

## **Carl Gmoser – Gentle Man of Mystery**

**Curtis Au**

Presented at Carl Gmoser's Memorial Service

May 2, 2009

Asbury United Methodist Church

Yonkers, NY

Gary thought that there might be some things that you never knew about his Dad. So he asked if I would mind putting together a brief biography. So I Googled "Carl," and this is what I found...

### **BIRTH / PENNSYLVANIA**

The story of Carl begins with Joseph and Anna Gmoser, Carl's parents, who came from the part of Austria where they just can't be bothered pronouncing the first letter of people's last names.

Immigrating to America, they settled in Allentown, Pennsylvania where Carl and twin brother Earl were born, July 10, 1921.

Earl was actually born first.

Realizing that one day he might have to shop for clothing, Carl stayed in for as long as possible.

Also in the family was older sister Mickey. Sadly, another brother, Joseph Jr., died at age 9, before Carl was born.

When Carl was a little boy, the Gmosers moved to Trexlertown, in Pennsylvania's Lehigh Valley. There, the family owned and ran the Eagle Hotel and Tavern, a popular watering hole among local farmers. It was during Prohibition, and if you ran a tavern back then, you had two choices: stop serving alcohol, or be discrete.

Carl loved telling the story of how one day several farmers, wearing their blue overalls and everything else farmers wear, walked into the Tavern, went over to the bar and asked Carl's dad for "The Good Stuff."

Joseph Gmoser knew exactly what they meant, and he poured each of them a glass of his top-notch beer. The so-called farmers reached into their overalls and pulled out hydrometers which they then used to measure the alcohol content of what had just been served to them. What was then served to Carl's Dad was an injunction. The farmers? They were federal agents, and they proceeded to close down the tavern.

This taught Carl a valuable lesson. From then on, anytime a farmer asked him for "The Good Stuff," Carl would give them fertilizer.

Carl learned another valuable lesson during those Trexlertown days. One time, he and Earl found a pack of cigarettes. They went to a nearby construction ditch, took a ladder and climbed down to the bottom so no one could see them, and proceeded to light up. Unfortunately, their dad walked by and yes, he saw them, and he yanked the ladder out and left the boys to spend the night at the bottom of that ditch, alone with their cigarettes.

Carl told his own boys this story and it must have sunk in, because none of them ever smoked, and we all know how Andrew and Kenneth can never be far from a ladder.

## **Gmosers Move to NYC**

After this incident with the Feds, a friend suggested Joseph and Anna move the family to New York City, and that's how the Gmosers found themselves in the Yorkville section of Manhattan – in an apartment at 83<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Carl attended School 190, Yorkville Junior High, and he graduated from Murray Hill High School in 1940 at the top of his class.

Just days after graduation, at age 18, Carl went to work at Merrill Brothers, a steel forging plant in Maspeth, Queens. He would work there 46 years, rising in the ranks, starting out as a die sinker apprentice, then becoming a union shop steward, a production foreman and ultimately, Plant Superintendent!

Gary, who for a brief time got to work with his dad at Merrill Brothers, remembers how his dad was the person all the other men at the plant would come to for answers to any number of things – often personal matters. Carl was always there for them with wise counsel, and always on his feet, day in and day out.

When Carl turned 65 he retired from Merrill Brothers. Carl even got to machine his own watch.

Don't know if you know this – Carl originally wanted to pursue a career as a naval architect, in fact, and he took the exam to become one. About a week after starting his job at Merrill Brothers, Carl was accepted for the training program to design ships. But our nation needed Carl right where he was. WWII was in high gear, and Merrill Brothers was running round the clock, producing valuable materials for the

war effort. Carl was anxious to serve his country, but as a vital craftsman in the steel industry, he was given a military deferment. Still, Carl did give his nation additional support as a member of the National Guard.

### **For The Love of Lulu**

Then came 1945. The Big Band Era. Carl was an officer and a gentleman in a naval cadet organization called The American Blue Jackets. While rehearsing for the Annual review at the Kingsbridge Armory in the Bronx, Carl spied a fair maiden by the name of Lulu Britz, who was also a member of the Blue Jackets. When Lulu told Carl to fall in, he fell alright...In love.

