

Robert Schweitzer

By Sophia Burrowes

In the early hours of May 4th 1939, a second child was added to the growing family of John and Helen Schweitzer. This little one was named Robert Edward Schweitzer. He was named Robert after his maternal grandfather, and Edward from his paternal grandfather. He was nicknamed Bob, and was the second of four children. The oldest child was Dolores (Dee), and his two younger sisters were Janice, and Marcia.

His father, John Schweitzer, was born, in 1912, in Frankfort, Indiana (IN). John grew up in Frankfort, but moved to Lafayette before he was sixteen. When John was sixteen, he quit school because the United States went into the Great Depression and he had to work to help support his family. Bob's mother, Helen, was born in 1911, on a farm in Wea, IN, just outside of Lafayette, IN.

As a toddler, Bob and his family had a pet goose, which would always follow Bob around. Sadly, the neighbor's dog chased the goose away and killed it. Bob's father always stated that he wanted to kill the neighbor's dog after the goose died. When he was old enough, Bob went to Highland Elementary School in Lafayette, Indiana.

One day, at the age of ten, while getting ready for school, he was told that he would be a range picker, a person who fetches golf balls for golfers. As he was leaving for school, his mother gave him a brown paper bag and Bob asked, "What's that?" and his mom answered, "Your lunch." He never had to take a lunch to school because he always walked home to have lunch. The bag contained a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and a cookie. Bob started golfing that same year and has played it for sixty-eight years.

When he was in ninth grade, he took an aptitude test to show what his interests were and what jobs he would suit him. He had always wanted to be an FBI Agent or work for the Secret Service, but he wasn't tall enough. When the test results came back, it said that he would probably have a job that helped others.

One after-school activity Bob participated in was singing. His choir sang for the PTA meetings and with his church's choir. The church choir sang every Sunday and all the singers received a small two by two inch envelope, with a

dime or quarter inside, as a “payment” for singing. One of the highlights, in choir, was his first solo. Since it was his first solo, Bob was so scared that he asked a friend to come up with him while he sang. His solo was an Irish piece called “Annie Lorry”.

A big influence on his musical education was Bob's father. His father was a trumpeter. Every day his father would practice in the bathroom. His father also passed on, to Bob, his love for Louis Armstrong and many other trumpet players. Since his father was such a big fan of trumpet players, he and Bob went to many concerts together. These concerts were performed under a big pavilion, at Indiana Beach, in Monticello. They attended many Louis Armstrong concerts, but the most memorable concert was the one where he was asked to go back to the dressing room with Louis. The concert began at eight in the evening, but Bob and his father arrived at six o'clock. Bob's father always came early because he wanted to be right in front of the band. During the band's break Louis came over to Bob and said, “You want to go back in the dressing rooms with us?” Bob looked at his dad, and said, “Sure”, so Bob, Louis and the band went into the dressing room. All of the members of the band poured some whiskey and talked. Bob sat on the drum cases till the break was over and then went back out again, at the end of the break.

Some other after school activities, for Bob, was wrestling, running, golf and football. His favorite was golfing. For one year Bob wrestled, but stopped because he did not like all the sweating that was involved. He also ran with a team all over the Midwest. His team competed in Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri. He ran whole marathons and half marathons for thirty-five years till he had to stop because of joint pain. Some sports that Bob had really wanted to do included basketball and football but he couldn't because he was too little. One year, Bob tried football but he would always get knocked down. He finally realized that he could never be a football player and resigned himself to watching the sport. Bob still enjoys watching these sports today.

On Christmas they could never open gifts till Aunt Ruth and Uncle Jim came over. Bob remembers waiting impatiently for them to finally arrive. Aunt Ruth and Uncle Jim lived in Anderson, IN and they would usually arrive by 9AM, which kept Bob and his siblings waiting many hours. One of the most special Christmases was the year when he got his first bicycle. That morning he raced

downstairs and saw, at the bottom of the stairs, his very first bicycle. Bob still believed in Santa Claus that year so he wondered how in the world Santa ever got that bike into the house.

When he was 19, his friend Johnny Tucker asked when he was going to the army. Bob responded, "I don't know. I will probably wait till I am drafted." In those days no one asked "*if you* were going to the army, but "*when*" you were going to the army. When a boy was drafted, he would get a letter in the mail that said, "You are drafted and must report to duty on X day." "His friend replied," Well, how about we go into the navy together? "Bob said, "Ok. " They chose a date and arranged a time to meet. On the arranged morning Bob decided not to go and told Johnny, "No, I am sorry but I don't like water. I am not going."

Johnny ended up on an aircraft carrier, and Bob joined the army. Bob had to catch a 2 a.m. train to go down to Missouri for training. After six months Bob returned home. He had signed up for six years so he had to attend meetings for the army. In the summer he would be gone for a couple of weeks at a time due to the army. After his first six years in the army a friend said to him," Have you ever thought about going to the army reserves? " Bob said "No, why would I? I have an honorable discharge." His friend replied, "Well, they are helpful because when you retire because you are given a retirement check." Bob went home and talked the idea over with his wife and decided to go into the army reserves. He had to sign up six years at a time. Eventually he signed up for another six, and another and another adding on to his first six years, twenty-four more years. Bob retired from his thirty years of service in 1997.

When he was twenty-one he decided to go to college. His degree was in vocal music and choral conducting from Indiana University. During his college years Bob participated in the college choir. The group was called The Singing Hoosiers. At the choir, Bob met his future wife Catha. At twenty-six, Bob married Catha on June 13th, 1965 at Irvington United Methodist Church Indianapolis, IN. While at the university, Bob was required to teach for eight weeks. He really enjoyed teaching and one day, after helping his father in the family business of plumbing and realtor, he told his father he wanted to teach. His father was almost heartbroken but Bob moved with his wife to Indianapolis.

When Bob moved to Indianapolis, he went to the Indianapolis Public Schools personnel office. Once he was in the office of a personnel man, Bob said, "I have a degree in vocal music and choral conducting and I am a licensed teacher. I would like to teach in one of your high schools." The personnel man laughed and said, "Mr. Schweitzer, we only have seven high schools and none of the music teachers will be leaving for a while, but can *you* teach sixth grade?" Bob answered, "Yes." He had no experience teaching but he did know that he had new baby and a wife, who was pregnant, to support. The personnel man gave him the address to his new job.

When Bob arrived at The Julien Coleman Elementary School, he went into the principal's office. While waiting, Bob observed was the wooden name card on the desk. Inscribed on it was "Powell" and on either side sat an eagle. Bob recognized that Mr. Powell was a retired colonel. When the principal came into the office, Bob reached out his hand and said, "Colonel Powell, I'm Sergeant Schweitzer." Colonel Powell responded and said, "Welcome, when can you start?"

Bob's first year was teaching a class of forty sixth graders. On the third day, after the beginning of school, Bob came home to his wife and said, "Oh my God, what have I done, what have I done?" It got better as the years went on. In Bob's fourth year in teaching, the principal said "I am minus one fifth grade teacher. " Everyone began looking at one another and looking down. Bob responded, "Sure! I'll do it." Bob wasn't sure about this change but after teaching the fifth graders he says that, "They were absolute dolls". Bob taught for four years.

Bob is currently residing in Lafayette, near his sister Marcia. Bob has a master's in music and has many "favorite" musicians. Some of his favorites are Louis Armstrong, Harry James, Mitsuko Uchida, and Arthur Rubinstein. Uncle Bob has encouraged my sister and me in our musical education and I am very grateful for his criticism and encouragement.