

Reflections by Warren Himmelberger – 2003

Warren was born in Lebanon, PA, October 12, 1922 to good Pennsylvania German stock [both his parents spoke the dialect]. He had one younger sister. In high school, he worked on the school newspaper and graduated first in his class. He received a full-tuition scholarship to Muhlenberg College, and by attending summer school, graduated in three years.

The following is from a letter he wrote to his five children in 2003, reflecting on his life.

He writes:

I wanted to become a meteorologist in the Army Officers Program. It was filled by the time I had completed the required college physics (which I was able to complete because of a six-month deferment). I then tried to apply for the Navy Aerology Officers Program. This required a college degree, which I would have in June 1943. I passed the physical in Philadelphia, and I thought I had been accepted, only to receive a letter informing me that now a master's degree was required, but that I could apply to become a deck officer. I did not want to be a deck officer, so I chose to be drafted and take my chance on the enlisted man's aerography program. On the day I was drafted in Allentown (I had enrolled in the draft there, rather than in my home town, as some college students did, hoping to get special treatment). One could choose Army or Navy. I chose Navy. Some days the choice was only Army.

I did not know where the Enlisted Aerography School was located. Before I left boot camp, I learned that it was at Lakehurst NJ, and that I had been accepted for the program. The weather school was actually located seven miles north of Lakehurst as a small prep school. There were not enough rooms for the several classes of 120 men and women, and 20 or 25 males had to sleep in an unheated shed. I was one of them. It gets cold in November and December. Each morning we would dress quickly and run to the main building to thaw out before breakfast. The school lasted three months, with classes meeting eight hours a day. I tried to be first among the 120 sailors, Marines, Coastguardsmen, WAVES and Marine women. I did manage to be first, and I was assigned to the weather office at the Lakehurst Naval Air Station.

We worked 8-hour shifts around the clock. The men had a large private room to sleep during the day, but the WAVES had no private place to sleep during the day, and they had trouble sleeping because of noise and commotion. On my watch was Bill Myers, who had been a Prudential clerical employees, and a woman, Alma, who had worked in weather at a small airport in Maine. We got along well. Bill was head of the watch, and he never left the office to nap during the night watch, but Alma and I would take turns to catch an hour or two of sleep when all the work (weather maps, observations and the like) was caught up. There was a room with some bunk beds, used by the weather officer on duty if he wished to take a catnap. One of the other WAVES wondered if it was not a bit unusual for a woman to nap in the same room as a male officer. Alma laughed at the idea. She had a husband in the army.

This idyllic duty was interrupted for me when one noon, walking to go out the gate on a weekend leave, I passed the lieutenant commander who was in charge of the weather office. No one ever saluted in the office. He was with another officer, and he looked pained when I spoke to him. When I returned from the weekend, I got called into his office. He told me that he was sending me overseas because of my failure to salute. He substituted my name on orders of another person who had just finished the three-month course at the weather school.

I left September 6, 1944, on a troop ship, the General Hershey. The ship, after a few stops in eastern New Guinea, ended at the Admiralty Islands, just north of New Guinea. At the Weather Central for the Seventh Fleet I was on the usual three-man watch. On February 25, 1945 I left for the Leyte Weather Central, at a base, Tolosa,

Once, in the weather office, we got out a deck of cards to determine which of the three watches would get liberty that day to go into Shanghai, and I drew the winning card. Instead of going to bars, I sought out the French Club. There I was welcomed by the men who had been under house arrest during the Japanese

occupation. [The Americans and English were interned north of Shanghai.] I met Rene Ricard, and he invited me to his home. It was the beginning of a beautiful friendship. He had been in Canton during the 1920s and roomed with an American. We talked a great deal about everything. He had gone back to France to marry a wife. They had 6-year-old Anne Marie and 4 ½-year-old Hubert. The children adored me. I was their American sailor. Mrs. Ricard spoke little English. I'd visit them every weekend, either Saturday or Sunday, depending on my schedule.

