

*Seymour Jack Wellikson*

Seymour Jack Wellikson (SJW) was born on or around August 17, 1926, probably not in a manger. His parents, Anna and Jacob, had emigrated early in the 20th century from the Western part of what would become the Soviet Union. Seymour was the middle child, sandwiched between an older sister, Rose, and younger sister, Leah. While he was born right handed, he would become a left handed adult. He was raised in a variety of locales in southern New Jersey and Delaware and he would eventually graduate in the top 24 in his high school class in 1944. It turns out that in that season of D-day there were only 24 graduates from Harrington High (okay, he was number 2 and he has not yet forgiven the girl who was number 1). He would go on to Temple University to study journalism (an aptitude that would never become a career, but more a launching point for his avocation in creativity) and he was the first person in his family to graduate from college. It also helped out all of his children as this is where he met our mother.

“Holding hands at midnight  
‘neath a starry sky  
Good work if you can get it  
And you can get it if you try”- Cole Porter

It is said that Sy married Mimi after getting tired of serving “other newlyweds” while working as a waiter at the Surfside Hotel in Atlantic City. In any event, they were wed initially in September 1947 and “remarried” on March 21, 1948. That’s their story and they are sticking to it.

As is every journalist’s dream, Sy went to work for his father-in-law in the box and bag business. This temporary career detour lasted for more than 25 years, and what started when Truman was in the White House would go well past the Nixon years. For the last decade or so of his working life, our father had the privilege of helping special ed students develop the skills to be independent adults. Besides the obvious personal satisfaction, Sy had a captive audience for his vaudeville routine and got paid for it. His students loved him.

During his Philadelphia years, he lived at 1034 E. Phil Ellena Street, where he and Mimi raised 3 children. We thought everyone had only one car which only received talk radio or music from the 40s, vacationed in Atlantic City, ate dinner once every week with our grandparents and every holiday with our extended family, and had a father who knew more than the encyclopedia.

The emigration of our family to California started in 1973 when Larry went to UCI for internship for one year and never returned. It wasn’t the fact that Larry was 3000 miles away (and was soon joined by Elissa and Wendy), but more that Larry produced 3 grandsons and then Wendy produced grandson #4 that lured Sy and Mimi westward. It is a well known fact that all retirees either move to where their grandchildren are or to Florida. Sy never cared much for the humidity.

Maybe not all the children, but at least some minority, wondered what life changes would come about when Sy and Mimi moved to California, unencumbered by the routine of work and untethered from their friends of 25-50 years.

To the surprise of no one they reinvented themselves and created a new California life, full of new friends and new experiences.

Sy never seems to age or get old. He is the energizer bunny of Laguna Woods. Who else would hold auditions for a musical he was writing, producing and directing at the age of 79? At a time when others his age are checking off a menu for the 4 p.m. dinner seating, who else would be making dinner parties for friends and family?

“In your dreams you are never 80”- Anne Sexton

To get to be 80 you have to live a long time. You also get to know a lot of people. Our father has lived his life in Technicolor, not black and white. He has been a person people notice and remember. For much of his life, he has been a man in search of an audience.

While at times his children have had to fill the entire role of the audience (for example, while trapped in a car on family vacations), Seymour has been generous with his time and talent.

“We do not remember days; we remember moments.” Cesar Pavese

This book provides a smattering of recollections of moments with Sy. It gives a flavor of a life well lived and a chronicle of times well spent. The stories in this book provide a glimpse of how our father touched other people, first on the East Coast and more recently in California.

Few who have met Seymour can forget him. He does have an indelible personality.

For us, he is a part of who we are and who we will be.

This book may provide some answers as to how all of this has happened.

Larry & Sharon  
Elissa & Tim  
Wendy & Charlie



Dad:

First of all I can't believe you are 80. I still remember when I thought you were old and over the hill and I think that was 30 years ago, when you were younger than I am now.

I like to think that I made you who you are. After all, you were just Mom's husband until I actually made you a father in 1949 (you were just a babe of 22 at the time). I don't even want to mention my role in making you a grandfather (and indirectly a great grandfather). But I must admit you had a major role in making me who I am. Those who know me can decide whether you should be praised or just drawn and quartered.

I remember you taking me to games- Phillies' double headers (scoring both games together), Eagles (you going out for hot chocolate at a crowded and freezing Lions game and never coming back), and your softball games. Yes, grandpa played ball. You instilled in me a love for all sports that I have passed on to my boys.

I remember you ruling the dinner table-sometimes by pouring milk on Elissa's head, sometimes by cutting off debate with "that's enough!", but mostly by stimulating new ideas and forcing my sisters and me to defend our positions. I think everyone who knows your children can see that streak of tenacity manifested in so many ways.

