

An Appreciation

For the past twelve years, the Harvard Institute for Learning in Retirement has been my haven of learning. I have encountered many talented friends and colleagues who have enriched my life. Attendance now renews my flagging energy in these later years.

I came from humble beginnings, born into an immigrant family who arrived in New York City in 1904. They came from Burstyn (Burstein), a shtetl then part of the Austro-Hungarian (Hapsburg) Empire, in Eastern Europe. They settled in Manhattan, on the lower East side, among the many relatives who had preceded them.

My father was employed as a presser in the garment industry. The work was seasonal and precarious. In those days there were no unions or benefits of any kind.

I was fortunate to benefit from the excellent New York City school system and graduated from high school in 1932, in the midst of The Great Depression. My grades qualified me to enter the City College of New York tuition-free. I signed up for evening classes, hoping to find daytime work. Jobs were scarce and the market was worsening. I attended evening sessions for the 1932-33 year.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt was inaugurated on March 4, 1933. Among the “alphabet agencies” created to deal with the severe economic problems was the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), a work for pay program for young people and WWI veterans. I entered the CCC in September, 1933, and stayed for almost a year. The pay was \$30 a month; \$25 of it was sent directly to my family.

In 1935 I returned to evening school, at Pace Institute, then a high grade vocational school for training accountants. It has since become a university with several

campuses in and around New York City. I graduated in 1939 and became a Certified Public Accountant in 1940. As it turned out, work in auditing the books of business organizations required verification and confirmation of underlying records, skills which could, by lateral transfer, be applied to scholarly work for class.

The dire poverty in my family, amplified by the Great Depression, denied me the opportunity of a four year college education. I felt resentment at being deprived of the experience available to others, and developed a feeling of respect and admiration for those who were able to earn degrees. In the following years I maintained a sporadic interest in scholarly matters on my own.

After a successful life in family and business, I retired in 1988 at age 73 and looked forward to the rewards of leisure and travel. Life was good for Helen and me. Our two children were doing well and we lived in our Bedford home among neighbors, old and new. In the early 90's I detected some changes in Helen's behavior and in 1994 sought help from a local counseling group in Bedford. I asked for an older woman, who turned out to be an excellent choice. I still see her on a regular basis. She suggested, among many other things, that I apply to the Harvard Institute for Learning in Retirement.

Soon after, I did apply, and was accepted for the fall semester in 1994. Since then I have been feasting on the many offerings at HILR. I have studied under many Group Leaders and sought always to impress them with my ardor and work. My early educational lack has been steadily remediated. I now accept the unmerited Pace BA degree that somebody "awarded" me in the listing of the HILR Member Directory.

What astonishes me is the acceptance by my highly educated colleagues as a valued equal. I try still to merit their high regard. Also, having turned 90, I have

received added ceremonial recognition from our Dean and University Marshall. All this just for trying hard to be a good guy and avid student!

In my two Memoir Study Groups, I have improved my writing skills (so I am told) by creating vignettes. My daughter Amy, who works at Middlebury College, has helped me in the computer presentation of my memoir work and has shared some of my writings with her co-workers. Some, including two history professors, have expressed interest and would like to read more.

The Harvard Institute for Learning in Retirement will commemorate their 30th anniversary in 2007. I hope to join in the celebration during my 13th year of joyful learning and friendship.