



The "Olszewski" Family
Anna, William, Raymond and Robert

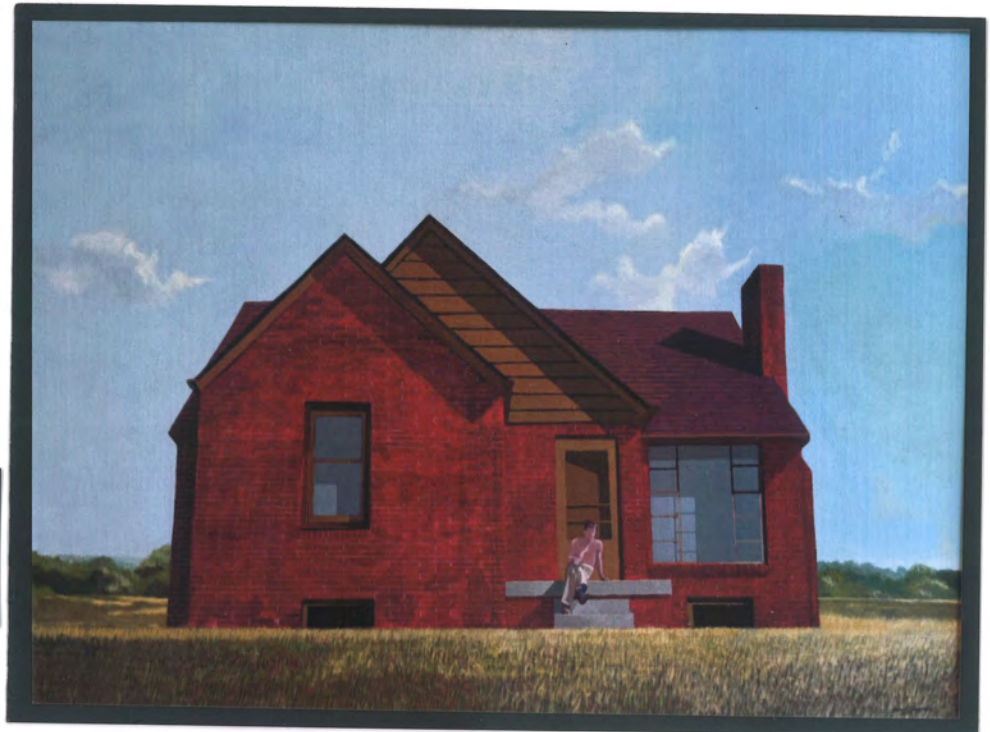
"The Early Years"

I, Robert William Olszewski, was born on May 2nd, 1945 in Natrona Heights, a small town located just 21 miles north of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. My Father, William, worked at the local steel mill as a crane man and My Mother Anna worked as a domestic, cleaning houses and doing laundry for the Doctors in town. My Brother Raymond was six years older and we shared the same upstairs bedroom where we had plenty of room to work on our art projects together. Set back just off a country road, the two story red brick home our Father built was foundational in forming my outlook on life. Behind our house a large victory garden took up more than half the property and in front of the house and across the road, a field of deep grass made its way so far over the hill that you could not see the end of it. When Ray was busy with his friends, I was content to spend time alone drawing or with my dog roaming the woods and building dams in the creek.

As a young boy of six, I was fascinated with looking out our upstairs windows that were at each end of the second floor. Looking at our house from the front, our bedroom was on the right side of the house and I would sit at the windowsill to see if anyone was out walking and would watch them until they disappeared "down the hill" and were out of sight. If someone was walking up the road and past the front of the house, I would run to the other side of the house and would watch them until they disappeared "up and over the hill" and would always wonder where they were going. On some days when I looked out the windows I would see my Father, shirt off, cutting the grass, and on other days I would look out to see the land filled up with snow. With television still in its infancy and with no morning programming for children, I was happy to start my day enjoying the morning sunlight and taking in the views outside. For me, it was magical.

In the next three pages one can see in my art how strongly I was imprinted by those happy years in the country. People often ask "Of all my Art work, what is my favorite?" and I always answer "The painting of me riding my bike on a country road" which hangs next to my bed and greets me each morning. It is not a great technical work of art but the memories of that time are so positive, as is symbolized by the "American Flag and Open Sky" which to me means, "Anything is Possible".

