storey residential buildings along tree-lined streets.

While I was working at the library, Dorothy married and the entire library staff were invited to the reception at her/their house on Carroll Street. It was the first time I experienced "being an ethnic minority" as one of the very few Whites in a sea of Black faces. Until that time, my environment was almost exclusively populated by caucasians save for the one Black student in my class, Courtenay Ettricks. It gave me a new perspective on the wider world. The party itself was a blast, and a good time was had by all.

*Margaret*

Uncle Frank, Thank you for sharing this. Margaret

## Memories | Frank Clarke

*Jack*

Frank,

Another A+ for composition and clarity in sticking to the subject and interesting side observations. Jack





# What was the neighborhood you grew up in like?



I grew up in the Sunset Park section of Brooklyn at 441 43rd street, just downslope from the 5th avenue entrance to Sunset Park. The area is marked primarily by one- or two-family 3-storey brownstone houses. In the 40s and 50s when I was growing up there, the denizens were mostly Irish and Italian, with a smattering of other ethnicities. Below 4th avenue, the ethnic make-up gradually changed to Hispanic.

Just down the street at 4th avenue, was St.Michael's elementary school, and St.Michael's church (at 42nd street). There had been a high school attached to the elementary school, but it closed the year I graduated from 8th grade. A replacement high school, Xaverian, was built on Shore Road at 71st street. St.Michael's, by the way, has been described as 'the finest example of Byzantine

architecture in 'The New World'. Its steeple is one of the tallest structures in Brooklyn. See <http://frankclarke.dx.am/2001FR/html/StMike.html>.

Looking downslope, the Upper Bay was visible in the distance. Upslope was the park. The avenues, 4th and 5th, were lined with apartments over storefronts. A bus line ran along 5th avenue, and the subway on 4th avenue, with the nearest stop being at 45th street. An elevated highway ran along 3rd avenue with exits (but not entrances) onto 38th and 39th streets. Because of the huge amount of shade thrown by the overhead highway, 3rd avenue at street level always seemed to me to be a dingy place. Because the highway was so noisy, any residential buildings along 3rd avenue were rarely over two storeys — who wants to listen to cars whizzing by when you're trying to sleep? There were, naturally, commercial buildings in that area, most notably the Bush Terminal complex, lofts dedicated to manufacturing and ancillary processing. There was a bakery in the Bush Terminal and a coffee roasting operation, and the aromas that drifted upslope from them are still fresh in my mind.

Sunset Park was our main play-area. It's quite substantial for a neighborhood park, stretching from 5th avenue to 7th avenue and from 41st street to 44th street — 1500ft by 750ft, 1,125,000 square feet, almost 26 acres. At 7th avenue there was a pool complex consisting of a main pool (as wide as an olympic pool is

long) and a semi-circular diving pool, 16ft deep with a diving platform. That diving pool no longer exists, apparently filled-in. At the other end, but outside the fenced area and therefore 'free', was a kiddie pool, shallow and with sprinklers. That, too, no longer exists, having been turned into a garden area. Throughout the park were walking paths that also served as bicycle paths. Plenty of calories were burned in that park.

The neighborhood was 'factioned', with gangs that always seemed to be at war with the gang from the next street over or the gang below the next avenue, over what issue I can no longer even imagine (if I could then). I once observed that from the age of nine, I never left the house without a knife in my pocket, and I wasn't the only one.

Getting out of Brooklyn was accomplished by several means. The subway could take one to Manhattan, The Bronx, or Queens. The Staten Island ferry serviced Richmond (Staten Island). If you were driving a car, the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel connected to Manhattan, as did the Brooklyn Bridge, the Manhattan Bridge, and the Williamsburg Bridge. From there, the Lincoln Tunnel took you to New Jersey for trips west, and the George Washington Bridge for trips north on the far side of the river. Trips north on the east side of the river were accomplished via the Westside Highway or the Eastside Highway to the Saw Mill River Parkway that connected to the Taconic State Parkway at

Hawthorne Circle (that isn't there any longer, having been turned into a superhighway interchange). For trips south, the Staten Island ferry put you in position to connect to the Goethals Bridge or the Outerbridge Crossing into New Jersey until 1964 when the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge opened and the ferry went out of business.

For lots more, see <https://dispatchesfromheck.blogspot.com/2017/02/growing-up-in-brooklyn.html>.

# Did you have a car in high school?



During my years in high school, 1957-1961, I lived in Brooklyn. All of New York City's boroughs have decent mass transit systems, so there was little practical need for personal vehicles. My father had one, but that was largely due to the fact that he could write much of it off for income tax purposes because he used it in his work as an insurance salesman for the Brooklyn Tavern Owners Association. Then, too, he always got a good deal from his brother-in-law Johnny Fanelli's Shenandoah (PA) Packard dealership when it came time to trade in the old one for a new one.

When I needed to go somewhere, such trips were almost always doable via subway, bus, ferry, or taxi. 'Prom night' called for a rented limousine with the cost split among several couples. Almost no one had their own car. In 1958, Aunt Marjorie from El Paso TX invited my mother and me to come visit. We made the

3-day trip via bus from the Port Authority Terminal in Manhattan — and return — an experience I have still been unable to forget no matter how hard I try.

When Norene started going to Kings County Hospital Center School of Nursing, her mother gave her her old 1953 Ford sedan (so that she wouldn't be forced to ride city buses late at night) and replaced it with a 1963 Ford Galaxie. Since my girlfriend had a car, I (kind of) had a car. When my college fraternity needed to scout Catskills resorts as venues for its annual 'Winter Weekend' fundraiser, Norene became the house's more-or-less-official chauffeur. When we started looking for honeymoon places, Joe Watters and girlfriend Mary went along for the ride since they needed to do some scouting, too.

# Who did you date while in high school?



'Dating' is a rather broad category, and I suspect it has several incompatible definitions.

There were plenty of occasions where I would say "There's a great movie playing at the theater. Want to go?" and often the expectation was that she would pay her own way because 'jobs' in those days didn't pay very well, and most teens subsisted on allowances. The minimum wage when I was in high school was \$1.15, and after-school jobs might only provide 8 or 10 hours of work, so less than \$12 per week. In fact, I had a job at the Brooklyn Public Library that kept me busy for more than that, 16 or more hours at (I think) \$1.25 that brought in about \$40 (before taxes) every 2 weeks — some of which became a 'contribution' to the household expenses — so I could treat a date to a movie and a milkshake, but not much more. I exclude from this all those 'movie and a milkshake' dates.

I dated Alina Novosielska for a short while, and we shared the occasional dinner at a local Chinese restaurant, subway rides to Coney Island to bask in the sun and get sand in our bathing suits, hot dogs or hamburgers at Nathan's, and side-by-side bicycle rides here, there, and everywhere.

I dated Leila Holmberg, a Finnish blonde not from my regular neighborhood, and she was my Prom date. We split up just before I headed off to college. I cannot tell you at this point how it happened that I first met Leila. It's possible that she also worked at BPL, but I don't remember her there. Our connection was never very deep, and when I started seriously saving money for looming college expenses, she lost interest in me.

It wasn't until long after high school that I met Norene, dated her, and finally got serious about relationships.



# Who did you go to prom with?



I went to Senior Prom in '61 with Leila Holmberg, but I don't recall whether it was St. Augustine's Senior Prom or Bay Ridge High School's Senior Prom. I doubt I attended both. That was an expensive proposition. That's why, in those days, one's prom date was almost always a classmate. Of course, St. A's was 'all boys' and Bay Ridge was 'all girls', so neither had classmates of an appropriate gender to be one's prom date.

When Norene graduated from Kings County Hospital Center School of Nursing, I escorted her as, by that time, we were solidly 'an item'.

Prom Night meant dinner and a dance at a fancy hotel, followed by night-clubbing in Manhattan and staying out until the wee hours and getting home by the dawn's early light. Since 'proms' were usually scheduled for Saturday, it would be Sunday before

we all got home, so the wrap-up of the night's festivities often included a dawn church service. The girls from KCHCSN, many of them Catholic, migrated toward St. Patrick's Cathedral to fulfill their Sunday obligation, and therein lies a tale:

As the teenage revelers occupied the pews for a very solemn (in those days) Latin Mass, some could not quite get into the spirit of the event and whispered this and that among themselves. Irene Galvin — whose family lived just up 43rd street from the Clarkes — turned on them, and in her most serious whisper snapped "I -beg- your pardon! People are trying to sleep!"

They didn't throw us all out, but I can't imagine why not.

*Ken*

That was hysterical.

# Who was one of your favorite high school teachers? What made them great?



**M**y high school was St. Augustine Diocesan High School, a Catholic HS for boys. Most of our teachers were Christian Brothers, FSC, 'Fratres Scholarum Christianum', with a smattering of lay teachers. The curriculum was what you would expect from such a school, with Catholic doctrine seeping into nearly everything.

Two teachers stand out in my memories: Brother Robert and Brother Jerome.

Brother Robert taught, among other subjects, Religion in my freshman year, which was a survey of The Old Testament. Now, the fundamental difference between Catholics and Protestants in

this respect is that Catholics are not generally urged to acquaint themselves with the Bible (either testament). As a result, we grow up with just a smattering of knowledge about it, mostly focused on the more well known tidbits: the birth of Jesus, the Magi, Baptism by John in the Jordan, Crucifixion, Resurrection, &c., along with Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and the Flood, Moses and the 10 Commandments, Samson and Delilah, Abraham, and a few others. Beyond that is a vast wasteland of ignorance.

The first lesson in Brother Robert's classroom was that the Bible teaches morality, not science, and that its origin is in a long-running oral tradition before any of it was committed to parchment. That oral tradition was geared to the needs of nomadic shepherds who wouldn't have understood cosmology, physics, chemistry, or mathematics. Thus the world was created in six days, with each day having its own work schedule, a concept that can be easily understood by anyone without respect to their level of education.

One of the most enduring lessons, one I still recall, was "Belshazzar's Feast". You certainly know it from the image of the finger of God writing a message on the wall (from which we get the modern 'handwriting on the wall' metaphor). Daniel is called in because none of the court magicians can interpret the Hebrew characters. Daniel looks and understands. The literal

text of the message is "Mene, mene, tekkel, upharsim" which is gibberish to almost everybody because Hebrew doesn't have vowels. That means you have to be able to determine (usually from context) which of several meanings some stack of consonants has.

'Mene' is an old Jewish coin. Menes were often used for counting games and are each half a 'tekkel' (shekel) which is both a coin and a measure of weight. 'Upharsim' has several meanings, some of which relate to Persia, others to apportionment. Because of all the confusion, only Daniel is able to suss out a meaning: '(mene mene) Your days are numbered (tekkel) You have been weighed in the balance and found wanting (upharsim) Your Kingdom will be divided and given to the Medes and the Persians'.

The lesson: reading the Bible (either testament) without a knowledge of the culture that produced it can be a very frustrating experience.

Brother Jerome taught algebra, geometry, trigonometry, and calculus. Our curriculum started with geometry and progressed to algebra and trig. Our geometric education started with a quick survey tour through Euclid, after which everything was Cartesian — which gave us a taste of algebra-to-come. In Cartesian geometry, shapes are described as occupying space in x-y

coordinates. A 'triangle' has three vertices each with their own x-y values, and you can learn everything you need to know about this triangle from those three data.

He would often pounce on a student who had just made a factual statement and ask the class whether that statement was true 'sometimes, always, or never?'. I still rely on that sort of analysis in everyday life. Some lessons never leave you.

# What is one of your favorite memories of your mother?



While my father was the family disciplinarian, my mother was often my defender when I got into situations I shouldn't have been in. As the 'baby of the family', I mostly had Mom to myself while living at home, and, if what my sisters-in-law said was true, I probably got away with murder. That's why I needed a defender.

Many of my most vivid memories of her seem to center around how much she loved her children and (especially) grandchildren. My siblings produced their own families and Mom never turned down an opportunity to visit with them and coddle her grandkids. When Norene delivered identical twin daughters, Mom couldn't have been happier.

In the late-70s, we moved her up to Brookfield CT to be nearer to us, and this provided her near-constant access to Ann, Siobhan, and Jessica. She became a frequent dinner guest at 1 Allen Road, and therein lies another story... another memory. Mom lived at the local church-associated Lutheran Seniors' Home, but regularly joined us for dinner. Dinner was often accompanied by 'something to drink', and Mom's favorite tippie was the Brandy Alexander — made with vanilla ice cream in a blender. They slide down so easily that it's not difficult to overdo it. In fact, it's a piece of cake to overdo it. Norene's favorite 'Mom story', not surprisingly, concerns the time the pastor at her church called to ask if Mom had had anything to drink the night before... and to caution us about letting her get too much 'in her cups'.

