



From our house to yours...



Holiday Greetings from Bob and Merle

My Cousin Al 1924-2009

By Bob Scolnik

My cousin Al Feldbin died on November 8, 2009. I have a small family. It seems that most of the Scolnik relatives had small families.

My original home was in Albany, New York, and after I went away to college and then into the Army for four years, I never lived there again. I started a business in Muskegon and for the 28 years I was a business owner, I didn't want to travel much. Business was always my first priority and my personal life ... and that of my family ... came second. I missed a lot but that's the way it was.



My cousin Al teaching his granddaughter Becky to play chess around 1986

About a month before every Thanksgiving I would receive a phone call from my cousins Lois & Al Feldbin in Cossackie, New York, inviting us to a family Thanksgiving dinner. For many years I thanked them for the invitation, but seldom actually made the trip. That changed after I sold my business about 12 years ago. I started going to Cossackie for Thanksgiving and I'm now sorry that I missed so many years. Al and Lois lived in the same house for as long as I can remember. It is very old ... maybe 150 years ... with one bath upstairs. They loved their family and friends, and it was not unusual for them to have 40 people packed into the house where people would get a delicious meal stacked high in the dining room and somehow find a place to sit and eat. There were cousins I only saw once a year, Lois and Al's friends and other relatives with complicated family connections. We'd be there from early afternoon to late in the evening, and even then it was impossible to have a long conversation with many of those there

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2009 ... Wow!

By Bob Scolnik

Well, 2009 is almost in the books. It was a very busy year for the Scolnik family with lots happening ... both good and bad. Merle is busier than ever. We frequently only see each other at night (maybe a good thing?) and I'm beginning to think that Merle has another secret family somewhere. Between her Mah Jong friends, Red Hat groups, Women's Division of the Chamber activities, Yoga, Recorder lessons, Nordic Walking and more, she's b-u-s-y! Old man time can't seem to catch her!

Our son, Michael, is in his seventh year working as a Chemical Operator at Honeywell's Burdick & Jackson plant in Muskegon. He bought a motorcycle this year ... a Honda 750 Aero ... and proceeded to put about 5,000 miles on it. Mike also had a new two-car garage built at his house. When he bought the house four years ago, there was no garage and a gravel driveway. Well, there's now a nice new garage, a concrete driveway and new walks. While the contractors were there, he also replaced the roof on his house and upgraded the insulation in the house. It all looks great.



Mike and his new Honda 750 Aero

Our son-in-law, Lance, has now worked for Autodesk as the Director of Field Marketing for North & South America for about a year. Autodesk is a Fortune 500 Company and a world leader in 2D and 3D design software for manufacturing, building, construction, engineering, and media and entertainment. I'm still not sure what exactly he does, but I'm sure he's good at it. He lives on the phone and travels a lot and is a great cook and "Barbecue artist". They continue to live in Suburban Charlotte ... Huntersville ... North Carolina.

Our daughter, Amy, is busy volunteering at two free clinics as a nurse, volunteering in her kid's classes and very involved in the PTA. She continues to be a full-time kid chauffeur, a great cook and most of all, the World's Greatest Mom.



Amy, Ethan, Mara & Merle with Lance clowning in the background in N.C.

Our Granddaughter, Mara, is 10 and plays basketball and is the goalie on her travel soccer team. She's on the honor roll at her school, very bright, sensitive, and is a great kid.

Ethan, our grandson, is now 8 years old. He also plays basketball and is a tough football player. They take their football seriously in North Carolina and Ethan is a tough competitor. His Dad serves as one of the football coaches. Ethan is on the honor roll, loves to read (He's read all of the Harry Potter books!) and sends us e-mail.

My year has been full. It's been a signature year ... I turned 65 ... and I'm afraid time is finally catching up just a little. I've had to keep looking over my shoulder so it doesn't catch me. My *Mona Lake Productions* company produced five major events this year, including concerts with the *Platters*, the *Chenille Sisters*, the *Drifters* and the third annual "Concert with Friends". In looking back over the year, a couple of highlights include the full house ... 1700 seats ... for the *Drifters* and so many people up and dancing in the theater. It brought me back to the 50's and was just a fabulous night. Also, I won't forget getting up on the stage and singing "You are my Sunshine" with my musicians at the Concert with Friends. What a great night!

I also bought a motorcycle in 2009 ... a big Honda 1100 V-twin Shadow ... and I thought it would be great for Mike and I to go on day trips together. In June, after a great ride to Pentwater, on the way home I went off the road on the expressway. I don't really know why, and I was going around 60 mph when it happened. I don't

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2009 *continued.*

remember anything except for waking up in intensive care in the hospital. After 12 days in the hospital ... with my spleen removed, a broken ankle and a nice case of road rash ... I went home for about 9 more weeks of recuperation. I'm now fully recovered, but my motorcycling days are over. I was very, very lucky.

In October, Merle and I went on a 17-day trip to Europe and a cruise in

Cousin Al *continued.*

because there were so many people. But it was a Norman Rockwell Thanksgiving and I looked forward to going.

