

From Mr. Meagher – August 2007

Dear Esteemed Members of the Class of 1957 and Fellow Faculty Members,

At this juncture I have just passed my 92nd birthday and my attendance at the Reunion is dubious. In the event I can't attend, I hope you all have a wonderful time and that Roslyn beats Wantagh at the Homecoming football game Sunday.

Here are a few relevant details which led me along the path to R.H.S.

My mother was my first teacher. She taught me how to add, subtract, multiply and divide, decimals, fractions, mixed numbers and whole numbers between my ages 5 and 7. Each mistake was rewarded with a sharp pinch on my arm. The result of this instruction was a small cardboard American Flag with the date, "April, 1922", because I was the first in the 2nd grade to master the multiplication tables.

From the moment I entered the 8th grade my high school curricula were in the hands of Ivy Leaguers. My 8th grade science teacher had a Ph.D. in Physics. She rose through the hierarchy of the New Rochelle Public Schools to become the Assistant Superintendent in charge of the curriculum for the whole city. A Brown University graduate, my chemistry teacher had a Sc.D. from the University of Ghent in Belgium. He was fluent in French, English and was an intercollegiate diving champion. My Guidance Counselor was a Dartmouth graduate with a Ph.D. from Yale.

My trigonometry teacher was a Mount Holyoke graduate and a direct descendant of the French Protestant Huguenots from La Rochelle, France who settled New Rochelle. My physics teacher also taught in the College of New Rochelle. My third year European History teacher, Mrs. Brown, was a Radcliff graduate and in 1931 said, "*There will always be trouble in the Middle East*".

Right after high school graduation I visited my 8th grade science teacher. She asked me if I was going to college. I said I was to start working as a playground director, working my way through college. She opened her purse and gave me a check for \$400.00. She said, "*Here is something for your education. Four years from now you will walk through my door with your degree in one hand and \$400.00 cash in the other*".

I earned my degree as a chemistry major with a minor in math. I went to a Jesuit College, Fordham University. I commuted with a fellow who said he was prepared to become a Methodist Minister. I asked him why he was attending a Catholic University. He replied that his father was a Methodist Minister and had insisted that he take all the religion courses and all the philosophy courses. He also said that his father declared that after his son was ordained as a Methodist

Minister, it would be difficult to find another minister in the United States as well trained and as learned as his son.

One other experience stands out in my mind during my third year in Fordham. The Jesuit in charge of my Logic class one day said, "*Mr. Meagher, stand up.*" He told the class that I was one of the poorest pupils he ever had. "*Sit down Mr. Meagher.*" Don't worry - I got an 88 on his first difficult test to even the score. As the saxophone soloist in Cab Calloway's band might have played, everything from now on was *Smooth Sailing*.

Following my birthday the next summer I received a card from my Junior Logic teacher. On one side was a picture of the Blessed Virgin, and on the other side, a prayer. Beneath the prayer was his signature and the date, August 1939. That prayer has been in my Missal ever since. I guess I got the better of those weird syllogisms after all!

I next attended Columbia University where I earned an M.S. in Science and Math teaching.

Then came World War II. I was 29 when I reported for induction, only to find that men over 28 were not being called up at that time. I went back to New York the next day and enlisted in the U.S. Maritime Service. My grade was the highest score in the I.Q. test. The Commander, a full three striper, a Naval Officer, called me to his office for an interview. The result was that I was put in charge of all math instruction on the base for the duration of the war.

After VJ Day I was discharged. I immediately went to the employment Office at Columbia University. I was referred to Roslyn High School three weeks after the fall semester started to replace a physics teacher who left to take a position in industry. Physics and General Science were the program in 1945.

At the bottom of Harbor Hill Road near Glen Cove Road was a holding compound for German War Prisoners. In the company of Air Force guards they used to come and watch football practice. Some of them were interviewed by reporters from the Hilltop Beacon.

