



Mike's Life

A Collection of Memories and Stories about my early life
and my life with Rose

Mike's Life



This book is dedicated to Rose, my wife, partner, lover and best friend who stood by my side for almost 54 years. She was and is the love of my life. A part of me is gone now but I will never forget you sweetheart.



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Mom And Dad

My grandparents on my father's side were living in Palm Bay, Florida, on December 5, 1925, when my father, William, was born. The family lived on a small farm of about thirty acres, growing strawberries and peppers to supplement my grandfather's income as a carpenter.

Dad was one of fifteen children. My grandfather, Louis Schmitt, was married first to a woman who bore him five children - three boys and two girls: Lou, Nick, Frank, Toni, and Florence. Lou, Frank, and Toni lived



Dad in uniform 1944

long lives, but Florence died at about a year old, and Nick was killed in a car crash as a young man. Louis's first wife died shortly after the children were born, and he remarried Barbara Beasner. Together they had George, Leonard, and another Florence (who also died within

a year of birth), then my dad William, followed by six more children: Edward, Rita, Walter, Jerome, Veronica, and Bobbi.

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With such a large family, there were many hands to help with the demanding work of running a small farm. My grandfather also worked as a carpenter as their primary source of income. Most of the kids worked in the fields or doing other 'farm' chores. When my dad showed an early interest in cooking, my grandmother began teaching him while he was still very young. Grandma took care of things until the last of the children moved away.

I was very young when my grandfather had a stroke. Grandma moved to Melbourne so she could be close to the nursing home where he was cared for. After he died, she returned to Palm Bay, settling less than a mile from the old farmhouse. My Grandmother Barbara lived into her 90s and remained the proud matriarch of the Schmitt family. She was tough, but also very kind.

I have a few memories of the old farmhouse, though I was very young at the time. By then, it had running water and electricity—improvements my dad did not have when he was growing up. I still remember the outhouse, but the kitchen had running water, and there was

Mom And Dad

even a small bathroom that was added. Life was much harder then, but my dad did well in school and played on the high school football team. He graduated from Melbourne High School in May of 1944.

Many of my aunts and uncles stayed in or retired to the area, and I always thought of them as loving productive people — good examples for their children and for anyone who crossed their path. George and Edward both made careers in the military, and my parents held them in especially high esteem for it. All the boys were skilled with their hands, always collaborating on some home repair or vehicle problem. They came up through school in the Melbourne area and left home one by one after graduating.

Dad enlisted in the Army Air Corps on December 2, 1943, while still a senior in high school, and entered active duty the following May after high school graduation. I remember he told me he never even went home after graduation. He went straight to the train station and then on to basic training. After basic, he trained as a tail gunner on a B-29, but the war ended before he

ever saw action overseas, and he was released from service on June 10, 1946.

My grandparents on my mother's side were living in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on January 25, 1923, when my mother, Constance, was born — an only child to Arthur and Berdella Bault. After some years together, they divorced, and Berdella and Constance moved from Pennsylvania to Florida.

They first settled in the Tampa/St. Petersburg area, but my mother wanted to get out on her own and started looking for a job outside the area. Mom left home for Melbourne to work as a secretary, in Melbourne, at the Banana River Naval Station (Melbourne Airport) during World War II.

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Since mom had obtained a teaching degree from Indiana University back in Pittsburg, soon after the war ended, she began teaching at



Mom in 1944

Melbourne High School — where, one day, my father happened to be picking up a younger sibling shortly after his discharge. That's how my parents met. They started dating and married on

September 26, 1946, at Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Melbourne. My aunt Mickey and uncle Leonard stood as maid of honor and best man and later became my godparents.

My parents had a traditional marriage: Dad was the breadwinner, and Mom ran the household—cooking, cleaning, and raising the children. She always seemed genuinely proud to be a homemaker. Dad never went to college, but he did well in high school, and I have always thought of him as one of the smartest people I knew—without question, the hardest working. To

this day, I do not know how he found time to do everything he did.

After the wedding, they moved into a small apartment in downtown Melbourne. Like his parents, Dad had grown up Catholic; Mom was raised Protestant but converted soon after the wedding.

Early in my parents' marriage, my dad worked for a small mom-and-pop store in downtown Melbourne, repairing radios and other appliances. Their small apartment was nearby, and the store owner was also connected with the local funeral home. I was so young, I do not remember him working there. He soon took the job with Tom Houston Peanut Company, where he remained for more than 40 years.

My mother quit her job when I came along and did not work outside the house until Brian (youngest) started school many years later.

When my mother went back to work, she started as a substitute teacher at several schools. She eventually landed a full-time job as a teacher at Stone Middle School.

Stone Middle School was in the predominantly 'black' section of town and students were being bused

Mom And Dad

everywhere after integration in the 1960's, so the mix of races was very diverse. She thrived in the environment teaching Social Studies and History at Stone and retired from the Brevard County school system on June 7, 1985. I have been fortunate during my life to have relationships with many wise people. Some were wise in some ways with wisdom in specific areas but shortcomings in others. Others seemed wise in everything they did. I would put my parents in the latter category. My parents struggled at times but made the most of everything they had. Looking back, they had a very optimistic view of life in general, were very smart about life on a day-to-day basis and seemed to instinctively know the right thing to do at the right moment.

I have many memories of my parents, but the one that will always stay with me was my dad's love for my mother. They certainly bickered from



time to time, but I was always touched by the way they worked together as a loving team. Dad was proud of his entire family, but my mother always came first, and their bond grew

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even stronger over the years. As they got older and my mother's health declined, my dad did everything he could to care for her. Even when she was in a hospital bed at home, he moved a recliner beside it so he could stay close to her. I didn't realize it at the time, but he was setting the perfect example for me when it came time to care for Rose.

My Early Childhood

On December 28, 1949, I came into this world weighing just over 8 pounds and according to my mother, birthing was not without its challenges.



She sometimes talked about my dad and Dr. Kaminski sleeping in the waiting room while she was in labor and not being able to sleep because of

their snoring. The Brevard hospital was near US1 and Hibiscus Ave, and the original building is still standing. My mother was released from the hospital after 10 days and remembers the



hospital
staff
apologizing
for the size
of the bill

which was \$235.70. After I was born, my mother became a 'stay at home mom' and did not return to work outside the home until Brian started school.



On May 3, 1952
Linda arrived and
the apartment was
just too small for the
4 of us. So, on
September 5, 1953,
my parents moved
into a new house at

1012 Fee Avenue in Melbourne. Harvey Huggins and his wife were one of the more affluent families in the area. They owned the local hardware store, a house on the beach side and they also built a few homes for sale. My mother and dad purchased the home from Harvey Huggins for \$10,000 and he held the mortgage. My parents both told me many times about how fortunate they were that he 'took a chance' with them and that they would never have been able to own a house without his kindness. Harvey told me later that we should be so proud of them because they paid the mortgage off on time and were never late with a payment.

The house has a living room, kitchen, dining room, bathroom and 3 small bedrooms. My room was at the back of the house and there was a

My Early Childhood

small window that overlooked the back yard. The floors were shiny, newly varnished wood and covered the floor in every room. I don't remember the apartment we moved from, but I do remember the house seemed very big. My dad was always interested in having a nice yard and gardening and the new house was absent any kind of grass at all in the yard. The front and back yard were nothing but sand and were wreaking havoc on the new wood floors when we tracked in it from outside. I remember several times my dad rented a sander and re-finished all the floors in the house. My dad's answer to the lack of grass was to go to the family farm in Palm Bay and dig up grass from the fields. He would then 'sprig' grass from what he dug up at the farm into the yard in Melbourne. He was very busy during the day with his job, and I can still remember him planting those pieces of grass in the back yard at night with some lights he strung up so he could see. I would watch him out my window when I was supposed to be asleep, and it seemed this went on for months. My dad thought that a nice-looking yard was not only necessary but had to be something to be proud of. He finally got the front

yard looking pretty good but mostly gave up on the back yard because he could not keep it nice with all of us playing on it all the time. He even built us a playhouse out back, so I am sure he knew that a nice backyard with lush grass was not to be until we got older.

Dad's job with Tom's kept him on the road at least six days a week. When I was very young, I began helping him load the truck at night, and when my school schedule allowed, I traveled with him as he serviced customers. Even then, I could see how seriously he took care of them, and he always seemed to have strong relationships with the people he served. The lessons I learned during those days helped me later when I worked with the public.

Although his work for Tom's was a major part of his life, it was only one piece of his story. I have always wondered how he found time for everything else he did while I was growing up.

Because he grew up on a farm and had experience repairing appliances and household items, I do not remember ever seeing a repairman inside our house. My dad could fix almost anything and kept everything working, both inside and out.

My Early Childhood

He also took great pride in the yard and worked constantly to keep it looking nice.

When I was about eight, I bought a used reel-



to-reel tape recorder from a neighbor. It played tapes well, but the recording function was

very weak. My dad examined it, used a meter to trace the problem to a resistor in the circuitry, and replaced it. After that, it worked perfectly. I thought that was remarkable, and years later, my Army job involved troubleshooting circuitry and finding problems much like the one he had solved.

Dad also found time to decorate the house for Christmas, and his homemade displays won the city lighting contest many times over the years. There was plenty of vacant land then, and my dad knew many of the owners. Each year, we would go to one of those properties and cut about 15 small pine trees for the outdoor display. When we

got home, my mother would pick out the best one for inside the house. He always built a manger scene where he cut manger figures from thin wood panels, painted them by hand, built the manger out of old wood scraps, and arranged the lights to complete the scene. Traffic would often back up for blocks as people slowed down to see his work.

Dad was also a very creative person. One year, he used a bicycle wheel and a washing machine gearbox to power a book whose pages turned to tell the Christmas story. At the time, I thought it was the most creative thing I had ever seen. I do remember that was one year he did not win first place and I think he was very disappointed. I still think about that project and am so impressed by how he dreamed up and built the display with so few resources.

My dad worked very hard to make ends meet. He never went to college or attained any degree higher than graduating from high school, but I have always considered him to be very smart. Without exception, my dad was the hardest working person I ever knew, and I

My Early Childhood



I am still in awe of how he was able to find time to do all the things he did

We were Catholic, like my dad's parents and most of the

neighborhood. We lived two blocks from the Our Lady of Lourdes church and every Sunday, we were in church. I remember more than one Sunday spent sitting still in a chair afterward as a consequence for not sitting still during the service.

Catholic meant no meat on Fridays, which was never a hardship, since Dad loved to fish and was equally at home with a cast net or a rod and reel. We ate whatever he caught every Friday and plenty of weeknights as well. It was almost always fried and full of bones. I remember both my parents constantly warning us to make sure and not swallow a bone. I still don't care for fish today.

I learned many of my skills from my dad, and one of his favorite places was his workshop. He was

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very skilled with wood and, after he retired, created many projects with his scroll saw. He spent countless patient hours cutting out clocks and other pieces, most of which he gave to friends and family.

My dad has always been my hero. He was also one of the smartest and most creative people I have



ever known. Although he had only a high school education, his instincts and talents far exceeded his formal schooling. I have always felt deeply fortunate to have had both of my parents,

along with their endless love and support, throughout my childhood and beyond. There is an old saying that you are amazed by how much smarter your parents seem to get between the ages of 16 and 22. Although we had our share of minor disagreements, I think I understood even when I was young that my parents were wise, capable, and doing their very best. We had very

My Early Childhood

little money, but we never lacked the things we truly needed. I was never hungry and always had clothes and the basic necessities. Everything they did was guided by what they believed was best for us. My mother sometimes apologized, especially at Christmas, for not being able to buy us more, and those apologies always made me uncomfortable. It was clear that they loved us deeply and that their children were the center of their lives. It was obvious to me they were working their tails off and using their example, I always thought if I really wanted something trivial that was out of their reach, I could always work for it. We always knew how they felt about most things, and their values made sense to me. Over time, I adopted many of those same beliefs as my own.

I remember the night my dad put me to work for the first time. His day included doing the paperwork for the day and he had a crank type adding machine mounted on a small portable desk he had made of wood. When I stood up, I was about as tall as the adding machine. One night he called me over while he was working and asked me if I could count to 18. I remember standing there and proudly shouting out each number

perfectly from 1 to 18. I have never forgotten that because he was so proud of me and since I could do that, I had new responsibilities to the household. My chores around the house now included doing 'stales'. This new job involved removing the stale crackers, peanuts and candy from the packages that he had picked up from his customers. Once the contents were removed, the packages were then put together with a rubber band with a strict count of 18 packages in every bundle. I was to perform this task for many years until I was able to pass it to Linda when I was too busy doing other more important tasks.

In addition to "cleaning the stales" a couple of times a week, I was also expected to help my dad load the truck at night after he returned home and we had eaten supper. In the summer, I often went with him early in the morning and was with him all day. Supper was at about 5pm every evening and we ate together as a family. My dad would call my mother near his last stop to tell her that he was on the way home so she could have supper ready. As soon as he was home, we ate supper so that he would have time to load the truck for the next day. Everything we loaded had

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its own place and it was critical that everything was loaded correctly so that he could find it quickly the next day while on the road. After I was about 8 years old, I helped him load the truck almost every night. There were times that I was lured away after supper to play with friends and didn't show up to help him load. He would just do it himself, but I was normally "shamed" by my mother for not being there to help him with the work. This didn't happen often, but I still remember my mother's words. Sometimes my dad knew I had plans, especially during the summer when it stayed daylight longer and he would tell me to join my friends.

I was very young when I started riding with my dad on his route. I often sat on the step of his



Mike in Dad's Truck

van and watched the road just outside the door and we traveled down the highway. Other times I sat on the engine cover, and I remember it getting very warm. During the summer, my dad would take me with

him and as I grew up, I was able to help him by getting the product he needed for his customer from the truck and taking it to him inside the business. This would save him a lot of time because he didn't have to go back to the truck and he always remarked that we arrived home much earlier when I was with him. In those days my pay was \$1 a day and I got to have a coke, hamburger and fries at lunch!

Being with my dad doing his job was an education about hard work, business and planning that was better than could ever be taught in a classroom. Since my dad had customers, he had to keep them satisfied, I was seeing that relationship firsthand. This experience gave me a real understanding of how business should be conducted and how customers should be treated. Many times, his customers became friends as well and the trust they placed in my dad always seemed special to me. I remember many times that when my dad was ready to collect for his products, the owner was busy and told my dad to "just take it out of the cash register". Dad would always tell them no, he would wait for them to finish what they were

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doing. He would tell me later that trust was so important between him and the customers that he would never want a question in their mind if the cash happened to come up short that day for that business. As more “chain” stores came to the area, dad began servicing them as well. It seemed to be a completely different atmosphere when servicing those stores. The personal relationship was gone with a much higher turnover in help and corporate rules and regulations about checking and replenishing stock.

On March 19, 1956, Roger was born. I believe he and Linda shared a room for a while but the house that seemed so big seemed to be shrinking. The property that the house was located on was very narrow but was pretty deep so there was room to build an addition on the back of the house. Soon after Roger was born, my parents came up with enough money to build the addition that included 2 bedrooms and a bathroom. My dad hired out the main structure of the addition, but he finished the interior himself. Linda and I were to each get a bedroom, and my dad built very nice desks and headboards for us. Linda’s were painted white and mine was a dark stain and

varnish. Like the main house, there was no air conditioning at that time, and I can still remember the hot nights in the summer. The addition to the house was laid out where you came out of the main house where the window in my original bedroom used to be. To get to one of the bedrooms, you walked down a hallway. Linda's room was the first bedroom on the left and mine was the last door on the left. At the end of that hallway was the bathroom door.

When I was a teenager, I had a BB gun and used the hallway as a place to target practice. I would set up a box in front of the bathroom door and shoot at targets. Sometimes the bathroom door would be open, and unknown to me at the time, if I missed, the BB would go through the shower curtain and hit the tile behind it leaving a chip in the tile. I honestly did not realize this had happened during the time I lived there but my dad figured it out years later and brought it to my attention. I guess I missed the target a lot because there were sure a lot of chips on those tiles and I could understand why he was not very happy with my previous behavior!

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Brian was born on August 2nd, 1961, when I was 11 years old and the family was complete. Roger and Brian shared a room until I moved out to go into the army.

Most of the families in the neighborhood were Catholic and we were as well. My grandfather had helped with the building of the old St. Joseph church in Palm Bay, and we were always proud of that. On Sunday we always went to mass as a family. We usually walked since Our Lady of Lourdes Church was only 2 blocks away. I was very young and church was long and boring. There was no kids church or other alternatives to keep us busy and we had to sit still in the hard wooden pew for what seemed like forever. I had a good attention span for a young kid but not in church so I was very fidgety. I remember getting home from church and having to sit on a chair for an hour as punishment for my behavior in church. I soon learned that sitting still in church was punishment enough without the extra hour at home and at some point, the chair at home was in the past.

After a year in the local kindergarten, I started 1st grade at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic

School. The school had opened just a couple of years before I arrived and was fully staffed with 8 nuns of the Dominican order. Classes were large but very well disciplined. Since I was born at the end of December, I must have been a very young 6-year-old in 1st grade. I was promoted to 2nd grade at the end of my first year but near the start of my 2nd year, I was moved back to the 1st grade to repeat. I am sure it was explained to me at the time, but I don't remember any explanation. I do remember crying because I was not allowed to be with my friends.

My 1st grade teacher was Sister Marie Ambrose. I remember liking her very much and she was always very nice to everyone. Looking back, I guess if I had to repeat a grade, it was good that I had a teacher I liked. There were about 50 kids in my 1st grade class, but I believe she always had total control. Even in first grade I knew that getting into trouble in school meant double trouble at home. I know my parents sacrificed to send me to OLL. Not only was there tuition to pay but there were also uniforms and other expenses that went along with private school. I know my parents had 2nd thoughts

My Early Childhood

about the value of Catholic school by the time Roger and Brian came along but I will always credit my 8 grades at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic School with the basic education that gave me the academic tools to succeed

In 2nd grade my teacher was Mrs. Hanna. She would be the only teacher I had while at O.L.L that was not a nun. I do remember that like the general attitude, she was very strict and seemed mean compared to Sister Marie Ambrose. The whole time I was at O.L.L. I always considered the atmosphere as strict but not overly so. They made it very clear what the rules were and that breaking the rules had consequences. There was no air conditioning in the classrooms, and I don't remember a lot of fans either. I remember it being very hard to stay awake, especially in the afternoons and falling asleep could get your fingers slapped with a blackboard pointer. The teachers always had full control, and I don't remember anyone giving one of them a hard time. Looking back, I don't remember anyone particularly worried about hurting our self-esteem or giving a student a 'safe space'. They just wanted us to learn. You were

expected to behave in class and do what was expected and expectations were high. Excuses were generally not accepted, and parents were expected at parent/teacher conferences. For most of us, it was not much different than being at home. During the time I was at O.L.L. all students attended mass each morning before school. Since I walked to school each day, sometimes I would be late and must wait for mass to complete before joining my class. Coming into mass late was not acceptable. We also had religion class every day and it was always the 1st subject of the day. Every teacher taught every subject, and we stayed in the same classroom for the whole day.

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There were lots of kids in the area and most of them went to the school attached to the church. After school we would change clothes (most of the time) and meet outside every day for playtime. I was not particularly interested in sports but did participate in softball and other games from time



to time with the other kids. From an early age my interests mostly were electronics and anything mechanical. My dad was always fixing something or working on a project, and I was always under his feet trying to figure out what he was doing or trying to help.

Living directly to the east of our house were Tony and Vivian Azzolina. They had an only child named John and he was about 4 years older than I. Tony was working in construction and worked on my parent's house construction previously.

John was interested in electronics and mechanics and when I was not under my dad's feet. I was trying my best to hang around John and his friends because it seemed they were always doing something interesting. Looking back, I know they were really pretty good at including me in many of their activities even though they were older.

We grew up in a neighborhood where moms were home during the day, and we gravitated from house to house. We all knew each other and the moms all knew us. If we did something off-color, we heard about it immediately.

Around the time I turned 11, I wanted to make some money, and I acquired a paper route with the Daily Times. The paper was a local that had an afternoon paper and a Sunday morning edition. There were several of us that went to O.L.L. that hung out together and we all had routes and rode our bikes down to the paper office every day after school. The office was in downtown Melbourne near the corner of New Haven Avenue and Waverly Place, and my Aunt Carole's father oversaw the carriers. My route was downtown Melbourne and all the adjacent side streets. The mayor of Melbourne, John

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Turner, lived on Strawbridge Avenue, and I can still remember him meeting me at the curb early Sunday mornings and handing him his paper. Friday was normal collection day and sometimes I had a hard time catching people home. Most of the moms worked so they could pay me, so it wasn't too bad. Between watching my dad with his customers and having my own with the paper route, I learned a lot about business and how to treat people and especially customers at a very early age.

The McAloney's

Ronald (Red) and Dorothy McAloney lived in the house across the street from ours on Fee Avenue. I don't remember when they moved in or when I met them, but we got to know each other while I was growing up. They were older than my parents but very active and hard-working.

Red and Dorothy previously lived in Grant, Florida about 20 miles south of Melbourne. Years ago, they had owned a dairy and Red used to deliver milk in town. When I met them, they still had the land and the buildings for the dairy were still standing along with their previous home. All the buildings were gutted and run down but they were using the land and what was left of the buildings to raise pigs for sale at the markets throughout the state.

Red and Dorothy had 4 children, Ronald Jr (Mac), Betty, Mary and John. The siblings were grown, some married and living outside the house. While I knew them all, Mac was going to play a huge part of my life later.

Red and Dorothy made the trip to Grant each day to work on the farm. They had about 200 hogs

running free around the barn and about 200 head of cattle in various pastures in the area to take care of, so the task was daunting.

To feed the hogs, Red would pick up food garbage at many local restaurants and schools. These establishments all had a system where the food 'leftovers' would go into one can, and the paper products would go into another. His service was valuable to the clients because he would pick up the food, clean the cans and clean up the area where they were stored.

Red normally had a car and trailer with six, 55-gallon drums with the tops removed. He used a trailer because it was closer to the ground. Red was very strong and used that strength to dump the cans from the school or business into the 55-gallon drums. He could always use some help and I started working with him part time at around age 12 or 13. I didn't particularly like the work of picking up the food garbage but when we were loaded for the day, we headed to the farm in Grant and I found this very exciting.

