



Fall 2008

# The BRUSTMAN HOUSE

The Newsletter of a decrepit place and the people who love it

## ANDY SCHOENFELD 1951 - 2008

### ***At a Memorial Service at the Brustman House in Sharon Springs, Soren delivered this eulogy:***

The expressions of sympathy Susan, Tristan, and I have received over the past few weeks have brightened and saddened our days. Your memories of Andy's humor and strength amplify our own. But for me, one of the most direct and eloquent statements has been, "He was a good man."

A eulogy is a really meager and impoverished thing compared to that sentiment, struggling to capture the depth of one's feelings, and the richness and complexity of a man's life. How can a eulogy do justice to any one life, let alone one lived like Andy's, with charisma, humor, and a tongue-in-cheek spirit of adventure?

Most of you all know at least one or two Andy-isms, those peculiar, funny little things he said or stories he told of wild, youthful days at the Fillmore. You know how to play games like "Who do you like better?" You were here when he screened "The Producers" outside, against the side of our home with a dubious crowd of Hassidim looking on. You remember when he came sauntering down the street with pliers clipped to his ear, a construction hat on his head, singing Matzo, Matzo Man...

But besides playing the clown, Andy was heroic on an every-man scale. Like most little boys, he fantasized about being a superhero when he grew up, but even then he had a practicality like "where do you put your shoes when you change into your cape?" As he became an adult, I like to think Andy achieved some measure of practical super-hero-dom. When you came under Andy's protection, you didn't just know it; you felt it - a feeling of fullness in your chest. He believed in his own strength and charm, and made you believe in it too. He was willing to fight for you. And it wasn't an empty promise - he did small things everyday to reinforce it. He let people know he cared about them and he made you believe that you were capable of greater things than you knew, if only you were open to the possibility.

No one in Andy's world was pre-judged. That incredibly efficient woman working the counter at Stewart's coffee shop had

as much potential to become a captain of industry as an ivy-league graduate. Long-haul truck drivers had to be respected for their knowledge of the road. The potential to learn and grow was not an elitist endeavor for Andy - everyone had some special thing about them, something to teach you regardless of their age, race or class. If you listened well, sharpened your intellect, and in some cases, opened your heart to the message, the messenger might be a complete surprise.

Today, one of those messengers is Andy. When he learned of his diagnosis, he started keeping a journal. He didn't keep it for very long, but to me one of the most telling entries about what was really important to Andy came from June 14, 2007.

*"Earlier this evening before bed, I received a call from one of my co-workers. She'd called to tell me she had been swept off her feet and married by a guy she has known for 20 years. Of course, she also offered me well wishes on my illness. Her story did far more to cheer me up than dozens or hundreds of cards. It was a story of time and beautiful love, finally requited after well over a dozen years! With more stories around me like that, how can I not fail to get well soon?"*



I can't share with you all enough how much I will miss the man who swept my mother off her feet, who so readily accepted me as his daughter, and who gave me a brother. Andy believed in the power of love to heal wounds. It is one of my saddest thoughts that our love was not enough to heal him, but it is one of my comforts to know that he died with very few regrets about the life he lived.

Some men recognize too late, the wealth in their lives beyond money: the value of family and friendships, the joy of a story well-told, the beauty and wonder that surrounds us, but Andy, under any name, was not one of them. So to Ignatz Bumblechuck, Mr. Andy Show-and-Tell, the Pastafarian, the conspiracy theorist, the matzo man, liberator of the Israelites in your BVDs, you leave our worlds so much poorer by leaving us much too soon.

# NEWS, NOTES AND MILESTONES

Of course, the biggest family news is Andy's passing June 20<sup>th</sup>. His death underlines how precious each of us is to all of us.

Andy's obituary appeared Sunday 6/29/08 in both the Albany and Schenectady newspapers. Here's what it said:

*Schoenfeld, Andrew G. SHARON SPRINGS, N.Y. Andrew G. Schoenfeld, beloved husband, father, cousin, and friend, age 56, of Sharon Springs, died June 20, 2008 after a long battle with lung cancer. He is survived by his wife, Susan McMillen; children, Tristan Schoenfeld of Los Angeles, Calif. and Soren Manillen of Chicago, Ill.; brother, Henry Schoenfeld of Takoma Park, Md.; sister, Alice Schoenfeld of Los Angeles; and many loving cousins, nieces, and nephews. A memorial service will be held August 3, 2008 at the Brustman House, his family's home in Sharon Springs. Memorial contributions may be made to Saint Barnabas Medical Center Foundation, 94 Old Short Hills Rd., Livingston, NJ 07039-9679 or online at [saintbarnabasfoundation.org](http://saintbarnabasfoundation.org)*

Naturally, the obituary only gives the bare facts and doesn't convey how much people were affected by this event. Scattered through this newsletter issue you'll see more expressions of the great affection for Andy we shared.

As the cliché says, life goes on. Thus there is other news. And here it is.

Billy writes, "Denks G-tt, there really is not much to report. Everyone is fine and at the usual routines. Aside from the economy, stock market, war, and politics, things are good. Aunt Ida's health of course is a cause for concern, but hopefully the worst is over. We visited Sharon over Columbus Day weekend and spent a good time with you and Loretta. Prior to that, Henry and I saw the two Susans, and Diane in New York City on their visit, which was also pleasant. I plan to visit Fla. twice: once with Henry in December, and again in February. I must say that I find myself, like all of you,

I'm sure, thinking often of Andy, along with my parents, and that generation as well."

Karen says, "I'm doing well, but busy with work, school, and my mental health counseling internship. I've actually started counseling on my own much sooner than I expected to -- a little bit scary, but it's great. I was also able to sit in on an anger management group for court-mandated clients. The men were about 6'2, 200 pounds... Actually, no juicy drama there, sorry. It turned out to be a great experience and I even got coffee and cookies from one of the big, bad men." She adds, "I moved to a suburb of Philadelphia over the summer, and it's working out great, especially in light of the Phillies actually making it to the World Series for once."

Lynn says she's busy these days; working three days a week at the library and two at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. To say she likes work at the Met is an understatement.