R.H.S. was growing rapidly. I obtained permission from Mr. Ross and Mr. Bryant, the Superintendent, to switch from science teaching to math. Miss Conover retired from math teaching. I began teaching the more advanced math courses.

I had four years of Spanish in high school, two years in college, and in 1952 went to Spain and took a summer course in Spanish. At that time I dropped Physics and Chemistry from my New York State Teacher's licenses and remained with math and Spanish.

In Glen Cove in 1955, I married the former Mari-Paz Ull, from Spain. Licensed to practice medicine in her native country, she passed the New York

State Medical Boards and obtained a medical license in New York State. Through reciprocity, she also held medical licenses in Vermont, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Virginia.

Over the years there were 60 in-service credits in math courses when professors from New York City colleges came to lecture to us.

In the 1950's Mr. Anthony De Luna was added to the math faculty. He was a brilliant individual, an excellent teacher, and subsequently became chairman of the department.

Some years prior Mr. Ross let me coach freshman baseball. We had one winning season after the other. Then I learned that administrative duties were not my cup of tea. We were playing a game at another school, and we were winning by 3 runs. There were two outs, and there was a man on first base in the other team's last turn at bat. I called a time out and told our team to ignore the runner on first, but only to play the batter. The catcher, ignoring my instructions, tried to pick off the runner on first. Our defense fell apart, and we lost the game. I gave our catcher a strong lecture, and then told him to be careful in the future.

Mr. Rooney, the varsity coach, retired from the job. Mr. Ross offered me the opportunity to coach varsity baseball. I turned down the offer, thinking of those sleepless nights.

From that time on I began to admire Mr. Ross and Mr. Canosa with their ability to handle the total situation.

The Russians sent up Sputnik. The National Science Foundation decided to bolster the math curricula in the U.S. secondary schools, and offered scholarships in math. I applied and was accepted at the University of Wyoming and Colorado State University. I chose Colorado State University. My son and I went by train: Grand Central – Chicago – Denver – Fort Collins.

For six weeks I studied math from 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. Two Ph.D.'s were in charge of my group, one for lecturing and testing, both of them for supervised study sessions and class discussions. In one of the study sessions a fellow from Kentucky and I were stuck on a rather difficult problem. Suddenly two men came up behind us and watched us struggle. After a while one of them reached down and took my paper. They finished the problem in a few lines in a few minutes. They turned out to be Navy Research mathematicians. We exchanged views on our different programs before they smiled, shook hands, and left. To the best of my recollection I earned a C+ in this course.

After teaching for seven years a teacher was eligible for sabbatical leave – one year at half pay, or a semester at full pay followed by a free semester. I chose the first semester at full pay. I then submitted my name in nearby local schools for substitute math teaching. A teacher at Port Washington High was to

be out for a few weeks due to medical reasons. It was a trigonometry class with whom I got along very well.

The first day in class I called the roll and came across the name, *Grimaldi*, a name which I had seen in the *New York Times* a few times recently. It was a girl who said, *"Prince Rainier of Monaco is my uncle. We get a Christmas card each year and, once in a while, a letter in between"*. For the few weeks I was there it was *"Your Highness this, or Your Highness that."* On Thursday I announced a test for the following Monday. Friday she announced in class that there would be no trig test on Monday because Friday and Saturday nights were Girls' Sports Nights, and that Sunday would be needed for resting. When you deal with Royalty, you have to put your best foot forward. So, the test was on Tuesday.

Another unique experience was at Great Neck High. You all know the typical reaction when a music teacher is put in charge of a chemistry lab situation. It was a class in the beginnings of Integral Calculus. I shocked them right off the bat. I said, *"Awright, gimme da book. Whatsa homework?"* I put the assigned problems on the board as fast as I could write, finishing the assignments in about twenty minutes. *"O.K. Whats ya questions?"* I explained the next days work. The next day I pulled a switch. *"If there is any young lady or gentleman in class who requires further assistance, please raise your hand."* The next day a boy said to me after class, *"We wish you could stay longer."* Regardless of my inner elation, I replied, *"Your teacher is returning tomorrow, and I hope that he shall be able to continue from where we left off."*

There are other subsequent educational experiences which took place after 1977, the year I retired from R.H.S. I shall also mention people, situations, and locations which you may find worthwhile.