I can see you prodding me to find all of the 3 and 4 letter words in "representative" after I could only come up with 20 (for gosh sakes I was only in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade). You took a crack and told me there were actually 120 words and left me to find them all. There were no words more feared in our household than when Mom would say "Dad will help you with your homework".

I will never figure out how you put a 4 foot 80 pound 4<sup>th</sup> grader on a bus, a subway, and a bus into the ghetto to attend Masterman School, but maybe you were trying to save the teachers at our neighborhood school. Somehow it all worked out in the end.

I remember you telling everyone at my Med School graduation that you were "much too young to be the father of a doctor". Or the time you came to Washington when there was a reception honoring me with Congressmen and Senators and I found you "working the room" so well that more people knew you were there than knew that I was there.

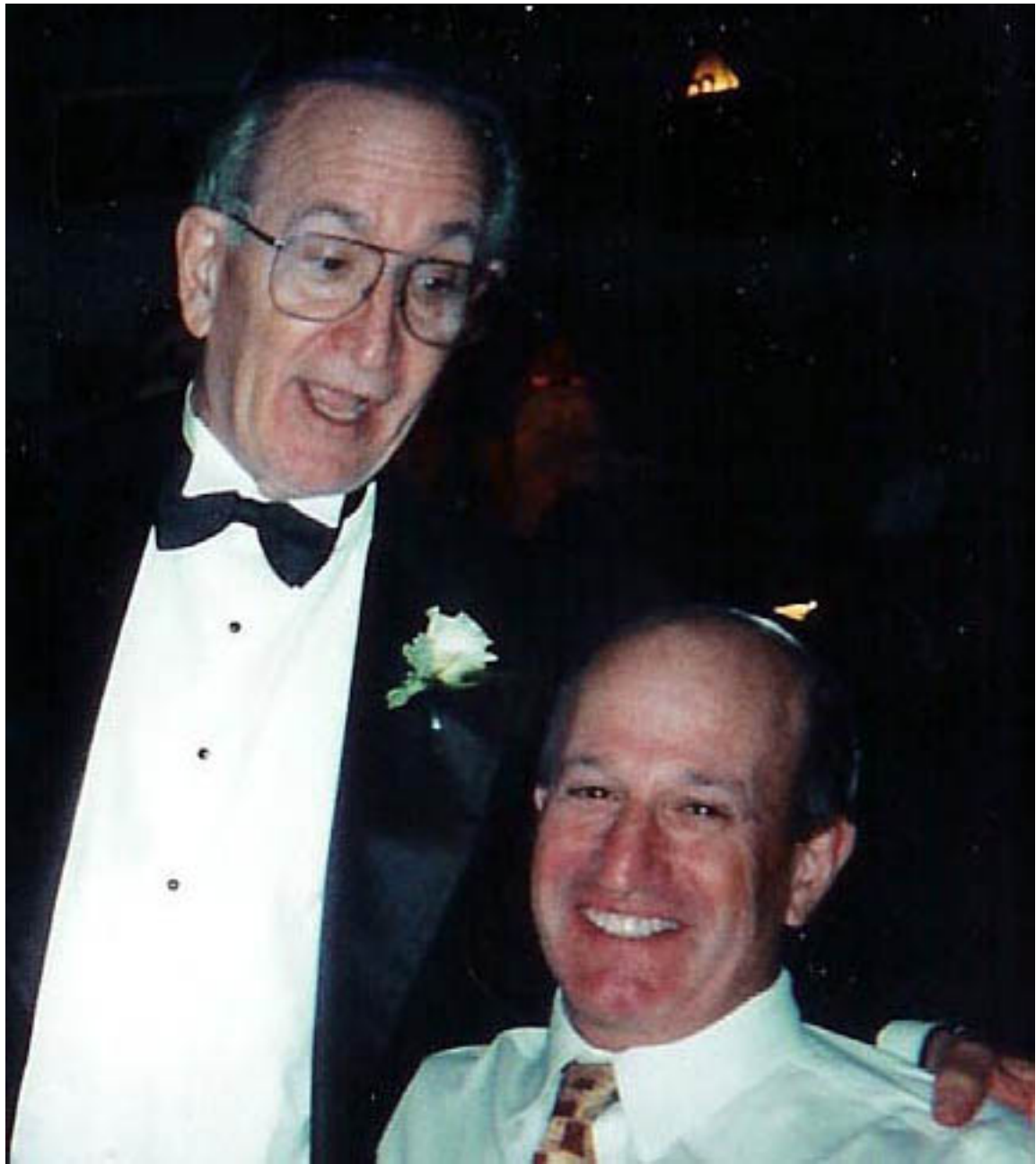
You have always appeared to be the smartest and most dynamic person in the room – the sun around which the other planets revolved with some weird gravitation pull. We thought this would diminish in retirement, but I am sure there is a rehearsal at some clubhouse in Laguna Woods in the coming weeks that attests to this force of nature being still alive and well.

