

Hello, everyone. First, I'd like to thank the Borscht Belt Historical Marker Project for all of their important and enriching efforts to remember and celebrate this era of the Catskills' history. I'd like to especially thank Marisa Scheinfeld and Isaac Jeffreys for allowing me the opportunity to honor and share with you the personal connection my family has to this era and this place, and I thank all of you for attending and supporting this meaningful endeavor.

These dedication ceremonies are of great value to the ongoing conversation of the history of our country. I say ongoing because the timeline of history never stops, and often, as we see even now, history repeats itself when we do not truly listen and learn from that conversation. My family, a Jewish family, took ownership of what would become the White Roe Lake Hotel back in 1919. This was the year my grandfather, John Weiner, was born, the youngest of three brothers. His elder brothers were Julius and Mack, their parents and new owners of the modest lodge were Meyer and Sarah. Meyer bought 750 acres on White Roe Mountain to "create a summer place for young Jewish people". The lodge began humbly, with 10 rooms and then some tents added later. Previous to this auspicious year, the lodge did not allow Hebrews or Consumptives as guests. My uncle Meyer, named after my great grandfather, has in his possession an advertisement from the time stating as much.

In 1929, the Weiner family built a casino overlooking White Roe Lake which included a night club, a recreation hall and an auditorium. Now, up to 400 guests were able to enjoy lake activities and sports such as tennis and baseball. There was live music courtesy of the house band, plays and musicals performed in the auditorium, and the hotel attracted performers that were or would become rather famous, such as Henny Youngman, Betty Garrett, and Danny Kaye. Danny started his career at White Roe and was actually a tummler, entertaining guests throughout the day. Betty Garrett became the girlfriend of my grandfather, John, which I'm certain, was the highlight of HER career. The Weiners also befriended the Haas Family, owners of the Edgewood Inn, and the Siegel family, owners of the department store on Main Street. Our three families are still close to this day.

John was drafted into WWII in 1941, achieving the rank of Captain and serving in the European theater. After the war he joined his mother and brothers at the hotel. Meyer died in 1946. In 1948, John met and married Lynne Lehrman. Lynne was the daughter of Philip Lehrman, a psychoanalyst who was analyzed by Sigmund Freud in order to finish his degree. John and Lynne worked the front desk, and Lynne actually wrote some of the songs and skits for the performers at the hotel. The Weiners also owned two hotels in Miami Beach during the 1950's, the Plymouth and the Adams. Sarah died in 1956, and, unfortunately, all three hotels went out of business by the summer of 1958. More affordable plane tickets to European destinations proved to be the death knell of this era we have collected together to remember.

After the hotels folded, John and Lynne reinvented themselves. He became a beloved History and English teacher for 25 years at Edgemont High School in Westchester, NY. Lynne was an editor for various publications and was very active in political campaigns. They both were very prominent, loving people in their community and in my life. I could go on and on about all they have done for me, all they have taught me, and how much they have influenced and shaped me. This dedication is as much for my grandfather as it is for the Borscht Belt. He endured the horrors of war; overcame the bankruptcy of three hotels; became a celebrated educator; a father of three, Meyer, Erica (my mother) and Sara; a wonderful grandfather to me and great grandfather to my older son, Dakota; a loving husband for 65 years; a caring and contributing member of his community. For example, John worked with Grace Church for a few years late in his retirement to raise over 180,000 dollars for the homeless.

I say all this to illustrate the love and strength and resilience of my family, but particularly of my grandfather. John died in 2013 about a month before the birth of my younger son, Dane. My wife, Sylvia, and I have joked that Dane has been inhabited by my grandfather's spirit, as Dane shares many traits with my grandfather. Lynne passed about a year later. Though my grandparents are no longer with us, their impact on our lives, our hearts and minds still resonates. Likewise, the era of the Catskill resorts and hotels still resonates, still speaks of the contributions of Jewish families and establishments. Today, we are hearing the term Anti Semitism being strewn about. Though the catalyst may be different today, prejudice is always the same. We need to continue to contribute to this conversation of our history, and hope that more people will listen and learn from it. Thank you so much for being here, and thank you again to the Marker project and Marisa and Isaac for making this all happen!

Dennis Hawkins, grandson of John Weiner, White Roe
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