## THE REUNION REPORT

Another August, another reunion. The family gathered at the Brustman House for the weekend of Friday, August first. Richie, Fred, Henrys S and H, Billy, Larry and most of their offspring were there in time for dinner. As usual, when Beijing based Dan shows up, he wins the prize for coming the furthest.

The informal Friday dinner in the house's dining room was pizza from Gino's Restaurant, salad by Rosa, and pies and cookies.

This, of course, is a far cry from the days of yore when the meal was kosher and Sabbath candles were lit. Afterwards Soren, Tristan and Susan came by and joined the crowd chatting on the front porch. It was a nice, clear night and occasional knots of cousins would take a walk through the village, or take in some stargazing.

Saturday, more people arrived: additional Heinbachs and the Florida contingent, Diane and Toby. At lunchtime one contingent went forth to try the new Chinese buffet in Cobelskill. In the afternoon, again the locus of activity was schmoozing and fressing on the front porch, with groups of people venturing out to stroll the village, or visit a gorge near Cherry Valley.

The evening meal was a trip over hill and dale to return to an old venue, the Talley-Ho Restaurant in Richfield Springs. It was the traditional Talley-Ho meal, but there were no speeches afterwards. (This year, without Andy to animate the group, that seemed appropriate.) We returned to Sharon and people lounged in small groups on the porches, in the living and dining rooms, and at Andy's house. More schmoozing and reminiscing. This included a call to Australia to bring John and Helsie into the



Soren Eulogizing Andy by the Brook and under a Willow

conversation. They said they'd be returning to the US in 2009.

Sunday was set aside to honor Andy. There was a memorial service behind the Brustman House alongside the babbling brook that Andy cherished (as most of us do). All manner of chairs and benches gleaned from the house were deployed and a podium with flowers was set up. Though an overcast morning, Andy's friends and family came in good number.

Soren was the only formal speaker, but many people spoke extemporaneously about Andy. The remarks were funny, sad and everything between, highlighting how we treasured him.

After the service the crowd walked up Union Street to Andy's house for lunch. A large tent was set out on the side lawn to house a buffet, and chairs were placed about the yard and in Susan's garden. The sun came out, and Andy's favorite music was playing in the background. The gathering went on for hours. Andy would have loved to be working the crowd.



Lunch Afterwards

In her words: "I LOVE LOVE LOVE working at the Met... my boss (the senior exhibit designer) and I meet world-renowned scholars or conservators for lunch and I can surreptitiously touch priceless works of art. If I decide I have too much respect to touch, I can always see the pieces up close in storage or when they're being installed. There are tons of secret passageways and everyone is very different but always very interesting. There is so much to learn! The best thing is listening to the curators talk about the pieces they love, or telling a story about some little known aspect of the culture in which they specialize."

Lynn continues, "Another thing I love about it is that everyone who works there, from the maintenance crews up to the director (who made eye contact with me the other day \*swoooooon\*) loves art, and loves what they do. Once, when I was helping with the installation of a show, things got very chaotic and people were extremely flustered. A graphics woman was complaining to me, and I told her that I still think it's exciting, even when it's hectic. She said "Of course it's exciting — we all love it, it just gets stressful sometimes." That sealed the deal. I'm currently applying for full-time jobs at the Met -- anything I'm qualified for. I was accepted into Seton Hall for grad school, but if I get a job, I suppose I'll have to defer."

Larry checks in and says, "We are all well. It's nice the kids came home to vote and then will scatter back to resume their lives. Claire and I are going to Costa Rica the middle of November for a ten-day bus tour hoping to take in the best of the country. It will be the end of the rainy season and I've heard that in the rainforest, the downpours are deafening and practically solid walls of rain. I'm sort of looking forward to it."

"In January we'll be going to Florida to try and hook up with the family and also go on a cruise out of Miami to the eastern Caribbean for a week. Anyone interested in joining us please get in touch for the details. All these plans were made prior to the economy sucking. So much for my desire for early retirement."

Larry continues, "I want to send special thoughts and best wishes to Aunt Ida with hopes for a quick and complete recovery. Can't wait to see you in Florida."

He also notes, "We have been spending time in Ocean City, NJ. Mostly occasional long weekends and we have had some exceptional weather where you can sit or walk on the beach or boardwalk. I was never a beach person and truthfully, the peak summer season doesn't appeal to me as much as the off-season when the crowds have gone and it is so much more relaxing. We have been renting out our place there for the summer weeks but are debating whether to rent it out as much or not at all. However in this lousy economy, every little bit helps."

Larry adds, "Before the summer, Aunt Martha and Saul most graciously hosted us at a luncheon in honor of the Australian Brustmans at the Tavern On the Green in NYC. It was our first meeting with John and Helsie and we hit it off right away. We had such a nice time on such a beautiful day with such wonderful company. Thanks again Aunt Martha and Saul. We hope we can all get together again when the Australian Brustman's return next spring."

Jeff reports, "Eric is training to be a volunteer fireman, and may be getting a position working at a juvenile detention center, so everyone's wishing him well. Loren's busy teaching in D.C., and recently stopped back home for the weekend. Apparently her work is stressful but rewarding. She's been speaking about a Halloween party that she and her fellow teachers will be throwing at their pad. Right now I'm finishing up the remainder of an internship at ShadowBox Pictures, a media production company in Yardley. They mainly do commercial and infomercial work. I'm also (haplessly) trying to get whatever freelance production gigs I can. So far I've worked on the Transformers sequel, and there's a chance I may work on a Bollywood movie shooting in Philadelphia in the coming months. We'll see."

Andrea tells us, "We are all doing well. The kids are busy in school and gearing up for Halloween. Shayna is going to be a vampire and Sadie is going to be Carrie, the overlooked younger sister of Laura Ingalls Wilder (hmm, life imitating art?) Next comes Election Day. The girls were so disappointed that Hilary didn't get the nomination, but are now huge Obama fans. Living in Massachusetts, the kids like to "out" the one kid in their class whose parents are voting for McCain, and just rip 'em to shreds."