Mom had an extraordinarily fine handwriting. It was almost calligraphic in its smoothness and regularity. When she kept the records for Dad's second job, selling insurance for the Brooklyn Tavern Owners' Association, they looked like something out of the 19th century. This was the direct result of attending Catholic school as a child where the nuns stressed the importance of 'a good hand', their description of pleasant handwriting. I can recall her sitting at the kitchen table with a ball point pen and a pad and watching her scribe loops like a Slinky stretching across the page as regular as if a machine had done it. Her handwriting looked the way it did because of muscle memory.



Mom loved to travel. Her nickname among all the aunts and uncles was “Mrs. Keep-The-Wheels-Rollin’ Clarke”. Our summer road trips were a particular joy. AAA always charted our route ahead of our departure, and the customized AAA Trip-Tik always included, near the back, a page or several ruled as a bookkeeping journal on which the trip expenses could be recorded, and it was Mom’s job to keep track of how much was being spent on gas, food, lodging, and entertainment on the road for the two weeks away from home — which she did in that same meticulous, delicate script.

If I close my eyes, I can still see it.

*Margaret*

Thank you for sharing this. Grandma Clarke never missed a Birthday. It always makes me smile. With all her Grandchildren, we always felt so special and loved.

*Cathy*

Wonderful memories Frank. I could see her as you wrote. Thank you for sharing. Cathy

*Chris*

In 1981, Sue and I were transferred from San Jose to Ft. Bragg NC and we stopped to visit Frank and Norene in CT. We took grandma to a restaurant and Norene warned us to not let her drink booze. I asked grandma what she wanted to eat and she said, “ let’s start with a Manhattan and have a bowl of vanilla for dessert.” Chris Clarke

# What are your favorite possessions? Why?



I don't have very many 'things' that I value. As the saying goes: "The best things in life aren't things." There have been (and are) a few material possessions that I cherished for the time they were mine or ours. Norene's Cocker Spaniel, Riqui, was a joy for the dozen years we had her. I always loved our 1968 Oldsmobile Cutlass S, but we gave that up when 'traveling' necessitated putting twin bassinets in the back seat — there wasn't much 'back seat' in the Olds.

Of the few things I still retain, they are all objects that speak to my heart. Norene gifted me with a chess board and a set of (large) Staunton-pattern pieces that I still hold on to with a death-grip. I don't get much chance to play chess these days, but when I do, I use that. Just recently, my nephew John ('Long Island John Clarke' to differentiate him from the thousands of other John Clarkes) saw that the box for the pieces was falling

apart after 50+ years of service, and built a wooden coffret to replace it.

Many years ago when Kylen was a tyke, we all, Norene, Jessica, Kylen, and me, found ourselves in a Tampa toy store at Christmastime. The store had this HUMONGOUS teddy bear. I rushed right up to it, gave it a giant hug, then turned and announced: "I never had a teddy bear when I was growing up." Jessica told us later that Kylen was in tears on their way home. "Grandpa never had a teddy bear!!" So, that Christmas, they gave me my own teddy bear. When I told this story to my colleagues at work, they all asked "What did you name it?" Not being well-versed in the lore of the bear, I was unaware that the recipient of a teddy bear is obligated to name it with a personally-significant moniker. Well, I had no idea what sort of name one would give a teddy bear, so I announced a contest at work: "Please help me name my bear." Peggy Thomas dug deep into my family history to generate the winning name: Hudson Nobber Clarke, who retains his place of honor on the bedroom dresser to this very day.

*Margaret*

Uncle Frank, Thank you for sharing this. Hugs!! Margaret

# What is one of the craziest things that's ever happened to you?



When Aramco started doing unfriendly things to its employees in late 1983 (an entire department, Foreign Service Employment, was wiped out in one smooth motion early one payday morning — 104 people — gone) I decided I needed to be ready with a spare job. I updated my resume and sent it out for bids.

One recruiter asked if I would allow him to send my resume to IBM for whom I had previously worked from 1967 to 1979. Shortly thereafter, I had an appointment for an interview at IBM's Clear Lake (TX) office, but when I got there, no one knew who I was or why I was there or who I was supposed to see. Confused, they had me re-do the standard 6-page IBM Application for Employment then rushed me through the

canonical four interviews. Two weeks later a letter from IBM said they had no openings that fit my qualifications. The date on the letter was the day after my interviews. The postmark was 10 days later. It appeared they held off mailing it so it would seem I had actually been considered. The only explanation I could conjure was that they agreed to the interview before seeing my physical IBM personnel jacket. Somewhere in my file it said “Never speak to this sonofabitch again.”

That summer we were in contact with Nick and Tricia Keller in Tampa making plans to visit them around Christmas. Nick asked how the job was going and I mentioned that I was looking for something new. He said he had heard IBM was looking for talent in Tampa. I recounted to him the story above and suggested that if IBM-Tampa were serious, they should pull my jacket from Corporate HQ in Armonk (NY) and review it before calling me. A week or so later as we were sitting down to dinner, the phone rang. Judy Manowitz, an IBM manager from Tampa, had in front of her what she said was ‘a perfectly ordinary IBM personnel jacket’ even to the notation that it was OK to re-hire me if the occasion arose. I flew to Tampa in September for an interview, met Judy and her staff, then flew home. Nothing. Until one evening in December, Monday the 3rd or Tuesday the 4th, Judy called to make an offer: Staff Programmer, \$43,000. I accepted immediately and resigned from Aramco the following day, giving

them the standard 2 weeks notice.

I had resigned from IBM in 1979 for 4 reasons:

I had been passed over for a promotion to Staff Programmer after delivering a flagship software application.

Installation of that software was being stonewalled and my management refused to intervene to get it fair treatment.

I had gotten an unfairly low-ball performance appraisal and a correspondingly tiny raise during a time when inflation was about 17% per annum.

I desperately wanted a transfer to Tampa, and that was refused, too.

When Judy hired me back into IBM, I achieved three of those in one bite. The application was finally installed after I left White Plains by someone else from the project after severe political pressure was exerted downward from the corporate level.

No one has ever been able to figure out what happened at IBM Clear Lake.





# What was life like in the 60s?



People are fond of pointing out that "If you remember the 60s, you weren't really there." The 60s were the zenith of the Hippie Era, characterized by 'flower people', heavy drug use, and a wide-spread rejection among young people of traditional cultural norms. This was the beginning of the "sex, drugs, and rock & roll" lifestyle, culminating at Woodstock in 1969. If you're going to San Francisco, be sure to wear some flowers in your hair...

My "life in the 60s" was markedly different and came with much different memories: starting college at 17, getting kicked out of college at 18, Pace College, the Goldwater campaign, finding love, starting with IBM, and getting married.

The earliest such memory dates from December 16th, 1960. Two airliners collided over Staten Island. One plunged straight down;

the other, badly damaged, continued flying until it crashed in Brooklyn at the intersection of Sterling Place at 6th Avenue, one block from my classroom at St. Augustine DHS. From the two aircraft, there was one survivor, a young boy who succumbed to his injuries a few days later.

There was also the occasional adventure, such as the time John Gunn, Artie Bergen, and I did a 50-mile hike starting at the George Washington Bridge, and ending at the Bear Mountain Inn. For more on this and other related topics, see <https://dispatchesfromheck.blogspot.com/2017/02/growing-up-in-brooklyn.html>.

Thus, I actually do remember the 60s, so I couldn't really have been there...

# Outside of class, what were you involved with in college?



At Manhattan (1962), I met David Brill. Dave had a wealthy aunt (or something) that picked up a Nikon F — at the time, the best 35mm single lens reflex camera available, and quite ‘pricey’ — while she was in Japan, and brought it home for him\*\*\*. Dave was very into photography and that opened my eyes to the ‘art’ involved in good photographs. I shortly thereafter acquired my own 35mm camera and began collecting images. Dave was also (along with our classmate John Celenza) into foreign films, especially ‘art films’ where the storyline either was not intuitively obvious or there were several layers of storyline to be parsed out of the experience, and these films were often in a foreign language and subtitled. This is where I learned to play ‘Marienbad’, a game I first encountered in the movie “Last Year At Marienbad” (more about this later).

Later, while at Pace College, I actually worked in a camera store near the college, a job that provided me with badly-needed spending money. This was back in the days of flash bulbs, single use high-intensity light bombs, plastic coated (so they wouldn't shatter) bulbs stuffed with magnesium fluff that, when sparked by a jolt of electricity, would turn night into day. They were expensive and wasteful, but if you couldn't afford a nice Bell\_&\_Howell strobe, they were better than nothing.

At Pace, I was a member of the chess club and actually participated in a few tournaments, although I never got so 'into it' that I bothered to get myself a USCF rating. I worked on the yearbook, primarily as a photographer, and got to attend many school sporting events, various social events, and some quite fancy receptions, all for the purpose of documenting them on film.

I started to get involved in politics at Pace, and initially thought myself a Republican, only later realizing the huge disconnect between my political philosophy and theirs.

Around that time, The American Museum of Natural History started re-doing some of their exhibits. One was a moonlit scene of a pack of wolves bounding through the snow, obviously in pursuit of a deer or similar animal. The scene was dimly lit in blue to simulate moonlight, and behind glass. The glass made

use of a flash a waste of time since the reflected bloom would have killed the picture. The only way to get the shot was with a long exposure, and I must have gone through several rolls of film trying to catch a decent replica of the display. I got my first tripod and my first light meter specifically for that challenge. Alas, when I finally \_\_did\_\_ get a frame I could show with some pride, it was a transparency (probably Agfachrome), and it turns out that transparency dyes do not do well in long-term storage. All the colors have since faded to the point that the image no longer looks as it did when new.

‘College’ was also the time when I met my soulmate and started thinking seriously about marriage and family. It seems odd to place that last, but it’s not something that happened specifically \_\_because\_\_ I went to college. It’s an experience shared by lots of people who never saw the inside of a college classroom.

\*\*\* When I mentioned this to Dave years later, he corrected me. He had saved money during high school by skimping or bypassing lunches, and used the proceeds to fund the Nikon. I don’t know where my initial impression came from.

===== Marienbad =====

In the movie “Last Year at Marienbad” (L’Année dernière à Marienbad — 1961) two of the actors play a game involving markers. The game — a variation of NIM — has come to be

known as 'Marienbad'.

The rules are quite simple. Four rows of markers containing 1, 3, 5, and 7 markers, typically toothpicks or matchsticks, form the initial layout. The players take turns removing as many markers as they wish, but from only one row at each turn. The player who picks up the last marker loses.

There is an intriguing bit of mathematics (that I won't get into here) involved in calculating the best next move, but most players play by instinct.

*Margaret*

Thank you for sharing your memories. Margaret

*Geri*

I remember you teaching me that game.

# Are you the same person you were as an adolescent, or very different?



I hope I'm a different person than I was as a teenager!

Quite honestly, as a youngster, I had no idea what I might do for the rest of my life or how that life might play out. This was largely true until after I got kicked out of college. It was the joint experience of having to work for a paycheck and facing being drafted for an all expenses paid vacation in Southeast Asia that provided the grain of sand in my oyster. After that, I started thinking about topics I had never thus far considered: things like 'family' and 'career'.

I'm even a far different person than I was as a young husband/father. Politically, from my earliest years I was a staunch Republican like my father. Today, I have little to no use for the two so-called 'major' parties, considering them both

utterly and irredeemably corrupt. Back then, I thought fighting the Cold War was God's Work, but now can see it was nothing but a slick way to funnel tax money to the military-industrial complex. I thought it was perfectly reasonable then, given a large number of examples among my co-workers, that I might work for a single company until retirement. It took a long time to disabuse me of that notion, and once gone, my work-life became very much more enjoyable — and profitable.

I was raised with the understanding that I would — that I damned well better — get a college education, and that training was so strong that I passed it along to my own children, possibly without an actual conscious thought. In that respect, I seem to be unchanged from my adolescent self, although I'm gradually moving toward believing that college is not all that it's cracked up to be.

