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Autobiographical Profile

Gainesville, Florida

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My own life over the past fifty years has been relatively calm, dull and uneventful compared to my twin brother's, who lived a memorable life under extraordinary circumstances. (See my tribute to my brother Melvin, "In Memory of a Tremendous Brother" at www.astro.ufl.edu/~cohen/WHEATLEY/melvin.html.) Still, curiosity may prompt some to read this brief account of my past fifty years.

The Long Island Years

In the fall of 1950 the Cohen family moved from the upper Bronx into the newest section of the Roslyn Country Club, the so-called "S-Section" where I learned all streets started with the letter "S." My brother and I were ten and I was overjoyed to leave the cluttered, concrete city for the refreshing smells of green "country life." I still remember my father, who was an architect, pacing off the distance from the Long Island railroad tracks to the location of our still unbuilt house. Meanwhile, the rest of us—my mother, fraternal twin and two younger brothers, Allan and Harvey—picked berries from among the bushes that grew on and near our future home site. My father was proud his plot stood at the peak of a small hill so water would flow away in times of heavy rain. Then, the Albertson Station was an inconsequential stop on the rail line and the East Williston School District had but one school, North Side. After entering fifth grade, Melvin and I, still bicycle newbies, would sometimes nervously bike down Roslyn Road to school.

Upon completion of our district's new school

about a year later, Melvin, I and many other classmates moved into the sixth grade of I.U. Willets Road School leaving friends behind. We would not rejoin until we all migrated to the Mineola High School after eighth grade graduation. But, it was at Willets Road that my life's course became set.

Some may remember that I became fascinated with astronomy as early as the seventh grade at Willets Road School when we began to study star patterns with our science teacher, Mrs. Smith. Then, one night, I was amazed to see the stars of Orion from my bedroom window on Shadetree Lane. With Eliot Simon, I began making monthly trips to the Hayden Planetarium in Manhattan. Afterwards, perhaps in 1954, Eliot's parents bought him a large but inexpensive, crude *reflecting telescope* that contained a concave, six-inch diameter mirror in a heavy cardboard tube more than six feet long! Since the telescope had no tripod, we leaned the bulky tube out his upstairs bedroom window so we could view a setting crescent Moon. I had never looked through a telescope before. Although the image was shaky and blurry, the view blew my mind. I was hooked forever. (My parents later bought me the same telescope which I mounted on wobbly pipe fittings.)

Meanwhile, my interests did not yet entirely remain with science. Trying to emulate my twin who was more athletic, I gained a position on the Willets Road soccer team. (I was really quite fast and agile in those days!) In fact, Eliot and I sometimes competed against Mel and Steve Perlin in touch football, often playing in Steve's backyard. Would you

believe that speed and agility (Eliot and I) sometimes won out over strength and brute force (Mel and Steve)? Sadly, I am this group's only surviving member. Still, this allows me to relate this tale without contradiction. (However, I'm sure Mel would deny this story in his usual, loud voice!)

Then, during soccer practice, Jeff Philipson and I violently collided. This accident badly injured my right knee and, in the spring of 1954, I was hospitalized for treatment. (Jeff, by the way, doesn't recall this episode.) Afterwards I wore a long leg cast luckily removed just before eighth grade graduation. Still, gym teachers suggested I try out for track since I was pretty fast. Nevertheless, one day my knee collapsed on the finish line of a race. We all decided running track might be a bad idea. So, this incident helped end my "sports career" and solidified my growing interest in science and photography. (Some may remember I was a photography editor of the Wheatley student newspaper and Melvin was a sports editor.)

While at Mineola High School I helped Steve Greenberg and others begin construction of a *cyclotron* but my interest faded after we moved to Wheatley after our new high school was completed. Still I tried to stay diversified and took time out to become an "actor," landing a lead in our new high school's first play. I assume this is the same play that Bobbie remembers directing with Janet Hart. I played a "father role" replicating a similar role (Professor McIntyre) I had in the eighth grade at Willets Road School (Auranai Rouverol's *Growing Pains*). Is this why I was typed "domestic" in the Willets Road graduating class stats? I also tried my hand at carpentry and with Eddie Brown built Wheatley's National Honor Society's tall, wooden logo with removable sections for scholarship, leadership, service, and character.

The University Years

Still, my interest in astronomy never waned.

So, after graduating from Wheatley in 1958, I left New York for the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, which had a long established undergraduate and graduate program in astronomy. So did Bobbie Kaufman, but I'm sure not to study astronomy. We sometimes met in the Michigan Union where we sometimes discussed her new love life . . . not me but a dental student at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Bobbie eventually left Michigan to marry him leaving me behind. Though I was happy for the new couple, I came to miss our occasional meetings.