Fidlers Two

"We had a busy, but good summer. Shayna spent most of her summer at sleep away camp and it brought back fond memories of my summers at Camp Leah, the Edgies sponsored camp in Bear Mountain. Shayna's vocabulary broadened to include lots of colorful words and the same old dirty songs we used to sing when I was kid. Mark spent a good deal of the summer traveling. His company, Evergreen Solar, is expanding from Massachusetts and Germany to build a solar panel factory in Asia. So, Mark scouted locations in Singapore, Taiwan and Malaysia."

Andrea continues, "I'm staying busy. Recently, I started a part-time volunteer position with a non-profit group. The mission is to bring arts programs and performers into the public schools. With cuts in funding, the six local elementary schools offer only a half hour of art and music each week. I've been doing a lot of grant writing and meeting interesting artists. So far, we've brought in African drummers and a production of Peter Pan to rave reviews from the Kindergarten through 6th grade crowd."

"I am also continuing my work with an organization in Massachusetts that matches children who are living in shelters with suburban families. My goal during the holidays is to match 100 children to 100 local families (last year I came close!). During the holidays, sponsor families purchase clothing and toys for the kids. It's a good thing."

Andrea adds, "Unfortunately, we missed Andy's memorial in Sharon because Mark was still away and Shayna returned from camp that day. I heard it was very special and that one of my favorite stories (Andy as "Matzoh Man") was shared. We remembered and talked about Andy at our house on the day of the Memorial and wished we could be there."

Alice writes, "I guess I'm a casualty or a beneficiary of the economic downturn, I've been laid off. I am enjoying catching up with everything that gets neglected when you work full time, like your health, seeing friends, calling relatives, writing blurbs for newsletters."

"I want everyone to know that I had a major ceremony for Andy here in Los Angeles and I wasn't able to be at the memorial due to prior commitments; I'm sorry I couldn't be there with everybody. The loss of Elsie and Andy are like losing the heart and soul of the family. But we had alot of fun, still- eh? Faversham? Haversham? Norcus."

Henry weighs in with; "I'm fine. Lucy and I went to Italy for ten days a couple of weeks ago. We spent a week in rural Tuscany, in

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a renovated farmhouse on a mountainside, with some friends from the Peace Corps. Four days in Rome. Wonderful time."

"Willie is taking an MBA at Johns Hopkins (in addition to working). He's doing well. Mikey is nearing the halfway point in Law School. His fiancée, Ashley, is in Texas - doing disaster relief work from the latest hurricane. She got a job with a company that contracts with FEMA."

Lucy loved the Italian vacation, saying the trip was "absolutely fabulous. We stayed close to the town where Michelangelo was born. Everyday we drove to a different medieval hill town. We ate, drank, went to markets and looked at Madonnas. Henry and I then spent our last three days in Rome. I figured out the place the day before we left, so I must go back."

She adds, "I have put off my retirement for another year and a half, can't burden Mr. Henry with the healthcare costs. I'll just visit my Florida house once a month and earn free tickets on Southwest. In the midst of all the financial mess, Henry got a raise, yeah. I hope to talk him into a new bathroom. Otherwise it's work, work, work. We got a new mattress and as winter looms, all I want to do is to stay in bed, but alas, I'm not allowed to do that quite yet."

Getting very excited re Nov 4, I'm counting on an Obama wipeout."

Debbie and Willie Schoenfeld were out west this summer, attending a convention in New Mexico. They stopped a few days in Las Vegas on the way home. There they got together with Caroline and Ed, and Dan who happened to be visiting his sister that week. Debbie wrote, "We had a great time!"



Debbie, Willie, and Danny visit Caroline in Las Vegas

Aunt Martha writes, "On everyone's mind must be Andy's death. I, though, think of his birth. I took Alice and Henry, whom I was caring for during their mother's confinement, and Richie too, to 'visit.' All of us stood in the street, outside the hospital, looking up at a high window where Frances held up the new brother for his siblings to see..."

She adds, "Fortunately, I've had happy events crowd in. I did get to see the world's wonders, my great-grandchildren Tyler and Maya, this June. A full three-day visit to Albany, thanks to Loretta's willingness to put up with Saul and me. Other happy events were two parties I hosted at Tavern on The Green. One, the end of May, was for our Aussie Family, John and Helsie who were visiting the US. The other, in late September, was an engagement party for Fred's Granddaughter Stephenie who, when all got up to toast her and her fiancé Kyle, had a surprise for us: She announced that she and Kyle had eloped!! So, this turned into a sort of wedding celebration."

Fred notes, "The big news from me is my granddaughter Stephenie Merrill's marriage to Kyle Moshera. My Mom (that's Aunt Martha to most of you) hosted an engagement party at The Tavern on the Green which became a wedding celebration when the happy couple announced they eloped."

He also noted, "It was great to see everyone at cousin's weekend in Sharon this summer, but bitter sweet as we shared memories of Andy. People had really lovely tales to tell about him."

"In June, I again helped sail a friend's boat back from Bermuda. It got pretty rough this

## BEST AND WORST PARTS ABOUT BEING IN THE FAMILY

In the call for newsletter input, there was a request to "ponder and then send in your completion of this sentence: The best/worst parts of being in this family is..." Three people responded, and here are their thoughts.

### From Jeff Heinbach

**The Best:** Being able to see spaceships in the worn wood of bathroom walls, the likeness of Uncle Mack in a kitchen spoon, and charm in the slope of the kitchen floor.

**The Worst** (but also maybe best again): Realizing that insanity is a genetic heirloom.

### From Brad Smith

**The Best:** I come home every summer with new jokes.

**The Worst:** Every male in this family carries the balding head gene.

### From Rita

**The Best:** My memories. Each summer, the families would gather and reconnect with each other outside the confines of steamy New York, amidst the beauty of the Mohawk Valley. It was magic time for me. I have the best memories. Here's some of them...

