

Dreams of What I Wanted to Become

From the time I can remember, and again, with help from my folks, I wanted to be a doctor. Maybe because it was a powerful job, and from what I heard, it paid well. Maybe because of the glamour of tv with Dr. Kildare and Ben Casey. Maybe because of my own experience with Dr. Kantor-- for whatever reason or reasons, I wanted to be a doctor. In primary school, the question was often asked, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" and the answer was always the same. By the time of high school, on career day, I attended the medical tables and asked questions. By the time I was considering universities, the colleges I wanted to attend had to have a very good medical school where I could continue after my bachelor's degree.

When I was in high school, I joined Menorah Medical Center as a volunteer. In fact, I was one of the first three male Candy Stripers in the country! It was 1966, I was 14 and "Summer in the City" was a hot song on the Top 40. As a Candy Striper, the girls would wear red and white pinstripe dresses, but as a male, I was allowed to wear all white. White, short-sleeved collared shirt and white jeans, white socks and white loafer sneakers. Clean look. Dramatic. I felt important as I would be moved from one department to another, mostly pushing patients in wheelchairs to and from their appointments.

In high school, I joined the scouting program Explorers, specifically to learn in the surgical wing. But I didn't last long as watching all that scalpel cutting into human flesh-yeah, that may have been the end of my serious interest in the medical profession. But I kept planning to be a doctor. That was a big part of how I chose Washington University in St Louis to attend in 1969.

People used to ask, what about a contingency? What happens if you change your mind and give up medicine? My backup was 'rabbi.' But I never was very serious about it, as I was committed to medicine. Still, look at me now, and I guess 'rabbi' won out in the end, didn't it?



Shawnee Mission East flashback at our 45th reunion. They dreamed of bigger things then also, but none of them went on to NFL. And I didn't go on to be a doctor.

Childhood Lessons that Resonate

I mentioned it earlier, but something that has stayed with me is 'wonder.' In 2026, as I write this, wonder is so passé. If you want to know about distance to Mars or who won the 1963 World Series or how to open a particular backpack, don't grab your smart device, but consider thinking and processing options. Wonder leads to intelligence and creativity; asking Google leads to laziness.

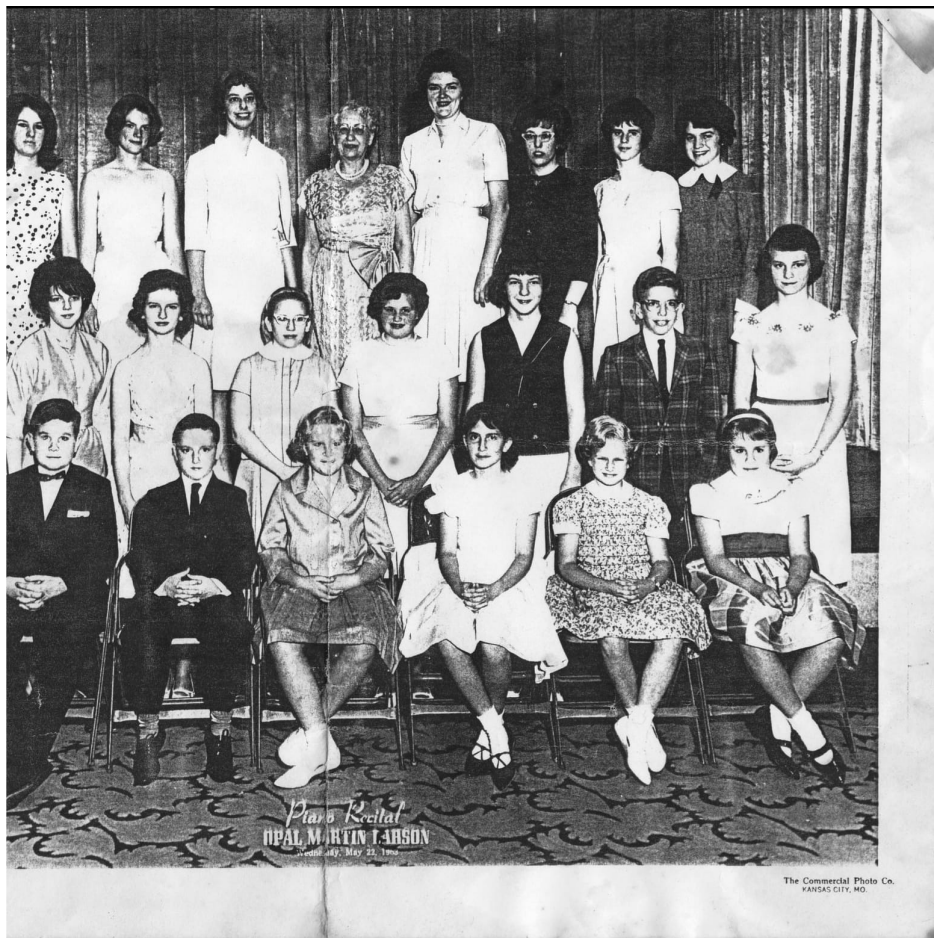
In 6th and 7th grade, Opal Martin Larson was my piano teacher at her home on 79th and Canterbury near Somerset. Each week, I would practice on our family upright at home, but not faithfully, and certainly not enough to convince Ms Larson of my proficiency. To this day, now decades later, I wish I had practiced those scales and read all those minuets and concertos and sonatas, but that's in the past. Nowadays, I still play keys and guitar, even write music, but I would be so much more capable if only...