"Portrait of My Father"
Painted c 1970
Collection of the Artist



"4th Of July"
Painted c 1969
Collection of the Artist

Pictured on the next two pages are just a few of the works that also reflect the influence of those early years in the country. A special memory was when it was my turn to feed the chickens, I would "run" up the garden path to the "chicken coup" and because of that memory I included the "Coup" as the centerpiece in the display that I made for the "Songbird Collection". Also in this selection of works, you can see that wildlife was a subject I so enjoyed working on, so much so that I decided to create a line that was devoted exclusively to "Wildlife and Nature" and titled it "Nature's Treasures". Within that line I was able to explore one of my favorite subjects "The Passing of the Seasons" which can be seen in the work titled "Fall". To further explore my interest in nature I sculpted the Heirloom Box "Monarch", which illustrates the life cycle of the "Monarch Butterfly".



"Wildlife Display" with Songbirds, Sculpted 1987



"Monarch"
"Heirloom Box"
Sculpted c 2010



"Fall"
"Natures Canvas"
Sculpted c 2009

In the painting "Fields and Shed" you can see just how much I loved the landscape across from our house and even better I might look out and see a "Deer" passing through. In the summer when my dog and I crossed the field, we both could be startled by a "Pheasant" rising up out of the tall grass before us. Last, only a person that loved the woods so much would create a "Woodland Nativity" that featured only animals as visitors and protective "Birds as Angels" hovering above.



"Fields and Shed", Painted c 1963 Collection of the Artist



"Pheasant" c 2008



"Deer"
"Nature's Canvas"
Sculpted c 2008



"Woodland Nativity", "Luminiart", Sculpted c 2005

"1955"

The year 1955 was to be a year of new adventures for our family as Mom and Dad had sold our home in the country and moved us into an apartment in town. The apartment was to be a temporary place to live as their plans were to buy a another country property, only this time with a lake, and to build a larger home. Tragically, and only three weeks after the move to the apartment, our Dad passed away on his drive home from work on January 21st 1955. No words can express how hard this hit our family. Dad passed at the young age of 43 leaving Mom widowed at age 37, my brother Ray was 15 and I was 9. For our Mom, raising two boys on her income doing housework had to be challenging and in the night I could hear her muffled cries of "Oh Bill, Oh Bill" for months. My brother Ray decided his best hope was to join the Navy which he did as soon as he turned 17.

For me, it was like a light was turned off. Not only did we lose our Dad, but just four weeks before, we were all still in the country home and I was still waking up to take in the views from our bedroom windows. In contrast, the apartment was "dark" and the view outside our windows was not the "woods and fields" I came to love but an ageing "VFW" with a cannon out front. Also, to make the move, our dog was sent to my uncle's where she got out of her cage, and was hit by a car. For me at age 9 all of this was so hard to process. My looking out at the views came to and end and instead of looking out at the cannon, I looked inward and turned to drawing.

In July of that year, Disneyland opened, and in our new circumstances, without a car and taking buses, Disneyland seemed so far away that it was not even a place that I could imagine. Even making the 21 mile trip to Pittsburgh was so huge an effort that we only made the trip once. So in my world, the only connection I had to Disneyland was to save the "10 cents" so I could read about the adventures of "Scrooge Mc Duck". To this day when I think of all the sadness of 1955, I still am amazed that that little boy, some 50 years later, was commissioned by Disney to recreate "Disneyland Main Street" in miniature.



"The VFW Outside My Window"



"Our Family Gravesite"