I loved being around the aunts and uncles and my cousins. I loved to eavesdrop on conversations and fights between the 3 sisters and watch them play mahjong; I loved getting lost in the woods with Uncle Bill, Andy, Alice, Larry, Billy, Toby and finding wild berries to eat; I loved rolling down the hill in the sulphur park with Larry and Andy; I loved the ice cream socials and basket weaving; I loved the street dances on Main Street with the Sharon Springs High School band and Melonhead as the conductor; I loved the bingo and the poker games with everyone in the dining room; I loved going to the library with Aunt Fersh and Aunt Elsie; I loved sneaking up to Meyer's Estate with our shopping bags,

stealing corn and then running down the big hill so fast I could hardly stop at the bottom; I loved going to the bus station and hoping the bus driver would call out "Brustman House;" I loved going to "Make Your Own;" I loved going to the A&P in Cobleskill with Alice, Andy, Larry, Toby, and others, with Alice being the ringleader and telling us that our mission was to steal something, anything! I loved stealing a bird ladder from the pet department.

I could go on and on forever.

For those who are still with us and those who are gone, thanks for the memories.

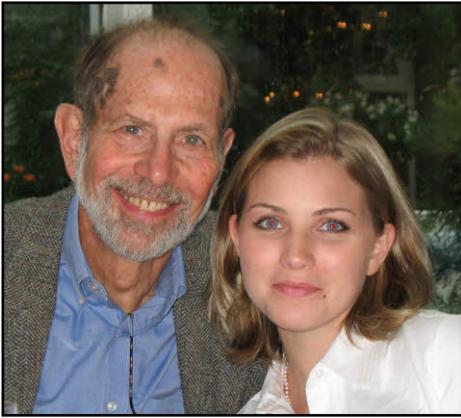
**The Worst:** Now for the worst part of the family.... nothing.

Rita's wonderful response made me curious, and I wrote back, "How old were you when Alice led you into a life of crime? And have you reformed yet?" Here was Rita's response to my questions.

"I was about 9 or 10 when I stole the bird ladder! Alice was a teenager. It was crazy scary but I had to do it because everyone else was in the game. Funny, I can only remember me. We had to get in and get out with something, anything. I wandered and wandered through the aisles. Someone said, "Hurry up" and I grabbed a bird ladder, put it under my blouse and walked out. I was freakin' scared."

"I'd be curious to ask the others their recollections. Did one of us get a talking-to by the manager on their way out? I don't know if I'm making this part up or it really happened. Like I said, I was only focused on ME and what I had to do."

"It was great! I can't wait for Alice to read this and see if she contacts me. Hah!"



Fred and Stephanie

time. We had 12-foot high seas and winds gusting over thirty knots for three days. The boat groaned and creaked. We tried to ignore it and get some sleep. We were wet all the time too. One night watch reported hailstones. This trip cured me. If any one hears me talk about doing it again, stop me."

Finally, at the time of the election Fred said, "I am trying to get volunteers to do visibility (i.e. holding up signs) at our ward polling stations. It is one of my jobs as Ward Chair. Good thing Obama isn't relying solely on me to get out the vote. I'll be glad when the campaign is over. I suspect most people will."

Richie, yours truly, relates, "the summer was typically busy for me. It's when retirement turns tough because the weather is good and there is so much to do. Though lounging about is my favored activity, I manage to bike ride daily and still do volunteer work as president of the New York Bicycling Coalition. (Barack, let me know if you need tips on being presidential.)"

"Loretta and I had houseguests nearly every week from May through October. Friends, relatives, old college buddies, and others came by to visit. It was great. Best of all were two visits from my grandchildren, Tyler and Maya, one visit in June and another in October. In the latter visit we introduced them to apple picking and pumpkin carving."



Soren and Todd passing through Albany

"This fall and winter we'll be spending a few weeks in Las Vegas where we'll baby-sit the grandchildren while their parents vacation in Hawaii. Then we'll head off to Florida (and may join Larry and Claire on that Caribbean cruise.) Of course, as usual, there will be occasional jaunts to Boston, New York and even Washington."

Dan left Beijing in June and spent the summer traveling. He wrote, "I spent last July in Vietnam working with my band. We had a great time and plan to go back sometime this winter. After a brief trip through Cambodia, I came back to the US in August, where I was lucky to see so many of the cousins in Sharon Springs. I also took a side trip out to Las Vegas to see Caroline, Ed and the kids." While in Vietnam he noted to his dad, "Saigon is pretty good so far. I've been taking it very easy. It's too hot to really run around too much. I drink a lot of iced Vietnamese coffee. Man, until you get out of Beijing for a while, you don't realize just how shitty the air is there. Saigon is a breath of fresh air in comparison." After returning to China in September, he said "Life is getting back to normal in post-Olympic Beijing; the traffic, smog and beggars are all back – just like old times!"

While surfing the web, Dan stumbled upon a professional photographer's photo essay on the ruins of Sharon Springs. One photo featured the Brustman House, which the photographer thought was abandoned. Now how could he make such a mistake? Well, to be fair, the house was boarded up for the winter when he took the photo. You can see his picture here: [www.flickr.com/photos/garyrt/1626368196/in/set-72157602509376774/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/garyrt/1626368196/in/set-72157602509376774/)

Caroline writes, "Our family took a long weekend camping trip in southern Utah this summer. We visited Zion National Park, Cedar Breaks National Monument, and Bryce Canyon National Park. The kids loved camping, as it is an endless source of entertainment. It's certainly a lot of work camping with a three year old and one year old, but I figure it's only going to get easier and more enjoyable over time. I hope!"

Lois, Marc and the kids were up in Schenectady to see their Danny in a play – Shakespeare – at Union college. Loretta and I joined the five of them for dinner one evening and then we all went off to see the performance. Near the end of it the auditorium filled with a bunch of loud, mysterious booms. Turns out a fireworks display was launched just above the building. Fortunately, it did not interfere with any of Danny Lust's lines. By the way, he was a great thespian. His sister Alyssa just graduated college and is now attending Cornell Law School.

From Miami, Susan writes, "I had a couple of interesting vacations this past year. Went

to Alaska in July – on a big birthday cruise for a friend – and went on a whale expedition. I actually saw 7 or 8 whales. Their mouths are so huge – you could park a car on their tongues. I saw some great eagles and seals -- and ate a lot of salmon. We spent a day or two going through the glaciers, which as many of you know, are an unearthly shade of pale blue and melting away.