I have always been — even from my pre-teen years — a writer, and that has not changed, either. The writing has gotten better, I think. At least, I hope the writing has gotten better. Some of my college profs would be so surprised...



# How did you celebrate your 21st birthday?



I'm sure this question was asked expecting tales of alcoholic excess, but that's not going to happen. At the time, I lived in New York, and the legal drinking age was 18. Any celebratory alcoholic excess would have happened three years earlier. Whether it actually happened or not is "lost in the mists of time". I do recall that Artie Bergen and I went out on New Year's Eve for a few libations, and got home somewhat later than expected. It was not uncommon for "the gang" to bring beer and Planter's peanuts over to my house on any Saturday to watch TV or to play cards.

The biggest thing to happen around my 18th birthday was 'registering for the draft'. The VietNam war was going strong, and lots of young bodies were needed to fuel that fire.

The voting age was 21, however, and so I became a voter in January of 1965, a few days after my 21st birthday and a few months after I was unable to vote for Barry Goldwater for President (November 1964). I thus always remember that Lyndon Baines Johnson won that election because it was a particularly painful moment. I was somewhat political then, and I ruefully recall one especially snarky member of the student Democratic Club at Pace College betting me that Goldwater wouldn't win even three states against Johnson. I won that bet because Goldwater did, in fact, win a whopping 6 states, 52 whole electoral votes. Republicans (and I was at the time one of them) were stunned by the scale of the catastrophe. It was the first campaign I recall and I recall that it was an unexpectedly dirty, bare-knuckled fistfight.

My girlfriend, Norene, watched the election returns with me that Tuesday night, and we were both disappointed.

# Do you have a favorite poem? What is it?



I don't have a favorite poem, but I have a favorite poet, and that's also the answer to the question "If you could have dinner with anyone, living or dead, who?": Dorothy Parker. I'm sure I would regret picking Mrs. Parker as a dinner partner because she would almost certainly crucify me for my pretentiousness... but it might be worth it even so.

Dorothy Parker put herself forth as a wild child and an iconoclast, but I suspect that at least some of that was façade, and perhaps 'much of it'.

\_\_Unfortunate Coincidence\_\_

By the time you swear you're his,

Shivering and sighing,

And he vows his passion is

Infinite, undying -

Lady, make a note of this:

One of you is lying.

Almost all of her poetry centered on forlorn love and the pain of loss, but some of it is, unexpectedly, hilariously funny. I refer any interested readers to "One Perfect Rose" or "Portrait Of The Artist" as examples. When she wasn't complaining about being thrown over by her latest boyfriend, she was examining the human psyche... 'autopsying' it, perhaps.

\_\_Fair Weather\_\_

This level reach of blue is not my sea;

Here are sweet waters, pretty in the sun,

Whose quiet ripples meet obediently

A marked and measured line, one after one.

This is no sea of mine. that humbly laves

Untroubled sands, spread glittering and warm.

I have a need of wilder, crueller waves;

They sicken of the calm, who knew the storm.

So let a love beat over me again,  
Loosing its million desperate breakers wide;  
Sudden and terrible to rise and wane;  
Roaring the heavens apart; a reckless tide  
That casts upon the heart, as it recedes,  
Splinters and spars and dripping, salty weeds.

But façade? Yes. When she wanted — maybe whether she wanted it or not — she could be so so conventional. For proof, I cite "Prayer For A New Mother" (which, please, DO look up and read), and "The Maidservant At The Inn" in the same vein, two beautiful Christmas-themed works.



# How do you like to spend a lazy day?



**T**his question originally brought a smile to my face. Now that I'm retired, every day is a 'lazy day'. But the question is probably “How do you like to spend a lazy day when they don't occur seven times a week?”

I love road trips. Until the Moo Goo Gai Panic hit, I didn't realize how much I love being on the road. At Christmas, we did 3 days going to Colorado and 3 days coming back, listening to an audiobook both ways. Even Norene enjoyed it, and we're both looking forward to doing something similar again.

I like to do games and puzzles on the computer as a way of keeping my mind actively in problem-solving mode. Hey, you never know... another contract might come along and I would like to be prepared if that should unexpectedly happen.

Just recently, my computer notified me that the version of the operating system I was running was soon to be out-of-warranty and I should upgrade for free. TANSTAAFL(\*\*), right? When the upgrade was complete, two pieces of software, MineSweeper and Solitaire, were MIA with no trace of either to be found among the ranks of executable software.

So... two of my favorite lazy day pursuits just went away, and I was bereft. It occurred to me that lots of software I had written over the years could themselves use a little spiffing up. Alas, all of that is mainframe software, and to work on it, one really needs access to a mainframe. So I asked around... to the group of old IBMers I'm still in contact with and to a few European IBMers and contractors: do any of you know of anyone who might provide cheap (or, better, free) access to an IBMish mainframe? Most just shrugged their shoulders, but one, Robert Prins from The Netherlands, suggested I contact Sam Golob, and therein lies a story (that I can't resist telling).

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In the early days of IBM's domination of the mainframe sector, the 60s and 70s, two user groups formed, SHARE and GUIDE. These were primarily pitched toward system programmers (called 'sysprogs'), the people who install hardware and software and keep the combination running. (Application programmers,



the people like me who write programs that groom data into forms that make sense to management, are generally not sent to SHARE or GUIDE meetings.) At one of these semi-annual get-togethers, a sysprog from Connecticut Bank and Trust (CBT) made a proposal (with the approval of his management): "if you have software or documentation that you think would be broadly useful, send it to me, I will collate it and redistribute it to all concerned". The effort came to be known as "the CBT Tape" because, in those days before the internet, the way you sent data from one site to another was by putting it on tape and mailing it via USPS. When that sysprog retired or died, Sam Golob stepped forward to take over the ongoing work of taking software in and shipping software out. Eventually, another company, flush with computing power, offered a sliver of its mainframe as the host for the CBT Tape project — which is no longer associated with the Connecticut Bank and Trust.

Sometime in the 90s, I gathered a few dozen of my most useful utility routines and packaged them as a submission to the CBT Tape project. That collection became 'File433', and it's still out there. Because I am a contributor to the project, when I asked the project's manager for access to that sliver of computer now dedicated to the CBT Tape, I got it — instantly. I now have mainframe access as if I were still employed by a regular company, and I can get to work giving all that software the

scrubbing and dusting it has needed for quite some time.

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So, I have things to keep me busy when nothing else does, and it feels quite fulfilling to know that I am making life a little easier for those programmers who haven't yet gotten to where they don't actually need to work. Yes, fulfilling. It feels good. It's one of the reasons it took me until Wednesday to answer Monday's question.

(\*\*) TANSTAAFL: There Ain't No Such Thing As A Free Lunch.

*Jack*

Hi Frank,

This is the REAL Frank! The Frank who figured out, mathematically, how to repeatedly end up with the one odd color peg in the center hole of the Hi-Q game.

And, that was when he was only twelve! I'm glad you are back in the saddle.

# What was your best boss like?



Until about 5 years ago, the answer to that question was simple: Yuko Kawakuri McLeod. Yuko was a stereotypical Japanese yuppie. She was petite, maybe 5-foot-3, well dressed and generally well put-together, always walked in tight little steps as if her legs were bound between her ankles and knees, possibly because she always affected what I think were called “pencil skirts”. She was my manager at CBS/Fawcett Publications in Greenwich CT, and the things that made her “my best manager” (until someone else tied-for-first) were that she seemed always willing to consider an alternative route to a solution, and she WAS always willing to go to bat for those who reported to her. It’s rare, in my experience, for those two qualities to appear in a single person, and rarer when that person is an IT manager. Alas, I wasn’t at Fawcett for very long before Aramco started singing its siren song to me in ‘81.

I've often wondered how things worked out for Yuko. I hope she rose high in CBS' ranks. She deserved it.

Then about 5 years ago, a contract came my way. It was an unusual contract in that HPE (later DXC), the company in Plano TX needing work done, wanted all its contractors to work from home. HPE was a service bureau, a supplier of mainframe computing services for other companies who didn't want the hassle and expense of having their own mainframe and service staff or who needed additional capacity that could be outsourced. HPE consequently dealt with many different clients with many different ways of doing business, differences that reflected immediately into their computing needs and styles. HPE's answer to what otherwise would have been 'chaos' was 'automation'. Their system(s) were highly automated, which is fine as long as the underlying automation software is working fine or until it needs to change.

It needed to change, and HPE needed help doing the change-over. They put several of their own HPE managers in charge and hired temps, contractors, to actually do the work. One of those managers was David L. Mills who, not coincidentally, also worked from home in Mississippi.

Now, it's possible that I'm giving too much credit to David, but that project was THE best-managed project I have ever had the

pleasure of being part of, and I'm quite sure that David had a lot to do with that. Our tasks were clearly specified, the due dates were realistic, management was always cheerfully helpful, and the team was extraordinary. The most surprising aspect of this was that, with very few exceptions, none of the people associated with the project ever sat together in the same room. I can't believe how much I learned in just nine months, especially when 'physical isolation' was the norm. I was sad when it ended, and I keep hoping I'll catch another contract like that, but I'm not holding my breath.

Managers like that don't come along every day, you know.



# How far back can you trace your family ancestry?



All by myself, I can trace my Clarke roots back to a single (paternal) grandfather. Luckily, our family has a genealogist or two among its numbers. Brooklyn John Clarke (so designated to distinguish him from the other 27 John Clarkes) is the son of John Clarke the Twin (of Chester) and has done considerable digging among dusty old records and has even gone to Ireland in search of even older, even dustier records and has documented the Clarke roots back to Patrick Clarke (1750 - 1821). Along the way, he made the acquaintance of cousins we never knew we had, including Shivaun Sheehan, now living near Dublin.

John has mounted his work at <https://meath-hill.tripod.com/>

My mother was a Fallon. All by myself, I can trace my Fallon roots back no further than my mother and her siblings, and my knowledge of those is sketchy. With the help of several Fallon

genealogists, Barbara Nugent and Bob Fallon of Virginia prime among them, I can trace my Fallon roots to Patrick (born Jan 18, 1865 in Ireland).

The Fallon genealogy is not yet available on the web, but I plan to correct that, and it should be available in the near future at <http://frankclarke.dx.am/>. Watch this space.



# How did you experience Neil Armstrong's first steps on the moon?



In July of 1969, we were living in an upstairs apartment at 150 Stephenson Blvd, New Rochelle, in southern Westchester County. I still had a tape recorder and was avid about audiotaping anything I thought might be worth keeping. When Armstrong and Aldrin landed on the Moon and CBS-TV, channel 2 in NYC, carried it live with Walter Cronkite narrating, I felt that probably qualified as 'worth keeping'. As we watched the grainy video, my tape recorder rolled tape at 3¾ips, the slowest rate I could use, and made a copy from the TV's speakers. Audio recording like that — from the sound produced by the speakers — is much less clear than a wired-in connection, but I couldn't do that with the TV we had, an old, small B&W with 'rabbit ears' antenna.

I no longer have a tape recorder or any of the tapes. The vinyl material tends to dry out over time and become brittle such that at some point it is impossible to play the tape because the force necessary to pull it through the mechanism causes the tape to break, but I recall us watching the event on TV into the night. If it were worth recording, it was worth staying up late for.

# What is one of your favorite drinks?



Because it's usually so expensive, I don't often get to enjoy Benedictine. Because it's so high in both alcohol and calories, I \_shouldn't\_ often enjoy it, but when it's available I can rarely resist. When we pass through duty-free shops at airports, I usually check their price for Benedictine, and I'm usually disappointed because it's usually not noticeably less than I pay at my local friendly purveyor of fine wines and spirits. The one time this wasn't true, I snagged four litres of the stuff, customs duties be damned(\*\*).

My sister Audrey liked a variant of Benedictine known as "B&B", Benedictine and brandy, but I'm a purist.

For sitting and sipping and enjoying the presence of company of an evening, there are few pleasures to compare to 'Jamesson's neat'. Of course, like Benedictine, it has a high alcohol content,

and it's too too easy to overdo it, but that, also, ranks high on my list.

(\*\*) Aside: back in the 70s, President Jimmy Carter pushed through 'The Paperwork Reduction Act of 1980'. Among its provisions was one requiring each federal agency to devise a plan for reducing the number of records it produces and retains. The Customs Branch plan was simple: waive import duties under \$10. In operation, this means that if you go over the limit for stuff you're bringing back home, you get charged an import fee for the excess, but if that fee amounts to less than \$10, it's waived, eliminating the necessity for Customs to make a record of the excess, your payment, and the deposit into the Treasury. Well, you're allowed one litre of spirits, but the duty on a single litre of liquor is well under \$1. You can bring home a CASE of wine (or Benedictine) and not pay duty on it. This is not well-known, so in practice almost no one ever exceeds their one litre allowance.