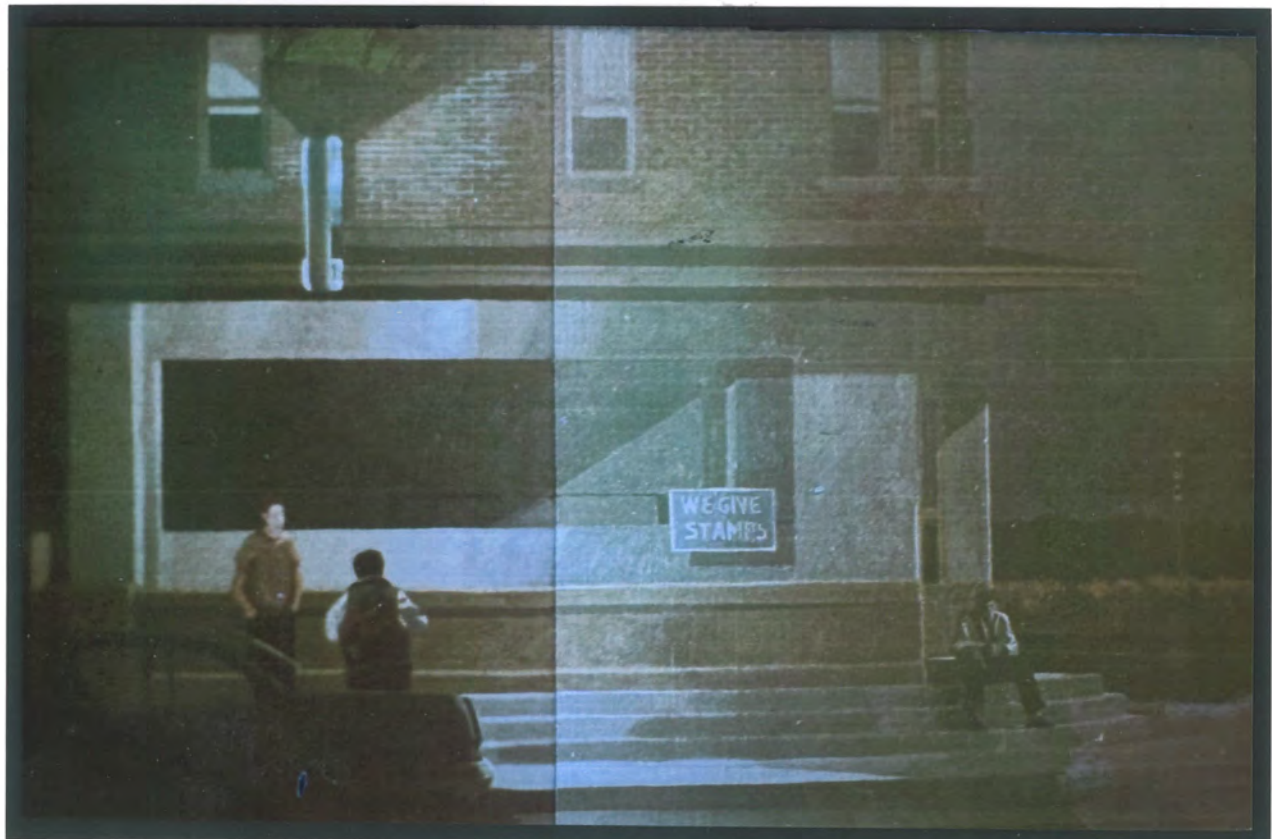
On this page are two works that I created years later to capture the sadness of 1955. A sculpture of "Me with My Dog" and a night scene I painted of my brother Ray as a teenager hanging out on a Friday night at the corner down the street.



"With My Dog", on our way to the woods 1954



"Loss of The Dream" Sculpted c 1969
Collection of The Artist



"On The Corner" Private Collection, Painted c 1970

"1957, Things Are Looking Up"

The year 1957 was a big turnaround year for our family. Ray joined the Navy right after graduating from High School and with the money from the sale of our country home, Mom bought a piece of property, built a two bedroom house that was filled with "Light" and was a perfect size for the two of us. I spent my time drawing and adding to my Stamp Collection became a Boy Scout and played Baseball. For Mom, to make our lives even better, she took driving lessons and surprised me with a ride in her new car which was a big deal as it meant that we no longer had to use the public buses to get around. Luckily for me I could get to most places on my bike but the one trip my friends and I always needed a ride for was for going to the next town to see the matinees at the "Roxy" theatre. To get to the movies, and with my Mom at work, my friends Mom was always up to giving us a ride.



