

One of my mentors, Coach Jack Daniels titled his auto biography, “Luck of the draw”. He talks about how there is an aspect of luck in all success stories.

I too have been very lucky.

Lucky to meet Dave Marsh at that Job Fair in Detroit.

Lucky to work in Ridgewood.

Lucky to have Carl Albano, a street smart guy from Mt Vernon be my teaching mentor and supervisor for many years. This country boy from Western Pennsylvania needed some “citifying”. I learned how to look worldly and wise kids in the eye and let them know I meant business.

Lucky to have an award winning track writer, Paul Schwartz, follow my career with his wonderful correspondence in the Record.

Lucky again that another street kid from Staten Island came to work at Ridgewood High School in 1979.

But my Luckiest day was that day Carolyn O’Brien came out for track in the Spring of 1987!

Sure I brought Track and Field experience, knowledge and passion to my Ridgewood Job. I was motivated to coach and had great energy to expend perusing it. I discovered that I liked working with teenagers. And I am the kind of guy that enjoys working! But I am convinced that if I had ended where I was headed before meeting Dave Marsh in April of 1971. I would be little known outside of some small Pennsylvania town that was my probable destiny.

But I landed in Ridgewood and there are not a lot of places in the United States that would have supported and encouraged the kind of coaching adventure that I have had!

Ridgewood students have this great combination of energy and confidence that make them exciting to coach. They have, as Dave Vanderbush once said to me, “a sense of adventure”. Ridgewood kids are “interested and interesting.” Interested in the world around them and interesting to teach and coach. Tell Ridgewood kids that you are going to throw them in a van, run in the cold rain on a track in Philadelphia, and then get up the next morning early and run the “Rocky Stairs” at the Philadelphia Museum of Art; their eyes light up. I have splashed in the Pacific Ocean with a relay that won the national championship; I have gazed at Pikes Peak in Colorado with Georgetown All American Jen McDermott; I have hiked in the mountains of Eastern Washington State with 5 time Dartmouth All American Jenna Rogers; I have swam in cold Vermont lakes and camped in the hay field on our farm West of Pittsburgh with the cross country team. I have traveled to 13 states, driven the mini bus countless miles, and slept many nights away from home. We have always had laughter and lots excitement on our team. But you know: When the starter called the Girls to their marks those eyes turned to determination and when the gun went off look out! The Ridgewood Girls were in town and everybody knew it!

Quick story: I could tell many but this is one of my favorites. Billy Joel's "an Innocent Man" album had just come out and one of the girls was playing the cassette tape in the van as we were returning from a meet. The song "UpTown Girls" played thru and as the song was concluding I heard one of the girls call out: "What is an Uptown Girl?" Then Senior Captain Anja Kannengieser said without a hint of irony: "We are UpTown Girls!" I got to coach the Uptown Girls for 44 years! How lucky am I!

While I am thankful to many I want to single out three for reasons that will be obvious.

In 2010 I felt I was losing my enthusiasm. My distance team was not the top in North Jersey and worse I felt I was going thru the motions of coaching. I was starting to wonder if my time had passed. I had known Steve Opremcak for many years as an opponent at Indian Hills. But he became available and Ridgewood quickly hired him for our coaching staff. Steve is a Track Geek to the Max. He fires me up every day, brings me the latest research to read, and tells me about the best clinics to attend. With him on staff I felt there was a real attitude shift in everything that we did. And we started to win again!

I also want to thank Josh Saladino. As the Boys coach for the last 14 years of my career Josh helped my ending be a great one. Josh had a great deal to do with our movement to coaching by events rather than by gender which is the college model for Track and Field and is showing great results for our current program. Josh would tease me about being an old General from the 1840's, but he really helped me keep up with the new ways. He brings excitement every day to practice and competition.

One more person to thank. The most important one. Mike Glenn was hired as a guidance counselor at Ridgewood in 1979. Looking back, I have always felt that there was a distinct change in the trajectory of my coaching career at that point. I wasn't bad before that but all the influences and collaborations that I have had with Mike over the years were critical to much of my success. He is one of those rare charismatic individuals and fortunately for our sport Mike is a Trackie. He ran at Xaverian High School in Brooklyn and at Iona College in New Rochelle. He had a distinguished coaching career at Paramus Catholic and then for many years at Ridgewood. He has had a profound influence on the Ridgewood Track and Field and Cross Country program over the years. Thank you Mike Glynn. I feel very lucky to count you as a friend.

And Finally Thanks to the Committee and all that are here: Thank You! Thank You!

Hall Of Fame Acceptance – October 22, 2016
Jacob Brown