In September she and Diane were in Pennsylvania for a wedding and, afterwards, "went to NYC to meet up with Brustman cousins Susan and Henry H. Di, Susan and I stayed at my old haunt, the Chelsea Hotel, for a few days. Our accommodations had a cute little kitchen and a huge terrace on 23<sup>rd</sup> Street that was perfect for people watching. Susan just loved all the art on the staircase – she thought it was the best gallery in NYC. (I agree.) We had such a good time. Di, Susan and I saw the musical Jersey Boys – which we loved. We went to the Morgan Library with cousins Henry and Billy for a very educational docent's tour and had a huge lunch. We visited MOMA on a Friday, when it was free."

Susan concludes, "We fressed up and down the city – culminating in a good-bye dinner with Henry at the Second Avenue Deli - which is now at 33<sup>rd</sup> and Park Avenue South (only in NY). It was like old times. It's always so great spending time with cuz. Hope to see as many of you as possible in Florida this winter."

Aunt Ida had a fall in September, broke her right wrist, had a stay in the hospital, had surgery, and then a stay in a rehab center. At the time Rita said, "Mom's still in rehab, probably at least another week. Her right wrist is healing and she has good use of it. It's still bandaged and in that Velcro brace thingy. Her balance is not good and they're

## The Rita Report

This year the Cousins contributed \$2750 in dues and rents towards the Brustman House's 2008 upkeep. Thank you, contributors! As you know, this is greatly appreciated.

More than ever, these contributions may make the difference in whether the House remains a family treasure or becomes some stranger's fix-up project.

Send in your 2009 annual dues, still a bargain at \$100. Affirm your "familyship." As usual, please make your check out to THE BRUSTMAN HOUSE and send to:

Rita Layson  
803 Shallow Brook Ave  
Winter Springs FL 32708

working on it. Less confusion. She has anxious moments where she feels she can't breathe. Don't nobody fall!"

Later on she wrote, "Mom is now home. She has a Home Health Aide 24/7 with her. She's still unsteady on her feet and not able to do for herself yet. One day at a time, as they say. Thank you all for your concern." Rita also noted Toby is "pretty wrapped up in Mom's doctor visits. It's her full time job and she's spent."

Rita later added, "Mom's wrist healed nicely. Now we're dealing with some other issues that we're trying to stabilize. She's scheduled for an MRI for her back. We'll know if she's a surgery candidate or relieve the pain with pain management. More drugs! Aunt Ida sends love to everyone and hopes to see family as they come down for winter."

On her own life, Rita wrote, "I wish I could tell you that Rich and I are traveling the continents, dining at the most elegant restaurants and shopping at the finest stores, but it's not to be. Rather, Rich and I are still working way too much and still nursing that sick cat I told you about 2 years ago. Yes, Cuddles lives and we need a vacation."

Rita adds, "Drew and Brettanie and Jeff are all doing well. Both boys got promoted to Staff Sergeant. Drew reenlisted and looks like Jeff will too. No pink slips for them in these rough economic times."

Jeff says all is going well with him and writes, "I never thought I'd do it, but I'm re-enlisting for another 4 years in the USAF. Along with the re-enlistment, I'm cross training into a different career field. I'm going from satellite communications to 'contracting'. It's a big change, but one I'm looking forward to. My Father, Hoyt, is doing well in Singapore. He's been there for about 3 years now and enjoying it."

Jeff adds, "There may be a shadow of a chance for me making it to Sharon next year, which would be nice to get away and see some of the family again. But I make no guarantees."

Brad, one of Orlando's finest, says, "For those who had not heard, my police car was broken into in April. I figured if bad guys had the balls to break into my police car and steal equipment out of it, it was time to move out of the neighborhood. And no, I was not home when it happened (if I was...oh man...). This was the main reason for the move. Now I'm in a nice new townhome with my girlfriend and her sister. We were set up in three days. Their parents came over and helped moved us all in. Her dad and I spent part of the day hanging my plasma TV on the wall and the other part hanging knick-knacks for the girls. At the end of the day I had a beer in one hand, the remote in the other and watching TV in High Definition - I was a happy man. I live with two girls so you know the place is always going to smell like a Yankee Candle shop! For everyone, our new address is 2097 Lake Baldwin Lane #101, Orlando, FL 32814."

A while later Brad, back from a Caribbean cruise says, "Let me tell you, it was the best time I have ever had. For any cousins who have never been on a cruise, you need to do it. Every night was something new. What beats the kind of vacation where you don't have to put gas in your car, make your bed, and don't have to pay for any food? We caught a show every night in the theater, watched live comedy shows, and ate and drank 24/7. We also got to visit St. Thomas, Grand Turk, and Nassau, which were all beautiful. I went with Lesley's family, which included her mom, dad, brother, and sister, all experienced cruisers. Every night they made fun of me, a virgin cruiser."

## THE OTHER ELSIE PASSES AWAY

On November 10 Elsie Krakower Lassman Shaw passed away. She was in her late 90's. While most of the cousins, especially the younger ones, don't really know who she is, I want to note this milestone.

Elsie Shaw was a first-cousin and childhood playmate of Mark, Irv, Ferish, Elsie Ida and Al. She grew up on the Lower East Side of New York with them, and stayed a life-long friend of our Aunt Elsie. She was an avid reader of the Brustman House Newsletter.

Her father, Moishe Meichel Krakower, Grandma Dora's brother, "discovered" Sharon Springs about 80 years ago, beginning the Brustman Family connection to the village. She outlived two husbands and tragically lost a grandson on 9/11 at the World Trade Center. This year she moved to Florida from Queens and, being there, would talk on the

phone to Ida and Rita. Rita thought Elsie was "a real sweetheart."

This Elsie was a delightful lady. To the end of her life she was alert, interesting and kept a sense of humor. She had a great memory and could recall so much of the past. I would talk to her on the phone every so often and found it fun. There always was a good story. For instance, a conversation with her eventually became this past spring's newsletter story, "How We Were Almost Related to Bugsy Siegel."

I am indebted to her for these conversations. I learned many things about family history from her. To the extent you've learned them also, through this newsletter, you are indebted too.