When we arrived down at the farm in Grant the 55-gallon drums on the trailer had to be emptied into this huge vat that would cook what

we had collected. We always had to gather up firewood from the pastures and light a fire under the 'cooker'. After cooking all night, a man that lived nearby would come over the next morning and dip the contents of the cooker onto the concrete floor for the hogs to root through and eat. I was always amazed that they would eat everything off the floor and it would be perfectly clean except for any glass, metal or bones.

I was always interested in anything mechanical and there was always something to build or fix. I learned to drive at a very young age on a variety of equipment including the big 'cattle truck'. I remember one time the transmission had to be rebuilt on the cattle truck. I was probably about 13 at the time and interested in what the mechanic that Red had working on the transmission was doing. I watched him take it apart and replace some gears and bearings that were bad. He put it back together and was ready to put it back in the truck. Removing and replacing the transmission on this size truck was not an easy task. It had 5 forward gears and was very heavy. They were doing the job next to the

house in Melbourne and did not have the correct jacks or stands that are common now.

Charles the mechanic declared it ready to re-install and Red came over to look. I was curious and while they were talking about the next step, I had shifted the transmission between gears while it was on the ground. Whenever I shifted it to a different gear, I would turn the shaft that went into the engine and look at the output shaft that went to the wheels to see how it turned. When I shifted into one of the gears, I could not turn the input shaft. Before they installed it into the truck, I pointed this out and Red and Charles, both ridiculed me telling me that what I was pointing out didn't make any difference because turning the shaft was what the motor was for. They said what I had discovered was normal. They proceeded to put the transmission into the truck and after about 2 hours or so, they were ready to test it out. The reverse worked perfectly but when they put it in 1st gear, the engine stalled when they let the clutch out. What I had discovered was indeed a problem and after they took the transmission out of the truck and tore it down, they discovered that a gear was installed

backwards. I honestly don't remember their reaction, but I know I never rebuilt a manual transmission without testing it my way before I reinstalled it into the vehicle.

While I was never a hunter, I did like to roam though the pastures and shoot armadillos. The armadillos would dig holes, and the cows could break a leg if they fell into one of those holes. That was tragic when it happened. The dead armadillos didn't go to waste; they went into the cooker with the other food garbage. A 22 rifle was all I needed and I carried one almost everywhere I went. There was plenty to shoot at in the pastures and that rifle has seen its share of many varmints. Being familiar with firearms may have helped me later at the rifle range in the Army.

I also learned to ride a horse and to gather up cows to go to the market. Riding a horse during that time was a lot of work but very exciting and enjoyable as well. Many times, I was sore from the constant hard saddle after several hours.

I remember the Fourth of July 1965, when we moved about 200 heads of cattle from Mico to Grant right down Babcock Street. The cattle were in a pasture off Mico road about 10 miles

The McAloney's

from the pasture on Grant Rd. and we thought it would be easier to move them on horseback than load them all in multiple trips on trucks. The traffic wasn't what it is now but there were still occasional cars to deal with. The main thing was the heat. I learned what being on a horse for over 8 hours was all about on that day.

I spent a lot of time with the McAloney family, especially with Red and Dorothy. I would go over early in the morning, and it was always dark when we got home. During the summer I was with them most of the time for a couple of years. I didn't understand it at the time, but I learned a lot about life being around these two. They were both older than anyone I had worked with to that point and it was obvious that they had worked very hard all their lives. Picking up food garbage and cleaning the cans that contained it would seem demeaning to some people, but they viewed it as just part of the overall mission of feeding their hogs.

Sometimes we would take hogs or cows to the market to sell them. This meant we would have to gather the ones that were going and put them in a holding pen. We usually did that the night

before. The next day we would get up early and drive to Grant. When we got there, we would load the big truck with whatever was to be sold and drive to either Kissimmee, Orlando or Palatka. The markets were a fun place for me. They were very busy and I got to wander all over the feed lots looking at different livestock. In the sales area they would bring in the animal being sold for buyers to look at while bidding. Most of the buyers were from major meat suppliers like Oscar Meyer or Swift but local ranchers would also buy something as well to stock their herds. Most of the time the sale went very quickly. The auctioneers talked very fast and I had a very hard time keeping up with what was going on. Red and Dorthy did not seem to have that problem and occasionally we would bring hogs or cows back with us that they had purchased. These were mostly for breeding purposes.

Originally, the main reason I wanted to work around the farm and for Red and Dorthy was that I was able to drive, work on cars and ride horses. It turned out to be a lot of work too! I didn't know it at the time, but even though it was a different experience than being around my dad, the net

result was still being around people that worked hard to make ends meet. On the farm and with no one to call when there was a problem or something needed repair taught me how to be self-sufficient and to 'figure it out' on my own. There is no doubt that learning these skills helped me land my first 'real' job with Brevard Rentals at 16 years of age.

Mike's Life

Early Teens

After eight grades at OLL there was a decision to be made. The parish had built a Catholic high school during my time at O.L.L. and my parents were talking about sending me there. I was not interested in the least because it was heavily geared toward academics including 4 years of Latin. In public school I knew they had wood shop and auto mechanics, subjects that I was more interested in. I wasn't too worried about my parents following through with their thoughts (threats) because it was so expensive they knew they would be wasting their money. I know they considered sending me there because they thought that the academics would be better for me, but I am very glad they dropped the idea and I was going to public school. During my time at O.L.L. we were constantly led to believe that under no circumstances did we want to attend public school. We were told the students were undisciplined and the schools were dangerous.

Since Our Lady of Lourdes school only went through the 8th grade and public high school started at grade 10, I was forced to spend one year

at Southwest Junior High. This school was grade 7 through 9 and was located where Palm Bay High School is now.

The only experience I had with feeling scared or in danger came from the first school bus that I rode to Southwest. There was a school bus stop really close to our house, so on the first day of 9th grade I boarded the bus on my way to junior high school. Even though my age was the same as the older kids, I was one of the 'greener' kids on the bus and there were older boys that were bullying the younger kids. It was getting somewhat physical and the bus driver was clueless. After about 3 days of this, I had met other kids from the neighborhood, and they were using the bus stop about a mile away. I showed up at that stop the next day and that continued for the rest of year.

Some things about public school were very different than Catholic school. This was sometimes embarrassing and drew laughs from the other students. One of those situations was when we were called on in class. At Catholic school, we were required to stand. There was no such requirement in public school, so when we stood, everyone would laugh, knowing we were

from a private school. I think our behavior was a little better than the students that had been in public school before, but we soon settled in and felt comfortable. I took all the normal subjects in 9th grade except that I was allowed to take wood shop with Mr. Bill Ratley. This of course, was the best time of the day for me and I thrived in that class. The one thing that was obvious in the other classes was how far ahead we were in Catholic school. Most of the material I had seen before, and school was mostly boring to me. That's not to say I got great grades. Subjects I was not interested in like English and math were not something I was going to spend extra time on. My goal as far as grades went was to get at least a 'C' and keep my parents happy. I think in my whole time in junior and high school I only failed one subject. There were a few 'D's mixed in for sure. After the year at Southwest Junior high, it was time to make the transition to high school. Melbourne High was close enough to the house to walk and until I managed to get 'wheels' that is what I did.

Since I was interested in cars and anything mechanical or electronic, spending time with

older kids exposed me to those interests earlier than I might have discovered them otherwise. My dad worked on our cars and his truck whenever something went wrong, and I was always eager to watch and learn.

I always looked forward to coming home from school and working on projects, whether building a go-cart or experimenting with radios and other electronic devices. I had very little money, so most of what I used came as hand-me-downs from neighbors or older kids. On my paper routes, and I remember stopping and searching through the dumpster at the local Bell Telephone office, where workers often discard defective or extra parts after cleaning out their trucks. Sometimes there would be really good stuff in there!

There became a time when the population of the area grew to the point where Tom's company decided that my dad could no longer handle the volume. They decided they wanted to add more trucks and create a hub in the area with a manager to oversee the operation. My dad had the opportunity to take the position but turned it down. I am not sure why he did that, but I believe he just didn't have the confidence to take a chance

Early Teens

with the family income. This was a shame because this meant he was working for someone else in the area where he had been his own boss. I always thought he had sold himself short because there was no doubt about his abilities and they would have served him well in the new position.

I was still going with my dad on days when I was not in school or working at the farm. Dad still had a good number of customers, but he didn't have to travel as far with the new Tom's structure. He had made many contacts over the years, and he used those contacts to help get his vending machines into the public schools. I was working with dad one afternoon at Central Junior High filling a machine when my sister and a



friend came up to say hi. That is the day I met Rose Ann Friend. Rose was my sister's age, and Linda wanted me to meet Rose. I was 15 and Rose was 13 at the time. I'm

sure I was busy and wasn't paying much attention to her that day, but Rose was around

Mike's Life

the house quite a bit since she was a friend of Linda's, so we did know each other. A couple of years went by and we began dating. Little did either of us know that in a few years, we would marry and spend the next 53 ½ years together as a happily married couple.

Brevard Rentals

Even though I have had a couple of changes in career paths, I have only had a handful of jobs in my life. My first 'real' job was at Brevard Rentals in Melbourne. I remember interviewing when I was 16 years old by answering an ad in the newspaper. This turned out to be my first and last interview for a job. I didn't get the job after my interview. I was a little disappointed but about 3 or 4 days later I remember Bill and Nancy Grahm came to my house which was close by the store. They told me that their new hire was not going to work out and they offered me the job. In those days, I would not have asked them about pay or benefits, I was just happy to have a job doing something I was interested in.

Bill and Nancy Graham were probably in their late 40's when I met them and I remember them as very kind to each other and deeply in love. There were only a couple of employees and they treated us well. I really liked coming to work because there was always something new going on.

Brevard Rentals was a 'mom-and-pop' operation, and they rented everything from lawn mowers to hospital beds. My stated job with the company was to deliver items to customers' homes or job sites and to repair any item that was broken. It turned out to be much more.

Bill and Nancy both had an active role in running the business. Bill made sure that everything we purchased to rent was also able to be repaired. For me, this was a great job as a young person. The skills I learned there I have used my entire life.

One perk of the job I enjoyed was being able to purchase hand tools at a discounted wholesale price. I just had to tell Mr. Graham what I wanted, and he would order it for me from his suppliers. Many of those tools I still have in my toolbox today.

Brevard Rentals was housed in what used to be an old church with living quarters attached. We were constantly renovating the property, and I learned so much about electrical, carpentry and even plumbing from Bill Graham during those days.

Brevard Rentals

While I was in high school, I took a 2-year course in auto mechanics. The course was 3 hours each day and it was in the morning in my junior year (grade 11) and in the afternoon in my senior year (grade 12). In the senior year there were many times that we mostly worked on teachers' cars or our own cars. I would always check with the instructor (Mr. Dorsey) and if he didn't have something special, he wanted me to work on I would just go to work. Things were more relaxed in those days. If he gave me permission to leave, that was all I needed. I was happy going to work doing something I really liked doing.

It would be hard for me to think of a better job for a young person than Brevard Rentals. For me, it was a continuation of all I had learned from my dad, working on the farm and being around the older kids. I scored high on the tests in the induction center for the Army and I believe that was a direct result of what I had learned up until that point in time. Brevard Rentals was a big part of that.

Mike's Life

Older Teenager

I often spent time with older kids such as John Azzolina and Bob Garvin. They were interested in homemade go-carts, electronics, ham radio, and cars, so I picked up those interests early. I had a soldering iron when I was very young and had somehow obtained a shortwave radio that could pick up stations and ham operators from around the world.

The first (sophomore) year at Melbourne High School was all about academics. I took all the normal subjects like English, Math, Science and even a semester of Spanish. I was not interested in any of these subjects, but they were required and I had to pass them to be able to take auto mechanics for my Junior and Senior years. Starting in my Junior year, I signed up for 3 academic classes and 3 hours of auto mechanics. The auto mechanics class for 11th grade was held in the morning. We met our teacher (Marvin Dorsey) and I immediately liked him. We had a great time in his class that year and we learned a lot. Most of the time was spent in the classroom and that was sometimes a little boring but for the

most part, Mr. Dorsey was very well organized and kept us busy most of the time. He was very serious about his teaching and there was study, homework and testing just like any other subject. When I entered my senior year, I knew I had one goal and that was to graduate. 4 years of English were required and I had 1 more. Because I had taken almost all the required academic classes in prior years, I was only lacking a passing grade English to graduate. In those days, they had what they called phases. Phase 3 was designed for average middle of the road students. They also had a Phase 2 English class that was so easy to pass I barely needed to show up. The class had about 100 students in it with a theater-type setting and the teacher really didn't know if you were there or not. I took the phase 3 class to make my mother happy and the phase 2 class as a backup in case I didn't pass the phase 3 one. I passed them both. In my senior year, auto mechanics was the last 3 periods of the day, and very little time was spent in the classroom. We often had teacher's cars to work on, and we worked on our own cars as well. In the senior

Older Teenager

year, there was far less classroom work, and almost all our time was working in the shop.

There were many times that Mr. Dorsey did not have something for me to work on, so he just let me go to work early. Mr. Dorsey knew me well enough to know I was going to work but I wondered later how much trouble he could have been in had something happened.

During my senior year some of us often skipped 1st period and went to the auto parts store to acquire parts to work on our cars in the afternoon class. Sometimes that happened a couple of times a week and after a couple of months the dean called me to his office. I remember him confronting me with a very high number of 'tardiness' and exclaiming something like, "we are having a hard time getting to school on time." I thought this was a little funny that he used 'we' in what was a statement and I asked him if he was having trouble as well. He didn't think it was as funny as I did, but we worked it out and I tried to make sure I had the parts the day before I needed them going forward.

There were a few of us in the auto mechanics class that had been working on cars for years

before high school and we were knowledgeable in most areas. When a teacher needed something done on their car that was more than a basic repair, Mr. Dorsey would usually pick one of us to do the work. About halfway through my senior year, Chrysler sponsored their 1st trouble shooting contest in Florida. The contest was around the Tampa area and Mr. Dorsey picked Charlie French and I to go as a team. When we got there, we were overwhelmed with the number of teams there. We also realized we were at disadvantage. Most of the teams were given cars from the local dealership to practice on but our dealership in Melbourne would not cooperate, and we went into the contest flying 'blind'. Each team was assigned a car and every car had problems with parts preventing the car from starting or running correctly. There were multiple problem parts on every car. In addition to the car, each team was assigned a judge near the car that had spare parts to provide when asked. Soon after the starting bell was rung, Charlie and I had replaced a couple of parts and were the first to get our car running. The problem came when we were trying to figure out why the

Older Teenager

motor would not idle correctly. We worked on it for several minutes and tried replacing a few items. After time went by, we were guessing and the part we wanted to replace was not even in the bag of extra parts. At some point we gave up and said we were finished. The carburetor was a 2-barrel type and the fuel nozzle that required 1 screw to remove and install had one of the stems missing so the fuel mixture was incorrect. This was the only part we missed but were disqualified because of the omission. I always wondered if we had a similar vehicle to practice with if we would have caught the problem and won the contest. Mr. Dorsey seemed proud regardless and Melbourne High School was to compete in many future contests.

I graduated from Melbourne High School in June of 1968. Things didn't change much and I was still living at home and working full-time for Brevard Rentals. Since the Vietnam war was still going on, and the draft was in effect I knew that military service was almost certain in the near future.

Mike's Life

United States Army

In 1968 the war in Southeast Asia was going strong. In the months following graduation, many of my friends were either getting called for the draft or enlisting before the notice came. Around January of 1969, I decided it was time to figure out what I wanted to do. There was a real possibility I would be drafted. The draft seemed very haphazard, and they were not drafting males in college or that were married but I was not interested in college, and they were discontinuing the married deferments during that time. Many of my peers were either drafted or joined one of the services to avoid the draft and guarantee specific army school and training so I decided I would do the same.

In December 1969 the United States had a lottery for picking draftees and my number (birthdate) was 123. There was no doubt had I would have been drafted soon after that, so I was glad that I had decided to take the path I did.

I do remember my thought process in deciding which service to join. For the Marines, Air Force or Navy, the commitment was 4 years.

I was very active, but I didn't play sports, work out or otherwise do things to target strength or endurance so I assumed basic training would be hard regardless of which branch I joined. The Marines were not something I was going to consider because of the physical requirements. The Navy and Air Force were a consideration, but they were a 4-year commitment, and the Army was only 3 years. I reasoned that since the overwhelming number of males were drafted into the Army, many of those draftees would be unmotivated. I reasoned that if I worked hard that would leave an opening for me to achieve and thrive. In many ways I turned out to be correct. The first step after speaking with a recruiter was to go to Jacksonville and take the required physical and proficiency tests. I was looking to be placed somewhere in the mechanics field as a truck mechanic and that is what I requested. When the tests came back, they told me that my test results were very high and that I could request any MOS (job) that the Army had because of the high scores. I was still looking for the mechanics field, but when my orders were cut, they put me in a 36-week school at Redstone

United States Army

Arsenal for Nike Missile Test Equipment Repairman (MOS 22L20). I had no idea what that meant but the idea of spending 36 weeks in electronics school was very appealing to me. To this day, I don't know how my career field in the army was diverted but I am glad it was. I know my scores for both mechanics and electronics were very high. I guess that was not surprising considering my background, but I had requested the mechanic field so it didn't make sense that I would be put into electronics. My uncle George was an Army recruiter, and I always wondered if he had something to do with the change. Whatever happened, I was very fortunate and grateful to be spending my time in the Army working on electronic chassis and not be working on trucks or tanks in the country of South Vietnam.

It was March of 1969 when I left for basic training. I took the bus to the reception center in Jacksonville, Fl. We soon left the center and got on another chartered bus to travel to Ft Benning, GA.

March 15, 1969, was my official induction date into the US Army. I was to complete basic

training in the 'Sand Hill' area of Ft. Benning, Ga. It was in the Columbus area of Georgia and when the bus that was taking us to Ft. Benning crossed the Florida state line, it was the first time in my life I had left the state of Florida. During the bus ride, we left the flat land of Florida and began climbing hills that seemed like mountains to me.

I was nervous, scared and every other adjective you can think of described my feelings when we arrived at the reception center for basic training. We arrived in the middle of the night, and I remember the building they ushered us into because the barracks were very hot. The whole area had a smell that I was not familiar with that I was soon to learn was the burning of coal. It was very late and we were to find an empty bunk and go to sleep, I was tired, but I couldn't sleep. The next day came very early, and we went through all rituals you have seen on TV of physicals, haircuts, clothing distribution and more over the next few days. We also took tests and received vaccine shots. We stayed in the reception station for about a week. During that week, our group of about 30 guys was assigned a Drill Sergeant who

seemed like a fairly nice guy. There was not a lot of yelling or abuse. I remember us talking about how fortunate we were compared to other groups. In particular, there was one group that had a very tall, physically fit black drill sergeant named Sgt. Winn. He was constantly in their face, and you could tell they were terrified. What we didn't know at the time was that when we were ready to make the trip to basic training, they were to make a swap that reassigned him as our Drill Sergeant for the 8 weeks we were in basic training. When we got on the bus, I remember him shouting in a very loud voice that "You are grass and I am the big F...ing lawn mower" among other things. When we got off the bus, we had our duffle bag full of clothes with us that probably weighed about 75 pounds or so. On a good day I had trouble picking it up and carrying it. Getting it off the bus and getting into formation was a challenge for everyone. He was joined by about 5 other drill sergeants, and they laid into us like I couldn't even imagine. It was all part of the game, and I think I knew that but for a 19-year-old kid from Florida, it was something I will always remember.

Focus was on physical training for sure but there was a lot of training in things like the rifle range and weapon handling, first aid, gas masks and marching drills. The games the drill sergeants played were endless. Wake ups in the middle of the night, formations for no purpose, non-existent infractions and in your face confrontations were a daily occurrence. While physical confrontations between troops and cadre were not a normal occurrence we were all convinced, they could happen at any time. My focus was to become completely invisible and to draw no attention to myself. The worst thing that could happen was to be picked as a squad leader or some other position of leadership. It was obvious that you could never live up to their expectations and you would be made an example of when you failed. It was very common for squad leaders to be taken into the showers, fully clothed after training and doused with a combination of hot and cold water while being yelled at with more than one Drill Sergeant in your face. Of course, we were all on the other side of the wall listening to what was going on and glad we were not involved. After about six or seven weeks,

things calmed down considerably. We still had plenty to do but it felt like the drill sergeants knew we were becoming what they were looking for. I do think they knew the harder they made it for us in basic, the more likely we would be to live though what could be in store for us should we be faced with a true enemy in Vietnam. In fact, Sergeant Winn will always be someone I admire to this day. He had been to Vietnam and represented the Army in the highest traditions. Graduation day finally came and I was one of a handful in our platoon that had made a promotion of E-2. I will never know why I made the rank increase since I thought I was doing pretty well at remaining invisible, but I guess I did something right.

My parents came to graduation and since I had a few days before I was to report to Redstone Arsenal to begin school, I rode back to Florida with them.

I came home just long enough to escort Rose to her high school prom and visit with a few friends not yet in the military. A couple of days later, I left Melbourne and took my first airplane trip from Orlando to Huntsville, Alabama where

Redstone Arsenal is located. I arrived in June of 1969.

I remember our group meeting with the first sergeant in the day room on the company grounds at Redstone. The atmosphere was a 180-degree shift from basic training. The first sergeant also told us there would be a rank increase soon for all



Mike in South Korea

of us so since I was fortunate enough to make E-2 rank from basic I would be E-3, Private First Class when that promotion came out. It really didn't mean anything except that it was a pay

increase. For those that did not make the promotion from basic, they would be elevated to E-2. If we completed school successfully, we would graduate as E-4's, specialist grade.