But you have mellowed in recent years. Now you sit there with a serene glow happy to be sharing a moment with your extended and growing family – happy to be there for Hope's time or Jake's antics or Brad's smile or seeing the Sy in Ripken Sy Wellikson.

When I was still practicing medicine, I was in St. Joseph's Hospital one evening. As I got off of the elevator at the end of a long day I looked ahead and saw what I thought was you looking back at me. You see, the windows at the hospital become reflective glass after dark and what I saw in this window-mirror was my reflection, and indeed I had become you. And that my dear father, is a very, very good thing, as far as I am concerned.

Your only son,

Larry



From Elissa:

It is hard to pick out one memory from a lifetime. Some things I remember –

- being lifted up on the palm of his hand at the beach or in the living room and knowing he would not let me fall
- getting picked up at school and going to the SPCA to pick up the doggie he had spotted over lunch, responding to our unending pleas
- being tucked into bed every night with a kiss, except when the new dog growled at him and wouldn't let him on that first night
- being comforted by him when the dog got run over
- being dressed by him in my favorite red and white checked outfit and having him holding a bandage on my split forehead as a neighbor drove us to the emergency room, telling me all the time that I would be alright
- getting the “look” when I transgressed a rule
- being taught to do the right thing so well that, even when I was hundreds of miles away in college, if I transgressed I could feel him giving me the “look”
- hearing him whistle for “Whistle” to come home for dinner
- the look of pride and love on his face as he walked me down the aisle for my first marriage
- holding my bouquet and joking with the judge at my second wedding, with the same look of pride and love, knowing I got it right this time
- being at my school for every teacher's conference, when I played the second Hanukah candle, and when I graduated, with words of encouragement and delight
- continuing to discuss politics with us, even when Larry talked about King Franklin and Tim defended the Republicans
- his clever new lyrics to old standards and dozens of original dirty limericks (a short but intense phase)
- letters written to the school, protesting the Christmas tree and the Easter parade every year, teaching me to stand up for what you know is right (even though I thought the tree was pretty and I wanted to make an Easter bonnet to wear in that parade)
- getting advice on what to serve at parties, having him travel 400 miles to be at the party, then being the life of the party

Thanks, Daddy



Dear Dad,

You are a devoted father, grandfather, great grandfather as demonstrated by your constant love and support. You have *kvelled* at nearly every one of Sammy's piano recitals, baseball or hockey games, Grandparents' Days at Morasha, participation in services at *shul* and comedy performances. You are a natural entertainer and funny guy who brought down the house when making a poignant speech when I was being honored: "I first met Wendy...in Philadelphia; it was in Philadelphia because she wanted to be close to her mother."

Earliest images are of you lying on your back on the living room floor with Elissa and me, each on the bottom of a raised foot, with Larry standing on the palms of your hands, all three children hoisted in the air. You have been teaching me since before I could understand: "If squeezing a handful of oatmeal, it is *immaterial* whether it comes out here, here or here [between fingers]." I think I finally got that one five years later!

You have always made me feel loved and secure, from the days when I sat on your foot, clutching your calf while you danced, to the many times over the years dancing in your arms when I only *stepped* on your feet! When we moved to the suburbs, you wanted to make sure I could negotiate the route to junior high school, so one evening I walked it while you and mother drove alongside. You were actually pleased when the police stopped you to find out why you were stalking the small teenage girl!

With great compassion you have surprised me in a variety of ways. You had *rachmonis* for me so left work to save me from walking home from elementary school one rainy day, only to find me kicking a stone in the pouring rain. In the middle of your work day you picked up Elissa and me to adopt Dusty from the SPCA. Unexpectedly, to my delight, you showed up at my sixth grade graduation.

Dad, you were a strict disciplinarian (whistling for your three kids in the neighborhood or calling "Troops" to assemble us when time to leave a social event) who has mellowed so over the years that your grandchildren have difficulty picturing the stricter side of Poppy, despite the stories they've heard. A favorite is the bedtime you found Elissa and me sitting on our bedroom window sill, *noshing* snow like popcorn, watching our neighbor dig his car out of the snow. You obviously didn't appreciate this nocturnal activity, so mushed snow in each of our faces!

