

The following is a brief history of
the lives of

Robert & Mary Lyons

It's a collection of stories gathered
from children and grandchildren.

As everyone remembers things in their
own way, the facts may not be exactly
accurate. Keep this in mind while
you are reading.

Robert Henry Lyons Sr. was born February 10th, 1883, at 3 P.M., the eighth child of Katherine Shanley (30 years old) and Thomas Lyons (38 years old) at 189 Walworth St., Brooklyn. Both parents were born in Ireland. His father was a hatter. He had 4 sisters and 2 brothers (1 baby died)

Mary Finnerty was born February 2nd, 1886 of Margaret Gavin and Rodger Finnerty at 34 Stevenson St., Glasgow, Scotland. Her parents were married June 19th, 1874 in Bridgeton District, Scotland. Her father was a mason. she had 2 sisters and 3 brothers.

Robert and Mary were married in St. Patrick's R. C. Church, Kent Ave. & Willoughby St., Brooklyn. The date on the marriage certificate from the church reads July 20th, 1904; the City of New York issued their marriage license on July 21st, 1904. However Mary & Robert always celebrated June 20th as their anniversary. Mary was 18 and Robert was 21.

Mary & Robert (known as Robo) lived in Brooklyn - they had 6 children; Catherine Elizabeth, Thomas Francis, Margaret Anna, Robert Henry Jr., Richard Joseph and Harold James.

Mary & Robb lived in Brooklyn with their 5 children. Robb worked as a motorman on the trolley and then later opened a saloon. The saloon was located near the Lucky Strike Tobacco Factory. They sponsored outings to Coney Island and had annual picnics. Mary had to do all the cooking for those outings (mostly corned beef) and Robb's sisters who worked at the hat factory helped. There was also an annual Ball at which all the ladies really dressed in ball gowns and Mary & Robb always led the Grand March. I still have a tortoise shell comb with rhinestones that Mary wore in her hair for these special occasions.

They moved to Brookhaven, Long Island in 1919 by horse and wagon - being an overnight trip they had to sleep in the wagon. They bought a house and farm on Robinson Blvd. from Chester A. Arthur. Mary didn't move to Brookhaven right away; she came later when Robb and the older children had everything settled. Catherine & Tom went to school in Brooklyn and the other children went to the one room school house on Fireplace Neck Road in Brookhaven. Mary, Robb and the children went to Mary Immaculate A. C. Church on Brown's Lane in Bellport and many a Sunday Mary cooked dinner for the priests as there wasn't any rectory there at the time. Robb build around the farm house to make it a big 9 room house; 7 bedrooms, 2 baths (later), a huge living-dining room, kitchen and a very large sun porch. There wasn't any electricity or plumbing so they had an out-house, a gasoline pump for water, and a crystal radio. Jim Craven Sr. closed in the front porch with double glass windows that he got from Loser's Department Store (a prominent store of that era) where he worked. Robb raised chickens, vegetables and pigs and had a road-side stand out in front of the house. He bought a horse from someone in Yaphank and everytime the horse had a chance he would go back home to Yaphank and Robb would have to go after him and bring him back. In February, 1929 Mary's last son was born (Harold) and that previous October they had their second grandchild Margaret (Bubbles). Mary was 43 and Robb was 46. Arthur Waldron and Frank Craven, sons-in-law really celebrated the night Harold was born; they went into the cellar and drank up all the homemade wine, got drunk and ended up putting ice cream in the wine! ugh!!

In the early days of living in Brookhaven, Robb worked for the Washington Estates (later known as the Washington Lodge and now is presently the Bay Community School). Mr. Washington had a small zoo of exotic animals. He also worked for Romeo Contractors of Patchogue building the Montauk Highway, formerly known as Robinson Blvd., that went in front of the house. Robb had a cord wood business and had to go all the way to Shelter Island for his wood, which in those days was quite a trip. His fields in the back were stacked with rows and rows of wood cut by a power saw that was run from an old truck. No one was allowed at that end of the property when the saw was running. The wood was stacked by his sons in 8'x4'x4' rows (a cord of wood). Many batches of kittens lived in those wood piles. For every cord of wood he sold he would give a barrel of kindling.