# What are your favorite songs?



By ‘songs’, I presume that to mean music with words. But first, a side trip...

In 1998, I was living in Houston TX on ‘bachelor status’ while I worked a Y2K contract at EXXON. This meant that I would sometimes find myself in odd corners of Houston for shopping and/or exploring. On one of these trips, I was browsing in BestBuy and picked up — because I couldn’t resist the price — “The Best Opera Album In The World Ever”, a 2-disc set for \$2.99. Now, I didn’t like opera, I never had, but for \$2.99 I thought I’d give it a try. It did not disappoint. It, in fact, gave me a veritable ‘Top 10’ of ‘favorite songs.

Here they are, countdown-style:

10 — Dove Sono (Mozart, Le Nozze de Figaro, Italian)

- 9 — Au Fond Du Temple Saint (Bizet, Les Pecheurs de Perles, French)
- 8 — Suzel, Bon Di (Mascagni, L'Amico Fritz, Italian)
- 7 — O Mio Babbino Caro (Puccini, Gianna Schicchi, Italian)
- 6 — Signore, Ascolta! (Puccini, Turandot, Italian)
- 5 — Soave Sia Il Vento (Mozart, Cosi Fan Tutti, Italian)
- 4 — Belle Nuit (Offenbach, Les Contes d'Hoffmann)
- 3 — Va, Pensiero (Verdi, Nabucco, Italian)
- 2 — Viens, Malika (Delibes, Lakme, French)
- 1 — The Song To The Moon (Dvorak, Russalka, Czech)

If there is any chance at all that you might grow to like grand opera, these 10 will do it. If these 10 don't do it, there was never any chance that you would like grand opera. I hope that this list will bring some of you as much pleasure as it has me.

# What are your favorite movies?



For most of its history, Hollywood's output has been spotty at best. Yes, there were beloved classics like "Casablanca" and a few others in that genre, but most of it was junk. The high points were, more often than not, musicals.

At the end of the 20th century and the start of the 21st, producers and directors began embracing storylines that, in earlier times, would have been rejected out of hand. Most of those rejections would have taken the form "nobody's going to watch a ten-hour movie", or "that's too egg-head". A few brave movers-and-shakers decided to take the risk, and thus we have

"The Last of the Mohicans" (1992), a beautifully-filmed account of James Fennimore Cooper's tale of the French and Indian War, with a soundtrack that still gets plenty of air-time today. I had seen the earlier version from the 30s, but never fully understood

the story until I saw this one.

Leading off the 21st century's efforts are the three giant-sized segments of J.R.R.Tolkien's 'Lord Of The Rings' trilogy: "The Fellowship of the Ring" (2001), "The Two Towers" (2002), and "The Return of the King" (2003). Peter Jackson, the director, made the bold decision to film them all at once which must have made for a horrible logistical problem. He later swore he would never do such a foolish thing again... then broke his promise almost immediately to create "The Hobbit".

"V For Vendetta" (2005), is a not-so-subtle call for revolt against corrupt government, and well-acted to boot. I can't recall ever seeing anything so blatantly seditious coming out of Tinseltown. It was refreshing, and it ranks very high on my list.

On a lighter note, there are the eight (8) Harry Potter movies stretching from 2001 to 2011, a fairly-precise rendering of J.K.Rowling's texts. The casting was almost impossibly good: Richard Harris as Dumbledore until his death from cancer; Alan Rickman in his last (before his death) major role as Snape; Maggie Smith as McGonagall; Evanna Lynch as Luna Lovegood. They may not seem like 'classics' today, but they'll still be watched when all of us old fogies are gone.

These are all fine movies, but their coefficient of "let's watch that again" is not as high as one might expect for any of them.



There is one movie that has an unexpectedly-high coefficient of "let's watch that again": "Easy A" (2010), a story of a young (Ojai California) woman who garners an entirely-unjustified reputation as a slut, and how she deals with it. This is one of the funniest movies I have seen in decades, and it gets funnier every time I re-watch it. For the moment, it IS my favorite movie".



# What places can you travel to over and over again?



**T**here is a very short list:

Paris — A co-worker once asked me why we repeatedly returned to Paris and I responded: “Paris is beauty and mystery and wine and cheese and crepes-suzette from a street-corner vendor for breakfast. Paris is taxis swerving around pedestrians and flowers in the market. Paris is noisy cafes and quiet churches. Paris is life. Paris is love and I must go back because I seem to have misplaced my heart.”

Prague — Praha reminds me of nothing so much as a Hollywood set for a film about Eastern Europe in the 19th century. There are modern conveniences, of course, but the overall feeling is one of having been transported back in time to 1870. The same is true for very many cities and towns elsewhere in the Czech Republic (‘Czechia’), and everywhere you go in the

country, the beer is the best you've ever experienced.

Barcelona — The capital of Catalonia, besides being an enjoyable city to visit in and of itself, is a transit hub from which one can jump here, there, and everywhere in western Europe. Within the city are marvels: Sagrada Familia, Antoni Gaudi's masterwork begun one hundred years ago and soon (2050) to be finished; MNAC, the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, whose front steps brace a series of waterfalls that cascade down to the Plaza of the Fountains something like 200 feet below; Parc Guell that was to have been a residential complex (also designed by Gaudi) and which is now an eye-popping walk-through tourist attraction; plus Gaudi-designed buildings scattered all over the city, but mostly along the Passeig de Gracia, Barcelona's main shopping street. Barcelona is a happening town, and it's just fun to walk around it.

We're actively looking for more entries for this list.

# What is the best meal you've ever had?



In 2005, Norene and I were touring in the Dordogne River valley, admiring 16th-century castles, but that soon wore thin. We packed the car and headed for Chamonix in the Haute Savoie region of France, but we only made it as far as Annecy before deciding to call it a night. The Annecy TI found us a cozy hotel room in a town just south of Annecy, Menthon-St.Bernard. When we asked the hotelkeeper for a recommendation for dinner, he directed us to a pretty lakeside restaurant within walking distance.

Annecy and environs is in the Haute Savoie — dairy country — and their local cuisine reflects this. Raclette and fondue are always on the menu, and I can never resist fondue. It's always good, but sometimes it's unbelievable and the fondue we shared that evening as we watched the sun set across Lake Annecy was good beyond the ability of human language to describe. I would

go back there \_\_just\_\_ for the fondue.

Now, if the question relates to 'home-cooked meals', then Norene's Corned Beef and Cabbage must lead the list of several of her specialties. Much of that menu is, she willingly admits, patterned after my mother's recipes. People who are gifted with an invitation to St.Patrick's Day dinner at the Clarke's remark especially at the cabbage that arrives with nearly the consistency of cabbage pudding. People who hate cabbage ask for 'seconds'. The corned beef rarely survives the ordeal no matter how much was prepared.

An odd addition to the list of 'best meals' originates from a chain restaurant, "Glory Days", that has a branch nearby: meatloaf. Meatloaf is one of those plebeian meals that almost no one ever remarks upon. It's hard to ruin a meatloaf. Conversely, it's equally difficult to make an exceptional meatloaf. The meatloaf at Glory Days breaks that rule. It isn't simply the best meatloaf I've ever experienced, the whole thing makes it onto the "best meals ever" list.

# What is the farthest you have ever traveled?



In August 1981, I accepted a job offer from Aramco Services Company in Houston TX, and Norene and I bought a house at 3919 Hidden Glen Drive in Kingwood, a suburb of Houston alongside US-59. Although that move from Brookfield CT qualified as ‘the farthest I had traveled (thus far)’, it was to be immediately overshadowed by a business trip.

(See? You get old, you forget things. When I was a young teen, 14 or 15, the late 50s, Mom and I traveled by bus to see Aunt Marjorie Clarke Meagher in El Paso TX, and that’s further than Houston. Then later, when Jerry and Peg were living in California, we flew out there to meet them and drive back home to NY along Route 66. Those trips wouldn’t be surpassed until I went to Saudi Arabia.)

One of the first things Aramco had me do as an employee was to fill out a passport application that HR rushed through channels so I would be able to travel to Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, to meet the people I would be working for and with. Early in October, I boarded an ATA charter flight from Houston to Amsterdam to Dhahran, 19 hours in the air, just shy of 8,000 miles, arriving there on Friday the 9th which, coincidentally, was the start of the Eid-al-Adah that year.

On the leg into Dhahran the pilot came on the intercom and warned all the passengers to buckle up because it was going to be a wild ride on the way down. The Saudi Air Force was on maneuvers in the area and Riyadh ATC insisted we maintain 36,000 feet until we were within 60 miles of Dhahran. A little quick math revealed that we were going to have to descend 7 miles while the plane traveled 60 miles horizontally at 400+ mph (9 minutes). That's pretty steep, especially for a 747. The pilot was right — the ride down was a real thrill.

Somebody met me at the Dhahran airport and drove me to the Aramco 'compound' where I checked in, stowed my gear, got my local employee badge, and found out what there was in the way of 'fun' to do in Saudi Arabia. The least complicated of these was 'take the shuttle into (Al-)Khobar'. Khobar was the local seat of government and a bustling commercial center — I say this somewhat tongue-in-cheek — it reminded me of nothing so



much as Times Square with Arabic music blaring in an attempt to attract passers-by to spend their riyals on a television or a WalkMan or a rug or a scimitar.

I got to Khobar in the early afternoon and set about window shopping. I recall being just about ready to enter a shop when the owner came to the front and pulled an accordion-gate closed right in my face. Prayer time. Every store on the street closed within a few minutes and I was left with nothing to do and nowhere to go. I went to the bus stop and took the shuttle back to the compound.

The Islamic 'weekend' is Thursday-Friday, and the Eid ran from Friday to Sunday. My first workday, thus was Monday, October 12th. This gave me 3 days to decompress from the jet lag, and I needed every minute. When I stepped out of the residence at 7:30am local time on Monday, the temperature was 100F and 98% humidity. I walked three blocks to the office and had to wring out my keys when I got there.

The Aramco compound in Dhahran is what I think a west-Texas town c.1930 might have looked like: bright sun, desert setting, very little outside activity. Walking down the street with one of my co-workers I mentioned that everything seemed somehow 'odd' as if it were an old technicolor movie where the colors had faded. "That's just the dust." He grabbed a drab green leaf from

a tree and rubbed it between his fingers. Where he rubbed, the leaf was a deep, dark green. The leaves of the trees were all covered with a fine dust that blows in from the desert, the Rhub-al-Khali, 'the Empty Quarter', day and night.

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I took most of my meals at the employee cafeteria. The food was good and inexpensive, and I grew quite fond of a local fish called hamur, but it was the only thing worth remembering.

I got into the habit, coming off the cafeteria line, of looking for someone sitting alone. I would introduce myself and ask to join them for dinner. I don't recall ever being refused and in this way I met several fascinating people.

Everett Gourley was an administrative type, possibly the headmaster, of a school in Asheville NC. He was in Dhahran to pitch his school to the Aramcons who were looking to get their children out of The Great Sandbox before they had to deal with high school. One night at dinner, Everett picked up his water glass, gazed at the clear fluid and said: "I wonder why the water in the cafeteria is so much better than the water at the residence?" I took a sip of mine and replied: "It doesn't seem any different to me."

"No, really; the water here is clear. You can see right through it."

“Everett,” I asked, “where are you getting your water?”

“From the tap...”

I almost choked. “Everett, you’re not supposed to drink that stuff. It’s only for bathing. The drinking water is in the cooler at the end of the hallway.” Dhahran has two water systems, and the stuff that normally comes out of the faucet is only two steps removed from sea water. No wonder he thought it was poor quality. I sure hope Everett didn’t pick up something terminal while he was in Dha.

P.s.: hamur is grouper.

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Before I left Houston, all the experienced hands advised me to take some time off for a daytrip to Hofuf, said to be the longest continuously-inhabited spot on the Earth. When I got to Dha, I checked with the Activities Coordinator who told me ‘Sorry, We don’t do that anymore. Try the Marriott in Khobar.’

