

Yes, that's right...my last name is Kirschenbaum-you see, when my father went into show business, we all changed our name to Kirschenbaum.

That was his joke of course So much of his humor was rooted in his family and the fertile soil that anchored those roots was here in these beautiful mountains-The Catskills.

Fred Kirschenbaum first took the stage at his grandfather's tiny Catskill mountain hotel called The Crystal Spring, in Youngsville,NY, when he was 15 years old. He was the self

appointed emcee for their Saturday night shows and once he felt the warmth of that spotlight, held the microphone in his hand and made 'em laugh, it was clear that show business was his destiny.

He attended NYU school of drama, where he met my mother Ethel, YES-they were FRED and ETHEL like the Mertzs'. They married, started a family, and Fred Kirschenbaum joined his father in the ladies' shoe business-which he hated. The spotlight continued to call to him and so he sold the store, and officially moved from shoe business to show business.

His first job was as social director-or
tumbler- in Spring Glenn, at the
Homowack Hotel. Irving Blickstein, the
owner of the Homowack, fell in love
with my father, and visa versa. He
entertained Irving's guests by day,
leading activities like taking guests on
a hike to a teepee on the hotel
grounds and making up stories about
the made up Homowacka tribe. At
night he was the emcee in the
showroom introducing other
entertainers, and honing his comedy
craft. He was at home on stage at
the Homowack, doing shtick with the
maitre'd in the nightclub, Ben Tabby.
They would plan to have the phone

ring in the middle of my father's act and he would shield his eyes from the spot light, look to the back corner of the night club where the maitre'd's stand was, and he would yell "Ben, if that is my mother, tell her I took a sweater".

Our family vacationed at the Homowack every year during the school winter break with the family of comedian, Dick Lord. We learned to ski, ice skate, swim, bowl, play miniature golf, and of course we kids got to stay up late and watch the shows in the night club. With Shirley Temples in one hand, and wooden knockers with colored knobs on the end in the other hand, my brother and I watched audiences fall in love with our father. It was always so interesting to me that nobody ever used the knockers

when my father was on stage- they were so busy roaring with laughter they forgot all about the knockers.

Freddie Roman's jokes were born from the familiar flavors of the Borscht Belt. For example-there's the one about the lady who pulled Mr. Blickstein aside in the hotel lobby to complain- "Irving, the food tonight was poison....and such small portions".

As my father's career started gaining traction, and he began getting bookings at other hotels, Irving Blickstein told him that he could take the stage at the Homowack any time he wanted. My father's comedy career in the Catskills began to take off. The mountains were his stomping ground. The Concord, Kutchers, Stevensville, Grossingers, Pines, Nevele, Browns...the

bungalow colonies-“....Sometimes 3 shows in one night. First, the Imperial Room at the Concord on a Saturday night, then the late show at Browns, and a bungalow colony for a late late show, before he drove home to us in New City, NY where so many of the Catskill comedians, and some of our family’s closest friends called home-Morty Gunty, Myron Cohen, Dick Lord, Vick Arnell-were my father’s brothers in comedy. And of course Dick Capri and Mal Z. Lawrence who were his brothers in the show he conceived and produced. Catskills on Broadway ran for 18 months at the Lunt Fontaine Theater, and then toured around the country, and the world after that. This show was my father’s love letter to these mountains. He was so proud of where he came from and never batted an eye when someone referred to him as a “Catskills

comic". He often talked about the Catskills audiences being the toughest. He would say, If you could "kill" at the Concord, you could make it anywhere. There was no audience harder to make laugh than a bunch of Jews who had just eaten their third all you can eat meal of the day, and were looking forward to, and planning their fourth, in the coffee shop, right after the show!

My father's career took him to Broadway, Las Vegas and Atlantic City, He became dean of the NY Friars Club for 25 years. He toured with Cher, Dolly Parton, Tom Jones, Steve and Edie, opened for Frank Sinatra, performed for 4 Presidents, made movies and appeared on television, and worked all over the world. But when he took the stage in the mountains, he was in

front of his favorite audiences. He was home.

One last bit about Catskills on Broadway-When my father brought the idea of the show to a group of producers, one producer said he loved the idea of the show, but didn't want the word "Catskills" in it- too Jewish for Broadway, he said. My father stood firm and said he would walk away from the show if the name was changed. For my father, it was the whole point of the show- the legacy of the comedy that these mountains gave birth to, was the point. And even as he was watching the hotels disappear, he knew that the comedy could and already had moved beyond the physical stages where it was born .This humor, steeped in Jewish culture, characterized by the sharp timing, self

deprecation, and family friendly storytelling, had already migrated to sit com television, movies like Dirty Dancing and Sweet Loraine, and stand-up clubs across the country. Freddie Roman wanted to stamp this brand of comedy....it's rhythm, it's sensibilities, and it's hilarity with it's true moniker-Catskills comedy...and bring it to Broadway. And he did.

I want to thank you Marissa for inviting me to be with you today and for your dedication to this incredible project that will indelibly mark the sites of these hotels that were such a rich part of the history of American Jewish life. I could not be more honored on behalf of the proudest son of the Borscht Belt, the beloved comedy legend Freddie

Roman, and our entire family, for my father
to be included on this marker. Thank you!