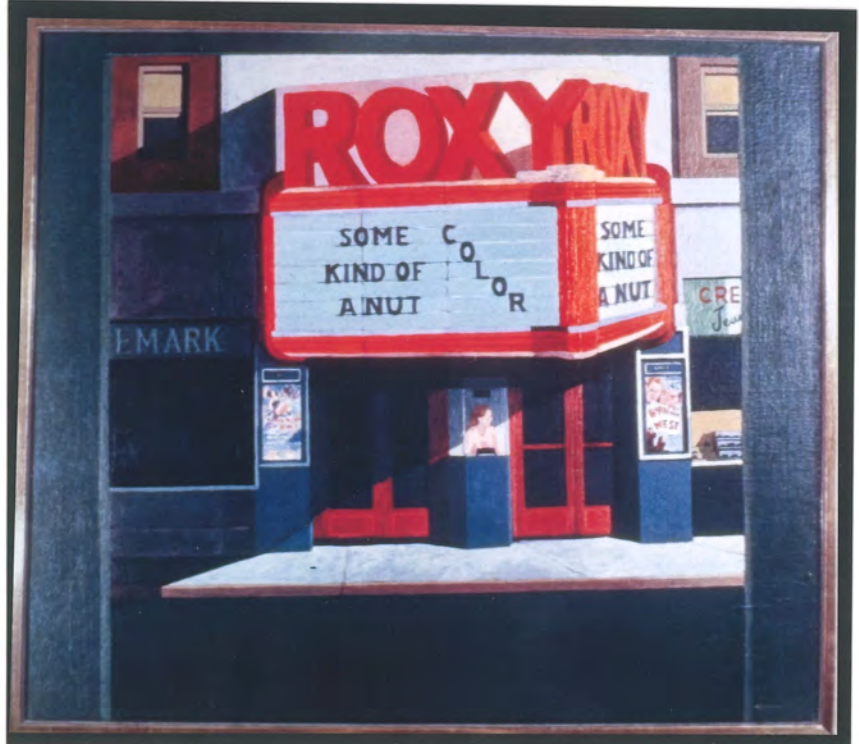
Ray 1957
Seaman Recruit



"Downtown Bus" Painted c 1970 Collection of the Eichblatt Family



"Boy On A Bike" Painted c 1970
Collection of the Artist



"The Roxy" Painted c 1971
Sold at The Ryder Gallery, LA

"A Word About Our Mom"

Although Mom worked as a domestic her whole life, she was a smart and talented woman who lived life on her own terms. Looking back to 1956 and that time in America, the fact that she could secure a bank loan to build a house based on her income as a domestic worker was a testament to her character. Besides her expert house cleaning, she was well known for her expertise in the kitchen and sold pastries of all kinds year round to earn extra income. When she graduated from the 8th Grade she was the top student in her class and for her high grades was awarded "The American Legion Award". In 1929 when the Great Depression hit, to help support her parents, Anna left school and at the age of 12 ,moved to Pittsburgh to work as an in house domestic for some of the wealthiest families in the area. Years later she became close friends with many of the Dr's wives she worked for and when they came by to pick up their pastries and perfectly ironed shirts, they would spend hours together just visiting.



"A Happy "Anna" in Her New Kitchen"