At the time, this seemed a long way into the future. He also made it clear that even though we were in the Army, the primary focus was on learning electronics and getting through school successfully. They also made it very clear that if

you were not doing well in school and your grades were not up to standards, they would put you back to the group behind yours to repeat what you were having trouble with. This was to be done only once. If you failed again, you were out of the school, and the Army could place you in any position that was consistent with their mission. It was well understood that this would probably be a ticket to South Vietnam. The motivation to do well was at a heightened stage after the meeting. Our barracks at Redstone were Quonset huts. These buildings looked like half of a huge soup can laid on its side. They were pretty nice inside and had top and bottom bunks on either side with an open floor in between. We were required to keep them clean and there was a walk-through inspection every morning after we left for class. It was rare that we ever heard anything about the inspection results, but it was required that things be picked up, bunks made and the floor cleaned. After I had been there about 6 months and many classes had graduated in the classes before ours, I was able to acquire a 2-man room located in the hut. These were coveted and only went to those with the most time

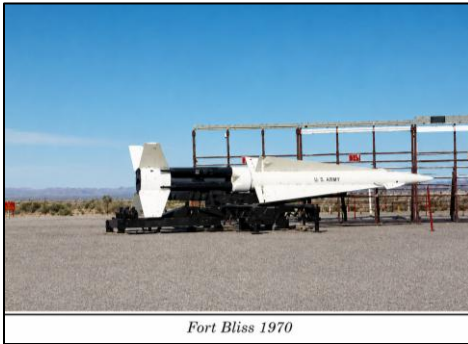
in those barracks. It was starting to get very cold in Alabama by that time and the barracks were not very warm at night. My parents sent me an electric blanket to put on my bunk and that was very helpful.

The blanket was a lime green color and when I first got it, I took it off my bunk every day and put it away, replacing it with the army issue blanket that was dark green. I really didn't think the daily inspection included opening up the private rooms so one day I made the bunk with the lime green blanket. When we got back from class that day, I was told I was wanted at the First Sergeants office. When I reported he told me that the blanket on my bunk was not army issue and he did not want to see it again!

While at Redstone, I always had a laminated pass in my wallet and was allowed to possess a car. After a couple of months or so, my parents helped me to find a car, and I flew home and drove back during a 3-day break. Even though we didn't leave the base every day, the weekends were ours and we enjoyed having freedom of transportation. My class initially had 13 military members. Over time we acquired students from

the class ahead of us and lost many due to failing grades. We also had a couple of civilians that worked for Western Electric that were taking classes with us. School was not easy, but I loved working with and learning the electronic subject matter. Tests were at the end of every week, and strict records of progress were accumulated over time. My test scores were very high, but I remember being very nervous every week. I am sure the guys grew annoyed with me expressing my nervousness only to 'ace' the tests almost every week. School started with 12 weeks of basic electronics. During this time, we learned the function of things like tubes, resistors, capacitors and much more. We also had a week of soldering. I used a soldering iron since I was about 6 or 7 years old so I thought this would be my easiest week. As it turned out, nothing anyone did was good enough and I had the worst single weekly grade that during my time at school. They were very picky about the quality of soldering for good reason since a bad solder joint could cause a disaster depending on where it was in the missile system. Everyone at the school took the same 12 weeks of basic electronics. When that was

over, they started instructions on the area of the missile system you would be working on. We were to be “Test Equipment Repairmen” which would seem to indicate that we would only repair the test equipment. While they focused on the equipment repair, we learned early on that our job in the field would be repairing all the chassis in the missile system. The reason for this was



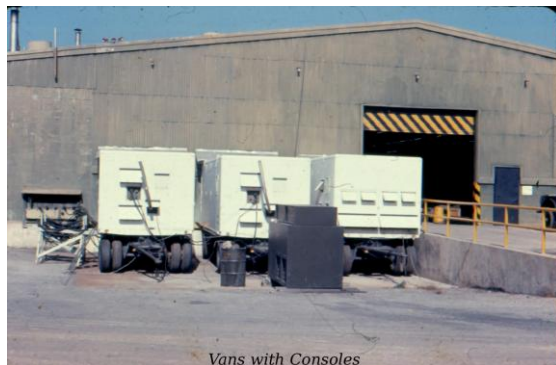
Fort Bliss 1970

that the equipment used to repair those chassis was just at temperamental

and prone to failure as the chassis in the rest of the system. We quickly found out that when the test equipment pointed to a bad chassis we were testing, there was a very good chance it was actually the test equipment malfunctioning. The equipment we were to be learning about was seven consoles that were housed in three different trailers as part of the Nike Missile test equipment. One of the trailers contained consoles six and seven. Those consoles were state of the art at the time and highly automated. In school

United States Army

the consoles were all located in the classrooms, and we started by learning the function of each panel located in each one of the consoles. There were panels acting as power supplies, frequency generators and producing other outputs that would mimic the outputs of the different parts of the radars, launchers, firing systems and other parts of the Nike system. Those outputs were to be the inputs to the chassis we were repairing. Other panels measured outputs from the chassis we were repairing to test the functions of the chassis. We spent months going through each panel located on the consoles and I was starting to get comfortable with troubleshooting procedures and repairs. We also learned that in the field, the trailers we would work in would be called 'shops' designated as Shop 1, 2 and 3. We had completed learning about Shop 1 and Shop



2 and were ready to move on to Shop 3. From the first day when we reviewed the shop 3 instruction plan, I knew this is where I wanted to work. They called it the automatic shop because



of the automation incorporated into most of the panels. In Shop 1 and Shop 2, switches on the individual panels had to be manually turned to the correct position that was outlined

in a manual for the chassis you were working on. This sometimes would take a half hour or more to hook up and set all these switched before you could even test the chassis. In Shop 3, the switches were all rotated electronically and were a major change from the manual consoles in the other trailers. The automation was driven by programs on a series of punch cards and were read by a card reader that stood about 3 feet high, 1 1/2 feet wide and 2 feet deep. The front had some switches on it for various functions and a

tray to put the cards in. When a defective chassis was received from a Nike site it was our job to diagnose and fix the problem. We had a manual to tell us which cables to connect from the chassis to the console and which punch card set to put in the reader. At that point we would start the reader and if things worked correctly, the card reader would issue commands to the various panels that provided voltage, inputs to the chassis and measured output on devices on the console. In theory, everything worked and it would quickly pinpoint the issue with the chassis, and you could quickly make the repair and move on.

The instructors told us when we started this week that we would probably never see a card reader work in the field and that they did their best to educate us to keep them running but because of their complexity, very few were working outside of school.

Early on in school they had paired us up into groups of two. It was no secret that I was probably the nerd of the group. I had very little ‘street smarts’ and it was my first time out of Florida, and I was always asking questions that

would annoy the instructors (because they didn't know the answers). There was one guy in the group that was about 4 years older than I was and somehow, we gravitated to each other. His name is Frank Dudinski and we are still friends today. He was at least as weird as I was but was also very serious about the learning process. It seemed that paring went very quickly and I was happy to end up with Frank. I reasoned very quickly that if the card reader was as complicated as the instructors were telling us and that translated to very few working in the field, someone who could fix the and keep them running would be of value in the field. I discussed this with Frank, and we went all out to make sure we learned as much as we could about the reader and its repair. I can even remember Frank and I going back to the barracks with books in hand to study this device and gain as much knowledge as we could. We were allowed to keep our workbooks and manuals from school and the one on the card reader along with my notes stayed with me until after I left the army.

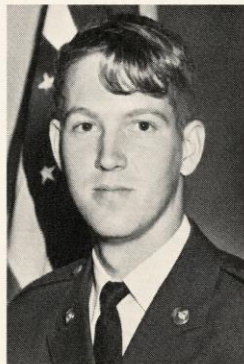
We had a couple of guys that had prior army years. We had a Sergeant named Lafferty and a

United States Army

Specialist Five Mick Tether. They had been to Vietnam and reenlisted after 3 years and were going to school for a more desirable MOS. Lafferty dropped back a class soon after starting but Mick finished with our class. My grades were good and I ended with an average of 96.4 which made me 'Honor Graduate'. Mick was #2 in the class with a 96.2 average. I still have the 'cigarette lighter' they gave me for my efforts, and I am proud to say it has never been used!

SPEC. 4 MICHAEL P. SCHMITT, son of Mr. and Mrs. William J. Schmitt, 1012 Fee Ave., Melbourne, was named honor graduate of a Nike missile test equipment repair course at the Army Missile and Munitions School at Redstone Arsenal, Ala.

During the 33-week course, Spec. 4 Schmitt became familiar with all test equipment used for the Nike missile. He also learned how to remove and replace faulty components in the equipment. He is a 1968 graduate of Melbourne High School.



MICHAEL P. SCHMITT

We had a mix of civilian and Army instructors in school. In general, the civilians were more knowledgeable but there were some good Army instructors as well. When I was close to graduation I enquired about becoming an instructor. The person I spoke to seemed to think it was a good idea and said he would investigate it to see if it was possible. The time was short and it didn't happen. I graduated in

February of 1970 with orders to Ft Bliss located in El Paso, Texas. There were five of us that graduated that day out of thirteen that started with us the previous June. The Nike school was not easy, and many had dropped out. Three of my classmates had orders to South Korea, Frank did not have orders at the time, and I had orders to Ft. Bliss.

After graduation, I headed to Texas driving my 1963 Mercury Comet. When I got to Ft. Bliss the culture shock was profound. I was assigned to an artillery unit at Ft. Bliss and they were all about Army regulations with regular KP and guard duty. I had just come from Redstone Arsenal where were treated more like civilians than soldiers. The single best thing about being there was that I was working in my MOS and in Shop 3.

When I got there, I worked the day shift and there were always things going on that had nothing to do with fixing electronic chassis. After a couple of months, a friend of mine and I convinced the leadership that the workload was so high that we needed a 2nd shift at night. They

agreed and he and I were put on night shift. This didn't get us out of KP or guard duty, but it was much quieter at night and since there was only a couple of us there, we were able to work without interruption most of the time. It was a lot of fun at night because I got to do the work I was trained for. True to what they were telling us in school; the card readers did not work and so that immediately fixing those became a challenge. After a week or two, I had them both running smoothly and we settled in to repair chassis the way the system was intended. My friend Frank from Redstone eventually followed me to Fort Bliss and having him there also made things a little better.

While I was in Texas, I went skiing. This was my first time and after taking a harrowing chair lift to the top of the beginner slope and starting down the hill, I realized quickly I could not stop. I fell down on purpose to stop and somehow got to the bottom of the hill safely. I had had enough and went into the lodge where it was warm. I soon met a young lady about my age that had the same experience. Her friends were up on the mountain

somewhere and she and I talked for hours until her friends and mine were ready to leave.

I also made a quick trip to Los Angeles with Frank and another friend. We had a 3-day pass but pushed the boundaries on how far we could travel during that time. Frank was from LA and wanted to get some clothes and other items he had left behind.

I also got to go on a quick trip to White Sands Missile Range where we were able to fire a variety of weapons. This was a treat for me and I never fired another weapon in the army after that day.

After about 4 months at Fort Bliss, I received orders for South Korea and was very happy to see Ft. Bliss in the rear-view mirror. Since I had been in the Army for more than a year at that time, I was due accrued leave and drove to Florida to begin my 30 days at home. I was anxious to get home and drove all night and into the day. I finally stopped for a few hours in Pensacola Florida after 26 hours on the road. Looking back, driving that long was not a good idea and I would not suggest anyone attempt it. I slept for about 6 hours in a Pensacola hotel and drove on to

Melbourne. When I arrived home, Rose and reunited and got to spend some time together.

There were a lot of rumors about Korea, and I was anxious about my future there. Thoughts about not making it back were on my mind because I didn't know what to expect and it was still technically a war zone. I remember trying to tie up any loose ends before I left and gave Rose my car so that she would have wheels while I was gone. When my 30 days of leave was completed, I left for South Korea.

My first stop in the process was to report to Washington state where I boarded an airplane to South Korea. I remember we stopped in Japan for a short layover and upon landing in South Korea we were taken to a processing center. I had been told a lot of things before I left Ft. Bliss on what to expect when I was 'In Country'. Everyone told me that I would be going to one of two places when I got there. I had orders to the 30th Ordnance Company, Nike Platoon located at Camp Ames. I was told that was the 'best' place, but they often re-routed new arrivals to the other location at Camp Humphreys. I found out after I arrived that I would indeed be going to the 30th

Ordnance Company located in Seoul. What I didn't realize was that the Nike Platoon was 100 miles south of Seoul. I remember the ride from the company in Seoul to Camp Ames. The platoon had a truck go to Seoul every week to pick up supplies. If there were new personnel assigned those guys would be transported back to the platoon on that truck. During that ride, I had my first glimpse of the country of South Korea.

Camp Ames was a very small Army post located in the center of the country near Taejon. I originally thought that the location was so that we could be centrally located for service to the missile battery's but soon learned that the location was all about what was stored at Camp Ames. The Nike platoon occupied only 1 building and our whole area was not more than one acre. We never had more than 30 guys stationed there at a time, and we had been nicknamed 'Dirty Thirty' years before. The building was quite large, and we had a barracks area, dayroom, electronics work area and mechanical work area in the building. There was also an area where the missile nosecones and guidance systems were tested and repaired. I learned that there were a

United States Army

company of MP's and a company of Infantry that were assigned for security and all the personnel required for support services like medical, food services, PX and entertainment. Camp Ames was in reality; a huge ammunition dump and the firepower of the MP's and Infantry were there to



Nike Platoon, Camp Ames, South Korea

keep the ammunition safe. There were many bunkers loaded with various munitions surrounded by a double very high security fence with guard towers ever 50 feet or so. Infantry and MP's were in the towers 24 hours a day, every day. The reason we were there was that the Nike missiles not on site in the country were stored in the bunkers located in our protected areas. Some of our guys were specially trained to remove those missile nose cones, transport them to our building and test them routinely to make sure they were ready to 'fly' if we got into a shooting

war with North Korea. Nike was both a surface to air system and a surface-to-surface system. While the United States position at the time was there were only conventional warheads on those missiles, we learned years later when they were removed that nuclear warheads had been stored in those bunkers for many years. While I was there it was always assumed that was true, but confirmation never came until the 1990's. I don't remember thinking much about it at the time, but it turns out that we were sleeping within a couple of hundred yards of nuclear weapons for more than a year!

I arrived at Nike Platoon on Friday night. I



did recognize a few of the guys from school that had skipped the Fr. Bliss experience and gone straight to Korea from

school. I was anxious to learn the 'ropes' as quickly as possible so I struck up a conversation with a group of guys in the office. While I was getting acquainted with my new surroundings, I brought up the fact that my desire was to work in 'Shop 3' where I would have the card reader and most advanced technology of the system. Even

though there were many different MOS's represented in our group of about 30 members of the platoon, it just so happened that the small group that I was talking to have the same MOS as I did and I soon found out that Shop 3 needed a lot of general help and that the card readers had not worked since they had been there. I commented at the time that those could be working again shortly. I was told later that they had a good laugh at my expense because they were convinced that the readers were beyond repair.

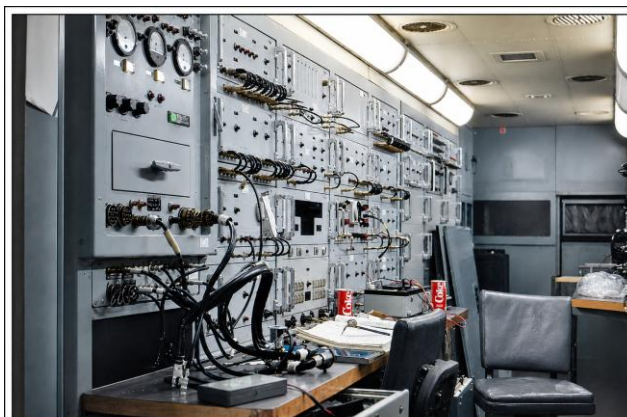
The next day was Saturday and after getting the combinations to the security locks, I got a chance to look at the shops, consoles and card readers. My first impressions were positive because the card readers were intact and complete. I was looking forward to Monday where I could get my hands on them. Over the weekend I explored my new surroundings including other buildings like the mess hall and PX. While I was excited to be there, I was still very concerned with safety. I remember standing in our building and hearing noises I had never heard before. It turned out that there was a helipad just outside our

building that was used to transport missiles to and from sites in the area and a Chinook helicopter had just landed. I would hear that noise many times in the future and even get to escort a missile on a ride to a missile site before I left.

Monday morning came and I was ready for work. It just so happened that there was only one person assigned to Shop 3 so I was able to step in immediately. My partner in the shop was Bill Kelly and he and I were to spend a lot of time together in Shop 3. He and I had already talked about working on the card reader as my first project and I went to work as soon as we opened the doors. In my view, the reason that the card reader caused so many problems was it had a design flaw. It is very seldom that you see relays with open contacts. Normally relays are sealed to keep dirt and dust away from the contacts so that a suitable electric connection is made every time. The card reader design had about 180 relays, most with open contacts. I always thought and proved

United States Army

that because of what I considered a design flaw, if I cleaned the contacts of the relays before doing anything



Nike Console #7

else, I would solve many problems without having to endlessly trace individual problems. I spent the first 3 hours of Monday morning cleaning the contacts on one of the readers. After a few other issues I was able to fix, I had the reader working perfectly before lunch. This turned out to be quite entertaining for the rest of the shop. Guys that had not seen one work correctly came over to see something they had not seen since school, and I think I gained a little credibility that day.

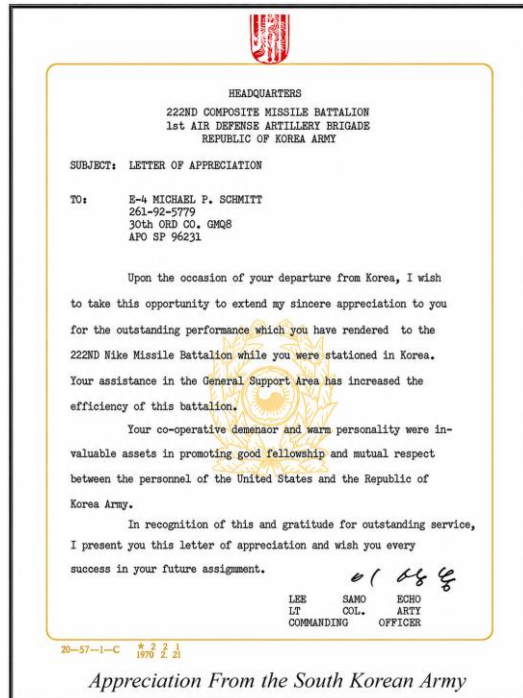
Once settled in South Korea, my day was fairly routine. Each morning, we had a quick formation to make sure everyone was there and then we went to work. I was repairing chassis just like we did at Ft. Bliss but there was no extra duty like KP or guard duty. Sometimes I was

asked to work through the night if a Nike Site was down and they needed chassis repaired to get it operable. We had 'house boys' to do our laundry and keep things clean, bunks made and other tasks we did not want to perform ourselves. We each contributed \$10 a month for their services.

There were also times that took me away from Camp Ames. One day I got a phone call from a civilian that was employed by Western Electric. That is the company that developed and built the Nike Missile anti-aircraft system. He told me that he had heard I was very good at repairing the systems and especially the card reader. I don't remember ever finding out where he got this information, but he suggested he could clear it with my superiors to pick me up and we would travel all around the country to help the Korean Army do repairs on their systems. I was all in with his suggestion and I found myself with him several times before I left. We would go to various locations where the Korean Army needed some help, and I would suggest ways of solving their problem. Most of the time, it was about card reader repairs.

United States Army

I do remember when we arrived at these Korean



camps, I was treated very well and most of the time, met with the camp commander during my visit. For my efforts, I was presented a Certification of Appreciation from the South Korean Army at the end of my 13 months in South Korea.

After about 7 months in Korea, I was promoted to Specialist E-5 and then to a sergeant E-5. There wasn't an increase in pay but that made me eligible to be made section chief to manage my guys in our work group.

I had a mandatory meeting with a recruiter and even considered re-enlisting if certain

conditions were met. The conditions I set were simple enough. 1.) Get an early out from South Korea. I still had about 4 months to go, and I wanted out a couple of months earlier. 2.) Be assigned as a teacher at Redstone Arsenal. 3.) a \$10,000 re-enlistment bonus. This one was automatic because of my MOS.

The guys were really working on me NOT to re-enlist and to take my chances finding a job on the outside. Rose wanted me to re-enlist so I was faced with a decision. The recruiter seemed to be dragging his feet and contacted me about a month before I was to leave. He told me he had everything in place for me to re-enlist. By then, I had decided against staying in the service.

I remember being very happy that this stage of my life was coming to an end and I was looking forward to getting married and starting a new chapter of life with Rose.

My military service ended in the middle of October 1971. It had been 2 years and 7 months since I arrived at Basic Training. I had been to 4 duty stations starting with basic at Ft. Benning, Ga. From there I went to Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, AL for 9 months and on to Ft. Bliss at

United States Army

El Paso, TX. I stayed at El Paso for 5 months before orders came to Camp Ames, South Korea. Most of the time the tour of Korea was 13 months, but I was there for 13 months and 2 weeks because if you had less than 5 months left in the 3-year enlistment, they would drop you from the Army instead of assigning you a new duty station. Thank you to the guy that changed my assignment to 13 months and 2 weeks at the reception station in South Korea!

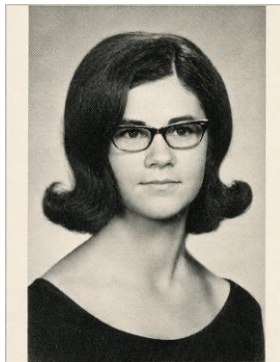
I joined the Army to fulfill my obligation to the country. There was a draft at the time, and my number would likely have been called. By joining for 3 years, I had more of a choice in what I would be doing as a job in the Army. As a two-year draftee, there was no choice. While I had many issues with things that were done in the Army, I will always be proud of my service and be very happy I participated in the defense of my country.

Mike's Life

Early Married Life

When I left South Korea, it had been 13 months and 2 weeks since I had spoken to anyone in the states. I was almost impossible to get a phone line to the states. Rose and I had written letters almost every day I was in South Korea, but we never spoke in person during that time. A letter took about a week to get to her and another week to get back so we were never ‘in sync’ with what was happening at our respective locations.

About 5 months before I was to leave South



ROSE ANN FRIEND

Friend-Schmitt

Mr. and Mrs. Charles Brown Friend of Melbourne, Fla., formerly of Richmond, announce the engagement of their daughter, Rose Ann, to Michael Schmitt, son of Mr. and Mrs. William Schmitt, also of Melbourne.

The bride-elect is a granddaughter of Mrs. Charles B. Friend of Waco, and is also the granddaughter of William J. Mason of Melbourne.

A November is planned.

Korea, I proposed in a letter that we would get married when I returned home. Before I received a letter with her acceptance of the proposal, she had already started planning the wedding. I started getting letters from her where she talked about talking to the priest, taking my parents to pick out rings, and nailing down the locations and guest

list. When the rings were sized correctly, my dad placed the engagement ring on her finger at the hospital where she worked during her break. This was not the romantic proposal that she dreamed of as a little girl, I am sure.