The two started dating while Lu was attending Linden Hall Junior College in Lititz, PA. Carl proposed, Lu said yes, and an exciting new chapter was about to be written in the life of Carl Gmoser.

An interesting story...Carl's bachelor party was held at the Boulevard Restaurant – "The Showplace of Queens." The singer there that night was the one and only Harry Belafonte. Rumor has it that Carl's brother Earl tried to get Harry to pop out of the cake, but it turns out Mr. Belafonte has a nasty frosting allergy. Who knew?

The grand wedding of Carl Gmoser and Lulu Britz was held October 3rd, 1953 at New York's equally grand Riverside Church.

For their honeymoon, the newlyweds drove cross-country in a light-blue Mercury. They did the trip in four weeks. It might have gone faster had Carl not stopped every time he saw a train. Carl's fascination with trains apparently goes back to his childhood. Some little boys want to be cowboys or firemen, Carl wanted to be a

train engineer. Carl said that trains were something exciting he could drive. Not unlike like trucks and planes for another Gmoser.

### **In a Family Way**

After the honeymoon, Carl and Lu drove back to New York and the two lovebirds found their first nest – an apartment at 153 East 18<sup>th</sup> Street.

In 1955, Gary came along. Realizing that there was no way they would be able to fit their growing family and a Mayflower Moving van in their modest apartment, Carl and Lu went house hunting in Westchester.

Lu told me there were two things she and Carl did not want. The did not want a house that was on a corner, or on a hill.

Apparently, Lu & Carl changed their minds once they found 218 Read Avenue here in Crestwood. They closed on the house July 10, 1956 – Carl’s birthday – and moved in the next day, but not before Lu had Carl drive her to the Post Office.

In 1960, Andrew was born.

And two years later, Kenneth was picked up at Wanamaker’s department store. You never heard that story? When Lu was at the hospital having Kenneth, Uncle Everett was staying with Gary and Andrew. “Where’s our mother?” Gary asked. To which Everett replied, “Your mother and father went to pick up your baby brother at Wanamaker’s.”

Whether they arrived by parcel post or the stork, the Gmoser boys joined their parents, embarking on what would truly be a wonderful life.

## **Carl and Crestwood**

Carl and Lu were both active in the PTA...

Carl was President of the American Bluejackets

And of course... there was Asbury Church.

In the 50 years that Carl and Lu have been part of this church family, Carl served on numerous committees and the Board of Trustees. He was an usher and the best collection counter this church has ever known. A problem solver and an ever-present voice of reason.

He was also the head dishwasher here since, well, since forever, working the mighty Hobart with flare and precision. This announcement: In honor of Carl, the family has requested that after the reception, you please wash your own dishes.

Thank you.

And let's not forget Asbury Summer Theatre. Carl's tireless devotion behind the scenes and his star turn on stage as a Member of the Court in the "Caine Mutiny Court Martial" were worthy of a lifetime achievement award. Those of us who were there for the final scene of the final act of AST, I doubt we'll ever forget Carl coming out from behind the curtain to sweep the stage one last time at the end of each performance – one of the many contributions he made to AST in 32 years.

## **Family Matters**

But it was at home where Carl could always be found doing something. In the summer, he enjoyed his garden and took great pride in his big, beautiful tomatoes which many of us enjoyed receiving – a memory the Gmosers hope you enjoy taking home today.

And who will ever forget all those dinners, brunches and parties. Each one an extraordinary Lu and Carl production. Here too, Carl worked quietly behind the scenes. As Gary says, “As long as the punch bowl was full, anything was possible at 218.”

It was always Lu and Carl. During their 55 years together Carl was Lu’s frequent companion at the opera. Carl’s favorite operas were Carmen and Peter Grimes. I think it was because Carl knew a couple by that name in Queens.

It was not uncommon for Lu and Carl to get home from the opera at 1 in the morning, and for Carl to get up 3 hours later to go to work. Someone once asked Carl what he would do if he ever won the lottery. He said he would buy an apartment across from Lincoln Center, so that after the opera he could just cross the street and go to sleep. I guess nobody ever told Carl that going to sleep was what the opera was for.