The House in Spain

The events, situations and locations which follow are not necessarily in any chronological order. When Spanish words come up, please use the classic Castilian pronunciation.

In 1968 Mari-Paz and I purchased a piece of property at Almuñécar on the southern coast of Spain. We began construction of a house soon after. My wife chose three men and an architect who had never built a house before – only apartment houses and hotels. We visited the construction site each summer. We found every bit of workmanship in perfect order. It was our permanent home 1977 – 1980. It was built against the side of a hill without back windows, but had four terraces and balconies in the front facing the Mediterranean Sea. We had a swimming pool. Our house had marble floors and stairs and so did the local bars. Why? There was a marble quarry in the nearby mountains.

In the garden were grown avocados, artichokes, potatoes, onions, cabbages, and persimmons. There was a banana tree. At that time there were market products better than we found in the U.S.: fish, wine, bread, vegetables and fruit. Items on par with U.S. products were coffee and desserts. The meat in the U.S. had a greater variety and was superior.

We had an old Mercedes. I wrote to Stuttgart for maintenance books in Spanish.

Our neighbor to the left was a German who had spent four years in the Army during WWII. In the winter he liked to spend Christmas in his "Castle on the Rhine." One summer he rented his house to a woman who worked in the Paris Lufthansa office. She always brought wine when we invited her to dinner. On the right was a Frenchman whose wife was from Tahiti. He was an international businessman, traveling several times to China. Some of the other neighbors were a retired Italian chemical engineer, A German Orthopedic surgeon, a Scandinavian landscape engineer, and a retired member of the American Diplomatic Service. There was also an Englishman who liked to discuss Charles Dickens with me.

We had a gardener, Manuel, once a week. He was in Franco's Navy during the Spanish Civil War. He said that one day Mussolini showed up with a contingent who was to help Franco. Manuel said that these men were the oldest, most bedraggled, unfit military men he had ever seen. Spain ended up taking care of them.

We heard that during World War II Hitler asked Franco if he could move troops through northern Spain. Franco is reported to have said, "*No, stay the hell out.*"

In town was the Hotel Sexí. I asked a Spanish man the meaning of Sexí. He replied that 1300 years before, the Phoenicians – a trading nation – had been in Southern Europe and North Africa. In their language, Sexí means "The Rock". The Hotel Sexí was built on a Rocky prominence overlooking the sea.

There was a summer movie theater called the Cine Bikini. The women of the town would sometimes wheel their baby carriages into the theater, take the aisle seats, and rock the babies to sleep at the start of the movie. On a summer evening, the babies were the only bikini clad individuals during the performances. All movies were in Spanish. We always went to the MGM, Warner Brothers or Paramount selections.

The women of town would also wheel their baby carriages to the local bars and sit on the marble terraces. They would have beer, potato chips, and maybe some olives. The waiter would then come out with a tray filled with cookies, milk and ice cream for the children. The children knew their place. The beer was for the grown-ups and the ice cream and cookies were for the children.

In our town was an extremely competent artisan in leather. He was a creative expert. Whenever we needed leather work done we went to him. He was from - of all places – the BRONX! One day he told us that there were vacationing in town, a math professor and his wife. We located him. He was a PH.D. in math from the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. He was our luncheon guest on several days.

Spain is slightly larger than New Mexico in area. Each afternoon three members of the state police – The Guardia Civil - would pass by our house with their automatic rifles slung over their shoulders. One day I asked them if they would like to sit with me on a lower terrace, facing the sea, and having a beer with me. *“Con mucho gusto, Señor.”* (With much pleasure, Sir.) They said they lived in the barracks with their wives and children. We exchanged views on life in the U.S. and in Spain.