In the fall of my senior year at Michigan, I met another senior, my future wife (on a blind date), still my one and only. Six weeks later we decided to marry, which we did in the summer of 1962 after we both graduated from Michigan. I was awarded a bachelor's degree in astronomy with minors in physics and math, she with a major in history and a minor in chemistry. After a short honeymoon we moved to Bloomington, Indiana. Here I intended to pursue master's and doctoral degrees in astronomy in the Department of Astronomy at Indiana University. Meanwhile, Marian enrolled in I.U.'s education college to get a master's degree in secondary education.

During the following years, after receiving her graduate degree, Marian taught social studies and chemistry in a small town (Spencer) about 17 miles from Bloomington while I continued my graduate work. After completing my master's degree in 1964, we lived in Flagstaff, Arizona for several short periods. Here I did both public outreach and research at Lowell Observatory with additional observing time at Kitt Peak National Observatory west of Tucson. Astronomers discovered Pluto at Lowell in 1930 and I had the opportunity to (very carefully) hold the large glass discovery plates. Research involved variability of the Sun's light, and photometric and spectroscopic studies of star clusters and binary stars. While at Indiana, I also did pioneering work in using high speed digital computers for astronomical

data reduction and analysis.

Settling in Gainesville

After completing my Ph.D. degree in December 1967, we left Indiana in early January 1968 and quickly moved to Gainesville, Florida. Of course I did not come to retire but to become a faculty member at the University of Florida. The move was quick because Marian was nine months pregnant with our first child, a baby girl. Most of my Indiana astronomy graduate school colleagues figured we would all stay at our first positions for only a few years and move on. We were all wrong. Jobs became scarce as the Apollo era ended and our few years stretched into decades. And so both my children are native-born Floridians. (A son followed in 1971.)

Gainesville proved to be an ideal family city with major centers for education, science and medicine. Although only a small town in North Central Florida when we first arrived, this university community grew into a much larger city with a university student population of 50,000, a community college of 15,000, and home to one of the Southeast's large medical centers (Shands at UF). Unlike South Florida, which is flat, open and barely above sea level, our area is more elevated and treed. Landscapes consist of karst (limestone dominated) topography with rolling hills, lush pastures and woodland forests dotted with lakes, winding rivers and the world's largest number of springs. Both distinct seasons with mild winters, a large cultural base including extensive higher education facilities, superb museums of natural history and art, and excellent medical care, have made Gainesville attractive for both new families and those seeking retirement. (Yes, most North Florida residents usually retire to North Florida.)

Note: *Cities Ranked and Rated 2007* ranked the Gainesville metro area as the #1 place to live in. And *National Geographic Adventure 2007* also ranked Gainesville as one of the

“best places to live and play.”

Interestingly, upon telling new acquaintances that we live in Florida, most assume we have recently come here to retire though we have now been Floridians for over forty years!

Offspring

Both of our children are now married with children of their own. Our daughter, Heidi, and her husband, Michael, have two sons (ages four and nearly one). They reside in Altoona, an old railroad town in western Pennsylvania about one hour drive from Penn State. Altoona contains a famous section of track, the Horseshoe Curve, used to raise trains high enough to cross the Allegheny Ridge to the west. (The city's double-A minor league baseball team is also called the Altoona Curve.) Here Michael is a cantor and spiritual leader at a conservative synagogue (Agudath Achim Congregation). In his spare time, Michael jogs and has run 30 marathons! Heidi has worked and has masters degrees in early childhood intervention and pediatric occupational therapy. However, she now devotes most of her time to her children, an infant boy and a very active four-year old son.

Our son, Andrew, his wife, Sandy (collectively called “Sandrew”), and their six-year-old son and 2-1/2 year old daughter, live in Alexandria, Virginia on the Western bank of the Potomac and approximately 6 miles south of downtown Washington, D.C.. Sandy, previously an Assistive Technology Specialist for Fairfax County Public Schools, now devotes time to her hobby doing photography, stationary and greeting cards (Sentiments by Sandy). With bachelors and masters degrees in journalism, political science and communications, Andrew has worked many years as an Internet consultant and project director for companies that provide business strategies, online communications and technical and creative expertise to organizations. He presently steers and advises clients on a range of projects

including Internet strategy, user experience and design and technology implementation at Forum One Communications.