--- Richie

## AUSTRALIA HONORS HELSIE BRUSTMAN

This June the Queen of England, who is also the Queen of Australia, announced recipients of the Order of Australia Medal. The Order of Australia is the pre-eminent way Australians recognize the achievements and service of their fellow citizens. Among the honored was Helen Sheila Brustman, and the Queen's citation reads "For service to the Jewish community, particularly through the Australia/Israel and Jewish Affairs Council." Honorees are entitled to wear a medal and use the initials OAM after their name. Helsie was among 120 Australians being honoured; Helsie was the only Jewish Woman.

The Award came as a huge surprise to Helsie. She learned of it only days before it was to be announced. She and John were in United States when the Australian media made the news public on the Queen's Birthday. They celebrated that night at a French restaurant in Boston

The Governor of the State of Victoria presented the medals, four of them, to Helsie in August at Government House. Husband John says, "There have been four dinners in her honour, and we celebrated at home a dinner with people who have touched and helped her communally over the decades. This has been a special time in our lives. She certainly made the Brustman name famous as media around the world mentioned the award. Of course, the Jewish press here did lots of photos and articles as well. Helsie received many letters, gifts, and emails and has just finished writing back to 1500 people."

So, to you, from now on, it's Helsie OAM!



Sporting the just awarded medal

Steve writes from California, "I'm in my first semester at UC Berkeley studying Art History. I have 3 semesters left, and after that I'm thinking about traveling for a while before going on to grad school for either a Museum Studies or Visual Arts Administration program. I love living here in Berkeley – it's only a 20-minute train ride to San Francisco, too. I'm working part-time at a restaurant to pay the bills, and neck deep in reading and writing papers the rest of the time! Love to all the cousins, and I hope you're all doing well."

John and Helsie write from Down Under, "Last May we went to the U.S., starting in Los Angeles where we had a special Friday with Alice and Holly, Jon and Milo. Then we went to New York, which was great. We were thrilled to have lunch with some of the family in Central Park, where Martha and Saul were our hosts. What a special day that was. We'll always treasure it. We met Edith for the first time, and Claire and Larry, who are just divine, and Jeff; we hope we can visit them in Pennsylvania in the future. It was great catching up with Billy again. Saul and Martha look great, and have such a wonderful spirit."

"After New York, we took a train to Albany and transferred to a stunning resort at Lake George. Rich and Loretta picked us up there and we stayed at Albany for a few days. Rich and Loretta were amazing hosts and we feel so close to them. Rich then took us to Boston, where we caught up with Fred again and met Joan. For us to see all the family on our US trip was just great, and we thank them all for their kindness."

Perhaps the biggest news from the Australian Brustmans is Helsie was honored with an Order of Australia Medal. Read the story on page 6 in this newsletter.

They add, "John is off to China early in November for business. He was going to have a hip replacement operation, but postponed

it until some time in 2009. He did not want to be away from his business for 6 weeks: with the stock market crashing and the Australian dollar down, people here are quite nervous, just as in the US."

Finally, John and Helsie said, "We trust you are all well, enjoying life, not working too hard. We hope to see you all soon, we wish you a Happy Chanukah, and a healthy 2009."

This spring a distant relative, Amy Holcomb, met with Henry and Billy Heinbach. Her grandfather is Reuben Katz, a first cousin to the three sisters (and three brothers.) Amy, who is from Arizona, was in New York to connect 97-year-old Reuben – a holocaust survivor – with his newborn great granddaughter. Amy's dad, Howie Katz, died when she was a small child and the bond with relatives back east was largely lost. Last year Amy was trying to locate Reuben and in the process met Elsie.



Amy introduces Reuben to great-grandfather

I sent Amy a copy of our family history, which discusses Reuben Katz. I also mentioned how a conversation I had with Reuben over 25 years ago made me interested in learning our family history. Amy wrote back: "Thank you, my grandfather is an amazing man. Someone who lived through

so much and yet when you meet him he is so full of life, even at 97. I am thankful to have met Elsie and Bill and now Henry. My grandfather and I are the only Katz's left I am aware of. I know he had many relatives but meeting others tied in with our family tree is always a blessing. My family story is a little faded since I only know what my mother told me. My father (Howie) told her bits and pieces. The only thing I know about my past is what I have seen in pictures at my grandfather's house.

Randy Karr, another cousin, when she heard about Andy wrote, "I am so deeply sorry to hear about Andy's passing. I have very fond memories of playing with Andy and some of the rest of you when we were very young. My grandmother, Helen Blumenfeld owned a "Kuchalein" on Division Street and we played and did various mischief on the "shortcut" between Main Street near Division and the Brustman House. We went to day camp and enjoyed our summers there. Our cousins were a major highlight of those summers. My grandmother's place burned down when I was seven and Andy would have been eight. My brother Steven and I went back to Sharon several times as adults with our children. We very much enjoyed seeing, among others, Andy. My deepest sympathies. He was a good man and a beloved cousin."

Shortly after that note, Randy's mother, Florence, unexpectedly passed away at age 82. I sent a note of condolence and Randy responded, "Thank you so much Richie. We feel a strong connection to the Brustman branch of our family and appreciate your note. Love, Randy."

**Hanukah ?  
Hanukkah ?  
Chanukah ?  
However you spell it ...  
Happy Holiday to All !**

## ANDY AND ME

I thought Andy the coolest cousin of our generation. His inspired silliness inspired. His belief in conspiracy theories, black helicopters, and weird cosmologies made for diverting conversation. His schemes – some bright, some cockamamie – were always interesting. He was an original.

When born in 1951, Andy was just another baby cousin to me. Because I spent so much time with the Schoenfelds in Stuyvesant Town, I watched him grow up first hand – even taught him to swim at the 23<sup>rd</sup> Street municipal pool. In the sixties he went off to California and we didn't have much contact. When he came back east in the seventies, he wound up settling in Sharon Springs. I was living not far away near Albany and we really became friends.

We'd bicycle together through the boroughs of NYC and through the back roads of Schoharie and Otsego Counties. We even biked in Martha's Vineyard where we'd share a house during the sum-

mers. I'd see him in Albany where he commuted to a business he owned for several years. But mostly we'd hang around Sharon Springs, a place he loved dearly.

Spending so much time with him, I think I got to know Andy pretty well. He had many friends, loved his wife and kids, and at heart was an optimist. He loved to listen to music and was proud of all sorts of things, including being a Florida virgin -- maybe the only American Jew never to set foot in Florida.