About 1925, Robb started an ice business (Bellport Hygiene Ice) and merged with Eugene Hulse in 1930. Gene Hulse also owned the Bellport Sanitary Laundry. Robb bought back Gene's share of the ice business a few years later. He build an ice house on the property for storage and a smaller ice house on the edge of the circular driveway. Mary used that to tend to customers who came to pick up their own ice. Robb had 2 trucks which he and his sons operated and served most of the big summer hotels in Bellport; The Wyandotte (where daughter Margaret worked), The Bellport Hotel, The Bay House plus all the rich "Summer people" who came to Bellport. I don't think there is one of his grandchildren who doesn't remember the taste of the slivers of ice we used to steal from the back of the trucks. His ice trucks were also used during the winter to plow snow. He and the boys worked through the night to get the roads open. He sold the ice business in 1948 to a Mr. Miller from Patchogue.

After he sold the business, one year Walter Zukowski stored some bath tubs and other appliances in the ice house. There was a freak tornado that passed right across Robb's property and destroyed the ice house and sent bath tubs flying through the air and they landed in the field in back of the house.

Arthur remembers when Margaret & Frank got married in 1927 and left for their honeymoon on the train. Arthur got on the train with them in Bellport, showered them with rice, dashed off the train and sped to the next station, jumped on the train again, showered them with rice, dashed off the train, sped to the next station and so on for quite a few stops. Everyone on the train had to know they had just been married.

In 1933 when it seemed as though fuel oil was going to be the type of heat that most people would be using, Robb and his son Tom started an oil business. They put in \$50.00 each and used a Brockway ice truck with a rack body on it. They dealt with Sinclair Oil Co. Sinclair lent them 10 heavy steel 56 gallon drums. The drums were filled standing upright. A drum was laid in a cradle until empty and then another laid in its place. About that time kerosene was about 90% of the oil sold. The business wasn't very successful in the begining. Tom was discouraged and went upstate to work for the Ford Co. Robert Jr. gave Robb and Tom their \$50.00 and took over the business in 1934. Bob had given Sinclair back their drums and had Walter Zukowski mount 2 flat 275 gal. tanks on the truck with pipes and valves running to the back of the truck. Also mounted a bucket box on the rear of the truck. Some heating systems were converting to oil and the first fuel oil delivery was to Gene Hulse; a gravity feed soft hose delivery. In 1936, Bob bought a second hand dual wheel Brockway from Art Hulse and ordered a new 1200 gallon tank from Kenick and Mahoney; 3 compartments with shut-off hose. Still gravity feed delivery. In 1938, Bob purchased a new Indiana, dual wheel, from Dudley Merrill. The 1200 gallon tank was switched to the Indiana and an electric hose,

reel and pump and meter were installed. Bob went into the Seabees in 1942 and Frank, Margaret's husband, ran the business till 1945 after the war was over and Bob took over again. In 1946 Bob bought a second-hand Diamon-T truck complete from Swezey Fuel Co. In 1948 he bought 2 new trucks; a Chevy from Lev Hulse and a 6 cylinder Dodge from Brown's. By this time he had moved the business up to Bellport. He bought Adel Cox's house, made an office in the front and converted the barn to a 3 truck garage. His son, Robert III (Two-Bits) came into the business with him at that time and they purchased a V-8 Dodge from Brown's which gave them 3 trucks. A few years later they purchased a V-8 International, their largest truck. It had a 2200 gallon tank. Then they had a 25,000 gallon tank installed in the driveway. When the business was started fuel oil prices were for #2 fuel oil - they paid 5¢ a gallon and sold it for 6¼¢; #1 kerosene they paid 6¢ a gallon and sold it for 9¢. Robert Jr. retired to Florida and Robert III still operates a thriving business soon to be 50 years old.

Robb also had a boot-legging business and "still" and sold whiskey to an Italian butcher named Sam from Brooklyn. This was from about 1920 till 1933. Once a spark from a train started a fire in the barn where the whiskey and the wine was stored. Bellport Fire Co. came to put the fire out and then drank up all the whiskey and wine.

Catherine and her daughter Anna lived with Mary & Robb from 1926 till 1935 when Catherine married Arthur Waldron. Catherine worked at Lagumis Resturant in Patchogue.

The local baseball team used the field in back of the house for their games. This was about 1936-37. Tom, Richie and Bobby all played on the team along with Adam & Joe Leskowitz, Joe Adamac, Joe Adams and a couple more local boys. Mary had a stand and sold candy, soda and hot dogs and always had her first-aid kit (which she called her mid-wife's bag) and fixed up anyone who got hurt.