I remember being very happy that this stage



November 6, 1971

of my life was coming to an end, and I was looking forward to getting married and starting a new chapter of life with Rose.

The wedding was scheduled for

November 6, 1971, just 3 weeks after I got home



Early Married Life

from South Korea. The rehearsal dinner was in my parents' living room, the ceremony was at Our Lady of Lourdes church, and the reception was held at Rose's parents' home in West Melbourne. Rose planned it all. Her dress was beautiful and her sister Carol was her 'Maid of Honor'.

My sister Linda and two of Rose's friends were her attendants. Rose's two brothers, Charlie and



Rose's Brothers and Sister

Bill along with my brother Roger were ushers and my friend Greg from high school was my best man.

I had purchased some big items while in Korea like speakers, tape recorder and amplifier because they were so much cheaper than in the United States. I had them shipped to our building so that I could use them while still in Korea, but they were very heavy and I over my weight limit. One of our guys was from the Atlanta area so I gave some things to him to put in his baggage to take

home. So of course, this meant I had to get it somehow.

Our honeymoon was a trip to Atlanta where we picked up my stuff and did touristy things



Honeymoon at St. Augustine Old Jail

around the city. Most memorable was taking the tram to the top of Stone Mountain. The picture in the front of the book represents that day. 50 years later, we had the picture taken again in the same spot.

On the way home from Atlanta, we also stopped in Saint Augustine, Marineland and Kennedy Space Center.

We were married 53 ½ years before Rose passed. She was 73 years old. We have 2 boys,

Early Married Life

Steven and Scott and 3 grandchildren, Emerson, Anna and Henrietta.

When I got home, Rose and I began to plan what we would do after the wedding. She already had a job at the hospital and was going to continue to work there after we were married.

I took a job with United Parts in Melbourne. The company sold auto parts to shops in the area and to the general public. I had been there many times in the past when I needed parts for my car, so I knew the counter guys and even the owner. Between the time I got home and the time we got married I had stopped by there and the owner asked me what I was going to do for employment. I replied that I didn't have anything yet but was looking. He asked me to consider working for him.

During that time, I also put in an application to Harris Corporation doing electronic work and was offered a job after a short interview. The job seemed complicated and I was not secure in thinking I could 'keep up' with the limited knowledge I had. Life in later years proved me wrong with all that was able to accomplish but at the time, I decided against that and was

employed by United Parts when we returned from our honeymoon. My pay was only \$1.60 per hour but the GI bill apprentice program helped to supplement that with about a \$200 a month stipend. Bill Sargent was the owner, and I saw him often.

One of the customers I delivered to was R&M Body shop. The owner was Ronald McAloney (Mac) and I knew him very well after working on the farm in Grant with his parents and sometimes himself a few years earlier. Rose was on 2nd shift at the hospital at the time and I was really bored between 5:30 when my day ended at United Parts and 11pm when Rose got off work. Mac told me that they came in late and worked very late at the body shop and suggested I come up there and work for him when my workday was over at United Parts. He always had things for me to do that involved 'turning wrenches' and I was thrilled to be working on cars again. I started coming to R&M every evening for a while when Sargent found out and called me to his office. I wasn't trying to hide the fact that I was 'moonlighting' at R&M, but he was having none of it. He told me that I had to choose and could

not work for him and moonlight at R&M. I gave notice on the spot.

That evening I told Mac what had happened and that I would like to work at R&M full time. He was agreeable with a couple of conditions. He had been paying me \$2.00 an hour as a part-time employee but was only able to pay me \$1.60 for full time. That was the minimum wage at the time. He also told me that I could work as many hours as I wanted but there would be no 'overtime' pay. I told him about the GI apprentice program, and he agreed to sign off on that if I could take care of the paperwork. I agreed and began a 9-year employment at R&M.

Rose continued working at the hospital as nurse's aide until Steven was born. We rented a house behind the Chevrolet dealer in Melbourne as our first home with a year's lease. Rose liked to cook and she did all the shopping, cleaning and cooking. Money was tight in those days, and I remember many 'hand me down furniture pieces' from our parents to furnish our small house. Rose made our house a home. I was very busy with work and probably did not appreciate how well she kept things together.

After a year of marriage, we decided to look for another place to live, and we found an apartment down the street from R&M. This was very close to work for me, and we stayed there about 6 months. It cost more (\$105) a month, and it was small but cozy. We still wanted our own home and at that time there were houses on the market that were small but had been repossessed and renovated. We tried hard to obtain one of these but had no luck. What we did find was a small house on Boyd Avenue that needed a lot of work. We purchased the house on April 1, 1973, for \$14,000. The mortgage was \$93.21 a month. I think we both were proud of ourselves that we had our own home after only 18 months of marriage. It wasn't much but it was ours. It needed a lot of work, and we spent most of our 'off' time fixing up our 'new' home.

Even though we were both working, money was scarce in those days. We were both committed and determined to keep our debt as close to zero as possible, so we didn't go out much and when we did, it was nothing fancy. We were really following the example my parents followed their whole lives. Rose still had vivid memories

Early Married Life

of money issues while growing up and I know she was very determined that not be the case with us.

R&M Body Shop

Rose was still working at the hospital until Steven was born and while she and I didn't make an effort to get up early, I was still at the R&M by 8-9am each day. Most of the time my workday ended about 11pm when Rose got off work. After we moved to the apartment down the street from R&M, Rose would often come down to the shop and wait while I finished something I was working on and we would leave the shop after midnight. Work at R&M was both hard and fun. Raises came from time to time and it physically demanding but I was young and able to keep up with what was required. The education I was getting was worth far more than the pay and I saw a future long-term career in the body shop business. The work quality at R&M was very good and I soon learned enough that Mac would let me do almost job that came our way.

Mixon White owned a wrecker service, and he had an office in the R&M building. He towed cars involved in accidents to our yard and they provided a steady stream of work for the shop. Soon after Steven was born, Mac and Mixon

R&M Body Shop

decided to take an old truck that they acquired and build a wrecker from the chassis. It took a few months, but the wrecker was built and I was asked if I would like to drive it as part of my duties. I was to receive half of whatever the wrecker bill was as payment. This involved keeping the wrecker at home and many times getting up in the middle of the night, but the minimum wrecker bill was about \$30 and \$15 for about an hour's work, sounded good to me. Rose feared the safety issues but relented because she knew this was what I wanted to do and the extra money would be nice.

A couple of years after I started driving the R&M wrecker, Mixon decided to sell his towing business. He had 2 wreckers at the time and had a buyer for one of them and asked if I would like to buy the other one and start my own wrecker



Mike's Wrecker Service

business. The plan was to only tow accidents from rotation the police called me for and work in the body shop the rest of the time. He originally wanted \$5,000 for the wrecker but something went wrong with the winch just before we did the deal and he told me he would do \$4,500 if I took it as is. Mac was all in because it would further supplement the work stream and offered to loan me the \$4,500 over 3 years if I wanted to do make the deal. I bought the wrecker and it was our first step into Rose and me owning our own business. I spent the next few weeks getting the wrecker ready to pass inspection with the police department. The winch problem turned out to be a simple fix, and I got the inspection and was placed on the police department rotation. Now I was driving both R&M's wrecker and my own so sometimes in the middle of the night it got very busy.

There was a roar of discontent with other wrecker companies at the time because they all guessed that my business was just a front and that Mac owned everything and I was just a puppet. That would violate the rules that stated that no company could have more than one

wrecker on rotation. I assured them this was not the case and over time I got to know everyone very well and they came to realize that I was indeed the sole owner of Mike's Wrecker Service. Even though the loan on the wrecker from Mac had been for 3 years, I paid Mac back in under a year. Not only that but I paid him interest based on the 3-year period. I always felt he deserved that addition interest because he had faith enough to loan me the money to start with.

After I had been employed by R&M for several years, Mac had an accident drilling a well in Grant and lost a couple of fingers. This was a traumatic time for him, and he did not come to work while recovering. There had been times that I took care of office things while he was out and by that time, I knew most of the parts salespeople and insurance adjusters, so I stepped in to run the shop.

By the time Mac was physically able to return, he returned to find that things were going well with me in the office and in charge. He never returned to manage the shop again while I was working there. During my time in charge, I learned a lot about how to run a business. I got to

know all the insurance adjusters in the county and many of the insurance agents and their staff. This was very important because almost 100% of our work was paid for by insurance. Having a personal relationship with the agent's staff was important since they were the ones that the customers called when they had an accident. Many times, the customers would ask for repair shop recommendations, and the staff or agent would send them to R&M. It was equally important to have a good working relationship with the adjusters. Depending on the company, their approach to the body shop managers would differ but much of the adversarial relationship could be overcome with a good degree of trust. For the most part, I was able to negotiate a price for any job without conflict. There were times when that was very hard and I remember one time I got very creative. Joe (last name withheld) worked for Allstate and at the time they had a reputation for being very strict with their adjusters' estimates to save money. There had been several times that I have had issues with Joe's estimates being very low. We normally worked it out to each other's satisfaction, but it was always a problem.

One day a good customer of ours wrecked their car and it was undrivable, so they had the wrecker company tow it to R&M. I called the customer and he was adamant that we fix the car. He also told me that his insurance company was Allstate and that Joe was the adjuster. I knew he would be there in a couple of days, so I called 2 private adjusters that I knew and paid them to write estimates before Joe came by. I also wrote an estimate. The damage was about \$1,500 and our 3 estimates reflected that amount. Joe came by in a couple of days, and I presented him with the 3 estimates. He was not happy and asked why I had gotten the other 2 from outside and I told him I was tired of him continually writing low estimates that were not up to industry standards at the time. He went to work writing his estimate and was struggling to get near the \$1,500 price that we had written. He finally got to about \$1,400 and I agreed. He also asked that I never do that again. I never had to because, after that experience he was always reasonable.

When I was managing R&M, I was sometimes accused of ‘paying off’ adjusters by other body shop owners. While it is true, I did

take adjusters who I considered friends to lunch on occasion and sometimes if they wanted to work on their own cars, I allowed them access to the shop, I certainly never “paid” them anything. During those years, the body shops had decided to form an association and have meetings each month. I didn’t go every month, but I did attend fairly regularly. Most of the time, the meetings were useless because they were mostly ‘bitch’ sessions and even though everyone wanted to increase the labor rate and other charges, there would be a significant number of shops that would ignore what was discussed and it would all fall apart.

The other issue with attending their meetings was that I often found myself as a target by some because of my younger age and that it seemed like we were always busy. One night when the meeting was over, I was walking out to the car. We were still in the restaurant when I heard someone behind me comment that I was always busy because I paid off the insurance adjusters. I spun around and exclaimed in a forceful voice “Hell yes, I pay them off by doing a great job on their customers cars”. Most of them

that heard my response knew that it was true. The agents and adjusters wanted their customers to get the best job for their customers so that their customers were happy with them. For that outcome, their cars had to be fixed where the customers were happy with their repairs.

We never did any advertising at R&M or when I opened Mike's Auto Body. Customer satisfaction was always the driving factor in our success. There was another group of individuals that relationships were vital to the mission. This was the Police department and Florida Highway Patrol. These two agencies were responsible for managing accidents and other incidents on the roadways of the county. We also had the Sheriff's department, but I had little contact with them. Just like the customers and adjusters, it was important to always be professional, timely and competent when called to an accident scene or other law enforcement situations. I got to know many of these officers pretty well over the years and they knew if they called me, I could do the job they needed every time. I am sure that from time to time, accident victims would ask for a

recommendation and were provided with my name as well.

During the time I was at R&M and driving the wrecker, we had decided to paint the wrecker a different color. We painted most of it completely assembled, but we did remove the booms on the back. They were fabricated from 8-inch square tubing and were very heavy. One day I was painting one of them and had it placed on 2 barrels to get it off the floor. The boom was about 12 feet long and I had painted 3 sides and wanted to turn in 90 degrees so that I could paint the last side. Instead of calling for help, I turned it over myself, and it slipped off of one of the barrels. It came down hard and hit the concrete floor. That wasn't a problem, but it bounced on the floor, came down and landed on the top of my left foot. Later that day, it really started hurting and I went to the emergency room and learned that it was broken and required a cast. This wasn't good since I was the only wrecker driver and I was also running the shop. I was also the only breadwinner of our young family. The medical staff put a cast on that ran almost to my knee, and I went to work the next day. Instead of giving

the plaster time to harden, I worked on it right away and within a few days the cast was destroyed.

I had a doctor's appointment the next week and I walked in without the cast. They put a new cast on and this time I was very careful to let it harden a few days. The new cast also covered my foot and went up to my knee. How I managed to drive the wrecker (standard shift) and manage the shop still eludes me. I do know the personal relationship I had with law enforcement was particularly helpful during this time because they were very patient with my handicap and were often helpful at accident scenes. I remember hearing the PA booming from one of the FHP cars one night a message from the dispatcher that 'Hop Along' was coming to pick up one of the cars. It was remarkable that the broken bone in my foot was the most serious injury I sustained during my working years.

Mac had 2 sons that we employed from time to time. I was a few years older and had been around them when I was a kid, so we knew each other pretty well. When I took over the office after Mac got hurt, I think they resented me in charge.

They were both working there but I was having problems getting them to be serious with their work. I finally fired one of them. I knew my time at R&M may be growing short because Rose and I had been talking about starting our own shop so at some point in 1979, I decided to go back to work and no longer manage. I also knew that Mac would want his oldest son Ronnie running the shop if I left so in about September of 1979,

In January 1980 an incident happened that I couldn't forgive, and I loaded my tools and walked out. At the time Rose and I had 2 kids and she did not work outside the home. I think Rose was more concerned about how we would survive than I was. Looking back, her concerns were very valid. We had paid off our home a couple of years earlier but there were many more bills to be paid and without a steady income things could get interesting.

Mike's Auto Body

I immediately started looking for a place to open a shop and that was when contacts that I had made over the years really paid off. Dickie Taylor was a friend I had gotten to know while I was running R&M. He suggested I talk to Tom Donahoe. Tom had been around for years. He had some space he wasn't using on Waverly Place near downtown Melbourne that worked for a couple of years until we built our own building. For income during this time before we opened, we relied on the wrecker calls (I still had my wrecker) and money that I earned from working part time for a local salvage yard.

Having money to pay the bills at home of course was just a part of the challenge. I was also trying to open a new business and that required substantial funds as well. I was still trying to open with our own money and not put a mortgage on the house but even though I cut every corner that made sense, I could see it was just not going to be enough.

While I was at R&M, Roger introduced me to Victor Grassmick. Victor and his wife Shirley had

moved here from Michigan and Victor spent a lot of time playing golf. He had done well around the area of Detroit in the restaurant business there as well as other investment opportunities. Roger had started playing golf and met Victor at the Port Malabar country club. Victor was still very interested in anything involving business and he used to hang out and watch how I was running R&M on days when he wasn't playing golf. This was around the time I was thinking about opening a shop of our own.

Victor liked to mentor me and since he had the credibility from his past successful business adventures, I always listened to him. He offered



Victor Grassmick

to help make up what funds I needed to open and promised me that he

would support me through the initial tough times and make sure I would not fail. I was wary of such a promise, but Roger said he was on the level and not looking for anything but the best for us. I

Mike's Auto Body

took a \$5,000 check from him and that was enough to get us open in May of 1980.

For the 1st two years I was renting a space from Tom. He was an interesting guy and very smart when it came to mechanical things. He had a machine shop next to the body shop space and I learned a lot from him and Dick Porter his machinist about building equipment I needed and using the machine shop equipment. I ended up buying a rebuilt lathe from him and when I moved to my new building I bought a milling machine from a company in Orlando as well. I accumulated a lot of machine shop equipment and tooling that I still have today. With that equipment and the knowledge, I had acquired, I was able to build most of my body shop equipment like pulling machines, drive on frame racks, tools and measuring aids.

Dickie Taylor helped me during the effort to open Mike's Auto Body with everything it took to get it going. I never totaled it up exactly, but I'm sure Mike's Auto Body launched with less than a \$15,000 investment. We had a paint booth that we built out of drywall, a frame machine that I welded together in the back yard of our house,

and an office that I built in the rented space. My vision was to continue to do nothing but insurance paid wreck work of any size and we were equipped to do this work from the start. Chris Welch was a Mac's nephew, and he was working for me at R&M when I left. Chris was interested in joining me when I was ready. Philip Cawley was also working as a painter for R&M, and he also decided to come on board with Mike's Auto Body. This gave Mike's a core workforce that would be sufficient until we started growing. For a while, we didn't even have a sign outside, but the shop started getting work as soon as we opened. Soon after we opened, I hired Larry Hinkle. Larry was very young, bright and caught on quickly. He and Chris did most of the 'body work' and Philip did the painting. Things were a little 'clunky' since our space was not ideal and the layout led to getting in each other's way all the time.

The normal way to pay body men and painters in those days was on an individual commission basis. Because of our unique issues with space, I came up with a commission schedule that rewarded Chris, Philip and Larry based on

the total revenue the shop was producing. I reasoned that this would make everything that everyone did important to the overall mission (and their paychecks) and that would increase productivity and camaraderie.

We were open for about 8 months in 1980 and the work piled up like we had been open for years. We really needed some help. In 1981, Chris's mother (Betty) called me. I had known her since I was very young, since she was Mac's sister. Chris's younger brother Scott was in high school at the time and Betty was concerned that when he was out of school during the summer and she was at work, Scott would fall in with the 'wrong' crowd. She offered to pay me if I would employ him to help clean up and other odd jobs. My reaction to Betty was that if he was so useless that she had to pay me to employ him, I didn't want him around. I offered to start him at minimum wage and see how it went. Scott turned out to be very interested, motivated and is still working as a painter at what remains of Mike's Auto Body today.

The key to a Body Shop that does only insurance paid wreck work is the relationship

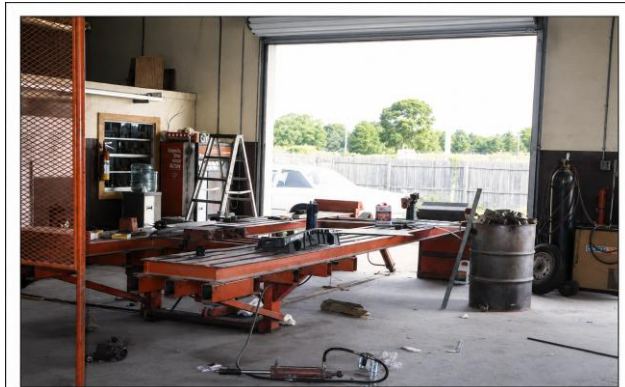
with insurance agents (and their staff) and adjusters. The experiences at R&M demanded that I get to know most of the agents and adjusters in the area. There were individuals that I knew better than others and they were key to keeping the shop busy.

Around October 1981, it was obvious that we needed to expand our space. I also wanted to purchase something that we would 'own'. I expressed this desire with a realtor I had met, and she began the search for a new location for Mike's Auto Body. We looked at many buildings but settled on an acre of undeveloped land in Sarno Industrial Park. This was a new development and there were no permanent buildings at that time. For that time, it was a little 'out of town' which concerned me. I spoke to several insurance adjusters and agents as well as others and they assured me that if I decided it was the right place, they would continue to support me. We purchased the property on Washburn Road on November 1, 1981. Soon after the purchase, I hired an architect to draw plans for the new building. It was very simple. The building consisted of a rectangle building 4,600 sq

Mike's Auto Body

feet, 12 ft ceilings with 9 rollup doors. The building was to be concrete block with a poured tie beam. The driveways were concrete as well. Since the property was a full acre, there was plenty of room for storing cars in the back of the building.

We purchased the property for \$34,000 with a down payment of about \$2,500. Rose and I had saved about \$20,000 since we opened the shop but



Mike's Auto Body, Homemade Frame Machine

that was not enough to complete construction of the new building. I was determined to raise additional money without having to go to the bank. The timing was right and my parents had a \$10,000 CD that was coming due. I offered them 10% if they cashed it in and Victor kicked in another \$8,000 and we had enough to proceed.

Mike's Life

While I had dealt with the city and fire



Mike's Auto Body

department for permits and licensing for the building I was renting on Waverly place, I had never built a building from start to finish before. Since this was to be a commercial building, only a licensed contractor could pull the permits required to get started. Al Bruce was a customer and a friend that happened to be in the masonry business. While he did not do the kind of work I needed, he did have a friend that was a contractor with a crew that could take care of all the masonry work I needed. His friend's name was Bud Nelson, and I didn't know it at the time, but Bud was to be instrumental in all the future buildings that Rose and I did.

Mike's Auto Body

After I took the plans to the city and hashed out any issues with them, I turned them over to Bud to pull the permits and get started. We broke ground on the new building in the middle of January 1982.

On the 8th of February 1982, Rose was in the hospital having her gall bladder removed. At the same

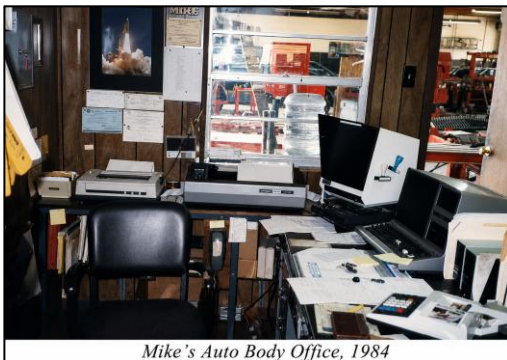


time, Bud was pouring the tie beam on the new building. I remember this date because the next few months proved to be very challenging. The building progressed as expected and we were looking for an opening around the middle of April. Bud was a huge help in getting me in touch with the right individuals to do the work that I couldn't do, which definitely helped. I built the office myself and wired the building with the help of my cousin Sam to pull the required electrical permit. After the septic tank installation and various other things, we were ready for the final inspection. There were a few very minor

issues that we quickly took care of, and the new building was ready for us to move in. We moved over a weekend with the help of all my employees, Roger, Dickie and anyone else I could get to help.

While the construction of the new building went well with just a few hiccups, things were far different on a personal level. Rose's operation was successful, but the recovery did not go well and on the day my employees opened our new building to the public, I was at the Shands hospital in Gainesville. Rose had been there about 2 weeks undergoing various tests and was to have a procedure that I felt like I needed to be there for. I write a more detailed look at this time in a different part of this book but suffice it to say that things were not ideal during this time in our lives.