The Professor and the Travel Agent

After both of our young children were in school, my wife had a variety of part time jobs and considered going back to teaching. However, Marian's situation changed and she became a travel agent in August 1980, a career she has expertly worked in for nearly thirty years. Marian now operates as an independent travel representative for a local travel agency (Continental Capers Travel). Her occupation in this field would later become relevant to my own work if you should care to read further. (See "Our Unique Specialty Tours Below.")

While at the University of Florida I taught graduate courses in my field including basic astronomy and science to more than 15,000 students. I also helped pioneer the use of multimedia for teaching astronomy at the University of Florida and developed, elaborate, sophisticated and lively "computer presentations" for classes and public talks. During this time my research interests spanned a variety of projects including lunar and asteroid occultations, eclipses, calendars, and additional work on eclipsing binaries and star clusters. During the 1980s I was also the first to test a prototype of a new Air Force ground-based electro-optical deep-space surveillance system (GEODSS) for the detection of asteroids and comets.

During the mid-1980s I also became a consultant to Meade Instruments Corp., one of the world's largest manufacturers and distributors of amateur telescopes. Later, in 1986, I took a temporary leave of absence from my university to become Meade's southeast regional sales manager. I frequently traveled throughout the Southeast giving sales demos, training seminars and public shows at camera outlets, hobby stores, and other establishments.

After returning to the University of Florida, I helped establish the Alachua Astronomy Club, Inc. (AAC), now one of the more active astronomy clubs in our state. With this organization, I later worked with Elizabeth Indianos, a Tarpon Springs artist, to develop and establish the "Gainesville Solar Walk." This linear scale model of the Solar System with large sculptures for planets and Sun stretches for nearly a mile along a busy Gainesville avenue. Considered one of Gainesville's most important public art works, we are currently developing additional components for this unique project.

In addition, with the artist and the astronomy club, I helped conceptualize and develop a unique, astronomical architectural theme for the lobby of a major, local movie theater. This theme consists of huge, fifty-foot long, eleven-foot high sky murals ("super murals") hanging over the concession stand depicting various constellations on the sky.

Our Unique Specialty Tours

Beginning in 1998, my wife and I started an unusual collaboration, she being a travel consultant and I an astronomer. We began to arrange and lead tours to singular astronomical events, especially trips to see total eclipses of the Sun. It was and still is a very good combination. My wife does the travel arrangements and booking details while I help plan the trips including the scientific details and production of our web site. Consequently, we now design our own specialty tours and escort small groups to various global locations.

Past tours have included a Caribbean eclipse voyage (1998), an exciting African eclipse Sun safari (2001), an extensive Australian eclipse tour (2002), a luxury eclipse cruise to the exotic South Pacific (2005), and an eclipse journey to ancient Egypt (2006). In 2004 we did a unique tour to Italy and Greece including Crete to witness a "solar transit of Venus," an event never before seen by anyone now alive.

(The event will repeat in 2012, never to be seen again until the 22nd century.) We also conducted a specialized, intimate and very unusual tour to see the astronomy, archaeology and geology of Arizona in 2005.

Currently we are planning an exciting, luxury tour to mysterious China to see the longest total solar eclipse of the 21st century (July 2009). See our web site (www.astroadventures.net/) for details about this latest tour. Justifying why one should experience at least one solar eclipse during your life is almost impossible to explain to someone who has never seen this extraordinary event! (See, for example, "Why See a Total Eclipse of the Sun?" at www.astroadventures.net/why_go.html)

Retirement?

Although now retired from teaching (since 2003), I remain an emeritus professor in UF's Department of Astronomy and still devote considerable time to our local astronomy club including further enhancements to the Solar Walk, and to future nature and astronomically oriented adventure tours. In addition, our days (and nights) are filled with local cultural events and visits to grandchildren, Melvin's

wife in Pembroke Pines, and to my younger brothers who have now moved to South Florida (Port St. Lucie).

I had hoped that Melvin and my other brothers and I would spend our remaining years together in Florida. Sadly, I lost my twin brother due to the dreadful consequences of polycystic kidney disease (PKD) in July 2006. In the fall of that year, members of our families participated in PKD's annual walk in Palm Beach, Florida to raise funds for this common but little known and devastating hereditary illness. Of course, I still visit my twin at his resting place. And, I carefully listen for his loud voice, still kidding me as he always did. Take a moment and listen too. I'm sure you too can still hear his loud, joking voice.

My wife and I have recently downsized to a new house in an area near but outside the hustle and noise of Gainesville where skies are darker and more open. (Come visit us.) Taking a cue from my father, our house resides on the "highest point" of our still almost flat lot.

And, if our relatively good health continues, I may even build my own observatory! ☿