

## BIO OF VESTRY MEMBER RICK MELLERUP

I am the son of a Methodist minister who was a member of the now defunct Troy Conference, which covered upstate New York from the Albany area north in New York and all of Vermont. So as a kid I moved a lot as my father moved to bigger churches, back and forth between the two states. Wherever we lived it was cold. Very cold. It was a lot colder in the 1960s and 1970s than it is today (climate change?). I've seen 40 below three times, 30 below about a dozen times, and an almost uncountable 20 below. In fact I witnessed 50 below once in, of all seasons, April, when we lived in upstate New York 100 yards from the Canadian border. It went from 50 degrees to 50 below in just hours when a cold front from Hudson Bay moved into our area. The sap was already rising in trees and the temperature froze the sap and the trees exploded. Yes, I saw trees explode like dynamite. The entire area had no power for two weeks, the Air Force from Plattsburgh AFB, which was about 28 miles away, evacuated many people but my family was fine because the parsonage had coal heat and we were family campers so had Coleman stoves, lamps, etc. So, folks, stop telling me to put on a coat when it is 30 degrees LOL. That was an October temperature when I was a child – most Halloweens I trick-or-treated in snow. By the way, there was a nuclear missile silo about a mile away from my house. There was a fire there once and every man in town raced out to help extinguish the fire.

I'm not a particularly educated man, but like Harry Truman, the last U.S. President without a college degree, I am well-read. I've got over 5,000 books in my house, and yes, I have read many of them – I'm surprised my floors haven't collapsed. In fact more people in Tuckerton know me as "Bookworm" than Rick. My love of reading began when I was four years old. My mother got a job and in 1959 there were no preschools or the like. But my father and her were friends with the local school principal and asked her if I could attend kindergarten. She agreed. It was a three-room elementary school – K-2, 3-4, 5-6. So between snacks and naps I listened to the grades 1 and 2 lessons and learned how to read. The next year we moved to a new town, that one 100 yards from the border, and New York State wanted me to repeat kindergarten, the normal spot for a five-year-old, but my test scores were so high they let me go into first grade. My classmates were reading Dick and Jane, I was reading Mark Twain – my grandmother gave me a six book leather bound set of Twain when I was three – under the covers at night with a flashlight. After second grade they wanted to move me to fourth grade. Thank God my parents refused. When I was in high school I was too young to drive until the end of my senior year. That's when I had to date "older women" 18-year old girls to get rides. LOL once again.

The other influence in my life happened in my sophomore year in high school. Probably many of you remember a teacher who was especially influential in your life. Mine was Evelyn Lockwood. She had been out of the country for a couple of years before she returned. A Jew, she had flown off to Israel to help during the 1967 war in Israel. She was in her 60s, but off she went.

She was also a huge theater fan. Now, I had been playing sports, but was basically a bench warmer. But she convinced me to try out for the school play in my sophomore year, I got a part in just a four-person play, and I was hooked on theater for life. I was no longer a bench warmer, getting big, sometimes lead parts. Over the years I have been in over 100 shows at the high school, college, community theater and pro level. Theater is my passion and my hobby, that and American history.

So why aren't I educated. I got straight A's my first year of college in Ohio. But then my dorm burned to the ground and not only that, the college's theater was located on the first floor. Then my girlfriend's father died and she had to move back to Connecticut. Needless to say, my sophomore year was not successful. I flunked out. I worked as a cook in one of Stowe's most famous restaurants but

then attended a church supper where I met a member of the Coast Guard.

I soon found my “real college,” the United States Coast Guard. I enlisted in 1975 at the age of 20. After boot camp in Cape May and radioman school in California I was assigned to Group Woods Hole on Cape Cod. Within a year I learned about responsibility. Group Woods Hole was responsible for numerous stations and ships on the southern part of Cape Cod (Group Boston covered the northern half), Nantucket, Martha’s Vineyard and the entire state of Rhode Island. I soon became not only a radioman but a search and rescue coordinator. In the days before Sea Tow we’d have 20 or so sorties (cases) going on every day during the summer, maybe 30 on weekends. Talk about busy; talk about responsibility. I soon became the second-in-command of the radio room, that had about 12 Coasties, and actually ran the place when our Chief was arrested in New Hampshire for selling drugs. Pretty heavy responsibility for a 22-year old.

While in Woods Hole I had a couple of unique things happen to me.