Shortly after Carl retired, he decided life just wasn’t busy enough, so he embarked on his second career. This one, as an industrial inspector for Electrical Testing Laboratories (ETL), which is where Carl’s brother Earl held many important positions over a long and distinguished career. For 19 years, until age 85, Carl traveled the Northeast, testing all sorts of things to keep us all safe.

He never stopped. A good friend referred to Carl as the Energizer Bunny – recognizing not only Carl’s fondness for bunny rabbits but also the fact that he kept going and going.

It can be said, though, that no matter how busy life got, Carl always put family first. Teacher and mentor, quiet, steady Carl was always there for the 3 boys, assisting them in their college and business ventures and any other interests they had. Whether it was seeing America by truck or jet plane with Gary at the wheel, or building theatre sets side by side with Andrew, or sharing his love of trains with Kenneth through their elaborate model railroad setups – Carl took great joy in sharing his love of life with his sons.

Gary fondly recalls one such adventure when he was in high school. Gary and his friend Tom had to truck a harpsichord up to Dartmouth College in the middle of winter. The instrument belonged to world-renowned concert artist, and former Asbury Church organist, Anthony Newman, who needed it to play at a recital the next day. The roads were a mess, and Carl said, “no way you guys are doing this alone.” So Carl called in to work to take the day off – probably the only day Carl took off in 46 years – he climbed into the truck and off they went. They finally got to the Recital Hall, and after this magnificent harpsichord was set up at center stage, Carl walked over to it, sat himself down, and proceed to play the only two numbers he knew how to play: “Love in Bloom” and “Chopsticks.” This was the beginning of Carl Gmoser’s baroque period. It was also the end of Carl Gmoser’s baroque period. Actually, the music that Carl loved most of all were the great marches by Sousa and others.

Kenneth also worked closely with his dad, but closer to home... doing remodeling projects – large and small – around 218. Kenneth got to learn from the master. And in the process Kenneth himself became a master, inheriting his Dad’s skills, his eye for beauty, and attention to detail. When Kenneth bought his own house, Carl returned the favor, working with his son to build a beautiful front porch, remodel a

family room, and repair a garage wall. At age 85, there was Carl... hauling cinderblocks and concrete. That's one way to stay fit.

Yes, Carl was always there. When it came time for his sons to marry, of course Carl was at the wedding, becoming a loving father-in-law to Tracey, Catherine and Mary Ann; then welcoming the next generation of Gmosers as proud Grandpa to Will and Alex, Thomas and Elizabeth.

To celebrate their 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, Lu and Carl took the family to London. In 2003, to celebrate their 50<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary, Lu and Carl recreated part of their famous cross-country honeymoon by taking all 12 members of the Gmoser clan on a trip out West to Colorado and Utah. Only this time they flew...and rented a light-blue Mercury once they got there.

Carl loved to travel and see this beautiful land of ours up close. Just about every summer vacation when the boys were growing up, Carl and Lu would take them on a terrific adventure. As a family, the Gmosers explored 20 states and Canada. Lu and Carl visited another 4 states on their own, including Alaska.

I hope this has given you a sense of Carl Gmoser, what, Lu...Oh, gosh, I almost forgot. On the way in to church, Lu handed this to me this envelope and asked if I would open it when I was finished. Lu...you still want me to...O.K.

(OPEN AND TAKE OUT PENCIL AND PIECE OF PAPER)

What a surprise...a Lu Gmoser party game!

1. First question:

What was Carl's Favorite dessert... **Jello!**

2. Carl invented and patented what tool?

**The Adjust-a-Clamp.** A lifting device for heavy industry. It was designed for lifting gigantic steel plates and the metal casings for nuclear reactors.

The Adjust-a Clamp. I'm sure you've seen it advertised on late-night TV.

3. What were Carl's 2 favorite movies? **“The Train” and “Das Boat”**

4. What was Carl's least favorite food? **Carrots**

And last but not least....

5. What were Carl's 3 favorite foods:

**Oscar Meyer Bologna sandwiches, hot dogs and Entenmann's coffee cake.**

Very good. Give yourselves all 100 points.

I'd like to close on a personal note.

Whenever I would call Lu and Carl on the phone, a part of me always hoped that they would not be home. That way I would get the answering machine and I could listen to Carl's soothing voice say” “Thank you for calling the Gmosers.”

Carl, thank you for being there, for me and for all of us, every time we called.