

Looking for an Image

by

David Brodsky

Illustrated

Digitized by Project Zikaron
Touro University-NY Libraries
www.zikaron.tourolib.org
2023

First Edition

© 1982 by David Brodsky

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, in whole or in part, in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the author.

Printed in the United States of America
by
Exposition Press, Inc.
325 Rabro Drive
Smithtown, NY 11787-0817

sy

WJ

Looking for an Image



David Brodsky, a graduate of Kean College at the age of seventy-five

I am grateful to my nephew Bert (son of my brother Irving) for being instrumental in having my manuscript published, and to Bert's assistant, Mildred Martin, for her help generally

My thanks also to Professor Santi Buscemi of Middlesex County College for his advice in this effort



"Smiling Dave" Brodsky in riding attire. He was once a riding master.

Looking for an Image

I was born in 1903 into a family of thirteen children. We lived in a small village known as Winograd, in the Ukraine. Our three-bedroom house was built of stucco and had an earth floor, and it was overcrowded.

My mother, born in Buslow, was a religious woman from a family of Talmudic students. My father had very little education but gave the impression of being an educated man. His vocation was nothing more than being a horse trader working on commission. There was very little business in town. Therefore three or four times a year, my father traveled where the markets were. These markets were more like the flea markets here in America.

My father made sure that his children received an education. There was very little employment in town and no public transportation. In order to find employment, you had to travel to the city, which was about fifty miles away. My brother Jack became a Hebrew teacher in a small town away from home. That job did not last long, due to the fact that he did not adhere to the Jewish laws: He was caught smoking a cigarette on the Sabbath; hence, he came home.

My grandfather was an educated and wealthy man. He wanted his son to marry a cultured woman who had a dowry. In those days it was unthinkable to choose a mate without one. After being introduced to Miss Chava



The Brodsky family, David in circle

Cohen, however, he told his son to accept her without a dowry. They were married and had thirteen children. Of my sisters, Ida was a Hebrew scholar and Esther was a business girl. My brother Joe also leaned toward business. He got a job in town as a clerk in a store that sold silks and woolens.

When I was three years old I attended a Chaider (Hebrew School) six days a week from morning until night. I was taught Hebrew, math and writing. My brothers and I had very little recreation. We were crowded in the house and were struggling through constant hardship. I recall having my feet wrapped in burlap bags during the winter. Two of my older brothers, Jack and Joe, were to be drafted into the army of the czar. Hence, my parents decided to emigrate to the "Golden Land—America," in hopes of a better life. I was too young to realize the meaning of the move. With the inheritance my father received from my grandfather, we were able to pay for the trip to the United States. My parents hired a large wagon, and we all piled in for a four-day trip to Libau, a Baltic port. We stopped a few nights in small villages. From there, we took a tugboat to Liverpool.

The trip was very eventful, because it was the very first time we had seen a large body of water. The boat was tossed from side to side by the waves as though it would turn over. The trip made my mother very ill. When we finally got to Liverpool, she visited a doctor and was told that she was pregnant (with my youngest sister, Miriam). From then on, the trip for my mother was not a pleasant one, but for the children it was a picnic. Once embarked on the steamer, my brothers and I roamed onto the different decks—the second- and third-class quarters—to while away the time.

On June 15 we disembarked at Castle Garden on Ellis Island. My uncle who sponsored us met and brought

THE FAMILY



Chava



Boruch



Jack



Ida



Joe



Esther



Steve



Rae



Abe



Irving



Miriam



Harry



David

us to the Hebrew Sheltering Society known as the HIAS. A photographer of the *Daily Forward*, a Jewish newspaper, took our picture and a reporter interviewed the family, because we were the largest family at that time to disembark. We were housed for the night, and the next morning a representative from the HIAS found us a flat known as a railroad apartment on Monroe Street in New York's Lower East Side. It had only one window in the front and one window in the back. The building was adjacent to a public steam bath. When both windows were open, we would get the heat as well as the steam. The bathroom was out in the hall. When it was time to go to sleep, every room was occupied. Four of us slept in a bed, but the sheets were nice and white so we all piled in. In the morning, however, we found out that we were not the only ones in bed. Many bed bugs were celebrating our arrival by toasting with our blood, and the bed sheet was decorated with red blotches. It felt as if we were sleeping in a sauna, the heat from the public baths was so intense.