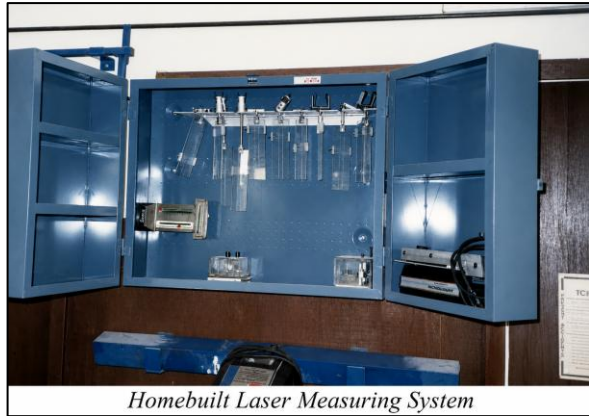
From the time the shop opened in the new building the business was a great success. Any



Mike's Auto Body Office, 1984

fears of customers not supporting us because we were 'out of town' evaporated quickly and we soon found ourselves with more than enough work to keep us busy. We found that the new layout with additional space made us far more productive as well.

With room to grow, the shop thrived and I hired a couple more guys to help with repairs and painting. It



Homebuilt Laser Measuring System

got to the point where I was doing very little work in the shop and was instead concentrating on my time dealing with customers and insurance adjusters or working in my small machine shop located next to the office. I built many tools and special equipment for the body shop that I could not afford to buy. I was also spending time teaching myself computer programming, always updating or upgrading the computers, networking or printers.

Around the middle of 1985, I told the Mac and Snap-on Tool salesmen that I would like to sell the shop. It was just a casual conversation, and I had no idea it would lead to anything. I was getting tired of the daily grind and really wanted something new. Around noon on about the 15th of July that year, I got a call from JW Williams. JW was running Beach Auto Body at the time. He said he heard I would like to sell and wanted to talk. I had known him for several years so I knew this was probably going to be a serious conversation. I also knew he was fully qualified to take over and be successful if he should buy the business. My reaction to him on the phone was that it was time for lunch and I would meet him at the Sizzler on the beach. When we sat down, I wrote a number on a napkin and handed it to him. He remarked, "When do you want to settle". We closed the deal at the lawyer's office on July 26, 1985.

After selling Mike's Auto Body, I really needed something to do. I had my eyes set on repairing the new style plastic bumpers that many cars were using and selling through a local business call Far-Mac plating. This company

Mike's Auto Body

straightened the metal chrome bumpers that had been damaged and re-plated them. This looked like a good opportunity at the time but was very short lived because about the same time, the aftermarket started producing 'knock-off' reproductions that were cheaper than I wanted to price mine. I did keep the business going for a few months, but it was evident that this was not going to be a viable way of making any real money. I shut it down and concentrated on teaching myself as much about Personal Computers and programming as possible.

Mike's Life

Rose 1982 Illness

In October 1981, Rose was not feeling well and went to the doctor. After some tests, it was determined that she had gall stones and that her Gallbladder would have to be removed. She tried to live with the problem for a couple of months, but the pain was severe and could happen at any time. After checking out a couple of different surgeons, we decided on Cape Canaveral hospital and a surgeon who practiced there. As it happened, the surgery was in the 2nd week of February and coincided with the same day they were pouring the tie-beam on the new body shop building.

The surgery went well and I brought her home after about 4 days. The surgery was much different than it is today where an overnight stay at most is all that is required. Things went well at first but after about a week or so, she was feeling very bloated and her abdomen was beginning to swell and was very uncomfortable. We called the surgeon on a Sunday night, and he would meet us in the emergency room. After taking X-rays, he told me to come with him to

check out the films. He took one look and said 'I'm sorry'. Her abdomen was filling with fluids probably discharged from her liver. He was visibly shaken. He said that the only thing they could do was to put her in the hospital and start running tests in the morning. We had the boys with us (6 and 8 years old) so I had no choice but to leave her there and go home with the boys. I vividly remember the ride home that night thinking that I would lose her soon to liver disease. What also terrified me was that I would then be responsible for raising our two boys as well.

Rose spent her 30th birthday in the hospital and they started running tests. After a few days, they felt like it was a disease called 'Active Chronic Hepatitis'. They know a lot more about now than they did back then, but it is an autoimmune disease. By that time, her abdomen had continued to fill with fluid and she looked very 'pregnant'. They discharged her into an internist care and after several appointments and the fluid retention not getting any better, he decided that we should go to the teaching hospital 'Shands' at the University of Florida.

When we arrived at the Shands hospital, we met the doctor (Kolts) that would be taking care of us, and he was a very upbeat kind of guy. He felt that the diagnosis was incorrect and that the problem could be solved with another surgery, but they had to do some tests. We were told it would take a very long time to get her into a room and that I should go back to Melbourne and communicate with her from there. Rose stayed at Shands for two weeks and I made the trip back and forth a couple of times. They were running many tests and ruling out possibilities, and, in the end, it turned out that the diagnosis at the start was correct. I remember one of the nurses telling me that “it is too bad they can’t do liver transplants. This statement really scared me. We were told they were going to release her with some very high-powered drugs and if they didn’t work, she would have less than 5 years to live.

During the time Rose was at Shands, I was working to finish the new building and running the shop the best I could. My mind was not on any of that but instead was in Gainesville with Rose. I did manage to make it up there to see her a couple of times but most of the time we

communicated by phone. I don't remember how much the phone bill was but Southern Bell sent me a note telling me that they realized that we had had something happen due to the extreme number of calls to the hospital and that if I needed more time to pay the bill, they would work with me.

During all this time, Rose was upbeat and maintained that there was nothing serious wrong and she would be fine. I think that helped, but that was not really the reality of the situation. I was trying to juggle Rose's health issues with running the shop, building the new shop and taking care of the boys.

During that time Rose's friend Jan was a godsend. I honestly don't know how I could have



made it
without her.
There were
also other
friends that
helped as well.
Steven was in
little league at

the time and the coach helped by picking him up

as much as possible. There was a lot that went on during the first 6 months of 1982 and so much of it tested my faith. To add to the worry, we had no health insurance to cover any of this and the bills totaled nearly \$20,000.

I remember picking Rose up at Shands after she had been there 2 weeks. I went by myself and we decided to spend the night in a nearby hotel. I remember laying in the bed with her in my arms and so happy and content that I could finally hold her again. There was a feeling of sheer exhaustion that came over me that at least for now, this nightmare was over. Looking back, it all worked out well. There were some setbacks and Rose was on medication that began in 1982 for the rest of her life but for the most part it was all good. The body shop was doing well also, and we paid off that medical debt each month. Dr. Kolts waved his fee and that helped us get that done. It was certainly a time when the 'highs' and 'lows' defined who we were. Rose was by far the strongest throughout the whole ordeal and I always remember the high value of faith she showed during that time.

Mike's Life

Washburn Road

We had built the building at 815 Washburn Road and opened Mike's Autobody in the new location in April 1982. Things were going well with the business, and Rose's health seemed to be looking better.

In January 1983, Rose and I bought the parcel across the street from Mikes Auto Body. At about the same time, Rose really wanted to build a new house. I was very reluctant to do that since I felt building a house would kill the momentum, we had going. Building another building for rental space made a lot more sense to me because that could provide an income stream, we could use in the future for college and other dreams we had.

Victor and others were also weighing in and of course the consensus was to build another building. I know she was disappointed, but Rose got on board and we started the new building early in August of 1983. Once again, we needed funds to go forward with the new building. We really wanted to do this one on our own and decided to borrow the money to complete the new

building by paying off the first mortgage (then about 22,000) and acquiring a mortgage on the Mike's Auto Body building. This would be the first mortgage we had acquired since the \$14,000 on the house on Boyd Avenue and we picked Southeast Bank because Victor knew one of the loan officers. It seemed like a no-brainer to me since the property appraisal on the body shop was well over the \$70,000, we wanted to borrow. After I turned in the paperwork it seemed like the process was taking forever. After about a month, I went down to the bank to see what was going on and the loan officer told me that the underwriters were having problem with the tax returns I had given them for Mike's Auto Body because they were much too good for a business that was only 3 years old. We had done well but I was surprised to hear this. He also told me that they were considering that I was selling drugs and using the shop to launder the money. After sitting down with him and others at the bank, they loaned us the money. By this time, I had building plans already completed by the architect and the site plan was the same as the body shop building except I it was a mirror image. I don't know why

I did that, but I think it was because I wanted the driveways directly across from each other. I turned the plans into the City Of Melbourne for approval and Bud Nelson was once again going to be the general contractor for the project. I had not heard back from the city for about 3 weeks, so I called for an update on approval. The lady that answered told me that there were major problems with the plans and there were a lot of changes that were required. This surprised me for sure because I had gotten the Certificate of Occupancy for the original building a few months before and it was the same site plan, only reversed. With her on the phone, I pulled the approved plans from the original building and asked to speak the person who approved those plans. She informed me that I was speaking to the same person and that her last name had changed after she was married! Obviously, I asked her to explain why there was a problem since the codes and laws had not changed and she had no explanation. I received my permits a few days later around August 1983. Bud started on the building a few days later and it took about 6 months to get it built. Like the first building, I did all the

electrical work and built the offices and other odd jobs in the construction. One day an inspector parked out in front of the building, and I noticed him from my building across the street. I had completed the 'rough-in' electrical and he was there to inspect so that I could begin putting the walls up. After a few minutes he came over and asked me, "Who did the electrical work across the street?" His question took me by surprise because I was allowed to do the work as a helper for my cousin Sammy who pulled the electrical permits, but it was always to be with his supervision. I quickly answered, "I did." to see where he was going. He came back to me and said that he knew it was not a professional because it was too neat! Once the structure was completed, Rose recruited our kids and the older Shea kids, and they painted the building inside and out. Once I finished the offices it was ready for occupancy. I built the new building for the purpose of renting stalls to commercial businesses. I had already talked to Dick Wykoff about re-locating his auto repair business and he rented 2 stalls and the office/storage area in the front. I also picked up an auto glass business and my painter Philip

Cawley who had been working for me at Mike's Auto Body decided he wanted to go out on his own and rented a stall from me as well. I decided to use the last stall in the building myself and moved the machine shop from where I had it set up in the body shop. That gave me more room needed to store parts waiting for repair jobs. The revenue that my renters were paying was enough to take care of the mortgage, taxes and other expenses that I had to pay and were cash positive within a few months.

In December 1983, Charles Walling came to speak with me about buying the property 2 lots south of Mike's Auto Body. He had put a sign on the property a couple of months before and I called the realtor to check out the price. In November 1981, I paid \$34,000 for the acre Mike's Auto Body was located on. When I called the realtor, they said it was to sell for around \$44,000. I was pretty sure that was higher than other parcels on Washburn Road still available and was not interested. I had gotten to know Charles a little bit because when I built Mike's he had already cleared and fenced his property. He would often stop opening or closing the gates

after moving his equipment his company used in their operations, and we would sometime exchange pleasantries. His visit today was to ask me if I would like to buy his property.

I was very busy that day and since I had already called the realtor, I thought I knew what the price was. Since I was not interested, I really wanted him to leave. He started talking about owing '38' and needing cash and I really wasn't paying attention to him. At some point he said something about the price he wanted was less than \$30,000 and my ears perked up. We got serious at that point, and it turned out he would sell the property to me for a total of \$28,700. I asked him where 'do I sign' and he had his realtor come over with the paperwork. The price was contingent on 'closing the deal' on the following Monday and he was to get all cash. I had just finished the building across the and cash was tight, so I did not have the money at the time. When he and the realtor left, I called Southeast bank and told the loan officer I needed \$25,000 and I needed it by Monday morning at the latest. He reminded me that it was already Thursday and he would have a hard time getting the loan.

I don't know how he did it, but I did get the money Monday morning with just a signature. At closing later that day, the realtor told me that this would be the best deal I would ever make! At some point Charles passed the keys to the gate to me across the table. I put the keys in my pocket and that night when I got home, I laid them on the counter with my wallet and other keys.

The next morning when I gathered up my stuff, I picked those keys up as well and put them in my pocket. About 10am the next day, Ken from Airport Fina pulled in with his wrecker. He did all of Gator Chrysler's towing and they had accumulated a bunch of cars at the dealership that they wanted to keep but did not have the space. He was looking for a fenced yard that they could rent. Without missing a beat, I pulled the keys out of my pocket and pointed to the property I had just purchased. I told him they could have this area for \$250 a month! By the end of the week, Ken was moving cars on my new property, and I rented space to Gator for many years.

In 1986 Dick Wykoff who was renting space for his mechanic shop across from the body shop talked to me about building him a building on the

last lot we had acquired. This sounded like a good idea to me because we had no other use for the property and the only income we had from it was \$250 a month for vehicle storage. We would lose the rental income from Dick, but I felt sure we could find someone fairly easy to take that space. In the summer of 1986, I took plans to Bud Nelson to start working on the new building. Dick moved in around the middle of October.

Rose and I built 3 commercial buildings on Washburn Road. There were many bumps in the road getting them completed but we had a lot of help staying out of trouble from friends we knew for many years and some we met along the way. I will always be grateful for the help we received.

Washburn Road

Our Forever Home

On April 13, 1983, we purchased a half-acre on Miller Lane. This was to be where we would build our 'forever' home. The property was covered with trees, bushes and palmettos and we had to hire someone to clear it. We didn't do anything else with the property right away but waited until our second building was completed on Washburn Road. Once that was done, we were ready to start on our new home.

Dorian Marks lived near the first location of Mike's Auto Body in downtown Melbourne. I had met him while doing a repair on his car and found out he was a framing contractor building houses on John's Island beachside. We talked about my upcoming 'home build' and about him helping with the project on weekends.

Rose was looking over different plans for the house, and I introduced her to Dorian. Together they came up with the plans for the new house. Rose knew what she wanted and Dorian offered many suggestions as well and once they had decided on a plan, Dorian put those plans on paper. Rose submitted the site and house plans to

Our Forever Home

the county and filled out all the required paperwork. Rose was the “General Contractor”.

I was busy running the body shop so Rose set about getting bids and prices for what we would need to start



Getting Ready to Start Construction

the project. Bud Nelson was again called in to pour the concrete for the pad and once that was done, it was time



Miller Lane Under Construction

to erect the structure. The lumber was to come from East

Mike's Life

Coast Lumber and Dorian gave us list of materials to order. When they delivered those, it filled what was to be the front yard. On a Saturday in February, we were going to start the build, we started at about 7am and the crane was scheduled for 2pm to set the trusses. I didn't think that was enough time and we would not be ready for the crane. But Dorian was the boss, so I ordered the crane. By 2pm, we had the walls up and were ready to place the trusses. By Sunday night, we had the roof on and the house 'dried in'.

After that weekend things slowed down as they always do. The crew came back the next weekend and finished putting up the framing for the inside walls and other miscellaneous items and once that was done, it was



Finished Home on Miller Lane

time for Rose and myself to take over to keep the project

Our Forever Home

going. I was going to wire the house myself so I had to decide where the breaker panel would be located and where to put the outside box for the meter. Once those were installed Rose went through each room and gave me an idea where she wanted switches and outlets. I had a friend working for a construction wholesaler, so I was able to buy the materials at a reasonable price. During the week I would come over and work for an hour or two before I left to start the body shop for the day.

On weekends, we would take Steven and Scott over to the house and Rose and I would work on it together. Steven was old enough to help with some things. Scott could help a little bit, but he was very young, so his ability was limited.

Rose also got bids on things we could not do



ourselves like drywall, brick A/C and plumbing. Once we decided on contractors to do those jobs they were

scheduled. People we knew and trusted helped us pick those contractors and that information was very valuable.

Rose's sister and her family were visiting about the time the sod was delivered for the front yard, so they helped with that after I had laid out and buried the pipe for the sprinkler system.

Rose and I did all the finishing things like tile, painting, wallpaper, cabinets, trim and whatever else we could do ourselves and after about 6 months we were ready to move in.

Spacecoast Software

A couple of years before we sold the shop, we had purchased a cheap Radio Shack computer for the kids at Christmas. Before giving it to them, I was playing around with it nights after they went to bed. I soon realized that with some programming knowledge, I could come up with programs to help with the body shop administration. Over a few months, I came up with some very rudimentary programs that accomplished that task. I also continued to update and refine the programming and by the time I sold the shop I had upgraded the computer and the programs to the point where I was writing estimates, invoices and doing most of the administrative tasks.

After we sold Mike's Auto Body and after rebuilding plastic bumpers didn't pan out, I spent much of my time learning more about programming. One day I found myself at Adger Smith's office. I had known the family for many years. They had recently purchased a computer for their office and were not happy with the programs they had. I knew about IBM type

personal computers but for just 'playing around', they were out of my price range, but I saw an opportunity to get some time in front of one by helping them with their new project.

Connie and Lisa were more than happy to have some help, and I was given full access to their office both during and after business hours. My eyes were soon open to the possibilities of a new adventure.

This was also about the time that the IBM 'clone' computers were hitting the market. They were much cheaper, so I purchased a 'clone' computer and was able to work on their programs at home. I started teaching myself programming with only a computer and programming books and was able to come up with workable, accounting, invoicing and many other custom programs.

Since I knew so many businesspeople in the area and computers were becoming a popular addition to business in general, I was getting calls about helping others too. This now seemed like a viable new career path for me so on December 22, 1986, Rose and I incorporated Spacecoast Software Enterprises Inc as our new business.

I created programming for well drillers, garage door companies, body shops, automotive shops and other businesses. Looking back, I was very reasonable with my pricing, but I mostly view my efforts as a learning opportunity and a hobby of sorts and was not really in it for the money. This went on until about 1993.

One of my customers was Allied Appliance. The business was owned by Mike and Diane Dingman.

Rose and I were having issues after we sold the body shop, mostly my fault. Selling the shop was not like selling a car or even a house. With Rose's support I had built this business from the 'ground up' and it was much more emotionally taxing on me than I ever would have thought it would be. It was creating strain on our marriage and Jerry and Ceil Shea convinced us that Marriage Encounter would be worth a try to get things back on track. Rose was skeptical but I really wanted to go. I wanted things to improve, and I didn't want to lose her. We went to the weekend and on Sunday morning, they played 'Morning Has Broken' instead of saying grace before breakfast and everything changed for the

better. Rose grabbed my hand for the first time all weekend and I knew we were going to make this marriage work.

Anyway, back to Mike and Diane. Marriage was not necessarily over after the weekend and



Mike and Diane Dingman

many times
couples
attending group
sessions of
people that had
been through the

program at one another's houses each month. It was our first time doing so and Mike and Diane were there. We seemed to hit it off and when he wore my shoes home and I wore his, we were destined to become best friends. We have known each other since 1985, and I developed software for his business, and he fixed my appliances ever since then. We also play golf together and collaborate on projects as well. He is someone I can call, and he will be at my door day or night, rain or shine.

Another one of my software customers was Jim's concrete. Jim was using a simple Invoice and Accounting Package that I had developed

and was using it for his concrete business. Jim was a good, likeable guy and one day I was at his office, and he happened to be there. Around the beginning of 1993 he told me he had a friend named Brian Bauer and that Brian and a friend had a program in development for building window coverings like vertical blinds, mini blinds and shades. He indicated that Brian wished to talk to me about my accounting programs to add to his manufacturing software. I contacted Brian and we reviewed each other's software. It turned out that he was writing in the same programming language (Microsoft PDS) and was looking for an accounting package to integrate with his manufacturing software. I showed him what I had, and he was so impressed with the function and look of my software that he wanted me to rebuild the manufacturing software with my look and style. Brian was interested in developing an overall package that we could market nationwide to companies that manufactured and sold window coverings of all types, and the opportunity appeared to have a lot of promise. He already had a couple of customers using his current software, but he realized that if he was to expand, there

had to be a lot of work done to their current offering. I agreed to work with Brian to develop a completely new window covering manufacturing package to sell and we went to work. In the early 90's I was working pretty much full time either with Brian or with my other customers. At some point we decided to market the software by going to a Window Covering show in Atlanta. Brian had some other customers using his old software package and they really seemed to like our new package much better. I found out later that Steve Freishtat was one of the visitors that came to our booth. Steve had sold a company he started that manufactured blinds and shades to Hunter Douglas a few years earlier and he was looking to start a new company with stores in the Maryland, DC and Northern Virginia area. Steve knew that to achieve his objectives, his manufacturing and distribution process would have to be automated and computerized. He was in Atlanta to check out various companies that had software he could use with his new business. Evidently Brian impressed him with our product and a short time later, he came to visit us in Melbourne. Brian picked Steve up at the airport and took him to our

workplace. At the time, we were working in the back of ‘Cribs and Cradles’, a baby furniture store that his wife Deelee owned. When Steve came in, I was in a T-shirt and shorts and the whole situation could not have seemed very impressive. Steve was dressed in a 3-piece suit, and I really wondered if this would go anywhere given the laid-back look of our workplace.

I spent some time with Steve listening to his needs and showing him what we already had and how we might do some of the things he was interested in. I do remember some of the things he was talking about seemed far beyond my capabilities and I tried not to oversell what we were capable of doing.

Steve went back to Maryland a few hours later and ended up purchasing the software. We had several other companies using our software and Brian and I spent a lot of time programming and taking questions over the phone. I had my own customers to deal with as well as the window covering manufacturing customers, so I was really busy. Brian was very limited in funds but paid me a couple of hundred dollars a week when he had the money. I really didn’t care that much

because I was looking to the future and felt this software package revenue might generate numbers that would make the lean times worthwhile.

It was a Sunday afternoon when Brian called and wanted to come over. He had been gone for a week and had made the decision while he was gone that he wanted to split up his marriage. This came completely from left field. Rose and I both had become close to Deelee, and we were both sad and stunned at this development. Aside from the personal issues, there was the professional issue of having the software development business in Deelee's store and very soon after Brian's announcement, I moved my operations back to the office at my house.

I continued to work with Brian from home, but things were never the same after that moment. By this time, Steve Freishtat had opened 'Next Day Blinds' and launched manufacturing, offices and 3 stores in the DC area. He also knew that I was the driving programming and development force behind our software. Steve called frequently asking for new features and bug fixes. He was constantly

challenging my abilities and while the relationship with Brian seemed to be falling apart, the relationship with Steve seemed to be growing at light speed. Steve called one day and said that he would like to fly Rose and I to Maryland to show us the operation and around the area. That was in February of 1995.