The Marriott did, indeed, run a bus tour of Hofuf, 250 ryals, about 75 dollars — a tad pricey for 1981. I decided to pass.

One evening, coming off the cafeteria line, I noticed an older gentleman sitting alone, so I introduced myself and asked if I might join him for dinner. He told me I was more than welcome, but that there were several others who would be along

momentarily. I sat down. (I wish I could recall his name... a doctor from Dollar-by-Stirling, Scotland).

It turned out that they were all doctors from the Aramco Clinic at the compound. During the course of our meal, I heard one of them mention 'Hofuf' and my ears perked up. I'm dying to get to Hofuf, I told them. Well, join us, then. Be at the bus stop by the softball fields at 5am tomorrow.

By the dawn's early light, six or seven of us waited for the bus. Show your employee-id; get on the bus. The bus took us to the Aramco airfield next to the Dhahran Airport. Inside the operations shed, we showed our employee-ids and got boarding passes. Aramco flew a 737 with eight passengers from Dhahran to Udalliyah (OODA-lee-ah), about 130km. We got off and 80 or 90 Aramcons got on for the trip back to Dha. We took the bus into the Udalliyah compound, had breakfast at their cafeteria, then grabbed the bus into Hofuf. Total cost so far: breakfast, \$2.

If you want to travel first-class, travel with doctors. They know all the tricks. We bummed around Hofuf, hit the souks, had lunch, and watched the camel auction. By late afternoon, we were ready to call it a day. We grabbed the Aramco shuttle bus back to Udalliyah, then another out to their airfield just in time to catch the 737 bringing all those Aramcons back from shopping in Dha. They got off; we got on. The flight got us back to Dhahran

just in time to grab dinner at the cafeteria before they closed.

Oh, yes... I now know why everyone says to visit Hofuf: it's better than sitting in Dhahran watching the trees get dusty.

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To this day, my trip to Dhahran is still the longest trip I've ever been on.



# How did you decide when to change jobs?



I signed on with IBM in 1967 as an accountant in NYC and shuffled debits and credits there and in White Plains until 1971. Around then, IBM was experiencing some very odd manpower imbalances: too many of this, not enough of that. IBM's Data Processing Division (DPD, the 'machine sellers') got permission from Corporate to prospect for new employees within other divisions. I had recently discovered programming because of the Masters program at Iona College in New Rochelle, and turned out in search of a Systems Engineer ('hardware/software pusher') position. When I learned the SE spot was in NYC's Wall Street area, I lost interest.

Ray Nowicky ran the Field Engineering Division's Information Systems (FEIS) department with a staff of 64. After DPD got finished ravaging him, he had a staff of 27. He put out his own call for volunteers: Who wants to be a programmer? I turned out

for that along with four other accounting types, and by December we were all novice programmers being taught the trade by some very experienced techies. They gave us all a superb education in systems lore.

So, the first major job change came about because I was bored to tears with accounting.

A year later, I was teamed with Dave Boyd on the accounting-related 'ledger reconciliation project', a wildly successful exercise in table-driven processing, and a few years later we teamed again for the 'Suggestions Tracking and Statistical System', STSS, FE's first conversational IMS production application (last I heard, IBM was still using it just the way we delivered it — over a quarter century earlier).

In early 1979, there was considerable talk of FEIS relocating to Tampa, Boulder, or Tucson. I was finishing up the installation documentation for STSS and having a very hard time getting past the roadblocks and hurdles thrown in my path by the 'production' side of the operation (who didn't want to install it). FE asked me to go to Miami in April to demonstrate the new system at the Awards Conference. Before I left, my manager mentioned that if I got a chance to look Tampa over with an eye to relocating there, that would probably be a good thing to do. Back in White Plains, FEHQ announced that the new Tampa site



would be staffed exclusively from our Mechanicsburg PA site, I got turned down for a promotion to Staff Programmer, management informed me that they could not (would not) exert any influence over 'production' to install STSS, and I got a 'merit increase' of 6% after 16 months (while inflation galloped along at 17%-19%). My income was rapidly losing ground to inflation, management no longer supported my work, I wasn't getting a promotion or a raise for a flagship application, and I wasn't going to get a transfer to Tampa. I put my resume out for bids.

So, the second major job change happened because I thought I could read handwriting on a wall.

In 1984, I was a regular employee of Aramco Services Company in Houston when the head office decided there were far too many 'westerners' employed and far too few Arabs. Layoffs began with a vengeance and I put my resume back out onto the street. It was picked up by IBM Tampa just in time to avoid the axe.

So, the third major job change happened because I wanted to chart my own course.

In 1992, Wall Street told IBM "you have waaaaay too many employees; you have to get skinny", and IBM responded by offering an 'early retirement window': anyone who could retire before the year 2000 could retire early, get a bucket of cash, keep their medical benefits, and become a real 'retired IBM employee'

as of their regular retirement date. IBM hoped this would be enough to get 14,000 graybeards to bail out. 41,000 graybeards disappeared over the course of six weeks. I was one of them.

So, the fourth major job change happened because it was just too good an offer to pass up.

I started doing contract programming again — where the programmer works for Company A and is assigned at Company B for a fee, usually elevated, and a fixed period, usually short.

In 1998, I was working a contract in Tampa at an hourly rate that was not as elevated as I thought it ought to be. Y2K-panic was setting in at companies world-wide, and there was gold in them thar hills. I switched companies and wound up working a contract at EXXON in Houston and another with Philip Morris in Richmond, both at rates far higher than I was making in Florida. EXXON and Philip Morris paid my mortgage off.

So, the fifth major job change happened because of money and the opportunity to make lots of it.

By 2001, I was only 57 and still had children in college. I hired on at Nielsen Media Research, the 'Nielsen TV ratings' Nielsen. I worked there until 2010 when a group of venture capitalists bought the company from the Nielsen heirs and began replacing expensive American employees with inexpensive Indian

employees. For the first time in my life, I got laid off.

So, the sixth major job change happened because of executive machinations.

After that, I picked up the occasional contract doing specialty work, but that market seems to have largely dried up, and I finally consider myself 'retired'.

*Margaret*

Uncle Frank, Thank you for sharing this. Hugs, Margaret

*Ann*

In 2001, unless I'm mistaken, all kids were done with college. Reagan was 6 weeks old at Jessica's graduation from USF in late August or early September 2000. Siobhan got her BSN pin in June 1995 and I finished UF in December 1994 with a tiny stint in police academy.



# What were you like when you were 50?



**M**y 50th birthday was December 29th, 1993. At the time, I had taken an unpaid leave-of-absence pending retirement from IBM Tampa, and was doing contract programming for anyone who needed my skills. I was then working at GTE Data Services (GTEDS) in Brandon, Florida building a software 'shell' around an Endeavor/MVS Configuration Management System so that it would appear to the typical user to be similar or identical to the CM regime they were previously used to using at GTEDS. I was working hand-in-glove with Chris Lewis and Don Ohlin developing the underlying philosophy that would guide the construction of the eventual product.

I had just recently convinced Chris and Don that we should review each other's code at the point of installation-to-production with an eye to (a) eliminating obvious errors, and (b) sharing techniques for improving

operational efficiency. We would meet in any available conference room (and at 5:00pm, they were ALL available) with a single master copy of the code to be reviewed on fanfold paper. ('Fanfold' describes high-speed printer paper where sheets are perforated at page-end and form a continuous stream so that the printer can drag the paper into the print mechanism. The printed pages fall into the output bin still connected and so a single print 'job' can be laid out in a long line of paper along the length of a conference room table.) We would gather around 15 feet of paper and the programmer/author would describe what the code was doing and how and why. The reviewers would ask why a given function was implemented this way as opposed to that way, and the author would defend/explain his design choice. Often, the result was that a routine would undergo significant change before final installation. Because three people were each making suggestions, we were also learning new and more efficient technique such that our 'learning curve' was very steep. It was those few years at GTEDS that largely shaped the design philosophy I still use with great effect.

Other programmers will sometimes look at a routine I've written and ask "Why did you make it so complicated? It's a simple problem." Almost always, I will be able to demonstrate that (a) the code ISN'T that complicated, and (b) the problem isn't as simple as it appears. Suffice it to say that a routine written using

the design philosophy we three concocted back in the 90s rarely fails in operation, and when one does, the problem — and therefore the solution — is glaringly obvious.

As to 'what I was like', I was a sponge, learning programming in a way that was markedly different than IBM had taught me 21 years prior. It was almost as if I were learning programming for the first time — again.

'50' was a turning point in my career. I wouldn't have been nearly as successful without it.

*Margaret*

Uncle Frank, Thank you for sharing your life story. Hugs,  
Margaret and Tom





# Are you an extrovert or an introvert?



According to my Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, I am an ENT\* (hybrid). The 'E' stands for 'extrovert', and I seem to fit fairly close to the two MBTI 'ENT\*' descriptors:

ENTJ:

Hearty frank, decisive, leaders in activities. Usually good in anything that requires reasoning and intelligent talk, such as public speaking. Are usually well-informed and enjoy adding to their fund of knowledge. May sometimes be more positive and confident than their experience in an area warrants.

ENTP

Quick, ingenious, good at many things. Stimulating company, alert and outspoken. May argue for fun on either side of a question. Resourceful in solving new and challenging

problems, but may neglect routine assignments. Apt to turn to one new interest after another. Skillful in finding logical reasons for whatever they want.

For a while during my Mensa days, I was the local Membership Officer, and my duties involved reaching out to prospective and new members to help them become more comfortable in the organization. I think I did fairly well at that.

During my Tampa days, IBM sent me to the Boca Raton Ed-Center for a course in 'Making Business Presentations'. On the last day, each of the students had to stand up and present some topic (of our own choosing) to the entire class. The instructor video recorded each presentation and at the end of each, the entire class got to critique the presenter's performance, and the instructor would add his critique as well. My presentation was generally well-received, as I recall, but the instructor's reaction to it has always stayed with me. "Who doesn't like Mister Rogers?" he asked rhetorically, and I realized at that moment that my presenting style was to wander into and among my audience so that I was, for all practical purposes, talking to each one individually.

Yeah, I think I'm an extrovert.

# Who inspires you?



(I apologize in advance for sloshing so much data processing hoo-hah, but it's almost necessary if I'm to tell the story adequately.)

Of all the people I've come across, few have had the impact of one particular IBM colleague. Dave Boyd and I crossed paths when I was just a novice programmer at Field Engineering HQ Information Systems in White Plains, NY. Because I had just come over to Systems from the accounting side of HQ, I was tasked with a project whose purpose was to reconcile the financial activity of FEHQ whose books of account were actually maintained by somebody else — the Data Processing Division, DPD HQ General Accounting. DPD GA took the field-labor-activity figures provided by FEHQ GA and mapped them onto the account structure mandated by Corporate HQ.

Every once in a while, the numbers DP published would be at significant odds with those FE provided and FE management

wanted to know why. Dave Boyd came up with a concise scheme whereby FEHQ General Accounting could specify "the rules of the road" regarding which activity got assigned to which general ledger account. There were, if I recall correctly, six datapoints that together precisely defined to which account any FE activity mapped. Dave wrote a programming 'spec' that

- (a) collected all the possible values of each datapoint,
- (b) created a comprehensive dictionary of every possible combination of each of these datapoints, and
- (c) gave the accountants within FEHQ General Accounting a method by which they could specify the 'from' and 'to' of each such mapping.

It was a long time after that project completed before I realized that Dave had gotten us to create a rudimentary spreadsheet application — on an IBM mainframe in 1973. In the first month the project was in operation, we discovered why DPD sometimes got things wrong, and got them to fix -their- process.

Later Dave and I teamed up on a project known as the "Suggestions Tracking and Statistical System" that led, ultimately, to me resigning from IBM in 1979 — but that's a story for another day. The project itself was a resounding success, and I remain quite proud of my part in it. The success of

the project, I freely admit, was due almost entirely to the brilliant design Dave created and the discipline he demanded regarding programming practice. On one occasion, I had stumbled over what I thought was an intractable problem and consulted with the assigned database manager. Between us we agreed that he would do 'A' and I would do 'B' and together that would get us past the roadblock. He got to work; I got to work. Twenty minutes later, I reported that I was finished with my part of the 'fix'. The database manager had anticipated that my part would take much longer than it did and pronounced my solution "f\*\*\*ing magic", proving that discipline pays dividends.