During the summer months some of the two-way streets were changed into one-way streets. One day as I was driving downtown there was a four-door green car parked in front of me. In front of this car was a truck. Facing the truck was a bus. The truck driver and the bus driver were arguing as to which one was to move first. Two men in white shirts got out of the car in front of me, put on their green jackets, then black hats – The Guardia Civil. They spoke to the bus driver and truck driver as follows: *“Now, gentlemen, we think that if you first think this matter over for a few minutes, everything will be fine.”* In a few minutes it was a clear intersection.

The Guardia Civil caught a tourist stealing clothes from the house next door. They took him to his consulate to be sent home on the first available plane. They told the consul that if they ever saw him again this would be an extremely mild punishment.

Franco allowed foreigners to open any business in Spain. The chief executive could be the foreigners, but all subordinate employees had to be Spanish, and were to be protected by all health and insurance regulations.

When Franco died notices began to appear on TV as follows: *“So, you wanted a democracy. Now you have one. But guess what? Democracies cost money.”* Taxes were going up in all phases of our living. There was an election, open to all parties. The Communists got the fewest votes and kind of faded out of existence.

The Return to the U.S.

We hired an international mover. He sent men to pack our clothes and all kitchen items. He supplied boxes for all other items such as books, medicine, vases, and office supplies. He ordered us to put a number on each box. I wrote the number in a book along with the contents of each box. He told us to buy a lock. Our van was packed while the workmen were putting the boxes in the van and calling out the box numbers. The mover locked the van and put a

government seal on the van doors. The container was placed on deck on a ship bound for the U.S. We picked our car up in Portsmouth, Virginia. I drove from Portsmouth, across country to Mesilla, New Mexico to pick up our shipment. We put our shipment in storage. We found that the salt air on deck froze the locks on the container. When we managed to open the locks, we found nothing was stolen and everything was exactly as shipped.

We went to Albuquerque to make a home for our son after his eight years in the Air Force. We arrived in time for the fiesta honoring Oñate, a famous Spanish explorer. At the Fonda Hotel we met once again the Ph.D. who was our guest in Spain. What a surprise! He told me that there would be a position open in Algebra for the spring term, urging me to apply for the position. I did and was accepted.

During the fall semester I went to the New Mexico Department of Education in Santa Fe to obtain a teaching license for secondary schools. There I was told that my academic background and experience were above the New Mexico requirements. However, I was not granted a license because I had not been a student in a college classroom during the past four years.

We went to Las Cruces and rented an apartment. I substituted in Spanish and Math in the Las Cruces Public Schools.

During the Christmas vacation we returned to Albuquerque for the spring semester. I lectured to ninety-five students in a small amphitheater. I had an undergraduate student correcting my homework assignments. Once in a while I had to correct his corrections. I had office hours given to me to answer students' questions and to give help. The results of my first test were pleasantly astounding. A professor laughed and suggested that I give an A and a B test the next time. (Two different exams placed on alternate desks so that students could not cheat.) The grades fell somewhat, but were still above average.

At the end of the spring term we moved down to Mesilla, New Mexico. We were not too far from the famous Plaza where Billy the Kid used to dance with the Mexican señoritas summer evenings. The Butterfield Stage made regular stops at the Plaza on its way from El Paso to San Francisco. There is a curio shop in the Plaza, which was the jail from which Billy the Kid escaped. The Kid was fast on the draw and quick on the trigger. Later he was shot and killed by Pat Garret, the first sheriff of Doña Ana County. Steeped in history, Mesilla's Plaza was also the scene of the Gadsen Purchase, land bought from Mexico in 1853 to control a promising section of railroad; and there were confederate troops stationed in Mesilla during the civil war.