A few days later my sisters Ida and Esther were given an opportunity for employment in a sweatshop working on knee pants from seven in the morning to seven at night. They worked six days a week for one month without pay; at that time it was called "learning the trade." After one month, they got two dollars a week. My father rented a pushcart and sold apples. My brothers Jack and Joe also rented pushcarts, with ovens on them, and sold hot sweet potatoes. After the summer the rest of the children were registered for school. I, for some reason or other, was enrolled in the oldest Yeshivah in New York. I was not at all happy with the idea, because I had to stay in the Yeshivah from morning until night. All the other children were playing in the street after three o'clock. However, I, like a good

child, obeyed my father and attended the Yeshivah until I was Bar Mitzvahed at thirteen years of age.

My father was not happy about me leaving the Yeshivah, but my mind was made up. My father also had problems with my older brothers and sisters. Since they contributed to the support of the family they wanted in on running the family, but my father did not like the idea. In Russia, he had been lord and master of the family; in America, it was not so. Therefore his life-style changed, and he did not like that. He was disappointed with life on the East Side. He had really thought the sidewalks were paved with gold. But disappointment was not enough of a problem. He had money left over from the trip, which he deposited in Yarmulowsky's bank. It didn't take long, however, before rumors began to spread that the bank was not in satisfactory condition. On hearing this, he ran to the bank and withdrew the money and carried it in a specially made belt around his stomach. The next day the bank failed and closed; runs on banks were frequent in those days.

We moved to a little better housing across the street from the Henry Street Settlement House. I was then enrolled in Public School 147 on Henry Street. My problem in P. S. 147 was that I was too old for one class and too young for another. But I finally graduated at the head of the class.

Boys and girls would register in different clubs and attend the gymnasium. There was social dancing and all kinds of athletic activities. The Celtics basketball team practiced there, as well as prizefighters like Sid Terris and Ruby Goldstein. I had the most enjoyable time when I was a member there. While attending school, I used to go out with a group of boys selling newspapers, picking up a bundle of papers on East Broadway and walking from there to Harlem hawking, "Extra! Extra!"