The last time we were in DC was with the kids many years before, so we were excited to accept his invitation. We were up there for about a week, and it was impressive being around Steve and his family as well as the employees of NDB. By that time, there were about 5 stores, and it was obvious that this company was growing fast. For a couple more years, I both worked through Brian where he would bill Next Day Blinds and others for my services and I would bill him for my hours. At some point, I started billing NDB directly for hours and Brian took care of his other customers, and our relationship was pretty much over.

I kept Spacecoast Software alive from my monthly support payments and occasionally did some additional programming for my current customers in Florida. After many years, some

businesses had gone to different systems or closed so I stopped charging them \$25 a month and closed Spacecoast Software in 2009. My focus was entirely on Next Day Blinds.

Next Day Blinds

During 1997, my relationship with Steve and Next Day Blinds (NDB) had grown and I called Steve and told him I would like to become an employee of the company. I would still turn in my hours every 2 weeks but instead of running the money through Spacecoast Software, I would have the benefits available of working for a growing company. Steve agreed on an hourly rate of \$20 and I was on the payroll the next week.

While it was very busy and frustrating at times it was fun working for Steve and NDB. Steve had a vision that I sometimes thought was more fantasy than reality but, in most cases, I underestimated his intellect and resolve. NDB was busy opening new stores, and I was building computers and software and sending them up there. We hired Napoleon Reyes and he was my eyes and ears on the ground in Maryland. He and I worked together until I retired.

I remember many times waking up in the middle of the night and thinking about a current project. In many cases I would get up and get in front of my computer to work out the idea that

had me awake. Sometimes I would send Steve an email about the project and in the middle of the night I would get a reply because he was up as well!

I made several trips to Maryland over the next few years, and the company was growing so fast, I decided that Rose and I should move up there for a year so that I could visit each store and clean things up a bit. I could also hire someone to help Nap and establish my vision of what we should be doing in the MIS department. I reasoned that I didn't really need to be there once this was done and we made the commitment to move up there for a year. Steve was onboard and they committed to paying for all our living expenses and even provided a new lease car for our efforts. In June 2001, we moved to Maryland with only what we could fit into the 2000 Blazer we had at the time.

Steven and Heather had decided to join the Army just a couple of months before we moved to Maryland and their job training was at Fr. Meade, MD just down the road from our apartment. This was an unexpected but welcome development, and we saw them often before they

were transferred to South Korea. At about the same time as we moved to Maryland, NDB was transitioning into a new manufacturing and office complex a few miles from the original building. The old building was retained for a time to produce Shutters and for additional office space. There was no room for me at the new building, so I had an office in the old building. This was fine with me because I could quickly go over to the main building anytime, I wanted but the old building was very quiet, and I could get more things done. Megan Hodge had retained space there as well for the catalog and website business and we both liked the peace and quiet. On September 11, 2001, we were in our offices when the terror attacks took place in NY, the Pentagon and Pennsylvania. The year 2001/2002 was very productive. I did meet my goal of visiting every store and cleaning up the IT issues I saw and met all the people I had previously only had phone conversations with. Rose and I had a good time, and I think she liked the area.

When the year was over, Rose would have gladly stayed but my deal with NDB was to stay a year, and we were moving back to Melbourne.

Many were telling me that we would be back but for whatever reason my mind was made up and we were leaving. When we got home, Rose was working for Palm Bay High School, but I sensed that she really liked the area and excitement of living in Maryland. Her best friend for many years was now in Maryland, and I could tell for many reasons that she would like to move back. I sensed that Steve was a little frustrated with the speed of things getting done in the MIS department and that he would like me to be there as well. He knew Rose and I would not sell our home in Melbourne or break any ties there, so he offered the same deal we had before where the company paid for living quarters, furniture, utilities and a vehicle allowance. The deal NDB came up with overall was an offer we couldn't refuse.

In June of 2004, Rose and I moved back to Maryland. Steve and Heather were home on leave and they helped us with the move. Rose and Heather drove my 1999 Lexus that I had purchased to use up there and Steven and I towed a trailer behind a Jeep that we had bought for Rose. When I arrived in Maryland, things were

very busy with a lot of changes at NDB. The corporate offices were expanding, taking on a lot bigger area of the building we were renting previously. The production area was moving to make space for material storage and more office space. The MIS and HR offices were part of that space, and I soon settled into my new office.

It was always busy and there were always projects to work on. By this time, there were 4 people working in the MIS department, but I was still doing the bulk of the programming. Because we had over 200 users working with the software every day, we spent a lot of time on the phone working through issues. My goal was to stop the phone from ringing with support questions and problems, and we did a pretty good job of that. Even though we were working hard, it was a good time in those days. It was around 2004 to 2008, and the company was doing well. We were up to about 36 stores and had over 100 employees on the road every day. During the summer of 2008, the economy had a financial crisis and sales suffered. The company was forced to make some adjustments and cut all employees' pay by 10%.

The company had been very generous with my car allowance and various other benefits. I felt that I should do my part and in August 2008, I voluntarily took a reduction in that allowance and other things. During the remainder of 2008 and the start of 2009, things were getting a little better, but I was still trying to cut my extra costs to the company if possible. Housing sales were still sluggish, but it was clear that housing had reached a low and was starting to rise in prices. The townhouse lease the company was renting for us was about to renew and moving back to Melbourne was not yet in our future so Rose and I decided to look for something to buy. We looked at many places but settled in with a condo outside of Baltimore. The property was on the golf course, and we bought it for 229K. That was a pretty good deal considering many had paid more than 400K in the same development. After we bought the condo, in place of the company paying for rent and utilities, they added a stipend to my pay, and we cancelled all other payments for our living expenses. The condo was new so Rose got to choose the paint colors, carpet and furnishings. There was plenty of room for the two of us and we

Next Day Blinds

were very happy there. The downside was that the drive was longer, but we got used to that as well and kept it until we left near the end of 2013.

I don't remember when it was exactly but one day I had flown to Maryland and was standing in Steve's office. We were talking and I noticed a chart on his desk listing the corporate structure of the employees. I was listed as the Vice President of Next Day Blinds. I had no idea I had been elevated to that title and I was very surprised.

Being a vice president of successful company in the IT field was something I never considered growing up. The fact that I could achieve this level of employment with a high school education was not even in my dreams. One of the best things about this job was that if I had an idea, Steve was always there to support whatever I thought would move the mission forward. I treated my spending for the company like it was my own money and the company always had the funds to spend on my projects. I had a good team in my department, and we thought big and most often achieved our goals.

Near the beginning of 2013, I had been crunching numbers, and it looked like we had reached the goal in our investment accounts to be able to retire soon. Rose and I talked about it, but Rose really did not want to leave Maryland. She was due to get a promotion soon and wanted to see it through. She also liked Maryland and we had a nice place to live, and she liked the people she worked with. She was also working on her PHD and Johns Hopkins was paying for most of the tuition.

I liked working for Next Day Blinds, but programming had begun to get tedious, and my mind was just not working the way it had for so many years. I was 64 years old and I was ready to 'slow down'. There was no way that I could retire in Maryland. We had a house in Florida and things were so much cheaper there, it just didn't make sense not to go home.

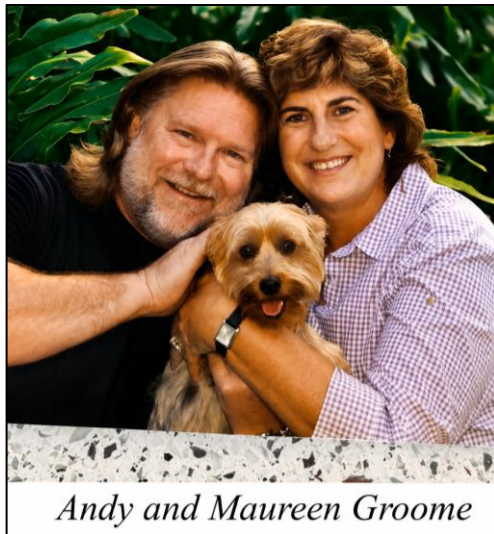
Rose decided that she would be ok to return to Florida if I would renovate the house (it had been 30 years since we built it) and we could pay the tuition to finish her PHD.

On February 6, 2013, my dad passed away. I was already scheduled for a trip to Florida and

Next Day Blinds

was in Tampa when he passed. Rose came down a day or two later and we went over what she wanted to change and update in the house. Before I left to go back to Maryland, my friend Andy and I started the demo on the house to begin the renovation process. Andy was married to Maureen who shared Rose's 'best friend' status with Jan Madison.

When I return to Maryland, I told Steve that I wanted to retire at the end of 2013. This would give the company ample time to select a replacement for my position. During the year, I



flew back to Florida several times to help with moving the project along. I had a VOIP phone

that kept me connected to the NDB phone system and I could fix or change anything remotely so



Miller Lane Renovation 2013

being away from Maryland didn't matter that much. Andy Groome had been laid off from NASA after the launch of the Discovery shuttle and had time to help do renovation

and other things. I also had a neighbor that was very handy and knew people I trusted that could work on the different aspect of the renovation while I was in Maryland. This worked out very well and we moved Rose back to Florida at the end of October. I followed her at the end of the year as scheduled and I was officially retired.

I worked for Next Day Blinds for about 20 years, and it was very enjoyable and fulfilling. I'll never forget the experience. It was my first time in a corporate environment, and I sometimes thought about the job I didn't take with Harris Corporation so many years ago because I did not

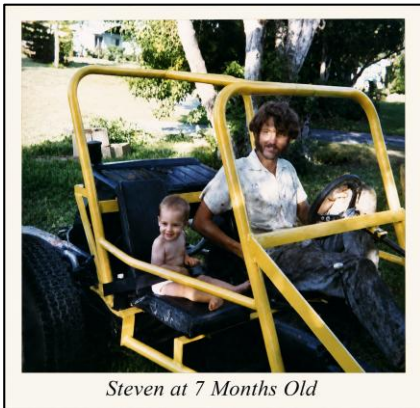
Next Day Blinds

think I could keep up with the expertise of so many there. After 50 years of “figuring it out” and “teaching myself new things”, I know I would have been successful if I had taken the job.

Mike's Life

Steve, Heather,
Steve, Heather,
Scott, Karina

After two and a half years of marriage, Steven was born on March 6th, 1974. Steven was physically perfect and the delivery went well. We were both proud of our new addition, and Rose knew exactly what to do. I remember her giving me a list of things to buy at the drug store that she needed to care for him. She loved everything about being a new mother and I know this was a



very happy time for her. I worked long hours each day so most of the time, she would get up with Steven at night. She told me that was her

favorite time because it was so quiet, she could hear him breathing while lying on her chest.

Scott followed on June 6, 1974. Shortly after birth, one of the nurses noticed he was having trouble breathing. She brought it to the doctor's attention, and he did something and he was fine.

When they did require newborn blood work on him one of the tests came back abnormal, so they decided to send Rose home and hold Scott there for over a week. This was a tough time for Rose having to leave our new baby at the hospital. I took her back to the hospital every day so she could hold and feed him until they released him. When he got home, I remember going into his room often just watching him breathe wondering if he was really ok.

With a toddler and a newborn at home now, Rose was very busy taking care of our young family. She was a great mom and nurtured and cared for our two children with everything she had. I continued to work long hours and many times I left before they got up and came home after they went to bed.

After the experience with Scott and seeing how it affected Rose, I was counting our blessings



with 2 healthy kids and decided that I really did not want to go through that again. Rose had expressed that she wanted more kids, but I was not really listening. I was

making little money at the time and health insurance was far out of our reach so that was also a factor in my desire to be thankful we had 2 healthy kids and stop there. I realize now by reading things that Rose wrote that she was disappointed not having more kids, but I do not think I understood that at the time. I am sure she tried to tell me. I do regret that her wish for more children did not happen, but I hope she found fulfillment in other ways like her education experiences and mentoring so many students in her classrooms.

Mike's Life

Rose was a great mom. She was constantly taking them to the park, the library and reading to them. She taught them her values and faith and made sure they were healthy and nourished with her love. I tried to follow her lead because it was obvious she knew what she was doing and most of the time she took the lead when it had to do with raising the children. The smartest thing I did was trust in her abilities and try to provide the resources so she could do what was best for our family.



Steven and Scott

When Steven was ready for kindergarten, Rose toured the available options for places he could attend. She picked out 3 schools and Ascension Catholic School was one of them. When

she walked into the classroom, Sister Immaculata was sitting in a chair with a child on her lap and the rest of the class was sitting quietly while she read a story to them. Rose was immediately sold on Ascension and that is where both Steven and Scott attended Ascension from kindergarten to eighth grade.

We spent a lot of time at Ascension during those years. Both Steven and Scott did very well there, and we always knew what was going on with their education. Rose volunteered for various duties and that kept her in touch with their teachers. We met Ceil and Jerry Shea during that time. They had 5 kids and Jerry was coaching little league. Scott was not much into sports, but Steven was, and he was on Jerry's team for a couple of years. I also helped as an assistant, but Jerry was a much more effective coach. Jerry has passed now but I am still friends with Ceil, and she has been a good mentor during this time without Rose.

Scott and I were both starting to get into computers, He was always interested in computers and programing, and it was an interest that has continued to serve him well. I

remember he had an Amiga computer around 1985. This is about the time that the personal computer craze began.

Steven was interested in sports, especially baseball, and was on various teams during Little League and beyond. There were times that we would take him and others to the spring training games in Vero Beach. Steven was a Braves fan and sometimes the Dodgers would be playing the Braves. He followed the Braves very closely and that continues to this day.

In those days, the public junior high schools were from 7th grade to 9th grade. High school started in 10th grade. This created a dilemma of where Steven would go for 9th grade since he had only completed 8th grade at Ascension. Several of his closest friends were going to Eau Gallie high school and that is where he wanted to go. We also had the option of sending him to Melbourne Central Catholic High which offered 9th through 12th grades.

Rose and I had many conversations about this topic and in the end decided to send him to MCC. This is the same school I wanted to avoid

when I graduated from Our Lady of Lourdes about 24 years prior.

This may have been the worst mistake we made with Steven. He knew other students there that had gone to Ascension, but he just did not fit in at MCC. Rose and I had concerns about the actions with one of his teachers that were not being addressed by the administration. There were also issues with drugs and alcohol that were never addressed either. In some cases, there were parties and the parents were supplying those items to the students.

Steven had a tough year and sometimes the problems he had were made worse because of his attitude and him just not wanting to be there. His grades were acceptable and he did participate on the swim team. Those were positives in his ninth-grade experience.

Rose and I both agreed that this time we made a mistake sending Steven to MCC for ninth grade. The following year, he went to Eau Gallie High School.

Two years later, Scott graduated from Ascension and we again had to decide on where to send Scott to 9th grade.

When Rose got her degree and her teaching certificate, her first assignment was Johnson Junior High. The experience was not great. I remember her coming home in tears some days because of the classes of disruptive students. Junior High was just not for her, and she never taught that grade level again after that first year.

Unfortunately, our options were limited with Scott and in the end, we decided to send him to Johnson Junior High. We had our concerns, especially with the lack of discipline but Scott and his friends were very good students and would be in high level classes and we hoped that that would allow them to avoid the more negative issues with Johnson that Rose had witnessed. That did turn out to be the case, and Scott's ninth grade year did not have the negative aspects that Steven had.

Both Steven and Scott went to Eau Gallie High for grades ten to twelve. Rose was teaching there during that time, and I was spending my time during the day teaching myself programming skills. Sometimes I would go to the school for events, and I met the principal and the assistants. It was the principal Tom Sawyer's

first year, and he wanted to create an active parent's group. He asked me to head that up and when I agreed it also led to Barbara Losson, one of the assistant principals asking me to substitute teach. I agreed so now the boys had both parents working at the school. Steven pretended to be embarrassed yet always managed to find us when the need arose. I tried not to take classes that Steven was in so that rarely happened. I don't think Scott really cared. Steven graduated in 1992 and Scott followed in 1994.

Both Steven and Scott attended Florida state schools. They had both attended the local community college for some college level classes during high school, so they had a head start for college. Steven decided on University of South Florida in Tampa. Rose and I agreed to pay the tuition, but he would need to get a part-time job to help with extras. He stayed in the dorm but struggled during the 2nd year and returned home to reset before starting the Junior year. After eight months, he and Rose came to me and wanted me to sign off on him returning to South Florida to finish and get his degree. I was

skeptical that he was ready but relented and he returned and unknown to Rose and me, took extra classes he paid for and graduated earlier than we expected.



Rose and Scott, UCF Graduation

Scott landed at University of Florida. Scott had several scholarships to use at UCF that paid the tuition, so we did give Scott a little money each month to help pay additional expenses. He also got a part-time job. There

were a few “bumps in the road” but Scott graduated after 4 years.

Both of our sons had college degrees and were ready to join the “working class” While Steve was attending USF, he met Heather Lyn Coryell. I think at first, she was just part of a group that they hung out with but after a time, they began

Scott, Karina

to get closer and she agreed to an engagement and marriage in June of 2000. The wedding was



in Tampa, and they began their new lives together.



In March of 2001, we went over to Tampa to visit the recently married couple. I remember they were sitting in the back of our car, Rose was up front and I was driving to a restaurant for dinner. Steven announced that they were joining the army. My immediate reaction was this was something they had not thought through, and I spent the rest of the evening trying to poke holes



in their arguments. To my surprise, they seemed to have thought things out very well. They both had college degrees but also had college loans. Joining the army would go a long way toward paying those loans off. Because of the college degrees, they would automatically be E-4's when they finished basic training and because they

were going in as a married couple, the army promised to keep them together for their assignments.

Rose and I are very proud to say we traveled everywhere they were stationed to visit. When they graduated from basic training, it was time for their advanced training. Rose and I were in Maryland at the time, and they were assigned to Fort Meade for training as broadcasters. It turned out that Rose and I had an apartment less than 2 miles from their barracks, so we saw them often.

After advanced training, they were traveling to South Korea for their first duty assignment. They both worked in the army media in the country and Steven was on radio and Heather was on TV and radio. I'm sure these were interesting jobs for both, and they got to meet many high-level officers as well as politicians and celebrities. They were in Korea for four years and Rose and I did visit them in 2002.

When their original enlistments came to a close, Steven left the army and Heather re-enlisted and went to Fort Benning for Officer Candidate School. Her extended career took them

many places in the United States as well as a couple of years in Iraq. Rose and I enjoyed visiting, especially when it involved her many promotions and new duty stations.

Steven stayed busy working with the various spouse's clubs where they were stationed and taking care of Heather's soldier's spouses and families when they were deployed. He also played the tradition role of the wife cooking, cleaning and taking care of the day to day like paying the bills or shopping. He also found community theater in many locations and performed in many plays during their time there.

Heather retired from the army after 25 years in May of 2026 as a Lieutenant Colonel.

Scott had other ideas and found a job in Boston, MA. He had a girlfriend at the time, and he and his girlfriend moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts right after Steven and Heather's wedding in June of 2000. Rose and I felt like this was a mistake, mostly because of the weather and we thought he would be back in Florida after the first winter. However, this never happened. Scott loved Massachusetts and has been there for 26 years.

Scott, Karina



Scott and Karina

Scott's girlfriend was not in love with the Boston area and moved back to Florida within a couple of years. Soon after, Scott met Karina Ku who was working at a local restaurant he liked visiting. They soon became friends and she agreed to accept his marriage proposal in 2006 with a marriage planned for June 2007.



*Scott and Karina
Engagement Party in China*

Karina was born in Hong Kong, but her



Karina's Parents at Engagement Party

parents lived in Shanghai on mainland China. In December 2006, Rose and I were invited to attend a “Engagement Party” in Shanghai. The party was much like a wedding reception, and we had a great time. This was the first meeting with Karina’s parents, and they were very gracious hosts. At one point at the engagement party, I got up with Karina’s sister as an interpreter and thanked everyone for their hospitality. Rose and I were very impressed with all of Karina’s family and friends and all of them could not have been nicer to us. We spent about 10 days in China and Karina’s parents took us to many places that we would have never seen as tourists. Rose and I really like them and they taught us much about

Scott, Karina

Chinese culture. I last saw them after Rose passed in June of 2026 when they traveled to Massachusetts to see Anna's graduation from eighth grade.

Scott and Karina's wedding was at a small historic church in Cambridge.



Scott and Karina

Mike's Life

The Grandchildren

The Grandchildren



Three Generations of Schmitt's and Ku's

Scott and Karina were married in July 2007 and have 3 children. They live in Newton MA and



Rose, Mike, Emerson, Anna and Henerietta

they have done a great job raising them. Rose and I are very proud of each of them. Growing up, Karina and Scott kept them busy and active with

trips to parks and museums. They are all good



Rose and me with Grandchildren on Disney Cruise

students and very bright. Even though Rose and I did not see them as often as we would have liked, we always kept up with their progress.

Emerson was born on January 28, 2010. I remember the cold and the snow the night he was born. As a toddler I will always remember his



Emerson

The Grandchildren

battle with Eczema. Despite what I know must



Emerson

have been very hard for him with the constant itching and medication ointment, he seemed to be a normal happy kid. Growing up he has seemed to have many of Scott's personality traits. He is 16

today and working to get his driver's license. Emerson attended Montessori school for the first 8 grades and is now starting grade 10 at the public school system in Newton, MA.

Anna was born on February 2, 2012. She is 13 now and a beautiful young lady. Anna is very interested in the theater and has been in several performances in the area. I hope she pursues this direction in her life because she seems to have real talent in that area.

Anna also attended Montessori school and



Anna

graduated from 8th grade this year. She will start high school in September (2026).

Henreitta was born on March 9, 2017. She is nine



years old now and also a beautiful young lady. She loves animals and has 2 cats that she takes care of. Henreitta is currently in Montessori school and will likely follow her brother and sister into public school after eighth grade.

The Grandchildren



Scott and Karina's Family

Mike's Life

Retirement and Travel

The first big trip as a family was a driving trip to Colorado. We had just sold the body shop in July of 1985 and 3 weeks later we planned and started on the 3-week trip. The main reason for the trip was to visit Larry and Jan Madison. They had moved to Aurora after living in Melbourne for several years. Rose and Jan were best friends, and Rose was anxious to reunite. Since we sold the shop, we had nothing to keep in Melbourne until the boys started school. I also wanted to distance myself from the shop to give the new owner a chance to find his footing without me being instantly available for comment.