On a vacation (1967), while attending a singdown, someone requested "My Old Kentucky Home" and you said, "He doesn't want to sing it; he just wants to go there." Asking you to be quiet was a big mistake; I spent the rest of the singdown back in the cabin! Years later (1999), I stopped by on the way to a house hunting trip with Charlie. Since I was pressed for time and you kept interrupting me, I said, "Sometimes you just have to be the 'listening guy.'" When you responded "How would you know?" I was suddenly 10 again and you were 37!

You are a talented singer, (my friend Lisi, who became an opera singer, was convinced the radio was on when she heard your melodious voice from another room) always ready with a familiar song prompted by any key word. You are also a master of song parodies for which friends and family have been the beneficiaries.

You have always been a ready resource to anyone and everyone with questions regarding cooking, child rearing or grammar. I've been impressed that you (and, of course, Mother) are a friend to your children's friends and a friend to your friends' children, always included in their *simchas* and holiday celebrations, attending their plays and grandparents' days. And you are a friend to each of your children and grandchildren. I appreciate the geographic proximity that enables us to enjoy three generations golfing together, frequent Shabbat dinners and many other informal and formal occasions. I am thrilled to have these cherished moments with you, my loving and wonderful Dad!

Love, hugs and kisses,

Wendy





Seymour:

We go back a long way, both in time (over 35 years) and over space (3000 miles across the country). After your original 3 children, I was the next one in the family, way before the grand kids and the great grandkids. In fact, now that I think of it, I played a major role in making you a grandfather in the first place.

When we moved to California and started growing our own family, we knew our boys would miss the close day to day, week to week contact with their grandparents back in PA. We were able to continue building our relationship over time with frequent trips East and when you and my parents came out to California. But it wasn't until you and Miriam relocated permanently to Leisure World that we were able to re-establish a closeness that has only grown stronger over the last decade.

This has been important to your children, but even more so for your grandsons. But the thing that really warms my heart is the way you respond to our new babies-Ripken, Jake, Brad, and Hope. You sit for them, hold them, laugh with them, and enjoy them. You call our house and ask "do you have any babies over there?" and if the answer is "yes", you say you will be right over.

When we all get together I see you so happy to just have these 4 gifts of life (that I love so much myself) that this has just bonded us together because of this common joy.

Reaching 80 is a milestone, but I only hope that we have many years together to see what our 4 new additions will do to make us smile.

Happy Birthday,

Sharon



## Seymour Likes to Fly

One of the first times Seymour and Miriam came up to visit us in the Bay Area we said we would go up to Calistoga and show them some of the Wine Country. That seemed like a good idea right up to the time that they saw us preparing the charts and other materials to make the trip by small plane the next morning. Not able to think up a reasonable excuse not to fly, they hesitantly got into the little Piper Cherokee the next morning and off we went.

It was a beautiful day to fly, the air was crystal clear and the temperature was just right. After wandering around town in Calistoga for a few hours, doing a little shopping and wine tasting (everybody except the pilot, of course!) we stopped for a little lunch. Over lunch we talked about the other interesting places to visit in Northern California. When we got around to discussing Mendocino, I suggested we make that our next stop for the afternoon. Could we really make it all the way over to the coast from Calistoga and still have enough time to wander around? Sure!

We took off on our next leg to go to Santa Rosa for some fuel. In Calistoga you land towards town and take off away from it, regardless of the wind. That makes for a very long ground roll if you happen to be taking off downwind, which we were. Seymour manned the copilot seat, the ladies were in back and off we went! Unfortunately, as we got way out on the runway we hit a bit of a pothole, the plane bounced, and the door latch popped open. This isn't really dangerous, but it sounds like the air is going to come right into the airplane and the copilot is going to get sucked out. Seymour was resolute, and we got to Santa Rosa okay.



As we took off for Mendocino, Seymour was again the copilot and up we went. By now the thermals had pretty well picked up and the turbulence was bouncing us all over the place! Everybody was really

quiet for some reason. As we walked away from the plane in Mendocino I said "That was about the most turbulence I think I have flown in so far!" Every body stopped holding their breath and started talking at once about how they thought it was just them, concerned with the bumps and trying to act okay about it.

We had a very nice walk around Mendocino, in beautiful weather, and the time came for the flight home. This time I picked a route just off the beautiful Pacific coast, over Point Reyes, over the Golden Gate, and home to Palo Alto. The air off the coast was smooth as glass and we had an excellent ride with a beautiful view. Seymour flew the plane most of the way and seemed to catch on pretty well. Since then, there has been no hesitation about hopping in and flying off to Scottsdale, Northern California, or wherever.

Tim Shroyer