THE DANCING BRODYS

1922-23, Rose Dancing Academy



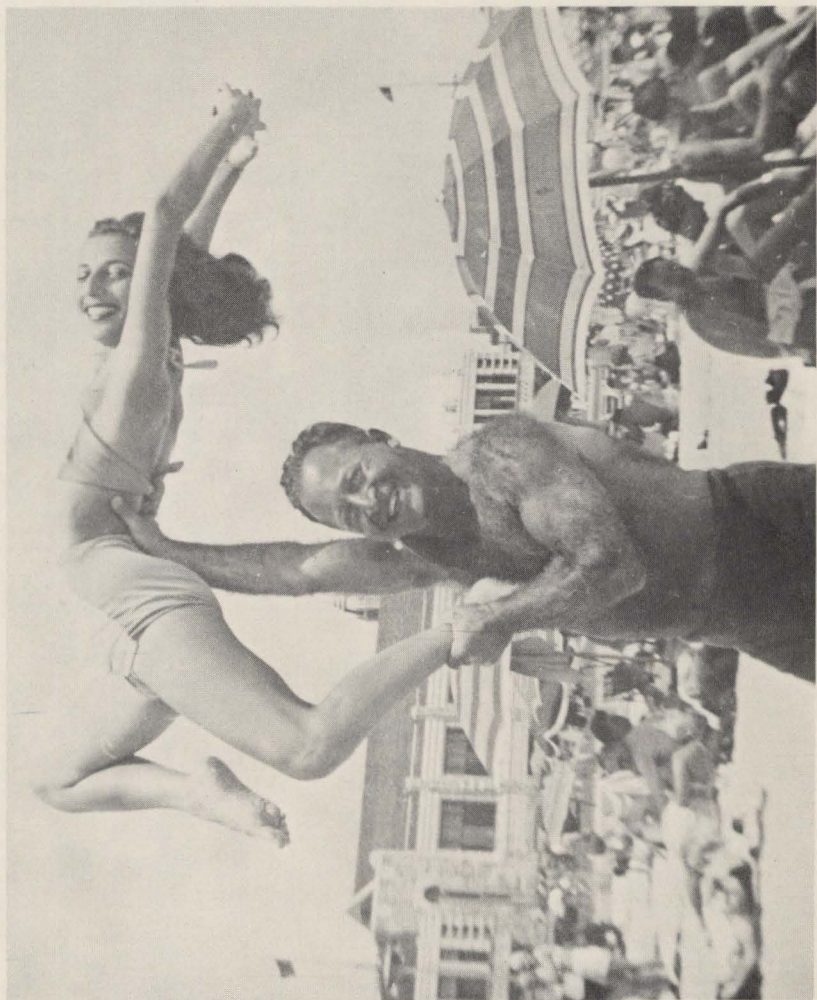
Dick Brody and Sally Kenny
at the Terrace Garden



Dick Brody and Beatrice Rosen, 1923

I then enrolled in De Witt Clinton High School, which was situated on Fifty-ninth Street and Tenth Avenue. It was a difficult task for me to get to school without any carfare. I walked to Canal and Broadway, which was at least a mile from my house. There I picked up transfers from the sidewalk that had been discarded by passengers changing from subway to trolley car, or hitched a ride on the back of a truck. Because of poor English comprehension and the problem of getting to school, I dropped out after my first semester. It was fifty years before my next class. So, as a foreign student from a large family, I became drawn into the work force.