In the early days of their marriage when they still lived in Brooklyn, Mary & Robb took in a young boy whose family had moved away and left him. His name was Robert Fawcett and he became known as Uncle Brownie and became a real member of the family. He drank a lot and he and Mary had many an argument over that. She would lock him out of the house and he would climb in his bedroom window and go to sleep. Brownie made his living by cutting lawns with a man called Mr. Beekman who lived on Beaver Dam Road in Brookhaven. Mary & Robb had a goat named Susie who became Brownie's pal. He used to take the goat swimming down at the end of Bellhaven Road. The goat used to steal tobacco out of Brownie's back pocket. He pretended he hated the goat but he really loved it. Once when the whole family was for dinner, Brownie sneaked the goat under the dining room table and you never hear such screaming and hollering from Margie, Catherine, Margaret and Jan. The goat almost choked grand-daughter Betty by chewing on the fur collar on her coat, but Brownie came to her rescue.

Robb, George A. Waldron and a few other local men started the Brookhaven Fire Department in 1923. George became the first Chief and Robb the second. When the Brookhaven Fire House burned in 1945 they carted water in Robb's ice trucks but were unable to save the house, trucks or equipment. George Miller wanted to donate a piece of property on the north side of Montauk Highway for the new firehouse but it turned out to be too swampy and couldn't be built upon. So Robb and Charlie Robinson bought the piece across the street on the south side and donated it to the Fire Department to build their new fireheadquarters in 1947.

Thanksgiving of 1938 when the whole family was there for dinner, there was such a snow storm that no one could go home. Tom lived in Mt. Siani and started out but had to turn back. Margaret, Frank and children lived in Sayville so they didn't attempt to go home either. Everyone stayed overnight!!!! All the kids slept in Jimmy's room; Anna Sheehan, Bubbles, Betty & Fat Craven, Bobby Walter Lyons; Franny Craven & Marie Lyons were only little. The grown-ups stayed up all night playing cards. There was no electricity or plumbing - there were kerosene lamps, kerosene stoves. Uncle Brownie told ghost stories to the kids and the fact that the cemetery was in back of the house only added spice to his stories. He told them that the ghosts from the cemetery danced on the roof (which was made of tin) and then he sneaked away and threw chicken feed on the roof to scare the daylights out of the kids. In the morning when the snow stopped, all the men walked to Bellport Village for bread and milk. Arthur Waldron had to walk the railroad tracks to check his house. According to the weather bureau there was 9" of snow.

Marie & Bobby Walter, Tom's children came to live with Mary & Robb in 1942 when their mother, Margie, died. They lived there until Bobby went into the Navy and Marie went to nursing school in 1949. Tom worked in New Jersey as a life boat inspector and came home weekends. In later years, after the war, Tom owned and operated the Brookstore on South Country Road and Mary and Marie made all the salads. Marie can remember sitting under the big maple tree in front of the house peeling what seemed like tons of little boiled potatoes. Tom was also the Postmaster until he retired to Florida in 1968.

Marie has a favorite story about Mary & Robb -- they would take Jimmy to the movies every Sunday night and leave Marie & Bobby home with Uncle Brownie. As soon as the car would leave the yard, Brownie would get out the cards and his beer. He would teach Marie & Bobby all sorts of card games and let them taste his beer. One night they got caught. Mary and Robb had to come back for something and walked in on them. They thought they were in big trouble. But Mary & Robb laughed and said it was o.k. and that they didn't have to wait for them to leave anymore before they started their games.

Another story from Marie -- Uncle Richie was stationed at Camp Upton and one day they were in a convoy passing the house and his officer ordered them to stop and get out and do exercises on the front lawn. (The front lawn was a couple of acres). Mary "just happened" to have a couple of bags of hard candy which she gave to Marie and made her go out and give the candy to the soldiers. Mary always "just happened" to have bags of hard candy on hand. She was known for having lots of goodies around and all sorts of good food too. When she shopped she bought food by the case; canned soups, vegetables, pork & beans, evaporated milk, but mostly peas because that was Jimmy's favorite. Her cellar was always well stocked.

Another story comes to my mind -- Catherine always made the best lemon meringue pies and one Thanksgiving Robb hid one to have all to himself. He hid it on the top shelf of the pantry. Later in the day, he reached up on the shelf for something and the pie came down upside down all over him. Thanksgivings were always special. The whole family would come for dinner. They would put 2 chairs a distance apart and lay a board between them and that's what the kids sat on to eat dinner. Mary always wanted a stranger at the table to share the food.