Al Feldbin died this November, just 8 days short of his 85th birthday. Al loved the Town of Coxsackie, set beside the Hudson River, and lived there his entire life. Al was a serious amateur historian and loved to read and collect materials about the history of the area that went back to 1663. At Al's graveside service, a story was told of Al being asked if he had lived anywhere else, to which he replied "Why would I want to live anywhere else?" He was a fierce guardian of preserving the Town as it was and I remember many conversations with him about improvements I thought were needed there. The town has not changed in all of the years that I've visited and Al wanted it to remain just as it was. While I always thought that change and progress go together, Al's arguments always reminded me that maybe I wasn't always right and there was something special about a place that didn't change.

Al served in the Army Air Corps in the Pacific during World War II. He was a bombardier on B-24s and flew 23 missions from bases in New Guinea and the Philippines. He once showed me a photo he had taken from his B-24 of the mushroom cloud over Nagasaki, Japan as one of his missions was diverted near that city on their way back to their base. He had a fantastic memory, loved local history and had a huge collection of material in his library.

Al loved people and enjoyed many outdoor activities. He loved skiing, hiking and being on the water in his canoe. He and Lois ... married for 62 years ... spent summers in the Adirondack Mountains at their camp in Pottersville, New York. They spent all of this past summer there, with friends and visits from family — Al had a wonderful time.

I'll miss Al and the Thanksgivings in Coxsackie. He was buried at the Riverside Cemetery in Coxsackie. It is a very old and beautiful cemetery with headstones and ornate markers dating back to the 1700's, overlooking the Hudson River that Al loved. I hope I'll see him again some day.

the Mediterranean with friends from my High School. It was a great trip and I'm slowly getting through my bucket list. At Thanksgiving, Merle, Mike, and I made a quick 1800 mile trip to the East Coast, to have Thanksgiving with cousins in Albany. We met some family we had not met before and then headed to New Jersey for a delightful visit with my Aunt Diana. I'm very glad we went!



Aunt Diana Siskind and Bob at Thanksgiving

Merle & Bob at St. Peter's Square at the Vatican

Retirement? Not!

By Bob Scolnik

I wrote this back in March of this year. I had an idea and I decided to write it down then, well before the deadline for my holiday newsletter. I just found it and decided to include it, although I found plenty to write about this year. But I still think these things need to be said....

In past Holiday newsletters, I've written about things that were important to me at the time. I've written about a sports car that I recently had restored after owning it for over 40 years. A few years ago I wrote about my Cousin Barry, who had recently passed away at a relatively young age. I still think about him often. This year, I've been thinking about a topic for quite a while. In past years, the subject of these essays sort of jumped up at me. This year, it's taken a little more thought and as I'll be 65 soon, the subject of my aging and my purpose here is something I think about fairly often. I decided I would write about it this year.

I've had an interesting and exciting journey so far in my life. The years since college have passed quickly and I'm proud of my four years in the military. While I never saw combat, those four years provided an experience that was more important than my four years in college. I enlisted, went through infantry training and then to Officer Candidate School. I learned about pushing myself, about leadership and accomplishing things I didn't know I could do. I spent over a year in Korea, a temporary tour of duty in Vietnam and learned to move to a city where I knew no one and discovered how to make my way.

I'm proud of the fact that I've been self-employed over my entire adult life. I've owned and started a dozen companies, built successful enterprises and provided decent employment for many people. It's been very exciting

I continue to serve as a County Commissioner for Muskegon County and do a lot of board work and fundraising. It's been a great year and although I'm now 65, I think I'm still productive and helping to move our community forward. For whatever reason, God got me through my motorcycle accident to do something. I'm still figuring it out, but it's beginning to make sense. Watch for news next year!

to have an idea, figure out a way to make a business out of it, and watch it grow from the first sale to a successful, profitable business. I loved to start things and didn't enjoy running them as much. And that's why, when I was 53, I sold my companies and decided to retire and look for another challenge. I thought I would find a new business opportunity or start something new, but I was drawn to public service. So, for the last 11 years I've tried to use my business skills with non-profit and government organizations to improve life in my community. Sometimes it's been very rewarding, other times it's felt like I was pursuing a hopeless cause. I know I've had an impact, but sometimes it's difficult to tell exactly how much of an impact.

Many times I've had friends ask me why I stay here in the winter. Or why I haven't bought a second home in Florida or Arizona and moved ... maybe for 6 months at a time ... to "enjoy" my life. I could have done this if I had wished, but I'm not ready to go quietly to a life of just passing the time. To be honest, I really don't understand the concept of moving to a different community and spending years when I can still be productive, playing golf or cards (neither of which I do anyway), looking for the best early bird dinner deal and going to the \$1.50 movies. Maybe the time will come when I'm no longer sharp or able, but the time is definitely not now. I've wondered why so many successful citizens retire and move away to "retirement life" when they could make great contributions to our community and society in general. It's a tremendous asset that I believe is being wasted and while I know that some will disagree with me, I'd like to encourage my near-retirement and retired friends to find organizations that can use their experience and get involved. I intend to keep going, working for non-profits and on behalf of myself as a citizen for the betterment of my community, as long as I am useful and productive. I'll continue to work to make this a better place. Please join me!