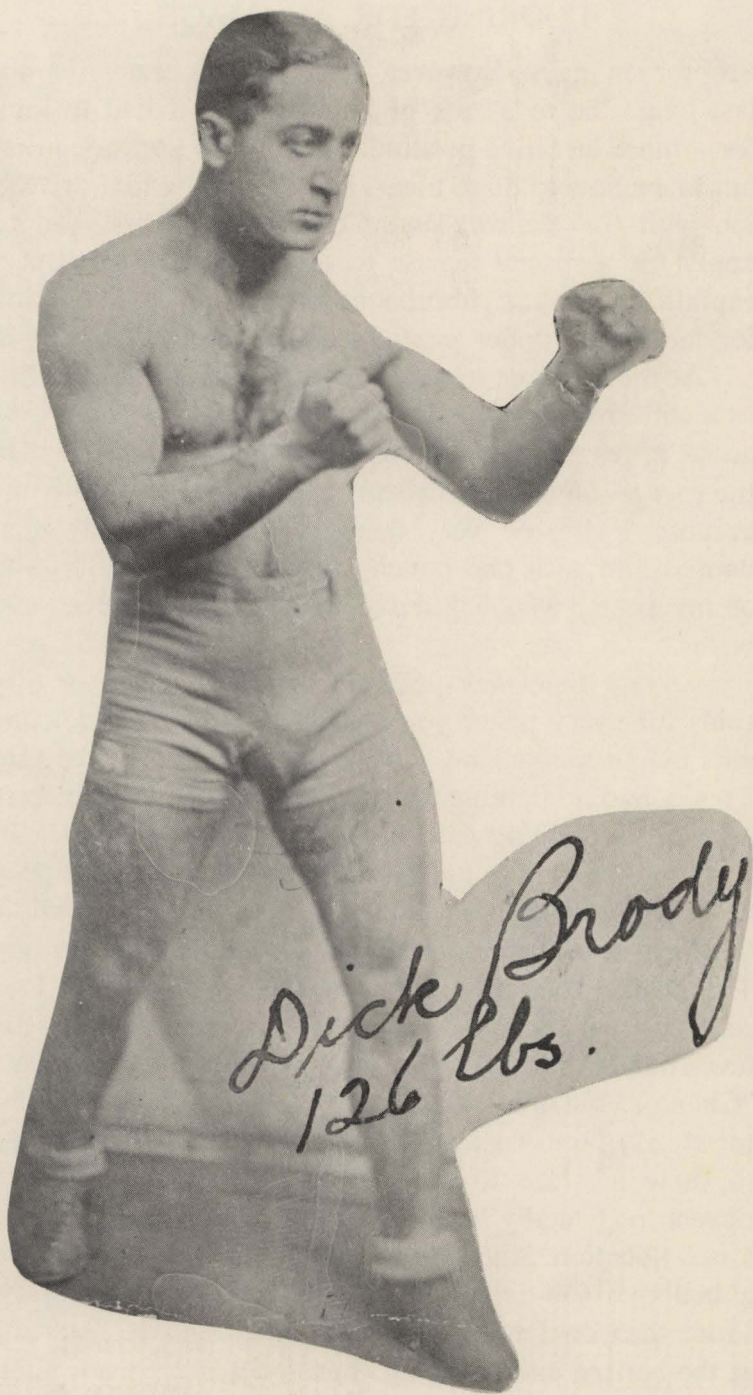
My brother Steve became a professional dancer and then worked for a dancing academy on Fourteenth Street. My brother Harry went into the laundry business on Lexington Avenue. I became his routeman, picking up and delivering to his affluent clientele. However, he was not in business very long when he took ill and passed away. I was left without a job. I frequented Sixth Avenue employment agencies and was offered a job as a shipping clerk in an umbrella factory. Half of my salary went for a furnished room. I left my parents home because I could no longer sleep four in a bed; besides I wanted privacy. I worked about a year when the firm failed. Once again, I went job hunting and found one in a millinery factory as an inventory clerk; that lasted two months. Then along came an offer of a job from my brother Steve as an instructor with the dancing academy. I lasted there until I teamed up with one of the female instructors and won a prize for dancing. I then became a professional dancer after winning talent shows on the Loew's Theater circuit. My partner and I (now using the stage name of Dick Brody) were accepted in the local Follies given by the Loew's Theaters. The Dancing Brodys, as we were called, made a hit. We entertained at different nightclubs (known as speakeasies) during



Training for Adagio dancing at Jones Beach



David Brodsky's (on right) physical culture class on the beach at Twelfth Avenue, Belmar, New Jersey



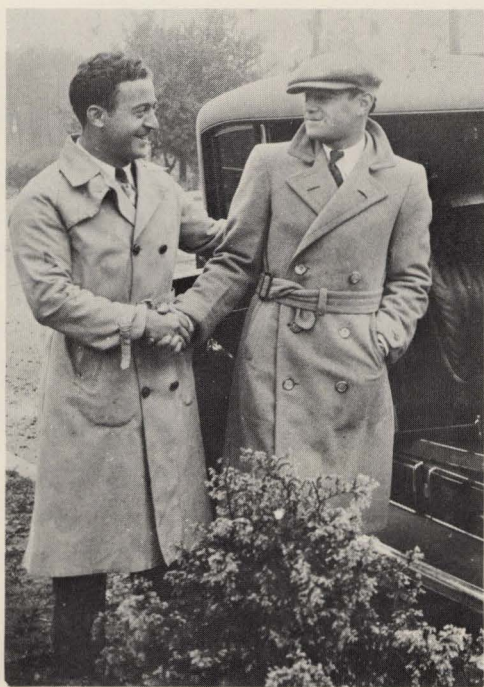
Dick Brody's (on right) defeated Eddie Cass (on left) in the 1907 N. Y. State Athletic Club 200 yards

Prohibition days. However, this dancing team did not last long, due to a lack of bookings. So, I had to look for a more lucrative position. Since I had no trade at all but knew how to drive a car, I applied for a taxi driver's job with the Yellow Taxi Corporation. I first had to apply for a special license to drive a cab. The district captain in my neighborhood gave a recommendation for me to the police captain, and I received a license.