Learning of his illness hit me hard. As with all of us, I was in shock. How could this be? It wasn't right. As his physical condition deteriorated, his outward spirit didn't. He was the same old Andy: grooving to his music, enjoying electronic toys, hoping for better days, relishing movies (preferably ones with car chases and other mayhem,) and grumbling about the state of the world.

Like the rest of the family, I will miss Andy. He helped make the good old days good.

--- Richie

Your editor is always looking for stories by or about the family. Here is one I hope you enjoy.

## **PLANTY**

By Henry Heinbach

It was born in the Bronx over 25 years ago and was a present from one of my patients whose family owned a plant store. Karen, my client, said that she was appreciative of the fact that we had worked closely together and mentioned that this gift, which looked small and scrawny, was in fact a Norfolk Island Pine tree and that it would grow to be very large despite its anemic appearance. Well, I like plants and have a bunch of them at home so I put it with the rest of them and as I did so realized that I knew nothing about a Norfolk Island Pine but thought that like most Pine trees it was a winter plant and that when the time came I could find it a suitable home in the backyard of the Brustman House where it would fit in nicely with the other flora. Best of all, I would be able to experience its continued growth.

With the passage of time, sure enough 25 years later, true to Karen's word, "Planty" my little plant had grown into a beautifully healthy tree standing over 6 feet tall and as many feet wide as it was tall. With its expansion, however, came the realization that I was now no longer alone in my small, suddenly crowded Manhattan apartment. Consequently, almost reluctantly, it finally became time to execute plan A: the relocation to Sharon.

In preparation my brother Bill had looked up the Norfolk Island Pine on the internet and forwarded me the text which unfortunately for me, described the plant as being tropical in origin (who knew?) and unable to survive temperatures of under 55 degrees thereby rendering Sharon Springs no longer an option.

It was just then that Bill and Rosa came to the rescue agreeing to house "Planty" indoors in their home during the colder months and then move it outside on their patio in Spring and Summer with the understanding that I would attempt to find alternative arrangements for it as soon as possible. That was 3 years ago, 2006.

Not too long after the plants' move to New Jersey, I began scouting possibilities for a permanent residence and plan B was hatched. This entailed my renting a U-Haul trailer, hitching it to my newly purchased Hyundai in order to drive it to Cousin Rita's home in Florida. Rita had expressed real interest in taking the tree and as I was recently retired and already going back and forth to Florida, it seemed quite the perfect solution. Yet, when U-Haul told me that my car would not take the hitch without first

purchasing a kit, for what amounted to hundreds of dollars, and permanently installing it to the bumper of my car, I began to formulate plan C – shipping.

Rather than bore you with all of the details which involved hearing how Fed-Ex and UPS, in an apparent conspiracy refused to be of assistance: the first agency requiring me to box the plant myself and then telling me that it was too large to be accommodated; while the other agency explained that they would wrap it like a Xmas tree and lay it down flat. The problem with that proposal being that unlike a Christmas tree which is a Fir tree capable of easily furling its branches, my Pine tree did not possess the same flexibility and if the branches were to snap off they wouldn't regenerate. As I didn't want to return Rita with a Maypole I developed plan D – donation.



**Mature Norfolk Island Pine**

Needless to say it wasn't as easy as it sounds and over time I had contacted many places including the George Landis Arboretum in Esperance, the Ford Foundation Atrium, the Bronx and Prospect Park Zoos as well as the Brooklyn and New York Botanical Gardens. I could go on but you get the point; they all said no. By this time Planty had continued getting bigger and in view of the fact that Bill & Rosa were undergoing a remodeling of their kitchen, time became of the essence.

During this year in the last several months, June through November, I began canvassing hospitals, first choosing facilities where Elsie (my mom) had received treatment, and at the same time, recalling having seen lovely plants housed therein. In several instances I came close: the Cancer Care Clinic on 34th Street at first expressed interest but later declined as did NYU Medical center. This last institution's turn down was difficult because they actually have a greenhouse attached to their hospital, which is housed in the Rusk Institute, also on 34th street. That lovely place is home not solely to plants but to birds and even to fish. Sadly I remembered how much enjoyment Elsie got from spending bits of time there with family on the occasion of their visits.

As a last resort I had resolved to place the tree in Elsie's apartment on the FDR Drive, an idea which was suggested several times by different people and rejected by me only because it seemed to be a postponement of the inevitable - having to watch it grow too big for that location as well. However that idea did offer a timely, although temporary, not wholly acceptable respite. Still, when coupled with the fact that the apartment has a balcony which offers the opportunity for fresh air, not to jokingly mention the additional possibility of presenting a "final solution" should push come to shove in a manner of speaking... it wasn't such a bad idea. While it was crazy to think like that, appropriately, that's when the idea of donating it to Bellevue came up. They have an enormous lobby with lots of diffuse light and no plants.

Armed with a color photo taken by Bill and enlarged by myself to highlight Planty's best attributes I arrived last Monday at Bellevue on First Avenue and began searching for the correct department, which would authorize acceptance of my gift. Confidence was high when I arrived but began to fade after being referred from one department to another only to learn 40 minutes later that the department whose authority was needed, was closed on Mondays. Funny, I should have known.

At this juncture I'm going to wind up this story with the anticipated happy ending which goes as follows: As I dejectedly walked uptown from 29th street, away from Bellevue, I found myself in front of the Rusk Institute.

Seeking to cheer myself up and relax I went inside and found it as pleasant as always. While there I spoke to Nancy Chambers who held the position of Greenhouse Supervisor and mentioned to her that my mom was a patient at NYU and very much enjoyed these natural surroundings. Nancy was glad to hear that and so I decided to tell her that I was looking for a home for my Norfolk Island Pine and asked if she'd be interested. Well Nancy gave me a very funny look, hesitated briefly and then surprised me with a question. She asked if it was me that called about 3 months ago asking if the Hospital would accept a donation of a Norfolk Island Pine?