First of all, one winter night in December, 1976, I took a call from a boat that had run aground off of Nantucket. I expected it was a fishing boat, instead it turned out to be the *Argo Merchant*, a 641-foot oil tanker what was responsible for the largest oil spill in U.S. history before the *Exxon Valdez*. What a month after that! I was working 12 hour shifts every day, not only coordinating the communications between the Coast Guard vessels that responded to the spill but serving as the public affairs officer that communicated with the national press and Massachusetts politicians who I gave updates. I remember taking in so many calls from the likes of the Associated Press, *The New York Times*, *The Boston Globe*, TV networks including Barbara Walters and many many phone calls from Ted Kennedy’s office, including several from Kennedy himself. Pretty cool, huh?

The other thing was extremely cool. Woods Hole is well-known for being the home of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute, the world’s premier independent organization dedicated to ocean research, technology and education. One evening when I was on watch, a gentleman from WHOI came in and asked me if I could help him out. When foreign vessels came to Woods Hole their scientists were feted with dinners, etc., but the crewmen weren’t. He asked me if I could gather a group of four or five crew mates to take the sailors out for an evening of fun. He gave me \$500 – a big sum in the days where beers were less than a dollar – and I indeed asked crew mates to accompany the foreign sailors to local nightclubs or trips to Fenway Park in Boston, etc. Over the course of the year we entertained sailors from Spain, Portugal, Japan, South Korea, West Germany and Poland. I felt like a diplomat. The sailors from the USSR, though, were kept 3 miles offshore – we used to boat out to throw up Playboy magazines, American cigarettes, etc. while they responded with vodka. Well, finally they were given permission to visit Base Woods Hole’s enlisted man’s club and I was put in charge of the festivities. Yeah, I definitely felt like a diplomat at the age of 23.

I could have stayed in Woods Hole for my entire enlistment. But you know the phrase – “Join the Navy, see the world?” Well, most people don’t know the USGC serves overseas as well and with about a year left in my enlistment I asked for an overseas posting. I asked for duty at Coast Guard Loran Station Marcus Island, one of the most remote places on earth, some 800 miles east of Iwo Jima. Marcus Island is about a ¾ mile coral reef on top of an extinct volcano. We had about 32 Coasties there and about the same number of Japanese Defense Forces on the other end of the atoll. Talk about a unique experience. The Japanese had a submarine refueling base there during WWII, and had bunkers built about five floors below the surface. It was shelled two times but never invaded. At any rate, we suffered through a 160-mph super typhoon and woke up the next morning with a Japanese WWII tank uncovered in front of our barracks. Wow!

The island was also a Japanese game preserve for the Arctic Tern. They wouldn't allow spraying because of the birds so the island had a huge fly population. We used to play softball against the Japanese twice a week and when we got hot both sides would throw their t-shirts off. At the end of the game we'd pick them up and it would look like a beehive of flies, absolutely covering our t-shirts as they soaked up our sweat. Oh, oh, one last thing from Marcus – our coral reef had an opening called "Shark Alley." I snorkeled in the lagoon many times and never saw a shark. But one morning when our cook and I were walking by Shark Alley we saw a shark in the lagoon. Then we saw another one and another one until we realized the lagoon was filled with thousands of blue sharks, average length five to six feet long. They were so stuffed in there that some were half out of the water. The cook threw them a steak and they weren't interested in the slightest. We had three dogs on the island and they were running over the backs of the sharks to no ill-effect. It turned out it was mating season for the sharks and they had gathered from hundreds of miles around – they were only interested in one thing. They were there for about a week and then one morning they were all gone. Wow!

Oh, I have so many stories from my time on Marcus Island. But... With about five months left in my term the Coast Guard urgently needed radiomen on Guam so I transferred.

Over the course of my time in Japan and Guam I became friends with many of the locals. I had to be the mailman on Marcus so I did three weeks temporary duty in the fleet mail center in Yokohama and made friends with one Japanese man in particular. We exchanged gifts and he invited me to his and his family's apartment in Tokyo. The Japanese have a custom where they leave their shoes outside their door. Well, I am a size 13 so my shoes stood out. Well, soon there were a dozen Japanese men visiting the party, and we watched a heavyweight fight from Vegas and they all stood up and saluted when the American National Anthem was performed. It was sung by Marvin Gaye and it was the best performance of the anthem I have ever seen. Those who know me from my readings, I can become very emotional and I certainly was that night, thanks to the warm welcome I had and that performance. I cried with joy, and I still do every time I hear the Marvin Gaye version of The Star Spangled Banner. He sang it again at the NBA All Star Game in 1983 – Google it – and see if you don't agree with me.