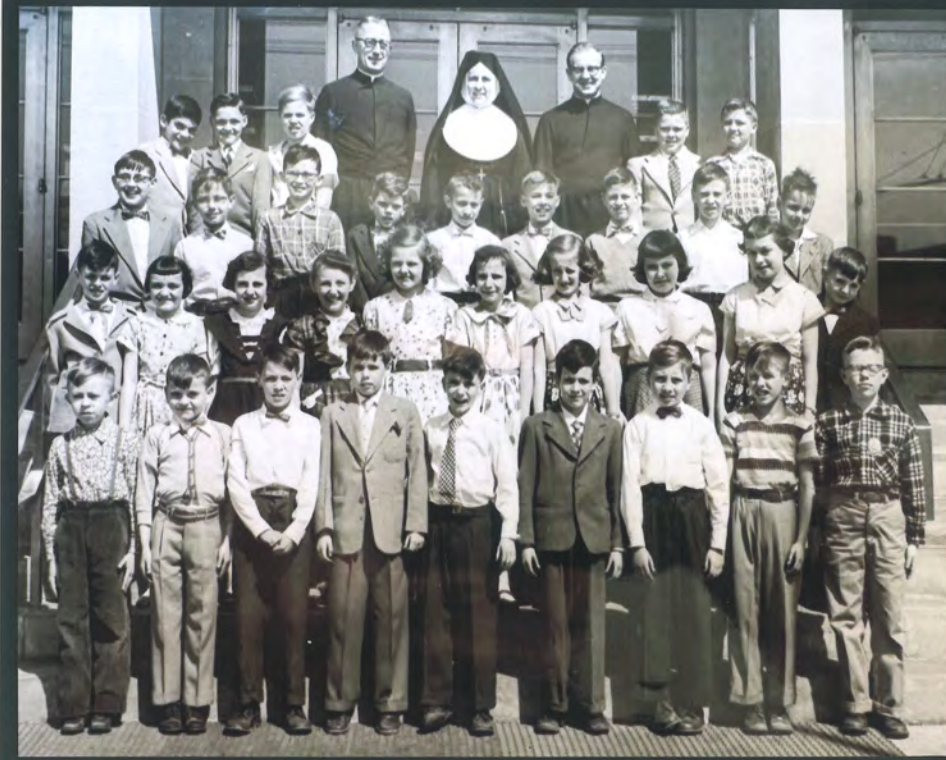


"Moms New Car"



"The House Our Mom Built" Notice the large front window that let in lots of light.

When our Dad passed, I was in the 4th grade and in my first year of Catholic School. Our church was named, "Blessed Sacrament", and the parish was a huge help for our family during those difficult years in the apartment. For the students, there was a school lunch program and Mom was hired first to work in the cafeteria and was later hired to cook the evening dinners for the parish priests which I attended. I was a "Patrol Boy Crossing Guard" and sang soprano in the boys choir. The influence of that environment on me was positive, long lasting and showed up later in my art work in subjects like the micro work "Moses", the "Noah's Arks" and as seen on this page and the next, one of my favorite subjects to explore "The Nativity".



"Blessed Sacrament" 5th Grade Class" 1956



"Bob the
"Crossing Guard"



"Crucifixion"
Painted 1962
3rd Place Winner
Category "Abstract"
Tarentum Art Show
Private Collection

The "Nativity"
Heirloom Box 2008



The Art of Miniature "Nativity"

When taking on any project, whether it be a personal concept or a commission, I know that the project will occupy my mind until it is completed and because of that I will turn down projects that I don't want to think about. Over the 3 years that I worked on the "Nativity", my own faith came to the forefront and I am the startled Shepard on the left, and am placed in the lowest part of the "landscape" to begin my journey to it's highest point where the "Holy Family" resides. To further explore "Faith", I depicted the Kings in three different stages of "Belief". King "Melchior" has the strongest faith and readily kneels before the Christ child. "Balthazar", who I identify with the most, not kneeling, leans forward and wants it to be true. "Caspar" is the most distant and stands upright and unbending and because of this I dressed Caspar in an outfit topped with a "Santa Red Hat" and beard of white. Also, notice in the "Night Scene Photo" how their "Distance From the Light" further gives us insight into their differences in faith.



"The Nativity" Sculpted 1991-1994



The "Three Kings"
Left to right
"Melchior" kneeling
"Balthazar" and
"Caspar"



The "Nativity"
"My First
Illuminated
Micro Work"

"My Step Dad, The Unforgettable John Simonoff"

First, there was "John The Good", a bigger than life character that my Mom met on a girls night out at a local tavern. When Mom came home she sat at the edge of my bed and said, "Robert, I met a man tonight", and I asked "What was he Like?" and her answer was "He dented a Dime with his tooth!" John was 32, a Korean war veteran, worked as a welder, a boxer, a gambler, an avid Fisherman and had a "Big Personality". I was 15, Mom was 43 and we all hit it off. As a family we fished together in every local stream, pond, lake, river, creek and even made the long drive to North Bay, Ontario Canada to fish. These were great years and John treated me as his own, called me "Rob" and loved that I was always up to go fishing with him and never once hollered at or hit me.