When the summer started I went to New Mexico State University and applied for a job for the coming fall semester. The chairman of the math department said to me, *"Your credentials are impressive. However I am required by law to advertise the position over this summer. The job is yours if there is no other applicant with superior credentials."* Two weeks before the semester started I received notification that the position was mine.

I taught trigonometry, college algebra, and elementary calculus. There were two options: lecture sections or self-paced sections. I chose self-paced when I heard that the results there were always better than the lecture sections. I was in charge of 130 – 150 students. They were divided among myself and my assistants. There were people employed to correct tests, put the results on a computer, and return the corrected exams to myself and my assistants.

On the first day of class I addressed the whole group as follows: *“You will be given an instructor who will return your test papers and answer your questions. If your instructor is working with another student, ask any other instructor for assistance. Always go to the instructor who helps you. And, this includes myself.”* My assistants were math majors, engineering majors, chemistry majors, physics majors, computer majors and biology majors.

Now, let’s face it. Some of the undergraduate helpers had intellects superior to my own. They were “quick on the draw” from pocket or purse a calculator which enabled them to do any math problem in a matter of a few minutes. Nevertheless, superior or not, they frequently came to me with the following question: “Will you please show me the proper way to submit a solution for a problem, so that I may be able to indicate it to one of my students on homework or on a test situation, if all work is to be shown?”

I taught four self-paced sections and was an instructor in a study hall. I had the good fortune of working with a Ph.D. candidate in the study hall. He was from Chile. When I saw him looking at me I knew he was having a lot of trouble with English. I would read the problem slowly and carefully aloud to assist him. When he saw me looking in his direction he understood that some third or fourth year engineering or math major had me on the ropes. He would come and do the problem while I paid close attention.

There were two math department chairmen. One was the Ph.D. who hired me and the other was my immediate superior, in charge of all of us who taught self-paced or lecture classes. There were weekly notices informing all math personnel of scheduled faculty meetings. I thought it was my responsibility to attend the general, all inclusive meetings. I was completely swamped. There were Ph.D.s from all over the world, lecturing on their specialties. During one of the meetings the Ph.D. who hired me told me she was glad to see me in attendance but that my position did not require my presence at every single meeting. My immediate department chairman said she would excuse me from any one of her meetings, on one condition: she would see my name in the obituaries!

I worked as described above from 1980 – 1985, when I retired again.

Here is another reference to establish the superiority of R.H.S. My son, Edward, was an average student at R.H.S. He had four years of Spanish, math through trigonometry, and chemistry. He had, following graduation, two four-year enlistments in the Air Force. The time arrived when he decided to increase his

studies. After looking at nothing but training manuals for these years, the R.H.S. Guidance Department sent his transcript to the local university, N.M. State U. He was in a math course – statistics. One day he said to me, *“Thank God for R. H. S.”* I spoke to the professor in charge of his course. He told me that my son’s work was not of A or B quality, but he had a firm grasp on the fundamentals and was sure to pass the course. *“Where did he go to school?”*, he asked. R.H.S!!!

At that time I was tutoring the son of the chairman of the engineering department. I said to the chairman that his background and experience were far in excess of my own. He looked at me and said, *“Did you ever try to deal with your own family?”* I tutored another engineer’s son who said to me as follows: *“Don’t worry, I attend every lesson you give to my son so that I may hear the way you say it. Then we go home and I give him another hour the way you say it.”*

I insisted that my son take college algebra before he began his calculus course. I knew that the complicated manipulations would be a hazard in college algebra and might cause trouble in calculus. He was exempt from the first two years in ROTC because of his eight years in the Air Force. He accomplished three things upon graduation: He was commissioned a second Lieutenant, was designated as a Crimson Scholar, and elected to the Beta Gamma Sigma Honor Society. A Crimson Scholar is one notch below Dean’s List.

He was sent to Fort Hood, Texas, where he rose to the rank of Captain. He began his studies to become a Major when the Military began to close bases. His unit was closed out. He enrolled in the National Guard and has just returned from a tour of duty in Iraq.