It was those two and a few other less noteworthy projects that formed my embryonic mental state as regards the programming 'craft'. What success I've experienced as a programmer/analyst is due almost entirely to the mindset that Dave pounded into me while my young programmer's mind was still malleable.

One lesson he taught that has stayed with me for all these years is that just talking to users is often insufficient to determine what it is they're really asking for. In many cases, the users themselves don't know what they actually want. After months of blundering through a poorly-specified project, my manager (thankfully) asked Dave to step in and 'help the kid out'. Dave's first act was to call a meeting with the head of the user group. During the meeting, it became obvious that this user did not, in

fact, have a good grasp on what it was the users wanted. Dave handed the user rep a pad of "report formatting templates" and asked him to "lay out on here what you want your output to look like". A few days later, the user rep called Dave and asked for a fresh pad. Every time he tried to fit his requirements into the 132-columns of a standard mainframe printer sheet, he found himself short by a few spaces — or a few dozen spaces. Eventually, they let Dave and me provide what we could within the limits of the machine. They wished they had gotten more, but they were happy that they had gotten something useful.

Thinking back on it, I conclude that Dave's chief defining characteristic was that he had an orderly mind. I try everyday to emulate that, but I still miss the master.

*Cathy*

Great story Frank. In someways similar to my Human Resources and later Career Coaching days. Preforming HR needs assessments always turned out that the stated needs usually always exceeded the available manpower. Likewise, helping students define their career goals usually ended up with frustration as their goals far exceeded their current education and experience levels. I guess what it comes down to is that we all want more than we realize is possible. It's part of the human condition.

If you could travel back in time to any country and any era, knowing you'd be completely safe and could come back, where and when would you go?



**E**specially if I could take a digital camera with me (and a 200Gb chip), Alexandria, Egypt, 400 A.D.

At the time, the great library of Alexandria was in full operation. Around 415, the library and all its contents burned to the ground, causing the permanent loss of centuries of ancient wisdom methodically gathered (often by force). It was the law then that any ship putting into Alexandria had to declare any books (scrolls) on board. These were 'borrowed' by the librarians, copied by hand, and the copies returned to the original owners;

the original books became permanent additions to the library's collection.

So thorough was the library's destruction that today we do not actually know what the actual building looked like, so I would get a few shots of the outside and the reading rooms and whatever else might be found there. Of course, there were (some say) 700,000 scrolls including several (now lost) plays by Euripides, and who-knows-what from mathematicians like Pythagoras, Aristarchus, Archimedes, and Euclid. I would be happily snapping away making digital copies of the original handwritten documents until the batteries ran out.

In August of 415, spurred on by fiery exhortations from Cyril, Bishop of Alexandria, a Christian mob ambushed Hypatia, the Librarian and herself a talented astronomer and mathematician, dragged her from her chariot and flayed the flesh from her bones with sharpened abalone shells. Step two was to burn all the heretical nonsense in the library along with the building itself.

You can't alter history, but oh, what wouldn't moderns give to be able to see with their own eyes the treasures that were lost to ignorance?



# What foods do you dislike? Have these changed over time?



**T**op of the list: liver and similar organ meats like kidney.

Running a close second: clams, oysters, mussels, squid, and octopus, all of which remind me of chewing on a pencil eraser.

Anything with lots of fat, especially if it becomes hard-to-chew.

Hot peppers. I never understood the fascination with jalapenos and habaneros because to me they're just annoyingly hot with little in the way of flavor to recommend them. Black pepper is still The King Of Spices.

I'm still not crazy about spinach, but creamed spinach, especially the Seabrook Farms variety, is actually one of my faves. Raw onions — they smell so awful! I never liked Brussels sprouts until I tried them baked. Someday someone will dish out

kale or turnip greens that taste great, but I'm still waiting...

There's certainly something I left off, but I just can't dig it out.

# What is one of the most expensive things that you've ever bought?



**T**he most expensive things I've ever bought have been houses.

In 1971, ahead of the birth of twins, we bought 1668 Central Street in Yorktown Heights for the princely sum of \$27,000. Five years later (1976), we sold it and bought 1 Allen Road (renumbered later to 11 Prange Rd) in Brookfield CT for \$48,000. Another five years later (1981), we sold Brookfield and bought 3919 Hidden Glen, Kingwood TX for \$89,000. In 1985, we made our last move to Florida, purchasing 150 Colette Ct in Oldsmar for \$86,500.

We have had four mortgages because coming up with that much cash was beyond our abilities. There have been car loans, but none of the cars were so luxurious that they could compete, pricewise, with real estate.

Before marriage, Norene's engagement ring held the record at \$400, soon bumped out of first place by my first good SLR, my Honeywell Pentax H3v, \$470.

After a near-fatal car accident on the New Jersey Turnpike in July 1969, we replaced Norene's totalled 1963 Ford Galaxie with a used 1968 Oldsmobile Cutlass S (250 cu.in.) and paid \$1,700 cash for it. That held the record for "most expensive" until "houses" took over the lead.

# How has your life turned out differently than you imagined it would?



There's an old joke, funny or sad depending on your point-of-view: "If I knew I was going to live this long, I would have taken better care of myself."

For one thing, I never expected to be staring '80' in the face. I really expected that I would retire at 65 from whatever career I had settled on, live for a few more years subsisting on Social Security, and pass on without having accumulated much in the way of 'worldly possessions'. Instead, with my beloved life-partner, we are financially secure world travelers domiciled in Paradise. She periodically asks: "Who would have believed two kids from Brooklyn would have wound up here?", and the answer is usually "Not me."

Early on, I hooked up with IBM, expecting it to be that career, balancing debits and credits and maybe climbing the ladder of success to some senior administrative sinecure. Instead, I tripped over a Black Swan Event and those expectations got — not 'derailed', but more like 'unexpectedly switched to the express track'. In retrospect, it seems entirely logical that, having found a career that makes one eager to go to work tomorrow, there is an increased impetus to stick with that career or something very like it. As a result, everything associated with that career dominates the remainder of one's existence. If I seem to have a one-track mind, that's the reason.

'What DIDN'T turn out differently' is, perhaps, equally notable. Norene and I have always had the same philosophy regarding child-rearing. We always knew that any of our children would be molded — 'hammered' if necessary — into entirely self-sufficient free-thinkers. What those ESSFTs did with their lives was immaterial, but we were supremely confident that it would all work out well. And they are. And it did. We are not surprised.

*Margaret*

Uncle Frank, Thank you for sharing your memories with us.  
Hugs from NC, Margaret and Tom

# What is the best job you've ever had?



**T**hat's an easy question.

In 1984, I rejoined IBM's National Service Division (NSD) in Tampa after about 5 years working for other companies. I was hired by Judy Manowitz into her 'Architecture' group that developed and enforced site-wide standards for the systems and operations staff. It was really kind of boring because it was mostly paperwork-related, but it gave me lots of free time to do stuff I actually enjoyed, like programming. Since the early 70s, I had been developing an elevated fluency with a language called CLIST to the point that I could teach it better than the highly-paid technical staff that created it. When the operations crew accidentally caused a horrible administrative catastrophe because someone forgot to update a particular control statement, they asked me if I had any way of preventing it recurring, and I solved it by writing a little snippet of CLIST that

automated the update. I developed a reputation as someone who could do wonderful things.

A year later, management concluded that there really wasn't much need for an Architecture Department since what we did amounted to 'winding the clocks'. The Architecture department was disbanded and the staff reallocated to other managers. Judy placed me with Bud Rowsey's newly-formed 'Site Tools and Productivity Department' where my job was to write custom software to help the programming staff get through their work. I was partnered with Karen McCloskey, and together we fielded requests from random staff members to automate this or that, and responded with CLIST-based processes that increased productivity across many functions. I used to say that our real job was making programmers smile. It was the best job I've ever had, and I still miss it.

Some time in 1988, some bean counter in Armonk (IBM Corporate HQ) discovered that while all the parts were warehoused in Mechanicsburg PA (and shipped from there) the software that ran the automated equipment that packaged and shipped parts orders was all located in Tampa, and there was a real monetary cost to having programs running in Tampa burning up the telephone lines to Mechanicsburg telling the warehouse gantries to fetch a packet of nuts and bolts and add it to an outgoing order. They decided that all that software and the



programmers who maintained it were to be relocated north. The response from Tampa was a collective middle-finger. It was said that Mechanicsburg made 141 offers and got six (6) acceptances, all from people who had been born in Pennsylvania.

Tampa management (in the person of Joe Rufin) found a project in another part of IBM that badly needed the kind of infrastructure that NSD was about to abandon — raised floors for mainframe computers and other devices, stand-alone power supplies, &c., and they agreed to requisition the entire crew of several hundred employees. A team of senior logistics experts put together a plan to move all the NSD hardware from Tampa to Mechanicsburg, leaving the Tampa site ready to receive similar-if-not-identical ISSC hardware. On December 5th, 1988, all of us changed our assigned division from NSD to ISSC, Innovative Systems Support Corporation, a wholly-owned sub of IBM. The best job I ever had evaporated before my very eyes.

Because my skills had no defined spot within ISSC where they might be put to use, I, along with seven others similarly afflicted, were assigned to a spare department whose function was to keep us busy and out of trouble. Our manager began to rent us out as fill-in employees assigned to random projects where our particular skills would be useful. I worked on projects in Poughkeepsie NY, Raleigh NC, San Jose CA, and Rochester MN over the course of the next few years until IBM offered a

pre-retirement package that was just too good to pass up, and I left IBM for the last time in July 1992.

All my subsequent jobs have always included some portion of automation work that makes me more efficient — and that somehow make their way to other programmers who find my tools surprisingly useful. I still like making programmers smile.

# Are you a regular at any of your local restaurants or cafes? What is that relationship like?



There are a few restaurants in the area where we are recognized as 'familiar faces'.

— Eve's Family Restaurant has been in business about as long as we have lived in Florida. It started out as 'Holey Donut', a strictly-breakfast place, and our daughter Ann was Eve's first waitress. Jessica also worked there later. About 30 years ago, Eve Falzo expanded her operation to a regular sit-down restaurant serving breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and it is a favorite spot for many Oldsmar families to this day, including us.

— East Lake Cafe is a cozy breakfast-lunch spot, especially among the after-church crowd. While there is some small

'churn' among the wait staff, several of them have been with Peter Pergola, the owner, since he first opened, and we are always greeted warmly.

— — Flapjack's is a relative newcomer to the casual dining scene locally, breakfast and lunch, with a heavy emphasis on pancakes, waffles, and crepes. The presence on the menu of items not common elsewhere has lured us back more often than one might expect, to the point that the waitresses are getting to know us.

There have been others in the past that would have made this list, but without the company of friends to suggest "How about Daddy's?" or "How about First Watch?", we tend to frequent a much smaller set of eateries. Perhaps when Covid-nuttiness (or as one wag called it: 'Moo Goo Gai Panic') has finally waned, the list may expand along with, alas, our waistlines.

# What are your favorite musicians, bands or albums?



I haven't kept current with recent music trends. I consider genres like rap and ska to be largely talentless forms and only vaguely related to actual music. Everyone raves about 'Hamilton' but (aside for my distaste for the person himself) it has a long way to go before it pulls even with 'The Music Man', 'My Fair Lady', 'Oklahoma', 'South Pacific', or 'Man of La Mancha' (and that's a highly abbreviated list).

For music that doesn't require a 40+ piece orchestra, few modern artists compare with ABBA, the Swedish quartet that at one point contributed more to Sweden's GDP than Volvo. Like The Carpenters, Enya, Billy Joel, and the Beatles, their music employs subtle technical tricks to tug at their listeners' emotions — tricks that haven't seen much use since Brahms,

Mendelssohn, Khatchaturian, and Rachmaninoff left us. As you might suspect from such an eclectic mix, my own musical tastes are much closer to hash than corned beef.

Let me single out for special mention an obscure music school in Slovenia, the Gimnazija Kranj. I have only heard (and seen) these youngsters on their YouTube videos, but I never fail to be impressed. Any one of them could walk into the offices of the Chicago Symphony or New York Phil and have a job offer the same day. Their rendering of 'Scheherazade' takes my breath away.

Among vocalists (aside from those already mentioned), let me not snub my favorite mezzo-soprano, Frederika vonStade, 'Flicka'. When she sings 'The Song To The Moon' from *Rusalka* (*Mesícku na nebi hlubokém* — it's in Czech) it's a very emotional experience despite my not understanding a single word.