To give some insight into his "Big Personality" and rather than leaving it at, "He was a "Boxer", I recall the night they went out to the same tavern to dance and enjoy a meal. At the other end of the bar, five men started to throw beer on each other and from a distance, John hollered, "You Better Not Get Any Of That Beer On My Wife!". With that, the five men started toward John and he met them in the middle knocking out the first fellow, grabbing the second and breaking three of his ribs. To get him off the second fellow, the three ripped off John's shirt and started to bite his back so he would let go. The next day, since Mom refused to go, I had to drive down to the Jail and pay bail to get John out. Since it was a small town jail, the two cells were next to each other, John by himself and the five together in the cell next to him. As I waited for him to come out I could hear John trying to convince the jailer to let him into the cell with the five men he had fought the night before.



"John Simonoff"



"Bluegill" Nature's Canvas c 2008



"Rainbow Trout" c 2008
Nature's Canvas

"John Simonoff, The Husband"

The first years of their marriage were "Great" and the photo of "A Happy Anna" in this writing was taken by John. It took about three years for things to start to go bad and started when John was out of work during my Sophomore and Junior years in High School. With so much time off, besides fishing, John spent more time in the local Bars playing pool, and playing pin ball machines. When he did get a job as a welder at "Pullman Standard in Butler, Pa", he continued to stop at Bars after work, and since he was paid every Friday we may or may not see him until late that night or not until Saturday. With two "Type A" personalities, the fighting was fierce and I only write about this to show how it effected me and my decision making. One night, when I was 17, the fighting was so bad that I vowed to myself that "I was not going to live like this and would move as far away as possible". It was a major turning point in my life and instilled a drive in me that "The Vow To Get Out" was the start of what took me six years to achieve, "The move to California when I was 23". Looking back, "Fishing", "Bars After Work" and "Pin Ball Machines" was who John was, before and after the marriage, which made him fun to be with as a kid, but were not the best attributes for a Husband. Even more astounding to me is that even as he aged and 5 months before he passed, at age 56, John was in another bar fight down the street. For Mom, it was a tragedy that lasted another 21 years. For me, as bad as it was, when I think of John today, I always smile and can say that I did love him and do know that he loved me.

When it was time for me to interpret the paintings of "Thomas Kincade" into the Gallery of Light format, the fisherman in "Autumn" made it an easy first choice.



"John Simonoff" 1928-1984

Thomas Kincade's "Autumn, The Good Life" Gallery of Light by Olszewski, c 2009

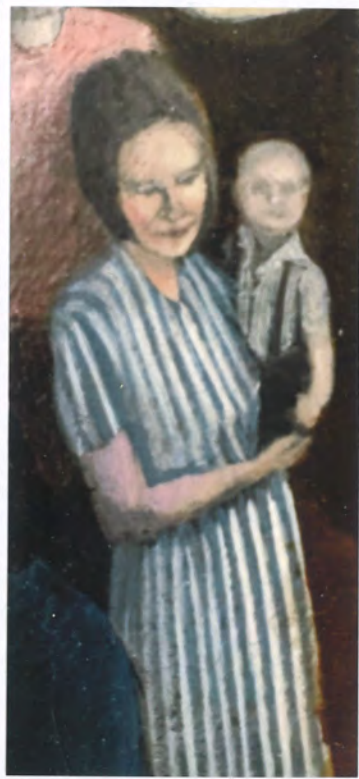


"High School Years 1960-1963 and The Memory Paintings"

Some years later I began a series of what I call "Memory Paintings". which allowed me to revisit and come to terms with the past. In all, there were 13 works that I finished, 9 which are in my personal collection, 4 that I regret I sold, and since they are so personal, I have tried to find the 4 to purchase back. On this page and the next are two "Memory Paintings" that recall the summer of my Junior year in High School. The Saxonburg Carnival was an annual summer event and was a magnet for High School kids to visit. In the "Carnival Sideshow" drawing, teenagers are mesmerized as a dancer performs.