Even so, regrets don't do much for a soul. I'll just thank God for the ivories and ebonies I did get to play and the ones I still tickle.

A group of friends from Somerset who also attended Kehilath Israel Synagogue were natural friends and we created some things like a chemistry club that often met at my house, or the chess club. We

played sport down at the park by the gas station in Meadowlake. Usually football or basketball. In fact I remember one Passover when we played some sport and then took a break. Often we would go over to Baskin-Robbins 31 flavors at Meadowlake, and this was one of those days. It wasn't until I was eating the cone itself when I remembered that it was Passover and I shouldn't have been eating the cone... did I finish it even though it was out-of-bounds? You betcha! I'd already paid my 45 cents or whatever it cost in those days. But I remember the failure and the inability I had to fix myself.

School was a place for learning and socialization, for developing skills for life and for becoming the man I would eventually become. As I look back on yearbooks from high school, or photos from grade school and comments from Facebook decades later, I see that my social circle included folks from synagogue or work and not from school. That means, even though I sang in choirs and acted and sang in musical productions, I didn't keep friends from those situations.



Recital formal photo with Opal Martin Larson in May 1963.



CHAMBER CHOIR - *Front row:* Kristi Swearingin, Ann Vilmer, Marga Slimel, Syd Blackman, Linda Smith, Robyn Messer, Janice Powell, Susan White, Debbie Giles, Priscilla Wingert, Melinda Burr, Jean Korpi, Audrey Cohen, Cynthia Carr, Linda Fisher. *Second row:* Sharon Mandelbaum, Nancy Baxter, Linda Weissbrod, Mary Pat Green, Kjell Andersson,

John Rooker, Ray Zarr, Jim Houske, Barbara Brown, Mary Liz Crane, Patti Woodside, Ellen Wood, Marie De Camp, Carol Hanson. *Third row:* Bruce Dexter, Jim Langknecht, Tim Reno, Don Richards, Dale Ellis, Ron Zarr, Rick Daniels, Rick Peterson, Carl Erickson, John Williams, Bruce Efron, Craig Miller, Bob Mendelson, Pat Thompson, Tom Larson.

As it shows, the chamber choir, junior year.



No doubt my braces were still on that summer when our photos were taken.



Dramas were part of our fun at Kehilath Israel youth group.