

Herbert “Herbie” Kupersmith



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I was born in 1939 in Brooklyn. My parents divorced when I was only 2 1/2 years old.

My mother's guidance shaped my life. She often told me, "Be a giver, not a taker." I have tried hard to live that way by organizing large community events. Her words influenced every birthday celebration and grand reunion fundraiser I organized for Chelsea High School, as well as similar events I ran for Swampscott and Marblehead public schools.

Some of these fundraisers drew close to 350 people and netted almost \$30,000. Whenever I think of the students who attended college with scholarship funds raised by these gatherings, I feel I did what my mother urged me to do.

Chelsea's Walnut Street Shul has always held special meaning for me. I was bar mitzvah'd there in 1952. Even though I'm not a very observant Jew, I have stayed connected with that shul my entire life. Over the years I raised funds to upgrade the building's plumbing, electrical, and heating systems and created a fund to help cover its maintenance costs.



**Herbie with a Chelsea High School
Grand Reunion Committee**



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I went to Williams School from kindergarten through ninth grade. That's where I first discovered something I truly enjoyed and could get good at: playing point guard for the Williams Junior High School basketball team and later for the basketball teams at Chelsea High School and Newton Junior College, where I was team captain. After college, I played basketball at the Chelsea YMHA.

My Williams School basketball coach, Julius Zeff, once told me, "Never drink your cup dry; leave

some for others." His advice, along with my mother's, encouraged me to give more than I took. She was a superwoman. The Williams School basketball team I was on had four black players: Lenny Nelson, Jimmy Walker, and two others whose names I've forgotten. The school was in a rough part of Chelsea, but those four guys protected me from anyone who tried to bother me.

When I belonged to an AZA high school fraternity called the Chelsea Clovers, I helped organize and promote the Clovers' annual Thanksgiving dance at the Bradford Hotel in Boston. We packed hundreds of teens into their ballroom, which was the biggest in the city. Those dances raised a tremendous amount of money that the Clovers contributed to the AZA for their charity work.

My lifelong love affair with basketball led me to visit numerous tournaments throughout Massachusetts, as well as in New York and Washington, DC, where I got friendly with many basketball coaches and learned about job openings. I was friendly with Mike Jarvis when he was a successful basketball coach at Cambridge Rindge and Latin High School. I was impressed with Mike's skills, so I helped him secure a college basketball coaching position at Boston University and later another at George Washington University.

I like to think Coach Julius would have approved of my efforts.

I spent many years as a sales associate for Bobby Brooks, a junior sportswear company. My job took me to England, France, and Haiti, among other places. In 1974, I was ranked 3rd among their top 180 sales associates. I helped the company raise enough money to create a \$1,600-per-year pension for the retired Haitian dressmakers who handmade some of Bobby Brooks' clothing lines. During an unforgettable helicopter trip to North Carolina for a secret meeting with the violent Haitian dictator, "Papa Doc" Duvalier, and his son, "Baby Doc" Duvalier, a Bobby Brooks Vice President and I demanded to know why the pension funds we had raised were not going to Haiti's retired stitchers. Duvalier said, "You run your country how you want, but don't tell me how to run mine!" We knew about his brutal reputation and decided not to press the issue.

The many plaques and shiny trophies I've received, carrying warm messages of gratitude, have never meant much to me. The satisfaction of helping others has always been reward enough. Even so, I was overwhelmed when the Chelsea City Council officially named part of Fourth Street "Herbie Kupersmith Way" to honor my "lifelong dedication to education and the synagogue." That part of Fourth Street runs alongside my beloved Walnut Street Shul.

I married Sondra "Cookie" Garron in 1965. We have three daughters, three grandchildren, two great-grandchildren, and a third on the way. Two of our



Herbie with Chelsea City Councilor Leo Robinson

daughters live out of state, but we all manage to stay connected. My Swampscott daughter handles all my health matters.

Chelsea was a wonderful place to grow up. The city had a large Jewish population, and Jewish families had a lot of influence. They were very giving people who looked after each other. If you were a kid, someone was always there to look out for you and make sure you had everything you needed. I wish more people were still that way.

Growing up in Chelsea, I learned that there are good people and bad people in this world, and how to get along with both. Playing on sports teams helped me figure out how to get along with everybody.

Recently, health issues have shown me that I can no longer run fundraisers. When I compare my life to what it was just a few short years ago, I sometimes think, "If you can't help people, what good is life?" Then I remember the Yiddish saying, "Der mentsh tracht un Got lakht."

Man plans and God laughs.