Shortly before selling the shop, I had acquired a wrecked Plymouth station wagon. It was to be the last car I fixed in the shop and had become the family car. It was in decent shape, so I checked it out and we took off. I don't even remember all the places we stopped but it took a few days to get to Aurora. There were many things to do there and I remember visiting the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs and other historic sites there.

One of the people I met when I was running R&M Body Shop was Cliff Lee. He had moved to the mountains outside of Denver and we spent a day with him and his wife driving throughout the mountains. I remember being impressed at the temperature changes and the snow that was present in August. I could only imagine how hard it would be to live there in February! We had a good time with Cliff and Gia that day and we appreciated their hospitality.

On the way back we stopped in Vicksburg, Mississippi. We got a hotel for the night, and Rose wanted to ride the paddle wheel boat down the river. It was a 'dinner cruise'. We showed up on the dock at the appointed time, and it was obvious that the dinner was sandwiches and the crew was a husband and wife. This could have been ok but as soon as we left the mooring, one of the paddle wheels was having issues so we just went around in circles. We were getting farther and farther from the dock, and it did not look like a relaxing evening on the river. Using long poles, they finally did get the boat back to the dock where we could disembark from our dinner cruise to nowhere.

Retirement and Travel

During the 90's Rose and I went on a couple of 6-week driving trips to visit family and friends. One of these took us to Chicago to visit Larry and Jan. After leaving them, we drove into Canada and navigated our way across the southern most highway all the way to Niagara Falls. We stayed a couple of days there and the views were terrific.

We continued our way south through Maine, New Hampshire, and all the other states until we ended up in Maryland. We spent a couple of weeks there with me working and Rose sightseeing.

When Steve and Heather graduated from Army AIT, they had orders for Korea and our longest trip to date that we took together had to be when we went to South Korea to see Steve and Heather. They were stationed in Seoul, and we had a great time during our 2 weeks stay with them. That trip was in 2002.

In December 2006 we were privileged to attend Scott and Karina's 'engagement' party in Shanghai, China. This was to be the 'longest' trip in distance that we had ever been on. Karina's parents Matt and CY were magnificent hosts, and we spent 2 non-stop weeks seeing the city and

surrounding area. The party itself had all the characteristics of a wedding because many of their friends would not be able to attend the actual wedding in Cambridge, MA where Scott and Karina were living at the time. We were struck by the modern city and spent time shopping, dining and being around Matt, CY and their families. Everyone was extremely nice and welcomed us into their lives with warmth and a desire to learn our customs as they shared theirs.

There were numerous trips to Boston to visit Scott and Karina and grandchildren and they started to appear. While we were in Maryland, we were able to take the train.

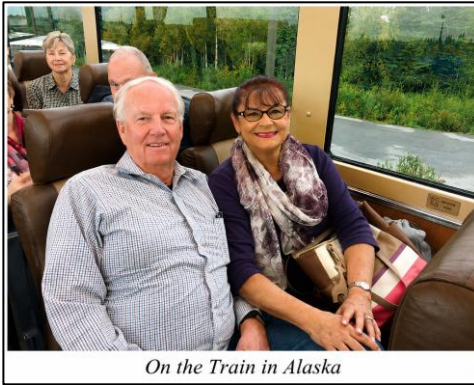
We also did a train trip from Washington, DC to Pittsburg, PA to get on a riverboat down the Ohio river. Its final stop was Cincinnati, OH and we had a good time on that trip.

Rose loved to travel and went to France and even Russia during the 1990's. I didn't like long flights, but when we left Maryland on of her requests was that we start traveling.

In 2016, we went to Hawaii. My cousin Chris had a time share on Kawai and Oahu she traveled with us. We had a great time and spent a week

Retirement and Travel

on each island. My biggest reason for going was to see Pearl Harbor and we spent a whole day going through the various exhibits and memorabilia.



In 2018, we went on a two tour of Alaska. We spent the first week in the state traveling

from Fairbanks to Anchorage with stops in Denali and Talkeetna. We went into the national forest at Denali and got a tour of the Iditarod dogs at a breeding facility. At Talkeetna, we boarded a jet boat and traveled up the rapids for about 50 miles. We also stopped at an Alaskan village on the way back.

We boarded the cruise ship at Seward for the 2nd week of our trip. We stopped at several towns and did a few excursions on our way to Vancouver. When we got to Vancouver, we took the train to Seattle where we toured the Boeing plant and other sights.

In 2019, we decided to go to South Dakota.



Custer State Park

We had never really been to that area of the country and decided to spend some time checking it out. We stayed in Deadwood. It was a very old town with a lot of history. One of the things it is



Mount Rushmore, South Dakota

known for is the murder of “Wild Bill Hickok”. Deadwood is still a gambling town and still reminds us of the ‘old west’. We also saw Mount

Retirement and Travel

Rushmore and “Crazy Horse” and took a side trip to see “Devils Tower” in Wyoming. We also saw a lot of buffalo and other animals in the Custer State Park.

While in the area, we visited and ate breakfast in Sturgis, which was very close to Deadwood. It is a very small-town famous for all the motorcycles that show up in the summer each year. The town was absolutely void of anyone at that time, but they were getting ready for the yearly events to happen in a few weeks.

At the end of December 2019, Rose threw a birthday party for my 70th birthday in



Jacksonville. Many family and friends showed

up, and it was a fun time. Rose was always so organized and thoughtful. I appreciated her efforts and enjoyed it very much. After the party at the Marriott in Jacksonville, she had booked a vacation rental house close to the ocean where we joined Scott's family for a few days before they had to go back to Massachusetts.

On September 1, 2020, I had a stroke. We were in Richmond, KY staying at a hotel. They took good care of me at Baptist Health hospital in Lexington, but our travel days were over for a short time.

In July 2021, we decided to try to start our travel



again after Covid with a Mississippi River Cruise. We reasoned that if something happened with my health, we would be close to land and able to

Retirement and Travel

obtain help. We picked the time frame around July 4th. It was not a great trip and too expensive for what they offered. We left New Orleans, LA headed to Memphis, TN. The Mississippi floods often so there was really not much to look at from the boat. When we stopped at various points along the way, many businesses were closed and it was just too hot to explore. We did have one excursion I enjoyed which was the cotton gin. The lady that owned it was a great narrator, and I found what they do really interesting.

On March 1, 2022, Rose turned 70. I knew it was Rose's dream to have a cruise where we could all be together so after talking to Scott and Karina we booked a Disney cruise. Steve knew someone that booked travel for Disney, and it was



a
good
thing

because circumstances happened and we had to postpone until April. We did go on the cruise, and I think Rose was happy to have our entire family together. Unfortunately, Covid was still fresh in Disney's mind, so they did not let the kids cuddle with the characters the way they had in the past, but I think everyone had a good time. Rose and I took the kids to a dolphin and a stingray encounter, and I really think they enjoyed those excursions.

In November 2021, we traveled to Panama City to start a Viking Ship cruise through the



Panama Canal

Panama Canal and other places north. The ship left late one evening and early the

next morning, we were in line to navigate the canal. It was very interesting how they kept the ship in the locks and the water kept rising and falling to make up for the difference in sea level from the Pacific and Atlantic (Caribbean). When

we got through the canal, we docked at Colon, Panama. From there we took an excursion from one end of Panama to the other and they showed up the canal from above in scenic towers along the way.

After the excursion in Panama, we had stops in Costa Rica, Honduras, Belize and Cozumel, Mexico. In Belize, we had a day trip from one end of the country to the other and visited Xunantunich Maya Temple. After leaving Cozumel, we were at sea for a couple of days before arriving at Ft Lauderdale.

In July 2022, we flew to Berlin to start a new adventure in Germany. Rose had booked a bus trip, and we spent a couple of days in Berlin by ourselves and with the group before heading to Dresden. The bus held 50 people, but it was part of the Oberammergau Passion Play and only 16 people signed up to go. Rose and her brother Bob had booked a trip to go to the play in 2020, but Covid caused them to cancel the season. We made several more stops before arriving at Oberammergau that were interesting.

When we arrived at Oberammergau, we found ourselves at a “mom and pop” hotel. It was old, small and had no A/C. It turned out to be a great place, and the food was included and was very tasty. After spending the night, we went out exploring the next day and found where the play was to take place about a mile from the hotel. We walked back to the hotel, and they had lunch ready, so we ate and we walked back to the venue to see the play. The play was in German, but they gave us translations in English, and we knew the story anyway, so we were fine. If you are not familiar with the story of the play and why they do it every ten years, it is a fascinating story. Only the townspeople participate and outside actors are not welcome, so the whole town shut down during the play.

After about 3 hours, the first half of the play was complete, and we walked back to the hotel. After an hour or so to rest, the hotel staff had dinner ready. We then walked back to the venue for the last half of the play.

Retirement and Travel

I must say that this trip was for Rose. She was very passionate about her faith, and I know how disappointed she was when the trip was cancelled in 2020. I thought I would be bored but that was not the case at all. There was something



magical about the play that I cannot explain. I followed closely with my translation book and only stopped following when darkness came during the last half. It didn't matter, I know the story and was very aware of what the actors were portraying. I am so glad that Rose got to see this play, and I know it was on her bucket list to come back in 2030.

In July of 2023, we traveled to the U.K. Rose had originally booked an ocean cruise that would

have taken us to Britian, Wales, Scotland and a side trip to Normandy. About a year before the trip, I was getting nervous about my health and did not want to be on a boat at sea if something happened. She was not happy that I wanted to cancel that trip, but she suggested we take a bus trip instead. We had done that in Germany the year before and it turned out well. She looked at all the options and booked the trip on a bus. Rose also booked a trip to Normandy for 4 days with a personal guide and we bought the airplane tickets as well. We were ready to go.

About 2 months before we were to leave, we got word that the bus trip had been cancelled. Rose was really upset because the air tickets were bought and the trip to Normandy had already been paid for. She didn't want to have to go through all the work of rescheduling everything because of this cancellation.

Rose found a company online that specialized in private and group trips and started booking private and group trips all around Britan and Scotland. We flew in and stayed in London and after 5 days we left a suitcase at the London hotel and took the train to Scotland. We stayed in

Scotland for 5 days and then went back to London for 5 more days before our private guide picked us up at the London hotel to go to Normandy. Our guide was a retired RAF officer, and he was very knowledgeable about all things in Normandy.

The whole trip was fantastic. I know it was a lot of extra work for Rose, but we did so much more than we would never have gotten to do had we done the bus trip and I am so thankful it was cancelled. It turned out that this was Rose and my last trip taking us out of the country.

Mike's Life

In September 2023 we met Karen and Charlie in Branson, Mo. Charlie is Rose's brother,



Branson, MO with Karen and Charlie

and Karen is his wife of many years. We bought our time share in 2002 in Branson and really liked it there but most of the time, we traded it for somewhere

else.

I think everyone enjoyed themselves that week and we kept busy exploring and going to shows.

Retirement and Travel

One of the last trips Rose went on was with her sister Carol. They had traveled before to China and some other cruises, and this trip was also a cruise to the islands as well.

As we had done in the past, we decided to join Steve and Heather on a Christmas cruise in December 2024. We

had a good time though Rose was experiencing



some abdominal pain. The boat was owned by Norwegian Cruise lines, and this was a first for

Rose and me. We stopped at the Cayman Islands, Cozumel and Norwegian's private island.

In 2013, Rose was hesitant about moving back to Florida from Maryland. She was about to get a promotion at Johns Hopkins and she loved working there. I was the one that wanted to come home. I am so happy that we decided to retire and start traveling. Rose had always wanted to travel, and we did a fair amount of travel before and during our time in Maryland. By coming home when we did, we fulfilled many of Rose's bucket-list destinations before her passing.

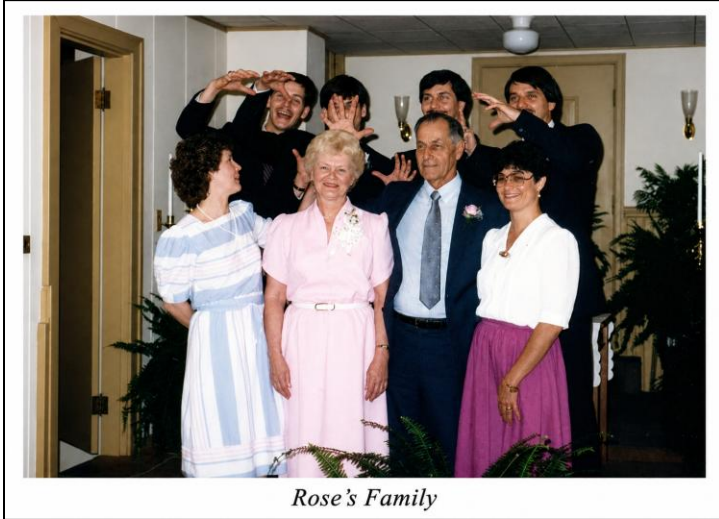
Life With Rose

Rose and I were married when she was 19 and I was 21. Like myself, Rose was the oldest and her youngest brother was about 13 years younger than Rose. A year after we were married, Rose's family moved back to Richmond, Kentucky. In some ways I think felt like they abandoned her, but it understood it really wasn't like that. Her dad was being laid off at the space center because the Apollo moon project was winding down and Boeing was off to new things. They offered him a job in Seattle, but they decided to move back to Kentucky instead.

We tried to get to Kentucky as often as possible but neither one of us wanted to move there and money was very tight in those early years so that was many times very difficult. Rose and I were on the same page about this and when the kids started growing, we tried to get there more often so Rose's family could see their grandchildren and cousins.

Mike's Life

Our first child 'Steven' came on March 6, 1974, about 2 ½ years after we were married, and I was a lot more nervous than she was. From the start Rose seemed to know just what to do. Her



mother had been sick a great deal of the time before we were married and Rose found herself responsible for taking care of her younger brothers. She was much more than a babysitter and the experiences she acquired during that time were obvious when we started our family.

Scott was born on June 6, 1976, and as the kids got older it was Rose that made many of the decisions about the family unit. We were a very 'traditional' family for the time and when Rose stopped working to have Steven, she was not going back to work outside the home for many

years. I was totally engulfed in the responsibility of providing the financial resources required while Rose ran the house. We certainly talked about everything but most of the decisions about children in the early years were her responsibility. While there are a few things I would want us to do differently, overall, I think we did ok. Rose was more conservative than I am and as I look back in time, I am very thankful for that ideology. I have always believed that the Catholic school experience I had in elementary school was the education that gave me the tools for life. Rose was not a Catholic when the kids reached those years but after surveying the public and private schools, decided that this was the place for our kids as well. I will always believe that was the correct choice. While our children did not have everything they wanted, they had everything they needed. We thought it was important that they learn basic skills around the house, have responsibilities like chores, help with family projects or participating in family activities. Our goal was always to make them self-sufficient and give them the tools to take care of their future families. Instinct, common sense,

and being an example play a big role in raising a family. Rose and I were very blessed to have witnessed those traits in our parents, and we used their experiences to guide us many times over the years. We are very proud of what our children have become, and we are happy with the part we played.

Rose proved her wisdom every day and played a central role in our success. Rose was indeed the “wind beneath my wings” and her steady support always allowed me to succeed in my goals.

Rose was and is the love of my life. I have no doubt that she has made me a better person. I know that I could not have had the accomplishments I have had were it not for her steady hand. While we are not the same people as we were so many years ago, we have grown up together. We were married 53 ½ years before Rose passed. To be sure there have been many bumps along the way that we had to overcome. Having the examples of our own parents and others has been something that we have relied on consciously and unconsciously all these years. Even though we were very young when we got

married, we had a mission, a purpose. We believed in the traditional family and we believed in commitments.

Rose always wanted to go to college since high school, but the money was just not there for her to continue her education. She got her wish after the kids both started school and we sold the body shop. She first continued at the local community college where she had taken some classes in the past and she graduated with an 'AA' degree on May 5, 1986. Her next step was at University of Florida. It wasn't easy driving over to Orlando several days a week, but she did so and on May 2, 1988, she received her Bachelor of Science degree.

Once she had the degree and she was eligible to teach, she landed a job at Johnson Junior High for one year. She was unhappy teaching that grade level and landed a job at Eau Gallie High School where she taught for several years.

During that time, Rose wanted to get a Masters Degree so that she could one day be a school principal. She got that degree from UCF as well and graduated with a Master of Education degree on December 18, 1999.

Mike's Life

Rose left Eau Gallie High and landed a job at Florida Air Academy in year 2000. She loved to teach there especially because of the discipline policies. They also treated teachers and staff well.

We both had a vision of the future and the things we accomplished with this partnership were far beyond our wildest expectations. While raising our children may be our greatest accomplishment, we have also had many successful building projects & business endeavors.

I had advanced to vice president status with my company before retirement.

Physical Challenges

One of the most difficult things I have done throughout my adult life is to keep my weight to a manageable level. I was always very skinny as a kid and beyond, but starting in my late 20's, I began to see the scale start to increase. In my early 20's, I was working in the body shop for many hours a day as a repairman and it seemed I could eat anything and still stay under 150 pounds but once work got into more of an administrative capacity, I started putting on weight. I should have seen it coming since I can never remember a time when my parents were not fighting their weight. This was also the case with many of my aunts and uncles as well. Of course, while genetics may have something to do with the overweight issue, many other causes have an effect as well.

Living in the south, there was always a lot of food and much of it was fried and generally unhealthy. We ate dinner every night as a family and it was normally a 'southern' style feast with meat, potatoes, greens, biscuits and always a dessert. My dad liked to cook and did cook a lot

on the weekends when he had time. My mother was from the north but learned quickly the ways of the south and the table always had plenty of good food that was hard to pass up. I have tried exercising more (which I hate) and eating less but it has been a struggle for 40 years. I have always been jealous of those people that can eat whatever they want and not gain weight but for my metabolism that was not to be. At 76 years of age, I am at about 190, and I have long ago reconciled myself to the fact that will never be 150 again.

My overall health was very good until I reached about 50. In December 1999, I had severe abdominal pain. At the ER, they told me I had my first (of 5) small bowel obstruction. This was the first time I had ever been in the hospital except when I was born and when I had my tonsils out when I was about 4 years old. The obstruction, whatever it was, cleared itself and I left the hospital a few days later.

In September 2005, I was finding myself out of breath going up and down the stairs in our townhouse. I decided to go to the emergency room at the county hospital in Columbia, Maryland.

Physical Challenges

The diagnosis was a Pulmonary Embolism (blood clot) in my left lung. They felt it came from my leg but did not find anything there after an ultrasound. It was before the time of the modern blood thinners, so I was to coumadin for about 6 months. An ultrasound later found an old blood clot hiding behind my knee which was probably from that time. Heather had graduated from OCS at Ft Benning, GA a few weeks earlier and Rose and I had driven from Georgia to Maryland in one sitting and they think that is what caused the blood clot.

In April 2006, some of the women in the office and myself were really trying to eat well and exercise often. I was on the treadmill every night and sometimes even in the morning too. One night, Rose suggested we walk outside instead. While we were walking, I realized I was not getting my heart rate to the level I was on the treadmill, so I decided to jog to the end of the road to raise it to a higher level. I was wearing a monitor and when I got there, I looked at the monitor, and my heart rate was about 185. This was my first experience with Atrial Fibrillation (Afib). The ER started 2 IV's, and I spent the

night in the hospital. My heart went back into rhythm the next morning.

In winter of 2008 and again in 2011, I started having pain like when I had the blockage in 1999 and went to the ER and they diagnosed it as blockage in my small intestine. Again, it cleared up while I was in the hospital and required no surgery. Reasons are still unknown.

I had seen Dr Patel, my cardiologist, in January of 2020. He suggested that I should go on a stronger blood thinner since I had turned 70 and had a history of Afib. At my request, we had some discussion, he decided to put me on a monitor for 30 days to check for Afib that I may not be feeling. We did the monitor in June-July of 2020 and there was no Afib recorded.

After this finding, he felt like we would be safe to continue the Aspirin or even to cut it to an 81mg maintenance dose. We were scheduled to leave for vacation soon, so I decided to keep the 325mg Aspirin until I got back.

On August 30, 2020, I played golf and went out to dinner. When we got ready for bed, I

Physical Challenges

noticed that my heart rhythm was not correct. Flecainide is an antiarrhythmic drug, and I kept several pills on my keychain. I took 75mg of Flecaïnide and went to sleep. I woke up during the night my heart was still out of rhythm, so I took some more Flecaïnide. In the morning, I took another Flecaïnide and my heart went back into sinus rhythm. I thought I was fine.

On September 1, 2020, I woke up at about 2am to go to the bathroom and I could not get out of bed. I had a stroke during the night and my whole left side was unusable. The stroke was obviously a result of Afib the day before. We were in a hotel, so Rose called 911 and the ambulance transported me to the local hospital. After doing a CT scan, starting an IV and doing a covid test (ouch), they put me in another ambulance and took me to the big hospital in Lexington.

I was very fortunate that day and the days to follow to be surrounded by highly competent doctors and nurses. I was in the ICU hospital room for 4 days when they released me. Steven came over from Fort Knox where he and Heather we stationed and he drove us back to Florida.

Mike's Life

My left side is still numb and tingling and probably has a lot to do with my leg and foot pain. This has been a problem for a while now and I had back surgery and vein therapy that have failed to correct the numbness issue.

Rose's Cancer

The last cruise Rose and I went on was a quick trip to the islands over Christmas 2024 with Steve and Heather. Rose had told me she had an issue with pain in her stomach that she thought was the starting of an ulcer, and it must have been worse than she was telling me because she hardly ate during the cruise. I knew she was being careful of what she ate, trying to avoid irritation of the perceived ulcer so I was not all that concerned.

After we got back, her pain continued and on Friday, January 3rd, 2025, Rose went to Med-Fast, an urgent care center. I was with Doreen at acupuncture at the time and I remember getting a text from Rose asking me to come home and take her to the emergency room. The Nurse Practitioner at Med-Fast wanted her to get a CT scan and get checked more closely than they could do there.

The ER was busy, but she had a CT and the doctor came by with the bad news a little while later. Rose had colon cancer and it was at least stage three. There was also evidence that it had

already spread to the lymph nodes. They gave us the option of going home and getting tests and surgery as an outpatient or staying in the hospital long enough to get them there. We opted to stay in the hospital.