The parties held at the house were really something. They had a "player" piano and everyone would sing the old songs. Robb's sister, Anne and her husband Joe Mooney would bring out all their rich friends from the City. The dancing went from the living room, through the arch at one end of the porch, out the other arch of the porch into the dining room. The rugs were rolled up - they would set up a bar in the corner (even though Robb owned a saloon, neither he nor Mary ever touched a drop) - and there would be food galore!!! The house would be lighted with strings of lights run from a battery. All the grandchildren were allowed to be a part of the party within reason. At one party, we kids decided to help so we collected all the glasses and drained whatever was left in them into one glass. Then we drank it. At these parties, when the ladies would have to go out to the out-house, the men would sneak around the other side and rock the outhouse. At another gathering, we kids were playing school on the stairs which we did many, many times. Richie had just that day painted the banister and it looked beautiful; white balusters and varnished hand rail. Anna was the teacher. While Betty was sitting there waiting her turn she scraped all the white paint with her fingernails. Each baluster was scraped at she passed each grade and moved from step to step. When all us kids were confronted later on as to who the culprit was that marked up the new paint job, Betty said she didn't do it, but alas, she had white paint under her fingernails and so was punished.

Richie's room was off limits to us kids but every once in a while he would let us in to look at his fireman's doll dressed in crepe paper. He also had crocheted pillow tops of a fireman's badge made by Catherine.

Jimmy's room had what seemed like to us kids a million airplane models

hung from the ceiling. Once he took one outside, put a firecracker in it, flew it up in the air and it exploded. We thought he was great.

Sean remembers how Gramma would offer all his visitors (of which there were many) a glass of "cider" but it would be his home-made rice wine. It was delicious! Mary always had a good home-made cake around too. If you asked her for her recipe she would say "Oh, a handfull of sugar and a couple of handfull of flour. She never really had a recipe and her cake turned out great every time.

Pat remembers in the dining room were the most beautiful red velvet chairs - they came from Germany from a relative of Aunt Margie's. Pat hated those chairs; the reason; because we were never allowed to sit on them.

When Brownie got sick and had to stay in Central Islip Hospital (where he died), Mary & Robb turned Brownie's room into the kitchen, and the old kitchen into the dining room. That made one great big living room.

All of us kids used to love to ride our bikes up to visit Mary. She was always good for tucking a dollar or two into your pocket before you left. Pat and her best friend Nan were especially fond of this because they were always broke. But to show their appreciation they would go up to the cemetery in back of the house and pick a bouquet of flowers from the graves and bring them to Mary.

When Robb retired, he built a small snack bar on the front corner of his property. Just to give himself something to do. Many of the students from the Gateway Theater came to eat there. At the same time he had a golf driving range in back of the snack bar. When business got too much for him, he sold the snack bar and leased the golf range. The snack bar is still there and is called "Varney's" and is doing a very good business.

Mary & Robb celebrated their 50th Wedding Anniversary with an open house for all their friends from Brookhaven. It was held outdoors and was really a great day. Grand-daughter Bubbles made a 3 tier wedding cake for the occasion. All the town's people came to help them celebrate.

Mary Finnerty Lyons died at home in 1960, March 4th, at age 74. She was waked at home and all the grandchildren sat up the stairs as they always did when there was a lot of company in the house. There was a very bad snow storm and while Richie and Jimmy were moving out the furniture from the livingroom to make room for the wake, Tom & Bill Van der Zalm shoveled the whole front lawn for the cars to park. She was buried in

the cemetery in back of the house; and the church that she and all her children were so faithful to all those years, refused her a funeral Mass because the cemetery was not a Catholic cemetery.

Robert Henry Lyons Sr. lived alone in the house until 1962 when his sister Anne moved in with him. When he became sick, he went into a nursing home in Riverhead where he died in 1968, July 27th, at age 85. He was buried alongside Mary in the cemetery in back of the house. Robb was waked at Robertaccio's in Patchogue and all the family and friends came back to his house for lunch after the funeral. Sadie Rutkowski (Fran's sister-in-law) made a sour cream coffee cake. Art Waldron decided he wanted that cake for himself and hid it in the pantry. Betty and Chet Arthur found the cake and hid it outside in someone's car. Anna saw them do this and she and a few others stole the cake from that car and hid it in another car. This happened a couple of times and the cake ended up in the minister's car (Rev. Gray) and it went home with him. This was in no way disrespectful to Robb. He would have loved every moment of the foolish fun people always had when they were in that house.

Robb's sister Anne lived on in the house with Bobby Jr. until Memorial Day, May 30th, 1970 when the house burned to the ground.