I had to laugh as it occurred to me that there couldn't possibly be another person calling with that particular request. When I said it was me, she replied that my request went all over the hospital, even up to the Hospital President's office; that no one knew what a Norfolk Island Pine was and worse, no one had called her to find out. She asked what answer I was given by them and I disclosed their response, which was that the hospital did not accept donations. Nancy said "well you found me now and we'll take it ...of course we will."

It's hard to describe the flood of relief and feelings of joy at that time; I gratefully hugged her and in exuberance asked if she'd like to see a picture of the tree to which she said she would. When I produced the picture I never expected to hear the words, "Oh it's too big for here",... but there they were... I knew it I knew it I knew it. Then Nancy said something else, "I know just where to put it. Would you like to see?" and she took me to the interior glass walled lobby of the hospital, which faces an inner courtyard. There, in a sunlit area occupied by a

dozen other large potted plants she selected a choice spot right in the center of the glass enclosure and indicated that Planty was certain to do well there.

As planned, this past Friday I rented a 12 foot Penske truck, picked up the plant from Bill & Rosa, trussed it up like St Stephen before the arrows and deposited it at Nancy's NYU doorstep. I was told that I have visitation rights, which are not afforded to everyone. I'm planning to see it when I return from my Florida

trip. Currently I'm experiencing a little separation anxiety but it's nothing compared with the overwhelming sense of relief and above all the feeling of gratitude I have for Bill & Rosa who without their help over the years, Planty's vignette might have resulted in quite a different outcome.

Well there you have it and like most tales there is a lesson to be learned. The moral of the story: If you live North of the Mason Dixon Line, don't dare buy a Norfolk Island Pine.

## THE SHARON REPORT

Not too much has been going on in the Village. Washington Street was repaved this summer, creating minor disruptions. Traffic was diverted to Union Street, causing a huge spike in traffic in front of the Brustman House — maybe as high as a dozen cars an hour.

There are no visible signs of the much talked about development plans of the Korean businessmen. However, in June, the NY Times ran a story about it, which follows. In light of this fall's economic meltdown, the plans may be different now.

### Like the Water, Grand Plans Buoy Spirits at a Vacation Spot From a Bygone Era

June 5, 2008

By MICHELLE YORK

SHARON SPRINGS, N.Y. — The Vanderbilts and the Macys were regulars. Oscar Wilde held readings of his latest works here. Ulysses S. Grant and Theodore Roosevelt came for brief respites.

For more than a century, vacationers from around the globe converged on this tiny village for its grand hotels and its unmatched view of the Mohawk Valley, as well as for its bubbling mineral springs.

As crowds swelled from 600 people to 40,000 each summer, Sharon Springs became a backdrop to American history. But as interest in mineral baths faded, Sharon Springs — where large Victorian homes are tucked in the rolling countryside — threatened to be-

come yet another forgotten upstate destination.

Today, however, a group of Korean businessmen say they are working on a \$350 million plan to erect two 11-story hotels — including one with a helipad — a golf course, condominiums and a spa with a bathhouse and a day care center.

If the plans come to fruition, Sharon Springs, which has a population of 548 and which only recently acquired cellphone service, would have to overhaul its tired infrastructure to keep pace with a modern, sprawling resort.

"Sharon Springs has to change," said George Denning, the spokesman for the Korean investors. "Nothing has been happening in that town for years."

But village officials have been working with the businessmen since 2006, listening to one majestic plan after another, and the officials appear to be caught among optimism, disbelief and some trepidation.

"We took it with a load of salt," said Doug Plummer, co-owner of the American, a hotel built in 1847, who is a member of a village task force that for months held weekly meetings with the three businessmen. Although not one spade has been turned, Mr. Plummer said, "I'm very excited about the possibilities of this project. It's positive for us and it's positive for them."

Sharon Springs, in Schoharie County about 20 miles northeast of Cooperstown, has long been known for its magnesium water, iron-rich water, sulfur water and "bluestone" water for healing the

eyes. After a surge in interest in mineral baths in the early 1800s, the village bustled for more than a century. By the 1950s, the clientele was made up largely of middle-class Jewish families. Bingo games were called in English and Yiddish, and some hotels served kosher food.

David S. Wieder, 65, of Miami Beach, who was a boy when his father bought the Adler Hotel in 1951, remembered that Holocaust survivors would come for mineral bath treatments, sitting in tubs blackened by the sulfur water. "They said it helped," he said, referring to the springs' apparent medicinal qualities, which people sought for physical and spiritual healing.

But by 1971, the spa business had declined sharply, and Mr. Wieder said his father sold the Adler for \$70,000 — less than a third of what it cost. Like many of the hotels here, it fell into disrepair, and by the 1990s the visitors who trickled in stayed primarily in small boardinghouses or were clustered on a few floors of the decaying properties.

Then in 2005, a local real estate agent sold three of the hotels, two bathhouses and the only village access to the mineral springs to an initial group of Korean investors for \$750,000. The new owners, who were affiliated with Dongbu Travel and Tour, a company based in Flushing, Queens, which specializes in bringing Asian tourists to the United States, kept up the spa business for the 2005 season.

But Mr. Denning said that while they made some structural improvements, they ultimately decided that the buildings were beyond

repair. When the hotels did not open in 2006, it was the first time since the early 1800s that the village did not have a mineral bath tourist trade.

But the owners promised to come back with a bigger plan.

Mayor Omer Cousineau said that over several months, the plans shown to officials changed from a \$17 million historic renovation to a \$34 million outline for new construction, and then to a \$100 million resort.

"There were these big, grandiose buildings, and that changed the whole aspect of what we were seeing," Mr. Cousineau said.

In the meantime, Dongbu brought in more investors, both Mr. Denning and village officials said, and more people wanted to weigh in on the future of Sharon Springs. After more than a year of weekly meetings with no clear blueprint, the village task force formed in response to these proposals disbanded last October. "I don't think they knew what they wanted," Mr. Cousineau said.

Since then, village officials have been awaiting word from the businessmen. "I'm still an optimist," Mr. Cousineau said. "I think they're going to do something."

For his part, Mr. Denning said the group sees much potential in Sharon Springs, and hopes to complete construction in five to seven years.

"The Asian culture very much believes in spas," Mr. Denning said, "and we're trying to bring a whole new concept there."

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**Photos from Cousins Reunion Weekend 2008**