On Saturday and Sunday, Rose prepped for a colonoscopy to be done on Monday. After the procedure the doctor came by, and the news was not good. Surgery would be required to remove the mass from her colon and as many lymph nodes as possible. So, the next step was to find a surgeon to do the operation.

Rose worked at the hospital every Tuesday as a volunteer. She was assigned to the 4th floor and got to know many of the nurses and other staff. When we found out she was staying at the hospital, she had called a nurse that she knew, and Jen arranged for her to be admitted to their area. This was a godsend because at least Rose was in a care facility and an area where she knew most everyone.

Since time was critical, getting a surgeon with the time to do the surgery was a challenge but with Jen's help, she soon settled on a good choice that was available. The surgery was done

on Wednesday. Before he started the operation, he came by to see us and told us that the pathology results had come back, and the cancer was the most aggressive type and that he would not be able to 'get it all'. After the surgery was completed, the doctor verified that what he had told us earlier was true and that chemo would be necessary after the surgery had time to heal.

Rose's pain from the surgery along with the pain from the cancer was horrible and seemed uncontrollable. A few days after the surgery I took her home and she stayed home until the chemo started in the middle of February.

Rose's mind was still there, and I did what I could to make her comfortable. I had never cooked and Rose would try and teach me how to make something lying on the couch and walking me through the steps. Because of the nature of the surgery and cancer, it was hard for Rose to eat anything and she was losing weight. I tried to use protein shakes and other things that would be good for her, but after she started chemo, it was increasingly hard for her to eat or drink anything.

On her birthday, we met Karen and Charlie in Orlando at a time share resort. I was skeptical that Rose would be able to stay the week, but she powered through and we stayed. During the trip we did go on a driving trip 'Wild Florida' with an animal park, and I think she enjoyed being there with her Charlie and Karen. That was Rose's last trip out of town.

By that time, Rose had been given a couple of rounds of Chemo and was having a hard time with nausea and gagging. We had 2 different prescription medications I could give her, and we also experimented with the medicinal marijuana gummies. They turned out to be more effective than the prescriptions most of the time.

Much of the 7 months Rose fought cancer is a blur to me. In the past, I had nothing to do with her medication, doctors or medical issues. She and I would always talk about anything either of were going through but this was different. Where in the past, she discouraged me from going with her to her doctor's appointments, I was now required to take her, and I know she wanted me there. Now, when the doctor or nurse asks her a question, she would often turn to me to answer. I

kept up with her medications and day to day appointments and care.

I know we were at the ER at least 7 times during that period. Things got bad when on a Monday, I took Rose to the ER and she had emergency surgery for another mass blocking her colon and then on Friday, I was in the ER for a bowel obstruction. This was my 5th one and I was in the hospital for 4 days. Rose had been moved to a rehab facility after the latest surgery and Steve and Carol (Rose's sister) took her to Viera to see me in the hospital. I appreciated that very much. Carol was a big help during that time with both of us in the hospital or rehab.

When I got out of the hospital, Rose was still in the rehab facility, and I went down there to find out what was going on. She indicated to me she wanted to leave as soon as possible so I went to find out when she could leave.

During the latest surgery the doctor had not made any attempt to remove the mass from the colon because that would have been too risky but had instead added a port to a re-routed colon so that a colostomy bag could be attached. This

meant that the bag would have to be emptied when it filled up.

Rose was very depressed about having the bag and I was determined to minimize her anxiety about the bag as much as possible. She was insisting that we have someone come in to empty the bag twice a day when she got home. I checked on services that would do that but the way the system was set up, it was cost prohibitive. I had spent some time with a nurse who taught me how to change and empty the bag so I was confident that I could handle the task. I couldn't understand why Rose was against having me do it and if she were to leave the rehab facility there would have to be a plan. When I asked her why she didn't want me to do this for her, she said, "I don't want to think of you as my care giver". It turned out I was clueless, not even thinking that would be an issue. As we had done all these years, common sense prevailed and she agreed that we would deal with the bag ourselves. After a short time, we realized that having someone come in twice a day made no sense because we never knew when attention to the bag would be required. When the bag needed

attention, we both did it together which, in a way, brought us closer during a really difficult time. Rose was still not comfortable with me changing the bag. We had a nurse coming in twice a week after that and they were changing the bag while they were here. This worked out very well and I only had to deal with changing the bag if it was leaking or another emergency.

After the latest surgery, the doctor decided to go to 'immunotherapy' instead of conventional chemo. It was obvious that a tumor had grown in a different part of her colon while she was having chemo, so it wasn't working.

The Immunotherapy procedure was easier on Rose and we had a 2nd opinion from Moffitt that was promising. She began those procedures shortly after the surgery. Rose was still not eating and the pain was intense. I was giving her all I had to try and control the pain, but I feared I was fighting a losing battle. She had been prescribed Morphine in both extended and short-term doses. There was a shortage on the market because of supply chain issues, and I spent a lot of time on the phone trying to obtain what she needed. I had to be careful how much I gave her

not only because an overdose could kill her but if I ran out before the prescription, I couldn't get any more. I was also supplementing the morphine with Delta-8 gummies, but I was losing the battle with pain, and I still see her sitting on the side of the bed crying like I had never seen before. This image haunts me to this day.

During the time Rose was sick, I asked her from time to time 'are you scared'. She always replied "no". Her faith in God and Jesus was so strong. About 3 weeks before she passed, she told me that she was "Ready to be with Jesus". My reaction was 'Have you given up?'. She replied, "No, but I'm, ready when its time". I had always told her that I would not give up and would fight for her until she made the decision that it was time. I knew after that conversation that her long nightmare was coming to an end, and I was going to lose her.

On Tuesday, July 22, 2025, I noticed that after a couple of days, her ostomy bag was still empty. This was alarming to me. Rose's belly was filling with fluid as well, so we went to the ER mostly to have the fluid drained to make her more comfortable. After a long wait in the ER, they

drained the fluid and sent us home. When we got home, I gave her a protein drink. She took a few sips of that and immediately threw them up. We decided to go back to the ER.

They took us right away at the ER and did a CT scan. The NP on duty came back to the room with bad news. Rose had developed yet another tumor that was located near her original surgery and it was blocking the colon, and everything was backed up so she was not able to keep anything on her stomach. They told us that the only fix would be surgery.

Rose immediately said she would have the surgery. They told us that surgery would not be possible because in her condition, she would not survive the surgery. It was, at that point that Rose said, "then call-in hospice".

Maureen and I were the only ones present during this conversation and both of us were



careful to make sure this was what Rose wanted, and it was her choice.

Maureen left, Steve came for a few minutes, and Rose and I spoke briefly before I left for home. Rose was to spend the night in the hospital. Since she had opted for hospice, they could now give her much higher doses of medication for pain if she stayed.

Early the next morning I came back and we spent the day with her sleeping and me working on plans for hospice and what to do when we got home. We left the hospital about 5pm on Wednesday evening.

Hospice came over shortly after we got home and brought pain medication that was far more effective than the morphine I had been giving Rose. The doctor also came by and assured me that I could give her a little higher dose than I had been told and that I would not have to worry about 'running out'. It was a morphine liquid and seemed to ease her pain well. That was something I was unable to do for months.

The next day, I had Rose out of bed and in a chair in the living room. She was watching 'ID' and I had it streaming all day. I could tell she was watching but she had little interaction with those in the room. The morphine was doing its job.

Thursday night, I asked her if she was ready for bed. She said yes so I put her in the wheelchair and into bed. I also gave her a little morphine under her tongue. It was then that I realized that she had not been to the bathroom to pee since we left the hospital. I asked her if she needed to use the toilet and she told me she did.

Heather was in one of the back bedrooms and I called her to come and help me get her to the bathroom. We decided to use the walker but as

soon as she sat down, I realized we had a problem. The morphine had kicked in, and she was like a 'rag doll' and could give us no help getting her up and back to bed. We tried but she was too heavy for us, and she ended up on top of Heather sitting on the floor. Heather and I were working together, and could not get Rose to her bed, so I called 911 for an assist. When the first responders got there, she was back in bed in 30 seconds. At that point, Rose seemed to be comfortable and slept through the night.

On Friday morning, I decided to leave Rose in bed for the day. Hospice came in and the nurse and I gave Rose a sponge bath and I turned on the TV and streamed 'Love Boat' for the rest of the day. By that time, Steve, Scott, Bobby, Carol and Heather were in the house. They all filtered in and out of our bedroom all day saying their goodbyes. I went in as well but spent time in the family room letting others have some privacy with Rose.

That night, it was about 10pm when I asked Rose if she was in pain. She said "no". That felt strange because I hadn't given her pain meds since morning. I then asked her if she was

Rose's Cancer

comfortable. She said “yes’. That was the last word she said.

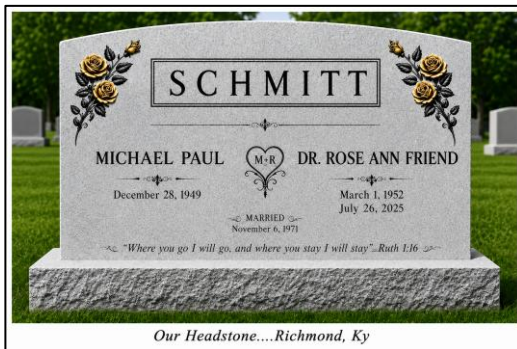
We both drifted off to sleep. I woke up at



12:30am. Rose was breathing a little labored but seemed ok. I felt her forehead and tummy and she was warm. I fell back asleep and woke up again at 2:00 am. Rose was no longer breathing and still warm, but it was obvious she was gone. I went and got the others and Steve called hospice to come over and confirm what we already knew. I held her until about 7am when transportation arrived to take her to the funeral home. Rose passed away peacefully in her sleep sometime between 12:00am and 2:30am on July 26, 2025.

Mike's Life

I had been at Rose's side every day, all day for about 7 months trying to help Rose fight this cancer and, in the end, we failed. It was one of the few times in my life I couldn't fix something. But I couldn't fix Rose's cancer. I had known her for about 60 years, married for 53 ½ and now it was over. Determined to see the whole ordeal through, I closed my sweetheart's casket and said goodbye for the last time at the church in Kentucky after the service.



Our Headstone....Richmond, Ky

Life After Rose

IT SUCKS!

After Rose passed, Steven took charge. Steve wrote Rose's obituary, posted it on Facebook, created the programs for the funeral and Celebration, went with me to the funeral homes, talked to the minister in KY and so many other things. When we got home, he organized the Celebration of Life where we had more than 100 people show up to pay their respects. Steve's help during this time was more than I could ever ask from anyone. Everything he did for Rose's and me during this time was simply perfect.

Heather created a video for the funeral and the Celebration of Life, and it was spectacular. It showed Rose in a way that most people had never seen before, but it showed the Rose that I had known for 60 years. Every so often, I watch the video. I still cannot do that without tears.

It has been over a year now and I still miss Rose terribly. That is not to say others have not tried to help me transition to life without Rose. I am going through the motions of routines that I must take care of like the house, meals, cats,

laundry, and other chores but there is no real passion or interest.

I am trying to get out of the house instead of just sitting watching TV even though that is mostly what I would rather do. I get a massage every two weeks, acupuncture every two weeks, Yoga every week and therapy every week. I have an air fryer, and I buy things that I can cook in the fryer each week. I am trying to stay away from “fast food” and to eat as healthy as possible. If I must live without Rose, I do want to be as healthy as possible. Unfortunately, I have physical issues in many areas of my body that make everything physically hard.

Rose's family was very compassionate and kind while she was sick. They came to visit as often as they could, but it is not easy to do when they live so far away. Regardless they made the effort and there were many visits before she passed. Her sister Carol, brother Bob, Steven, Heather and Scott were with us as well. I had long conversations with all of Rose's brothers and sister Carol when she could not be here to try and make sure they had the latest on Rose's condition. Since she passed, they have continued to reach

out to me and I know that if I need something, they are only a phone call away.

Around 4 months after Rose passed, I joined a small group called “Grief Share”. This was 13 weeks and we met every week. They had us watch a video which usually lasted about 30 minutes or so and talked about what we had just seen. My group was very small and most of the time we only had 3 people. We also had 3 moderators, who I appreciated taking their time to be with us. I completed the course. I liked everyone involved and it was interesting to hear from others that had just lost a spouse and from the moderators who had lost a spouse years ago. Our time together did give me some ideas and suggestions that I am using but I think it would have been more valuable with a bigger group.

Rose and I both had our share of pain that comes from living into our seventies and I had been to acupuncture in the past so I thought I would try that. I met Doreen Riser sometime in 2024 and have been going to her ever since. I told Rose that I thought she was helping my back, neck and shoulders and Rose started seeing her

for the same areas that were a problem for her as well.

Doreen has been someone that not only is extremely competent in what she does but someone that I have been able to confide in and feel secure. She always has valuable feedback and suggestions. I think of her as a healer and a friend that always has my best interest in mind. Her encouragement and sometimes very blunt “tough love” has been a godsend at this time in my life, and I will always appreciate her. Sometimes she and her husband Art and I play golf and I always look forward to joining them on those outings.

Rose had been going to Yoga for a year or more before she got sick. I really had no idea what Yoga was all about and was quite sure I could not do it anyway. One of Rose's friends from Yoga was Ursula. I never met Ursula until she came to see Rose while she was sick. She and I started texting about Rose's condition before Rose passed and after that, I got many texts to see how I was doing. Ursula made it her mission to get me to Yoga and out of the house. I think it took her

about 4 months to finally get me to go with her and I have been going to Yoga ever since.

As soon as got there, I felt I was in a safe space surrounded by people that cared about me. Ursula has been a good friend and always has a smile when I see her. I don't know if Yoga is doing much for my physical condition, but I do know I look forward to being there for love and acceptance in the room each week.

I have a lot of people I can talk to and that care about me and I am very fortunate to have those in my life right now. Heather is a shining star, and I don't know how I would live without her. She and I talk, text or see each other every day and she is always a shoulder to cry on when I am having a bad day.

It has been over a year now and I am still struggling with the loss of Rose. The nights are the worst and I spend most of them watching TV or talking on the phone. My brothers, Brian and Roger, frequently call as does Rose's sister Carol. That does help with loneliness but is not a substitute for Rose being here.

Mike's Life

Politics

I debated whether to put this chapter in this book. I had written it years ago and what I noticed when I re-read it was that my views had not changed much since I first wrote it, so I included the chapter because it is a part of who I am.

During my early years, I knew politics were discussed but they were mostly just another topic and not something I thought was that important. My parents were democrats as were most all the adults that I knew. The first election for president that I remember was Nixon/Kennedy and I assumed that since most people that I knew were Catholics, they voted for Kennedy. The day Kennedy was shot; I remember my mother in tears when we came home from school. I understood from the black and white TV coverage it was a very traumatic time for the country.

I do not know how my parents voted in the next election, but I do remember my mother watching every minute of the Watergate coverage on TV. I am sure I did not appreciate the significance of the event. When I was up for

promotion in the army, during my interview I remember being asked by the promotion board who was the governor of Florida. I knew the answer, but I am glad that was all they asked politically because that was about all I knew.

I was eligible to vote when I returned from the Army, but I did not register to do so because jury duty candidates were taken from the voter database. At that time, the population was much smaller, and it seemed that jury duty came up often. My employer at the time (R&M Body Shop) would not have paid me if I were not there and Rose and I simply could not afford to be away from work without a paycheck. This was especially true when Rose stopped working outside the home and Steven and then Scott were born.

In 1976, my parents and probably everyone I knew voted for Jimmy Carter. I remember my dad talking about it with one of the neighbors and him saying that “we need a change” to something different than the past. I did not follow it closely, but I do remember the oil crisis, Watergate and other world events, making people question the direction the country was going in to be a factor.

My ‘awakening’ to politics came in November of 1979 when the Iranian students took over our embassy and held the hostages. I remember Dan Rather with the Iranian leadership and thinking why isn’t Carter doing something. Up until that time, we may have watched the news many evenings but during that time, we watched it every evening. I can still see the networks starting their broadcast each night with a reminder of how many days our hostages had been held. Carter was hiding under his desk, and nothing seemed to be getting done about the embarrassment to the United States.

The takeover of the embassy was a big deal and important. ABC started Nightline, CNN launched a 24-hour news channel, I was no longer at R&M and had opened Mike’s Auto body. I remember the day the failed rescue attempt for our hostages failed in Iran was the topic of conversation when I got to work. People were really upset in ways that I had not seen before. The pictures of our failed mission were shown repeatedly on TV. I believe it was that moment that I knew I would vote and I would vote Republican.

Even though I hadn't voted, I had been aware of the election cycle 4 years prior, and I remember Ronald Reagan running for the nomination. In 1980, Reagan easily won the nomination for President and just as easily defeated Jimmy Carter for the presidency. The first couple of years were a little shaky because the economy had been devastated by Carter, but President Reagan got things under control and was re-elected by a 49-state majority in 1984. I was a Reagan republican and proud of it. Rose and I opened the body shop in 1980, and the economy was a major factor in making it a success. Everything seemed better and Reagan's message during the 1984 was 'are you better off than you were 4 years ago'. The nation answered the question with a resounding 'YES'.

Near the end of Reagan's term, I remember being in the car traveling just south of Jacksonville. Rose and I had been somewhere and were on our way home. I was surfing the radio and decided to try AM for a change. The search stopped at a talk radio station, and I could not believe what I was hearing. There was a guy on the radio saying all the things that I had been

saying for years but never hearing from the media available to us. This was the first time I listened to Rush Limbaugh. From that day forward, Rush has proved to be a bright light in the darkness of politics. What was interesting about these years was the transformation of those around me. Suddenly, it seemed like everyone had made the transition from Democrat to Republican and that has mostly continued to this day. Don't misunderstand, there were still Democrat's around, but what they called the 'Reagan Democrats' were a real force in the body politic.

After Reagan came George HW Bush. It is not a given that a vice president will succeed the presidency and in fact ones that were elected to the position are rare. Bush was coming after a very successful presidency of Ronald Reagan and won easily. In my opinion, because of his experience, he could have been the most qualified president elected in history. During the campaign he made a promise not to raise taxes during his administration that he did not stick to that made his re-election bid steeply uphill. He also presided in the successful first gulf war, with Iraq when

they marched into Kuwait and even though that gained him high poll numbers at the time it was not enough and his bid failed to William Jefferson Clinton.

I have always considered politics to be serious but at the same time the players in the political world are very entertaining. Bill Clinton was a very talented politician but at the same time, the daily scandal toll, bimbo eruptions, and investigations were entertainment that we had not really seen before. Fox News was launched during his 2nd term (1996) and was around the time that a young intern named Monica Lewinsky was determined to have had a fling with Clinton in the oval office. The time for me was perfect because I was working for Next Day Blinds from our house in Melbourne. I was writing software but having a radio or TV on did not affect my work. It was cable TV in the morning and Rush in the afternoon most every weekday. Rose was working full time at Eau Gallie High School, and many times I was laughing aloud about what was happening on the various news media I would be watching. Rush was also very funny during those years and

constantly had parity of current events. Even though Clinton was morally bankrupt he was a very adept politician and weathered a storm not seen since Watergate. As with almost any administration, there were many things that you can point to that could have been done better but Clinton had the unique ability to know exactly which way the political wind was blowing at any moment and to take advantage of that knowledge. One thing I remember that probably saved his presidency was the relationship he had with republicans after the Democrats loss of the House of Representatives for the first time in 40 years. Clinton immediately pivoted to the center and worked with Newt Gingrich and the new republican house. Looking back in history they accomplished many things during his presidency, and he left office with a very high approval rating.

I had a very hard time understanding Clinton's popularity. Even before Clinton was elected, more than just a few women had come out and claimed they had been intimate with him while he was married. He and Hillary made an appearance on 60 minutes that has become legendary where she defended him and the

defense continued throughout his presidency. We were told at the time that it was just about sex and that all the women were lying. Hillary was heading up the 'war room' to stifle the 'bimbo eruptions' with any means possible. Clinton was accused of everything from groping to rape by many credible women and it was all denied by Hillary as well as so many others in his administration. The women were ridiculed and made fun of by democrats and the mainstream press and even though it ended poorly with an impeachment, democrat males and females alike never abandoned him.

Bush v Gore came next and there was a big issue with the election that was not settled for weeks. In the end Bush was declared the winner. I was happy with the outcome because by then I was very republican. After only about 8 months of Bush administration, September 11, 2001, happened. It was a Tuesday morning at about 8:45. Rose and I were in Maryland, and she called me and told me that a plane had hit the world trade center. I was at the original NDB manufacturing building working because our new building was expanding and my office was to

be in the new section. Meagan Hodge was the only other employee there and she was having a meeting with the company that was tasked to do advertising for the company. We quickly found a radio, and after a few minutes it was reported that a plane had also hit the pentagon and crashed in a field in Pennsylvania. I went home early that day and was immediately struck that there were no planes in the air. The highway I took on the way home was in the flight path of BWI, and I was used to seeing several planes landing or taking off each day. Today there were none and it was eerie feeling. The impact of 911 was enormous and has continued to this day. The new Bush administration was forced into a war footing after 911 that came to define his presidency. I remember several democrats that were supporting Gore during the election telling me that given the circumstances they were happy that Bush had won. Bush was seen as a hard-liner when it came to protecting the country and that was something that had not come across on the other side. The Bush administration got to work and created Homeland Security, ICE and

various other departments and legislation in light of what happened.

After 8 years of Bush, Barack Obama was elected president. Even though the public was war weary and wanted change, I found it hard to believe that they supported the radical change that Obama represented.

This is where I stopped writing years ago. I still pay attention to politics, but it is different now. Politics has always been divisive I guess, but it is on a new level during and since Obama's reign. What used to be 'common sense' has become yet another wedge issue to garner votes. The country is completely divided, and "common sense" has been thrown out the window.

Thank You

Thank You

While I was growing up, I was so fortunate to have very wise adults around that provided a support base for me. It began with my parents of course, but it grew immediately to my aunts & uncles, neighbors, teachers and others. Melbourne was a very small town in those days, and it seemed like everywhere I went, anyone I encountered knew who I was and knew my parents. They were always eager to help me with whatever my need was. They set an example that influenced not only me but all of us ways they would never know.

I have had a good life and have been fortunate to have had Rose by my side. Since Rose passed, I have found friends that have supported me more than I could have imagined. I have named a small number of those individuals in this book but there are many more that have helped my grief process in so many ways.