My favorite album is no longer available from the publisher. I had it on 4-track open reel tape many years ago. I still hope that "Flappers, Speakeasies, And Bathtub Gin" will one day become available either on CD or streaming, but I'm not holding my breath. In the meantime, the album at the top of my list is a CD containing Brahms' 2nd and 3rd Symphonies, a Christmas gift in 1998.

# What is one of the stupidest things you've ever done?



**I**s throwing away free money stupid? I think it is, and I pitched a pile of it due to not checking all the angles.

In 1998, in the heat of the Y2K frenzy, I was working a contract for Exxon at 800 Bell St. in Houston TX. The contract was bringing in something like \$55/hr which, for mainframe programmers at that time, was lush. I had left a contract with GTE Data Services behind to take on this one. I had a studio apartment west of downtown at \$700/mo, and commuted to work via a bus route that ran right by my lodgings. The excess over my living expenses was being poured into our mortgage account, and we could see light at the end of THAT tunnel.

About September or so, I approached my manager at Exxon and inquired whether Exxon was going to want me to stay on at the

end of the current contract, December 31, 1998. He said he didn't know, but would get back to me when he did. I had to give 30 days notice to the landlord before quitting the apartment so, at the beginning of December, having heard nothing about extending the contract, I notified the landlord that I would be vacating on 12/31. A week and a half later, my manager advised me to plan on staying into the new year.

Bummer! I had given my notice to the landlord and set a date for the rented furniture to be picked up, and I told him I didn't have a place to stay and would have to leave as scheduled. THAT was stupid!

In retrospect, the landlord would have been pleased not to have to go to the trouble of finding a new tenant quite yet. The furniture rental company would have been pleased to delay picking up the furniture and thus gaining a few more months of rental revenue. All it would have taken was a few quick phone calls, and I could have continued to collect \$55/hr until Exxon was comfortable. My partner on that contract, Jim MacKean of Vancouver BC, did stay on, and worked the contract into early 2000. I gave up (easily) \$135,000 for not asking the simple question: "Can I turn this around?"

For every chess game, "you win or you learn". Since then, I have been very wary, when things don't go exactly as planned, that I



have a 'Plan B' standing by just in case. You win or you learn.



# How do you prefer to travel?



Given my druthers, I'll always opt for a road trip. I love to watch scenery passing by and, all things considered, road travel is no more tiring or expensive than flying, especially with two drivers. We typically put Norene's Audible subscription to good use, playing an audiobook nearly non-stop to while away the hours. Driving to Colorado for Christmas, 3 days going and 3 more coming back, is just about one good Ken Follett book :-)

There are times, however, when the relatively relaxed pace of the highway is too slow for the intended purpose. 'Business trips' and 'family emergencies' are obvious examples where 'flying' becomes the only practical option, and when there aren't roads going to one's destination, the car simply doesn't work. There is no easy way to drive from Florida to France.

Lately, she and I have discovered the joys of cruising. After a few experimental forays with Royal Caribbean and Celebrity, we finally settled on Holland-America as our carrier-of-choice. The onboard lifestyle of H-A very closely aligns with the preferences of educated septuagenarians to the point that we rarely consider other lines absent serious economic incentives.

Then, too, H-A is one of those lines that shifts its fleet seasonally, so they offer, twice each year, repositioning cruises. These occur when, for example, a line transfers its fleet from its winter cruise schedule to its summer cruise schedule or reverse. Sometime in late March through early May, H-A moves its fleet from the Caribbean to the Mediterranean/North Sea. The reverse happens around October. Each ship makes a one-way crossing to reposition itself for the next season. Cruise lines typically offer cut-rate passage plus deals on one-way airline tickets for those passengers who intend to return home directly after the cruise. It's often "an offer you can't refuse".

In 2015, eight of us did a repositioning cruise (2 weeks) to Rome, plus a week in and around Rome, after which Norene and I did a 2-week Rick Steves tour of Northern Italy starting in Venice. In 2016, we repos'd to Copenhagen and topped it off with another half-week locally. In 2018, we repos'd to Barcelona followed by another week in Madrid and environs accompanied by a quartet of friends.

COVID-nuttiness has put a serious damper on our travels, and 'progressive' mangling of the economy is likely to have long-ranging ill-effects on the ability of fixed-income oldsters to be able to afford such lavishness in the future, but we have our fingers crossed...



# Have you ever missed a flight?



**T**hree, actually, which, considering how little I fly in total, feels like quite a lot.

During my IBM (Tampa) days, I gained an extensive education on several esoteric topics related to computers and computing. As luck would have it, the Mechanicsburg PA unit asked me to give a short seminar on one or two of them, and I flew to Harrisburg, the closest airport to Mechanicsburg.

After delivering a few days of classroom wisdom to the crew there, I headed for the airport for the trip home. At the airport, my flight was delayed because the 'equipment' (the airplane) couldn't leave Boston because of bad weather there. Eventually, I wound up getting a room at the airport hotel, catching the first flight out in the morning.

In 2003, we (Norene and I) were headed for Scandinavia to see old friends. We were to fly Tampa-to-Newark-to-Oslo-to-Bergen, take a multi-day fjord cruise, see the sights, and wind up in Trollhattan, Sweden by Midsommardagen, June 21. Our Tampa flight was delayed by bad weather in Newark, and by the time we got to Newark, our cross-pond hop had already departed without us. After much bickering with SAS, we were booked standby for Newark-Copenhagen-Bergen at midnight. We were the last passengers boarded, got to Bergen very late, checked into our lodging, and started the cruise the next morning. It was a wonderful trip. See our memories at <http://frankclarke.dx.am/2003SK/index.html>.

In 2017, Norene's church planned a tour along what's known as 'The Reformation Trail' to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. We were scheduled to depart on September 10th, a few days ahead of the rest of the group, so that we would have a few spare days in Berlin before being herded onto tour buses, but Hurricane Irma changed all that by forcing the closure of Tampa International. Frantic rescheduling over the next few days couldn't link us up with the main group and we finally just cancelled the entire trip. Luckily, we had taken travel insurance and only lost a few hundred dollars in non-refundable deposits.



So, three missed flights, all due to weather in one way or another.



# What is your favorite joke?



**R**ene Descartes strolls into a McDonald's and orders a BigMac and a Diet Coke.

The counterman asks "Would you like fries with that?"

Rene strokes his chin and responds "I think not."

POOF! He disappears!

This is funny to a certain group of people and not others. Rene Descartes is famed for his assertion (in Latin): Cogito, ergo sum. I think, therefore I am. If you don't know that, the joke goes over your head.

*Jack*

Frank,

And he wasn't even a Christian Brother.



# When did you get your first car?



Norene brought our first car with her when we married. In July of 1969, her 1963 Ford Galaxie was rear-ended and demolished in a multi-car collision on the New Jersey Turnpike, and we were forced to replace it. We were at the time living at 150 Stephenson Blvd in New Rochelle, so having a car was an absolute necessity. Norene worked in Port Chester, and I worked in White Plains, and there wasn't any such thing as 'public transport'.

With only \$1,700 cash on hand, our options were severely limited. A co-worker at IBM, Sal Legato, helped us search for something appropriate and picked us up in his car and drove us around to check what was available. What we wound up with was far beyond what we thought we might have gotten. A young woman in (I think) Yonkers was about to get married and her future husband already owned more than one car, so she was

selling hers. When we offered our balance, \$1,700, she accepted, and we bought her 1968 Oldsmobile Cutlass S with a mere 8,000 miles on the odometer.

We later drove that car to Bar Harbor, and across to Nova Scotia on the ferry with my Mom and Eddie as passengers. When Norene delivered twins in December 1971, they came home to Yorktown Heights in their carbeds in the back seat of the Cutlass. The sporty Cutlass with its fastback roofline was entirely unsuitable for a family of four, so we eventually traded it in on a 1972 Ford Gran Torino station wagon. Later, we became a two-car family with the addition of a new 1973 VW Beetle, the first car we bought without a trade-in.

# What are some of your special talents?



“The principal virtues of a programmer are Laziness, Impatience, and Hubris.” — Larry Wall

For the longest time I didn’t know if I actually had any special talents. My early years showed that I was kind of on the bright side, doing well in school without actually trying very hard — primarily because I was a voracious reader. As a consequence, I skated through grade school and was accepted to several prestigious NYC high schools, Brooklyn Tech and Bronx High School of Science among several others. I wound up at St. Augustine Diocesan HS because it was close and (practically) free and I could commute on the bus using a student bus pass. My education there was heavy on the academic and light on the technical. I didn’t realize that until Manhattan College dropped me at the end of my freshman year.

Having failed at a topic that everyone told me I was a whiz at, Physics, I switched to 'something else entirely', accounting. If anyone tells you accounting isn't boring, they're lying to you. The problem, I think, is that I have a high tolerance for ambiguity. Other people look at a situation and typically see a perfectly plausible approach to it. I see all or most of the 11 plausible approaches to it. Simultaneously. Some of them are perfect. As luck would have it, accounting as she is practiced in corporate America is driven by 'the rule book'. Every possible scenario (heh heh heh) is covered in the book. No thinking is required, merely an ability to look things up in the book. I coped with it for 4 and a half years.

I had always been a writer, of course, but nothing more than a scribbler, possibly because while other writers see the end-point of their writings, I see ALL of the end-points of my writings. That's a failing, not a talent.

Around 1970, I enrolled at Iona College (New Rochelle) in the MBA program. Their curriculum was heavily geared to the computational, and so they insisted that every incoming MBA candidate be able to program their decrepit IBM 1130 computer, preferably in ForTran. I took a summer course in ForTran ahead of my Fall admission.



Holy macaroni!! A simple, straight-forward program written much the way one might solve an algebra problem resulted in a process that could be run repetitively with different input data and deliver, in each case, THE solution the particular data required. I had a new BFF, and it was an obtuse, literal machine. The following year, IBM offered some apprenticeships within their Information Technology area. I shook the dust of accounting from my sandals and went for a ride.

‘Programming’, by the way, is the perfect career for one with a high tolerance for ambiguity. Because we see many outcomes, we can zero in on those that carry penalties or produce errors — and design to avoid them. The result is what’s known in the game as ‘robust code’. It rarely fails and leaves breadcrumbs behind when it does.

In the ensuing half-century, I have parlayed that talent into four debt-free college educations, a mortgage whose ashes have long since blown away, and a dozen delightful European vacations. Along the way, people who probably know a thing or two have called me “one of the 50 best REXX programmers in the Western Hemisphere”, and computational techniques I originated are hard at work at companies and government installations around the world.

And... since personal computers now allow writers with my disability to try out multiple variants on stories they write — until they settle on one they like — I'm actually finishing some of the stories I write.

*Geri*

Well, that explains why I need an IT guy. I'm lazy and impatient but I lack hubris. Do I detect a hint of Adult ADD? If so, welcome!

# Are you a morning person or an evening person?



I think I may never have been a morning-person. Absent a reason to get up early (school, work, appointment, &c.) I would sleep late and stay up late into the evening. As a child, my parents planned elaborate vacations that always involved getting on the road by the dawn's early light. As much as I liked going on vacation, I really objected to being awakened at O-dark-thirty: "Get up. Get dressed, We're leaving."

School... are all schools run by morning-people? It's only been fairly recently that school start-times are what they call 'staggered' with some students required to report for duty before sunrise while others catch a much later school bus. All my schooling was in the era of 8am or 9am starts which, now that I think about it, was an acceptable compromise.

Employers insist that employees all be (roughly) in the same place at (roughly) the same time. That simply requires a standard start time, and it's generally early... 7:30-ish. After I left IBM in '92, I went to work as a contractor for GTE Data Services in an 8-to-4 job. At some point they needed to cover a late shift and offered it to me: noon-to-10:30 4 days per week. Yes, of course I jumped at it. This meant that I would transit Malfunction Junction (where I-4 branches off from I-275 in downtown Tampa) about 11:30am on my way to work and about 11pm on my way home, times when traffic was unusually light. It also meant I could sleep in until about 10am. Best schedule I ever worked.

Whenever I make a doctor's appointment, I try to avoid 'early'. For some doctors, this doesn't work out because they quickly overrun their own schedule. A late appointment in that case means waiting patiently (sic) for them to catch up with themselves. Even some doctors aren't morning-people.