By February 1946 I had enough points to leave the Navy. I had been accepted at MIT Graduate School in mathematics, beginning with the summer term. So, I took a labor job with the Bethlehem Steel Lebanon Plant during April and May. Most of my job was moving pipes which were being painted by a painter. I had left the Bethlehem Plant when I entered the service, and I was entitled to a job when I returned from the service. In June I took a train to Boston and went to my double room in the Graduate House on the corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Memorial Drive.

I did not do well in the MIT math courses. I could handle straight math, but solving rocket problems, electrical engineering problems, chemical engineering problems and such were beyond me. I did not understand the engineering. Had there been no war, I probably would have attended the University of Pennsylvania, taken straight math, and taught at a small college.

So, what was I to do? I was studying under the GI Bill. I decided to transfer to the Boston University School of Education, get a master's degree, and teach high school math. I had already gotten a teaching certificate at summer school at Muhlenberg. I found a position in Tourtellotte Memorial High School in North Grosvenor Dale CT, 60 miles from Boston. On the weekends, I returned to Boston, bunking with a friend.

What does a young high school teacher do on weekends in Boston? There are university dances where one can meet young ladies who are looking for dates. Then, in February 1947, I wanted to attend the annual New England Region Lutheran Students Association gatherings, and I went to Uni-Lu to get the information. I thought it would be ungracious of me if I didn't attend one service and an evening student forum.

I did attend a Uni-Lu service in the old chapel, and an evening student forum in the chapel basement. I never left. The dynamic and friendly atmosphere there was special. In November 1949 I dated Joan [*his first wife*]. We became engaged in February 1950 and married on June 24. We took a six-week honeymoon vacation: one week at Petit Manan near Steuben in Maine, and then five weeks touring the west as far as the Grand Canyon and Carlsbad Caverns. When we returned, I had no job-- there were no teaching vacancies at the end of August. So we moved to a small apartment in Brighton and I found a job with Able Rug Company, and Joan found a secretary job at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

We were young and struggling, but optimistic about the future.. We continued to attend Uni-Lu. I got a teaching job in a new Attleboro junior high school in September 1951 and moved there. Allen was born November 1, 1952.

Then I found another position in Holliston MA. David was born August 6, 1954. For the school year beginning in September 1955 I found a math teaching job in Natick. We continued to live in the Holliston apartment. Ann Elizabeth was born March 26, 1956. Joan developed a breast abscess in May, and the Holliston doctor prescribed a sulfa drug for it. This proved to be a huge mistake. Either Joan reacted to the drug, or the abscess had weakened her resistance. She went to the hospital, but by then her kidneys were not functioning. She died May 31, 1956. That doctor later died after taking a sulfa drug. This was before the days of penicillin being in regular use.

Joan's mother took care of Ann E. and Allen. My aunt Leah offered to take care of David in Bethlehem, PA. One of Joan's Simmons classmates wanted to adopt Ann. I rejected that idea. My mother had the idea that I could move to Lebanon, get a teaching job, and somehow care for three children with her help. She had been teaching full-time since 1938. I knew that it would have been a difficult situation at best.

After Thanksgiving, Mother Bradley was worn out from caring for two children, and Allen joined David in Bethlehem. Edith Rust, who lived in my apartment building in Holliston, offered to look after Allen, David, and Ann during the daytime while I was teaching, and I'd take care of them the rest of the time. After the summer of 1957, all three children returned to Holliston. The cooks at the school cafeteria would give me some leftover food most days, so that I had a start with supper meals. A woman next door babysat many times when I wanted to go somewhere. I also had regular babysitters.

During 1957 I tried to date people, but it looked pretty hopeless. Then Edith Rust told me that she would no longer look after the children after June 1958. That was a discouraging note for the future. Helen Kukuk a nurse from Uni-Lu arranged for a large Christmas party in her apartment in December 1957, inviting people from Uni-Lu and from the medical community. At the party I tried to remember names, at least first names. I sat along a wall, next to a dark-haired nursing instructor at Children's Hospital, named Ann. We chatted the entire evening, but I did not remember her last name or ask for her telephone number. I felt handicapped by having three small children, and I seldom pursued chance meetings. But I was impressed by Ann, and I should have asked Helen for her last name and telephone number. But I was too embarrassed to do it. I thought that it would look to be scheming.