At first, I came to work dressed as a dancer and not as a cabdriver, for I had no work clothes. I was working about a year as a driver when an incident occurred in the garage. One of the drivers thought he could bully me because I dressed very neatly. I struck out at him, floored him with one punch, and I won the admiration of my peers, who urged me to become a professional boxer.

At that time they paid ten dollars a round or fifty cents for every ticket you sold. The fight that took the guts out of me was my last; it then dawned on me that I really had no fighting heart. It was the night my picture was on the fighting card (that means you are special). I entered the ring to find that the opposing camp slipped an A.A.U. champ into the ring who was known as Eddie Guida in substitution for someone who had backed out. The champ told me that he would carry me the four rounds. I misunderstood the request as fear. In the next few rounds Eddie Guida showed why he was called "Champ," but by this time someone had thrown in the towel. My face was a patchwork of cuts. I was ashamed to show my face to the friends and cabdrivers I sold tickets to. I finally decided to quit. That meant seeking a new vocation. Since I wasn't living at home, I accepted a bellboy's job in a hotel in Lakewood, New Jersey. From then on I went from one job to another, starting at the bottom and going up: busboy, waiter, headwaiter, fry cook, master of ceremonies, horseback-riding instruc-

Smiling Dave and light-
weight boxing champion
Barney Ross



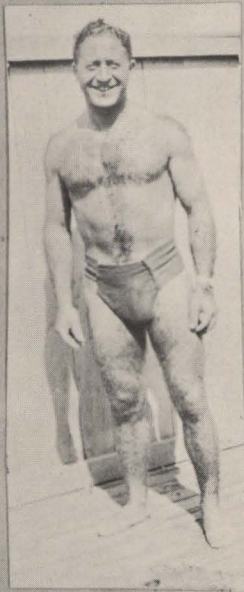
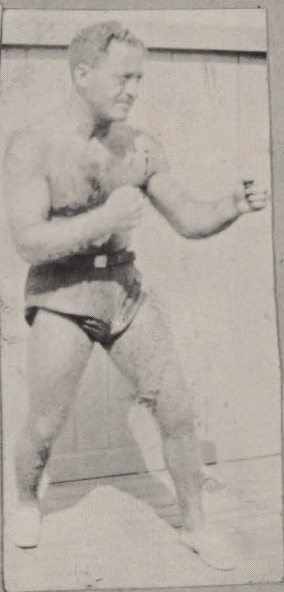
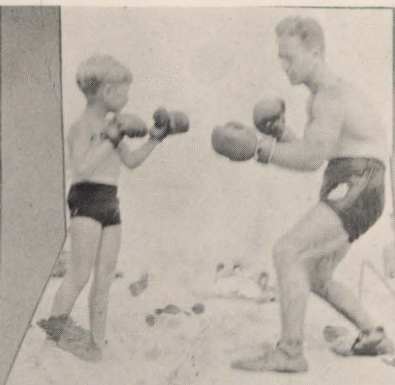
Dave Brodsky with world
lightweight champ
Al Singer

