

## **Roger Liss , Legacy Society Member Life Story**

It was 1969 and Roger Liss struggled, weary, wet and wounded, hidden in a batch of hollow reeds for 36 hours, somewhere in the treacherous Mekong River Delta teeming with heavily armed Viet Cong. He used the hollow reeds to breathe while remaining hidden in the river. As the Vietnam War raged on, he was one of only two survivors from a helicopter shot down with 15 soldiers aboard. Roger was exhausted and lost, in pain and struggling to survive, but he recalls praying to G-D during those 36 wet, desperate hours, that he was determined: "If I survive, it is G-d's will, and therefore, I should do the best I can with the rest of my life".

Roger's life began 78 years ago in the Bronx where he completed High school at age 16, finishing 3 years of study in 2 years in Junior High, while playing basketball, baseball and soccer. He was very bright, athletic and so tall and thin that they called him "the Stick" at Michigan State, the next stop on his life journey. He graduated Michigan State University with honors and a Bachelor of Science degree in Social Science. To finance college, Roger worked in jobs at the cafeteria, field house, and the National Foundation of Science. There Roger initiated a research project with a doctor in the Honors College, for "kinesthetic figural after-effect" which was of utmost importance for astronauts, and especially for Astronaut Gordon Cooper at that time. Roger wrote a very useful paper on hand control in flight for the National Science Foundation. Though he slept only 4 hours a night and worked 40 hours a week, Roger carried a full load of Honors College classes and research labs and still graduated Michigan State with Honors. Roger also made time to court and marry. A marriage that prevailed 33 years and would produce three daughters, all raised in the Jewish faith, and, all completing Bat Mitzvahs and university advanced degrees. They are all professionals now, married, and reside in various cities around the USA, and have also added the gift of seven grandchildren to the family.

After Michigan State, Roger was accepted for graduate study at Purdue University, where he completed a Masters degree in clinical psychology. Roger had been in ROTC since 1959, and was on Army deferment to complete his PhD. He wrote his Masters Thesis on "Officer Selection", supporting research that certain personalities make better officers. He was permitted to use actual new officers as subjects. After Roger received his Master of Science degree, in 1965, the Army was so impressed that they cancelled his deferment, and sent him to the Federal Building in Pittsburgh. He was a 2nd Lieutenant in charge of the Mental Health Entrance and Examining section.

Promoted to Captain after only 22 months by an act of Congress, Roger had 2 months left in his service obligation, and with the highest ratings on his efficiency report, he was given his choice of assignment: Seoul, South Korea or Bangkok, Thailand, as an Intelligence Officer. He chose Thailand.

Thailand was full of adventure. Roger's wife was 3 months pregnant. The Royal Thai Family befriended them and invited them to dine with them and to join them at sailing competitions and other events.

Assigned to the Joint U.S. Military Advisory Group, (JUSMAG), Roger had attained a high security clearance as well as a position of trust and confidence from his commanding and other

high level officers. He was assigned next to SEATO Headquarters, as a Top Secret Control Officer, by CINCPAC Admiral John McCain, Sr. (the late Senator John McCain's father).

In August 1969 Roger had to brief President Nixon.....Roger suggested that Nixon unleash U.S. Forces or sue for peace, which Nixon did 3 years later.

After 2 years in Thailand and a total of 4 years of Active Army duty, Roger's next assignment was to be in Saigon, but at 26 years of age with an M.S. in psychology and his wife having miscarried their 2nd child, Roger headed back to America.

Back in the States, he quickly found his niche as a “company doctor” with Continental Can, Royal Typewriter, Litton Industries, and Gallo Winery. Rising quickly through the positions, until Gallo wanted him to relocate to Modesto, California and spend 20 days a month traveling, Roger looked elsewhere..... Within 9 months, Roger was Vice President of the National Merchandising Company. Later work included General Manager of Busy Beaver Home Improvement, and eventually his own business.

Roger completed 8 years in the Army reserves, 4 years active duty, secured a Bachelors degree, a Masters degree, and raised 3 Jewish daughters. His education, distinguished service, varied interests, growing family and successful career spanning the late 1960's to the 2000's, took Roger from the Bronx, New York to Michigan, to Indiana, Pittsburgh, PA., Bangkok, Thailand, New Jersey, Connecticut, then Monroeville, PA. ....eventually landing here in the South Hills.

In 1997, Roger remarried and moved to the South Hills. He married Jan Davidson, who, with Rabbi Mahler's teaching and guidance, gave Roger a Surprise Wedding Gift-- her conversion to Judaism. Jan, a Jew by choice, and 10 years younger than Roger, worked for 30 years for the State of Pennsylvania, and rose to become a Director with the Department of Welfare.

Roger started his own company in 1979, and was very successful in the music memorabilia, advertising and vending machine businesses. He had been active in Temple David in Monroeville for 23 years, from 1976 to 1999, building the Temple's Sukkah there every year.

Once settled in the South Hills, Roger and Jan joined Temple Emanuel. They were quietly members of Temple Emanuel for over 10 years, often attending services, but not particularly active. Then, about 10 years ago, during the High Holidays, Roger was entering the Temple vestibule and bent down to pick up a stray paper on the floor. It was Bob Koenig's introductory brochure about TERMS, Temple Emanuel Retirees in Mitzvah Service! It immediately appealed to Roger. Now he had a reason to use his retirement time to actively fulfill his Vietnam pledge to G-D!

Roger has since served on Temple's Finance Committee, the House Grounds Committee, where he also designed an indoor and an outdoor Sukkah, was active as an ECDC volunteer and currently co-chairs the TERMS Committee. Roger was instrumental in saving the annual Bagel Brunch from extinction, and responsible for booking the Washington Wild Things mascot and the Pittsburgh Pirates Parrot, among many other special delights, drawing more families to the event each year.

Both Roger and Jan are now retired and living in South Park. Jan spends much of her time caring for two of her youngest grandchildren in Dormont, at least 3 days a week, and Roger is very active with Temple, still helping with the Sukkah, among other activities, and still enjoying all Sports, having spent 30 years as a High School Soccer Referee. Jan has a special passion for the island of St. Thomas's elegant, original designer G&H Jewelry....requiring frequent cruises to St. Thomas, Virgin Islands. You may have had the pleasure of a glance at some of these beautiful works of art adorning Jan. On one such cruise, during Passover, Roger served as the ship's Rabbi and presided over the Cruise Seder, continuing to fulfill his pledge to G-D!

Remaining involved and leaving a Legacy gift to Temple Emanuel further defines Roger's other passion, his love for, and focus on the future of Judaism. It also bolsters his long ago, unforgotten promise to G-D!

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