Then, about a month later, I heard Ann Herpy's name mentioned for donating some Revere Ware to Uni-Lu. I did not immediately act, but one Friday evening I went to Boston as usual (usually the neighbor would be kind and babysit). I looked up Ann Herpy in the telephone directory, dialed the number, not knowing what to expect. She was at home and answered the phone. I introduced myself, and she remembered me. I suggested a movie date, and even mentioned the possibility of attending a movie that evening or at another time. She agreed to go that evening to the nearby Kenmore Theater (torn down for the Mass Turnpike) to see "Gervaise" at the second show. We had to stand outside on a bitterly cold evening, and I got a sinus cold. We agreed to a second date the following week, dancing at the Totem Pole in Newton. We also decided to attend dance lessons at the YWCA on Monday evenings.

We had several long, serious talks, and we both were interested in a permanent relationship. On Monday evening, February 24, I asked Ann to marry me. She said yes, and we set a wedding date of Saturday, June 14. It took just 24 days for us to decide to face the world together. Now, 45 years later, we realize how fortunate we were to find each other. We bought an old house in Wellesley that needed to be fixed up.

Craig was added to the family in 1960, at Leonard Morse Hospital in Natick. Clark was born in 1962, also in Natick..

I was always interested in politics and history. I became a Wellesley town meeting member for 25 years (1962-67 1972-92), and chaired the Elementary School Accommodations Committee from 1966-68, and prepared a 21-page report to the town, showing present and future needs in elementary school facilities, including research, statistics, projections and recommendations. I was also involved with the Wellesley Historical Society, serving as treasurer.

I became chairman of a Regional School District Planning Board, 1974-77, to study the need for vocational education in the area which led to the creation of the Quinobin Regional Vocational School. After the school was begun in 1978, I served as secretary-treasurer of the four-town school committee until the school was closed in 1987. I retired from the Postal Service in 1984 [*he had worked every Saturday during the school year and full-time during the summer at the Holliston Post Office while raising his family, to supplement his salary.*]

I was active in the South Middlesex Branch of the NAACP, 1963-94, second vice president for 18 years, and ombudsman for perhaps 20 years. Also I did Tax Counseling for the Elderly from 1984 to 1994, and taught the annual review course for about 40 counselors in January from 1987-94. I sang for ten years with the Highland Glee Club from 1984-94. At Uni-Lu I was on the church council 1952-55 and 1959-62.

Ann was on the Church Council 1965-68, serving as secretary. She taught 4th grade in the Sunday School for 12 years, and was Clerk of the Congregation for perhaps eight years. After graduation from Simmons College in a five-year nursing program, She worked at Grace-New Haven Hospital 1953-54, and at

Children's Hospital in Boston 1954-58, both as a head nurse and two years as a Children's Nursing School instructor. She received a master's degree in nursing in 1975 at the Boston University School of Nursing, and she taught Clinical Instruction in Pediatrics there from 1975-79, then Academic Advising from 1979-88, when President John Silber closed the School of Nursing. She transferred to the School of Management, doing academic advising as Associate Director of Graduate Programs from 1988-93. Then she became Program Manager of the Doctoral Programs (half-time) from 1993 to 1997, when she retired after 22 years at Boston University. She picked up a doctoral degree in education in 1989, fulfilling a requirement of full-time study by working half-time from 1984 to 1985.

Ann did Girl Scout leadership for several years, and worked with Parents Anonymous, a program dealing with parental abuse of children. In 1971 she volunteered to have two small foster sisters stay with us for several years. Her interest in for Foster Children Program led to her helping to organize the Massachusetts Foster Parents Association, a union of several separate groups. She was the incorporator and served as secretary for several years.

I do a slight amount of effort on legislation on behalf of retired teachers. Ann is now the one who is involved with many activities. She is secretary of the Littleton Historical Society, and is planning the book for the 300th anniversary of Littleton in 2014. She organized an oral history project with the help of a high school history teacher.