Beach Calisthenics

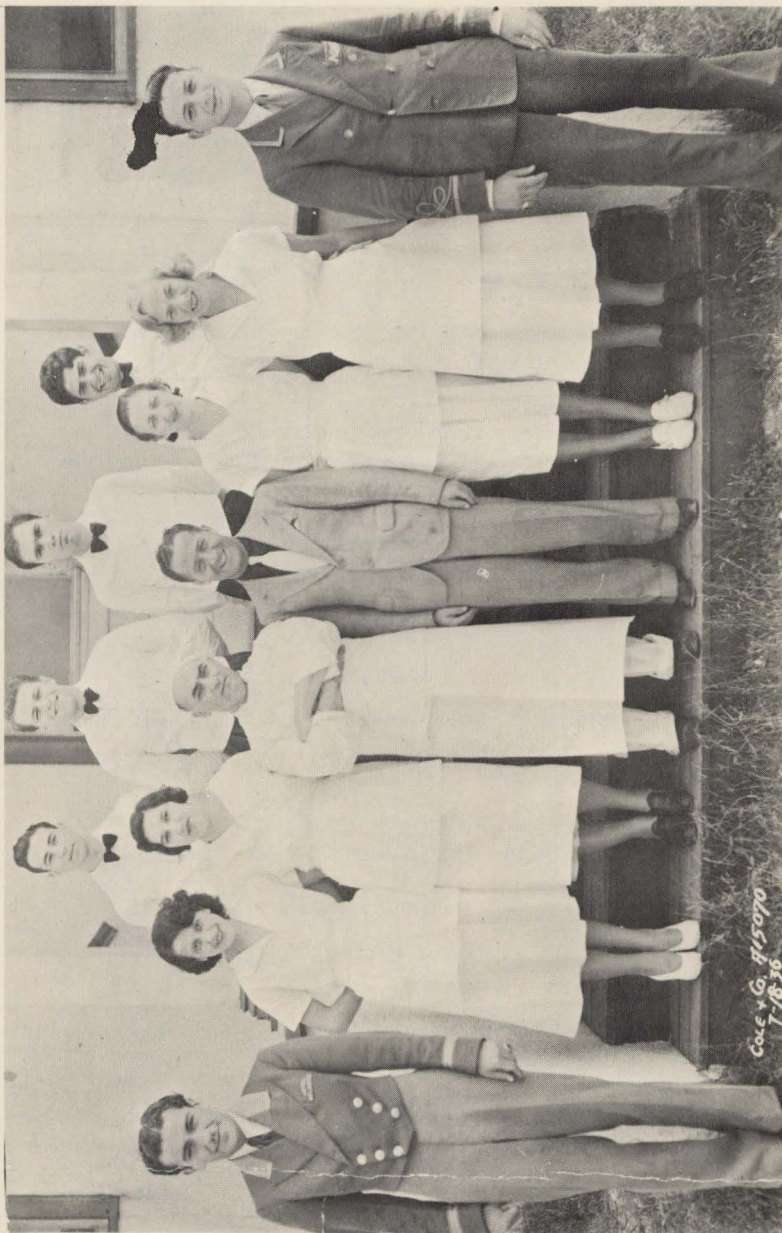
Begin July 1st

The open beach calisthenic class which proved so popular last season will begin again this season on the sands at Twelfth avenue this Saturday morning.

"Smiling Dave" of New Irvington Hotel fame will conduct the classes in from 10:30 to 11:30. Everyone welcome to enter the picture.



Smiling Dave as instructor of an open beach calisthenic class



Smiling Dave and his staff, Hotel Vendome, 1936

Let's meet at

Hotel Vendome-Plaza

TO CELEBRATE THIS



Are you asking for activities?

We have it, country and seashore combined, horseback riding, tennis, ping pong, golf and most of all swimming in the ocean which we are directly opposite.

And when the stars shine rhythmic revelry will be King. "Smiling Dave," the inimitable Master of Festivities, will supervise the Cabaret Night which includes a special midnight supper in conjunction with the show. Dancing and entertainment every evening. Miss LaSalle and her staff will conduct her studio for dancing, singing and music at the hotel the entire season.

For your children our playground teacher promises a most enjoyable vacation. You may be assured that we will make every effort to insure a pleasant stay for you.

CHOICE accommodations are available to those who make early reservations. Call Long Branch 4211-1599.
Dietary Laws Observed.



We anticipate your arrival
with our known hospitality.