For several years, we have done road trips for vacations or other reasons, and for such times, we try to be on the road as early as possible... a built-in relic from my childhood, perhaps. Getting on the road early is a necessity when the object is 'put miles behind you'. As we get older, driving in the dark is less and less attractive, so we tend to go to ground at dusk, check in to a hotel, get dinner, turn in early, and be up with the Sun. I don't like it,

but that's the way it is.

Yes, evening-person. Definitely.

*Jack*

Well Frank, if you aren't blinded by the early sunrise, you surely will be by the ever brighter LED

headlights, sanctioned, not truly regulated, by inept government specs that are meant to amply light the highways so faster cars don't outdrive their headlights! Bad specs, unenforced speed limits, and declining respect for the law and limits, well, either Walter Cronkite or Chet Huntley used to close their newscasts claiming, too, : "And that's the way it is!"



# What inventions have had the biggest impact on your day-to-day life?



Well, certainly, ‘computers’ have to be on that list. The natural evolution of computers results in ‘the internet’ which has had a huge impact not only on my life, but on virtually everybody’s life. The ability to find employment in computer-related fields meant that my family could do enjoyable things like ‘eating regularly’ and ‘sleeping indoors’.

When I was a tyke, my parents spent an exorbitant amount of money, \$200 or \$300, on a set of Compton’s Pictured Encyclopedia so that I would have the knowledge of the world at my fingertips (and they would, too). Those books, all 150 pounds of them, are now scrap. I have the world’s knowledge at my fingertips as long as my phone is charged. The phone costs an exorbitant amount of money, though...

Until I was a young adult with a family, day-to-day financial transactions were done either in cash or by check, and almost certainly in cash if the total were under \$30. That meant toting a wallet full of greenbacks and/or keeping one's checkbook handy. Right now, I can't tell you how much money I have in my pocket, but it is almost certainly less than \$50, and that includes the one or two \$20 bills I keep as an emergency reserve. The reason for that is that almost every financial transaction today is done by credit card unless the amount is under \$3 or \$4, and sometimes even then. The emergence of 'The Cashless Society' means today's world is virtually unrecognizable to a time traveler from 1965.

Medical progress over the span of my 77 years has been phenomenal. Maladies that once were fatal are routinely treated today. My father died in 1958 of his second heart attack; I have eight stents in my heart and am alive because of them. Surgeries today are often done by machines, sometimes under the direction of a surgeon; sometimes with a trained surgeon standing by just in case something odd happens. Cataracts that once were removed and substituted with thick, heavy lenses in eyeglass frames are now replaced in situ with lightweight plastic lenses custom-designed patient-by-patient giving them perfect or near-perfect vision.

It's a wonderful world, and it's getting better every day.



# If you were to do it over, what would you do differently?



**H**oo, boy! That's gonna be a long list...

Number 1 -- I would have brushed and flossed with much greater frequency than I did. My teeth are naturally soft, and any lapse in daily dental care has far-reaching implications. By 'far-reaching', I mean that I now have only one tooth that doesn't have either a root canal or a crown, or both. I can't imagine how it escaped.

Number 2 -- and not far behind #1, I would have learned to dance, and would have taken far more opportunities to do so. It may not be apparent now, but as a teenager I was catastrophically shy, and I think 'dancing' would have helped to overcome that. It would probably also have gotten me into the habit of 'moving around' which never developed very well. I

suspect (but have no actual evidence) that good dancers stay relatively slim, something I miss very much.

Number 3 -- I would have resisted the urge to blend in with my contemporaries by taking up the tobacco habit. My father's death in 1958 from a heart attack probably associated with his pack+per day habit should have been a wake-up call. Had I never taken the habit up there might have been less chance that my children would... aaaaand I might not have needed eight stents in my heart.

Number 4 -- I would have travelled more. One of my friends from my Manhattan College days, Dave Brill, got kicked out of Manhattan one year after I did. When I got bumped, I got a job as a drone at an insurance company. When Dave got bumped, he went to Paris and spent six months washing dishes, sweeping floors, and similar dirty jobs, but he spent six months in Paris. I am to this day sick with envy that I had not the wit to do something so outrageous.

Number 5 -- I would have been kinder. Growing up, I always felt somewhat insecure. I can see that now with hindsight but I think I was not aware of it at the time. That insecurity manifested as being a stereotypical smart-ass, and friends from that period will still admit suppressing (in some cases, unsuccessfully) the impulse to punch me out. I'm sure I lost a pile of friends who just

couldn't cope with my behavior. I'm not even sure I've weaned myself off that. Certainly, I still to this very day do not suffer fools gladly.

Number 6 -- I would have saved more and been less of a spendthrift. Had I done so, #4 above might have been an option.



# How has the country changed during your lifetime?



**M**ost noticeably: prices. I can recall being able to buy a pack of cigarettes or a gallon of gas for less than fifty cents. Our first house, a Cape Cod in Yorktown Heights, we bought for \$27,000 in 1971. While we were living there, I bought a Volkswagen Beetle (new, 1973) for \$2,400. When IBM first hired me on as an accountant in 1967, I was pleased to be making \$500 per month in New York City. That's what some people there now make per day.

The computer revolution was just getting started. The 'latest thing' was that a bill from a utility company might take the form of a punched card that you had to return with your check in a stamped envelope.

Your paycheck was an actual paper check that you took to your bank where you deposited it just before withdrawing enough cash to tide you over. EFTS (Electronic Funds Transfer System) came much later. Grocery shopping was done with greenback dollars (usually) and with personal checks (rarely). Norene got the scare of her life when she got to the check-out cashier and discovered that the \$200 she had withdrawn for two week's groceries was missing. Luckily, she had left it in the car, but our policy after that became "if you don't want our check, you don't want our business".

The age of electronics was in its infancy. In 1961 when I graduated from high school, my brother Jim gifted me with a Keuffel+Esser LogLog Duplex Decitrig slide rule, which was then the Starship Enterprise of computing devices. It would do the most amazing computations for anyone who had studied its manual thoroughly and who was content with three-digit accuracy. Jim got that for me because I was headed off to Manhattan College to major in Physics, and a good slide rule was an absolute necessity. \$26. I still have it. Eight years later, I was an accountant in IBM's Field Engineering HQ at 99 Church St. in White Plains when our manager, Dave Fisher, had to use up \$5,000 that was left over in his 1969 budget. Dave splurged and bought four (4) Sharp Compet22 electronic desk calculators with 14-digit nixie tube displays for his senior staff. Got that? They

were \$1,200 EACH. In 1976, we bought 1 Allen Rd. in Brookfield CT (later renumbered to 11 Prange Rd.) and decided we needed a calculator to help us balance the checkbook. The Caldor supermarket at Candlewood Lake Rd and Route 7 had a back-to-school sale on calculators and we bought a TI-35 that would do absolutely everything my slide rule could do, do it in the blink of an eye, and do it with 8-digit accuracy. \$13. I still have it. Moore's Law strikes again.

Credit cards were rare. Business men carried a Diner's Club card in case they had to take a client out to dinner, but ordinary usage of plastic was largely unheard-of. When I graduated from college, Mobil sent me (unsolicited) a Mobil credit card good solely for buying gas or repairs. It stayed in my wallet unused until one night we were distressed to discover that we could either buy gas or pay the tolls for getting home from Staten Island but not both. There were no such things as ATMs yet. We tanked up at a Mobil station and were immediately hooked on consumer credit.

Politics was much kinder. Nixon and Kennedy could meet on stage and debate the issues of the day, and afterwards shake hands and wish each other well. Those days seem so quaint now.

Telephones were wall-mounted or on one's desk. Wall-mounted phones usually came with a tightly-coiled wire so that you could

move some distance away and still keep the conversation going. Unless it was a screaming emergency, long distance calls waited until after 7pm when the rates went down. Even so, calls didn't go on for hours because they were being charged by the minute, and it wasn't cheap even if the evening rates were lower. That's one instance where prices went down: the telephone company now may note how long a call lasts, but with unlimited plans, no one cares.

There was no internet. There were no 'smart phones'. There weren't even any cellular phones except for a few ham radio operators who built and maintained their own private local cells. Watch episodes of "Banacek" on archival TV and see him using a mobile phone in his car. He could do that because he was fabulously wealthy from the fees he charged insurance companies for recovering stolen goods. As little as 20 years ago, it was next to impossible to go to Europe and have a phone that allowed you to call home to the States. When it was possible, it was super-expensive. Today, my iPhone works in almost every country across the world, and I can call home from almost anywhere for \$0.25/minute.

GPS didn't exist until about the 1970s or 1980s and that was primarily for use by the military. When it became possible for a private citizen to get a personal GPS, the software was deliberately tweaked to reduce the accuracy. Today there are



three independent GPS systems (soon to be four), and accuracy is now “within 20 feet”.

Cars did not typically come equipped with seatbelts, and ‘bucket seats’ were for sports cars. Airbags were far in the future, as were anti-lock brakes and crumple zones. Basically, we rode around in coffins with wheels. Highway speed limits (especially on the new [1956] Eisenhower Interstate System) of 70mph were typical until the Oil Crisis of 1973 resulted in the National Maximum Speed Limit (NMSL) of 55mph, an entirely unsuccessful attempt to save gas. It was sold as a life saving measure (“55 saves lives”) and counts as one more lie the government told us.

Television was black & white. Color TVs first appeared around (I think) 1960, but they were expensive. We got our first color TV while living in Brookfield CT in the late 70s.

Almost no one had a concealed weapons permit. That trend didn’t start until around 1987 when Florida became the first of the modern rash of shall-issue states. Illinois became the last state to go shall-issue (2013) just after the Supreme Court ruled in *McDonald v. Chicago* that most of its laws were unconstitutional.

In 1959 or 1960, Jerry and Peggy were in California and Jerry had just landed a job with GE in Utica NY. Mom and I flew to

California aboard a TWA Super Constellation to help them pack out and drive back east. The flight took 7 hours plus a refueling stop. Jets have managed to shave only one hour from that, but can now do it in one jump. The four of us rode back mostly along Route 66, taking 6 days for the trip. You can't do that anymore. Route 66, The Mother Road, is almost totally renamed and repurposed.

# At what times in your life were you the happiest, and why?



**T**hat's an odd question and therefore difficult to provide a precise answer (or answers) for.

There are, naturally, points at which I was unusually happy, but there are also periods of happiness, and perhaps they all rate attention.

Finding and marrying the girl I love is, no surprise, both a point and a period. Norene makes me happy almost on a constant basis. Between us, we have generated three surprisingly successful daughters. Oh, yes, there were times when they \_weren't\_ 'sources of happiness', but those are easily forgotten given all the times they \_were\_.

"Paying off the mortgage" has to rate right up there with the best of times. There is little to compare with the feeling of relief that sweeps over you as the necessity to come up with \_\_x\_\_ bucks every month evaporates. (Here's a great big "Thank You!" to all those Systems managers throughout the 60s and 70s who were so afraid of 'wasting two bytes of storage' that they precipitated the Y2K crisis.) To a lesser extent, having a car or cars similarly free-and-clear feels, let me assure you, quite nice.

Along about the turn of the century (right after Y2K paid off our mortgage), the demands of domestic life began to ease, and Norene and I discovered the joys of traveling in Europe. Between 1996 and now, we have been to Europe eleven times, lately doing so aboard cruise ships. Paris remains our favorite destination, but Prague runs a very close second.

When I first began working for IBM, it was in the accounting area, first at Eastern Region G/A, 350 Park Avenue NYC, and later at Field Engineering HQ G/A, 99 Church Street, White Plains. It was boring and I include it here merely as prelude. Near the end of 1971 due to some hard-to-explain manpower imbalances, I and four others from the accounting area got a chance to move over into Systems. It was scary at first, but as I began to understand how closely my talents fitted in with that mission, it became less scary and more pleasant. My insatiable curiosity worked to make me 'the resident expert' on several technologies

to the point that I could teach subjects for which there was no standard curriculum, where I had to design and develop the course from start to finish... and then deliver it. Someone once opined that I am probably among the top 50 REXX programmers in the Americas. If that doesn't make one feel good, there's something seriously wrong. At several international REXX Symposia I have presented techniques that I developed, and these techniques are now in use at companies and governments for whom I, myself, have never worked. All of this provides a background hum of happiness punctuated with individual peaks of joy. Mark Twain was right: "Make your vocation your vacation, and you'll never work a day in your life."

So, family, career, and finances are all aligned. What's not to be happy about?

*Eileen*

wonderful!!!