"Carnival Sideshow", Oil Crayon on Paper, c 1973 Collection of The Artist

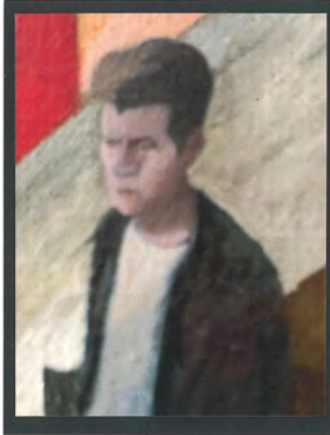


Note: To capture the feeling of the boys looking up, and the perspective of the Dancer's pose, my wife Linda was the perfect model for what I was trying to achieve. Linda also posed for other works as well including the Mom in the "Saxonburg Carnival"

With all of the fighting at home, my years in High School were a mixture of sadness and happiness in equal doses. In the "very center" of the "Saxonburg Carnival" painting are a couple arguing, who of course are a stand in for what was going on at home. Even though my brother Ray was in the Navy by then, I wanted to include him, and gave Ray a prominent spot next to the stage.



"Couple Arguing"



"My Brother Ray"



"The Saxonburg Carnival", Oil on Canvas c 1973 Collection Of The Artist

"Artistic Comments on The Saxonburg Carnival"

After reading the first eight pages of this writing, my brother asked if I was going to write about my artistic influences. It was an excellent question. Artistic influences are not always "Direct" but can be subtle as you will see in the two works I had in mind while working on the "Saxonburg Carnival". I have long admired the works of Peter Bruegel for his detail and his overhead views of crowds. While painting the "Carnival", a print of "Winter Landscape" hung right across from me in my studio.



"Winter Landscape with Skaters and a Bird Trap"
Peter Bruegel The Elder, 1565, 15 X 22 inches



"Saxonburg Carnival"
Finished Work, c 1973
Size 25 X 34 inches

The second influence was from Toulouse-Lautrec's Masterpiece, "At The Moulin Rouge". In this work, the lighted face of the woman on the far right inspired me to include the neon lights from the Ferris Wheel which you can see in the earlier stage of the painting shown below. After a year of work and frustration, I gave up on including the neon lights, which I feel would have been dynamic. Even today, I am still tempted to take the painting off the wall and to try to add the neon lights again.



"At The Moulin Rouge"
Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec
Painted 1892-1895



"Saxonburg Carnival", Early stage of the Painting with "Neon Lights", c 1973

"High School Years Continued"

Shown below is the work, "Fire On Presque Isle" that I painted in my Junior year in 1962. Without any comments, it would be just another painting, but it's not. If there was a low point at home, this painting summed it up. As I wrote earlier, the fighting was "Fierce" and one night after another fight, I smelled smoke and rushed to the cellar to find that Mom had set a fire to John's project in retaliation for something he had done. John was gone and if not for me, the entire pile of wood along with the house would have burned. When I started the painting it was to be about fishing with John on "Presque Isle Bay at Lake Erie" which it was, but the fire was too fresh in my mind to ignore. After writing this, I shared the story with my brother and said that I was hesitant to publish it. He wrote the next day and encouraged me to leave it in as he had his own memories of our Mom and felt that this was an important part of my story. Those years were conflicting for me for sure because I also had a great relationship with my Mom, knew I was loved, and on the days when they didn't argue, I can say that I had a good upbringing. The second painting, "Her Name, was Gay", shows that even after 7 years, I still missed the adventures in the woods with my dog and companion "Gay". As a further comment about the two of us, in the winter months, and to stay warm, Gay and I would sit together on top of the floor heater vent in the living room and look at books. Makes me smile to think of it.



"Fire on Presque Isle", Oil on Canvas
Painted c 1962 Collection of the
Shoalts Family



"Her Name, was 'Gay'"
Oil On Canvas, c 1962
Private Collection

Looking back, I was fortunate to have painting as a positive way to deal with the challenges that I was facing. However, equally important were my good art friends and Art Teacher Robert Hild. Like any teenager I enjoyed the privacy of my bedroom and spent my time painting, reading and listening to the music of Jazz greats Miles Davis and Thelonious Monk. At the same time I was also discovering the works of Van Gogh, Picasso and Jackson Pollack who were all unique in their approach to Art. With all of these influences, writers, artists and musicians, I was just beginning to formulate a vision of what I wanted my life to be when it all came together on a chance visit to Mr. Hild's apartment.

"The Visit"

I don't recall the reason for the visit but when I knocked, the door opened and a beautiful woman greeted me with, "You must be Bob" Stepping in, I looked to see Mr Hild at the stove, skillet in hand, cooking a meal, paintings lined the walls and Jazz was playing in the background. If ever a kid needed a role model it was me. Simply put, "I want that" came to mind, and my journey to become an Art Teacher and a life in the arts was launched.