Your Friendly Hosts

MR. and MRS. IRVING SACKS
Managing Director

"SMILING DAVE" BRODSKY
Director of Activities



A brochure from the Hotel Vendome. (Courtesy of the *Courier News*, Bridgewater, New Jersey.)

tor, physical instructor on the beach in Belmar, and last of all, manager of a hotel in Long Branch and Atlantic City.

I was in the hotel business about ten years, but then I decided to get married and work in New York. I met my wife, Rae, in November and got married in March. She was a quiet, naive girl who was more of a bookworm than a hostess. Some people take a cigarette on waking up in the morning; she would grab a book for reading. I got a job as a salesman at fifteen dollars a week selling house furnishings but couldn't make a go of it. I used to blush when I told a lie to a customer, because I never had a reason to lie. The employer gave me a job in the factory as a shipping clerk. I was making fifteen dollars a week, and my wife was making nineteen dollars a week as a bookkeeper. When my son, Bernard, was born I got a five-dollar raise, but I lost my wife's salary. The going wasn't easy, but by the time Bernard was three years old I was able to hold my head up due to the raises given me by my employer, and I pulled out of that rut. Bernard grew up with a good education because we were able to send him to a preparatory school in Connecticut. From there on he excelled in his studies and received a few college degrees in political science. It didn't take long before he met a girl and got married. He taught at a college for a couple of years. He then decided to study law. He graduated law school and is, at present, practicing law.

I worked in the factory mentioned above for forty-two years as a supervisor. About eleven years ago I realized that my life-style had become monotonous—working nights, sleeping in the daytime, and watching television. I had a good strong body and a strong mind: however, I began to think that my mind was deteriorating since I had no way of exercising it. At this time I had passed my sixty-eighth birthday. Most men figure it is too

late to get up the guts to be that special somebody they always dreamed about. I, too, felt that I had not been all that I could have been. I realized that a monthly check and a quiet corner where patronizing grandchildren could pay their respects just wouldn't be enough. By this time I was sitting pretty. I had a house and did well at my job. My responsibility to my son was finished, since he was married and practicing law. But sitting was never one of my favorite pastimes. I started to see myself as an old peasant sitting and waiting for the Lord to take me. I was a man who longed for inner satisfaction, and believed that only people who have special things are important. I began to think that even I might be one of them. Born and bred in the Hebrew faith, I had the feeling of Jewishness pent up inside of me. I became fascinated by the possibility of serving in some religious function, perhaps, as a singer of prayers. Why shouldn't I try it? I have a special crying voice for getting the feeling across; with that I began to learn the Lore of the Cantor. Because it was too far for me to travel to Yeshivah University of New York to study, I realized that my lessons would have to be self-taught. With the help of Rabbi Irving Greenberg, then of Temple Ohav Emeth, New Brunswick, and Rabbi David Lieter, of Beth-El, Edison, after six months I felt competent enough to apply for placement in any local synagogue for the High Holy Days. Rabbi Greenberg, in reference to me, had this to say to a reporter: "To me, David appears to transmit the basic desire to fill the sanctuary with love and devotion to God. For the short time he was with me David did very well and was able to lead portions of the Cantorial Liturgy. David did not wish monetary gain for his performance, but instead he donated his income to the congregation and Yeshivah University. When a man speaks to me like this, I can give him nothing