Enough of the Coast Guard, although I have to say it was my proudest four-and-a-half years in my life.

From remote spots to Manhattan. I was processed out of the CG in Governor's Island and I went to Manhattan and saw my first Broadway play. BOOM, that was it, I wasn't returning to Vermont of the Adirondacks. So I got a job at the American Stock Exchange in 1979 – when the Dow was, believe it or not, only 800! – and stayed there for 10 years. Then my girlfriend of many years, Meredith, inherited a Cape Cod on LBI. We lived there for a couple of years, and I got a job with The SandPaper and have been there ever since, but we liked older houses so in, oh, 1995 or 1996 – years go by so quickly don't they – we bought our current home in Tuckerton. We absolutely loved it, but now that it is 128 years old and needs repairs such as a new plumbing system and the removal of three huge trees that died from bark disease and need to be removed; we're starting to doubt our wisdom.

So, when did I become an Episcopalian? It started when I was at the Stock Exchange. The marvelous Trinity Church at the head of Wall Street was located on the above block and I started attending afternoon services there during lunch breaks. They were beautiful.

Plus my girlfriend at that time was the secretary for the priest who was in charge of Episcopal college chaplaincies across the country, serving at the Episcopal National Headquarters in NYC. And

we lived just a block away from the Episcopal General Theological Seminary in New York, which as I told people at one service had been the old farmstead of Clement Clarke Moore, the guy who not only wrote "The Night Before Christmas" but served as a Professor of Oriental and Greek Literature and Divinity and Biblical Learning at the seminary and donated the land for the seminary, which, by the way, our beloved Bright Obeng was a recent graduate. Thanks to her, I was able to picnic and play tennis many a time at the beautiful seminary.

Once again thanks to her, I was able to attend a Holiday season youth get-together in the YMCA of the Rockies in Estes Park, Colorado in 1983. The main speaker at that conference, along with a few late student arrivals, were landing at the Denver airport and needed to be picked up and driven to Estes Park, about 60 miles away. Well, a blizzard was approaching and nobody was willing to make the drive. So I, not officially associated with the conference, volunteered to drive a van to pick everybody up. After all, as I told you earlier, I was more than familiar with cold and snow.

By the time I got to Denver the storm was coming on strong. It was a hairy drive, that's for sure, with visibility of about 10 feet. The three or four kids were asleep in the back of the van but the keynote speaker was in front with me. He had flown in from the southern hemisphere and did not have a winter coat. I gave him mine – after all I had just gotten off the ski slopes and had about six layers of clothes on me. I had a great two-hour conversation with him while driving and the next day, after appropriate winter clothing had been provided for him, he gave my winter coat back to me offering much thanks.

Who was he? Bishop Desmond Tutu! A few months later there he was on the news because it was announced he had won the Nobel Peace Prize.

Whoa, I gave my coat to a Nobel Peace Prize. God, I feel so honored as well.

So when I moved to LBI, and then Tuckerton, I officially became an Episcopalian, and have remained so for 30 years, serving over the years as Junior Warden, Senior Warden and now, years later, once again a member of the Vestry. I am also a server at the altar, a reader, a member of the choir, a cook, at least once a year, for our community dinner, and the Clerk of the Vestry. I also run a Red Cross blood drive twice a year and even preached twice when there was a Morning Prayer service because a supply priest couldn't be found at the last moment.

I think you could all agree I've had an interesting life. Oh, there have been some bad spots as well. Meredith's son was/is a severe schizophrenic and was involved in two notorious murders. During the second one he cut his mother's stomach in half, which was very seriously threatening to her life because infection was a huge concern. Thank God for Hackensack Meridian's Jersey Shore University Medical Center's care. She was kept in a coma for two months before the situation was finally resolved.

At any rate, that's why Meredith and I never married – we worried the state of New Jersey would try to recoup all of the money the money spent on his time in psychiatric care (He's still in it) so we wanted to keep our bank accounts separate. But she is the love of my life and has been for 40 years, even if she is a agnostic.

Well, to conclude, put simply, I LOVE THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, I LOVE ALL OF ITS MEMBERS, AND I LOVE GOD THE FATHER, GOD THE SON, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT.

GOD IS GOOD ALL THE TIME; ALL THE TIME GOD IS GOOD!