Pictured below is my High School Art Teacher, Robert Hild, and on the right is my graduation photo from 1963. Over 62 years, we have kept in touch and have become the best of friends.



MR. ROBERT HILD
Art I, II
Mechanical Drawing I
Metal Shop



"Talking Art, 62 Years Later"



"Words written to me in my yearbook from a Great Man"

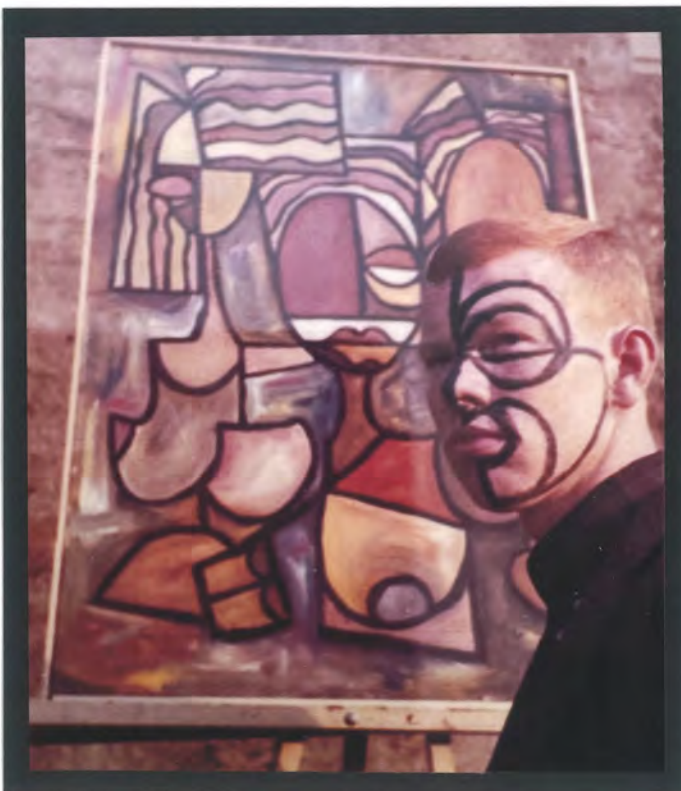
"To have you as a student makes art education enjoyable and enlightening. The future holds much for you, all you have to do is take it. Remember art expression must live within man. He must always think to survive. Thanks for the opportunity of helping you".
Robert Hild

"High School Graduation Day June 6th, 1963 "

I clearly remember the day I graduated from High School. Mom was at work and John had just been hired as a welder so I went to the ceremony myself. After it was over I came home and before going into the house, I stood on the front porch, looked out across the field and said out loud, "I'm going to be successful!" and that was it, and I went inside.

"Time For Some Hard Choices"

Mr. Hild had encouraged me to pursue an education with the end goal of becoming an Art Teacher which I was all for and had already been accepted to begin classes starting in the Fall at Indiana State Teachers College in Indiana, Pennsylvania. However with John out of work for so long, money was tight and as a Korean War Veteran, he was encouraging me instead to join the Navy like my brother and sat with me in our living room while a Navy recruiter spoke about the benefits of "signing up" and even getting an education while in the service. As I listened to the recruiter, I couldn't help but think about the "Cuban Missile Crises" that unfolded just eight months earlier in the Fall of 1962. During those tense days my friend Keith and I sat in his car at the local "Eat and Park" and talked about the sobering possibility of a "Nuclear War" and how we might end up in the military. With all of that still fresh in my mind and even with all the pressure from John and the recruiter, who had spent the afternoon at our house, to their disappointment, I passed on signing up for the Navy. With that tough decision behind me and to raise funds for college, I started looking for work and was hired at the same factory, "Pullman Standard" in Butler, Pennsylvania where John had just started work as a welder. With a good job and able to save for college, I was determined that I was going to be an Artist and an Art Teacher.



Har-Brack High School
Class of 1963

"The Three Nudes"
Oil on Canvas c 1963
Private Collection

"Portrait of Robert Olszewski"
with the painting, "The Three Nudes"
Photo taken by Joseph Ryznar c 1963