Cantor David Brodsky

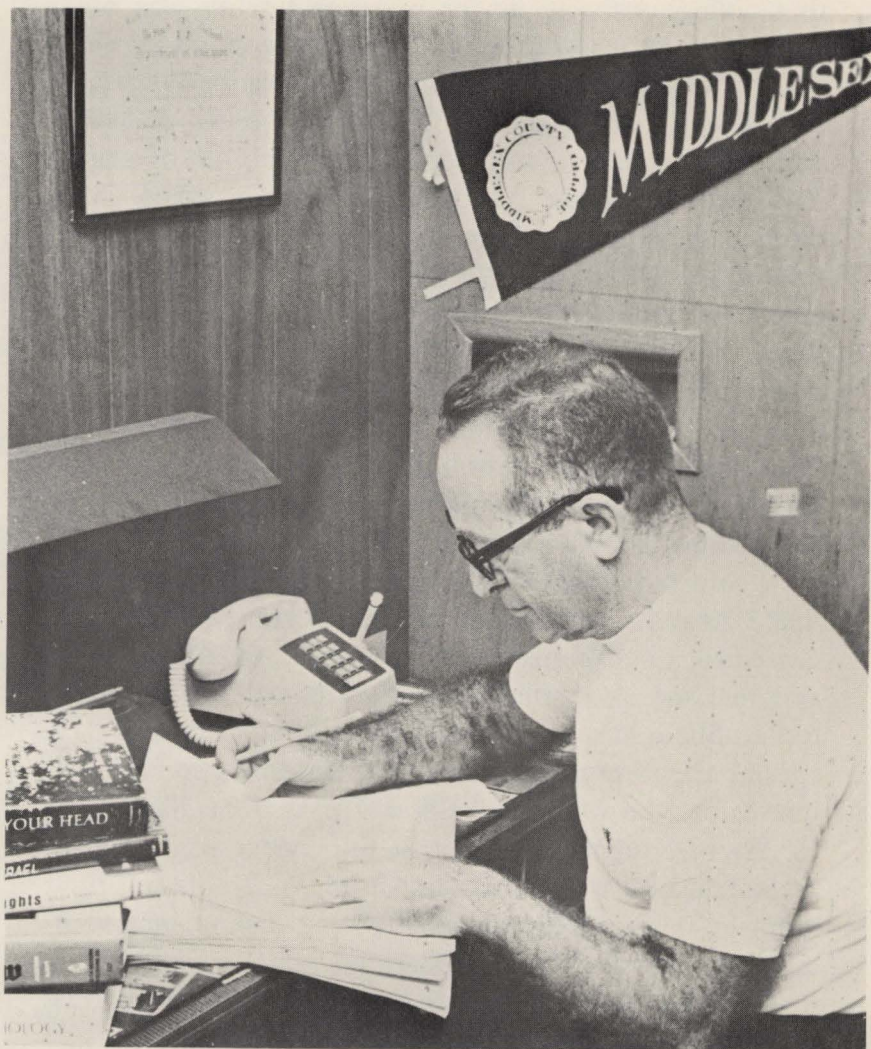
more than praise and encouragement as well as assistance. David's desire to be needed was fulfilled."

After auditioning me at Yeshivah University in New York, Cantor Macy Nulman placed me in my first position as a cantor. I donated half the money I earned to the Yeshivah and the other half to my own temple. For the next few years I performed in temples in New York and in New Jersey, until my own temple accepted me as one of their cantors.

But the High Holy Days came only once a year, which meant that my desire for inner satisfaction could hardly be met. But, if my cantoring hadn't given me all that I needed, it had at least given me the courage to succeed at doing other things. When I was a young man, I hadn't the slightest thought about attending a college. But that was in 1920, and at that time I did not see myself as one of the college set. Most of the students had fine scholastic records; I had only gone to high school for one semester. Competing with such people seemed more like a nightmare than a dream. But buoyed by my success as a cantor, I reconsidered the possibilities.

My son, Bernard, told me of the concept of open enrollment, which enables people to substitute life experiences for formal education in seeking admission to a college. However, I felt I needed a high-school background. I first enrolled at Edison High School for about ten days and studied at home every weekend until I was sure I would pass the high-school equivalency test. I received the equivalency certificate from Trenton on August 11, 1971, at the age of sixty-nine. I then began to search for a new image.

I enrolled in English I and English II at Middlesex County College during the summer. I felt honored when I was accepted as a student at the best and the biggest county college in New Jersey, but somehow I felt embarrassed when I entered my first class. I was dressed

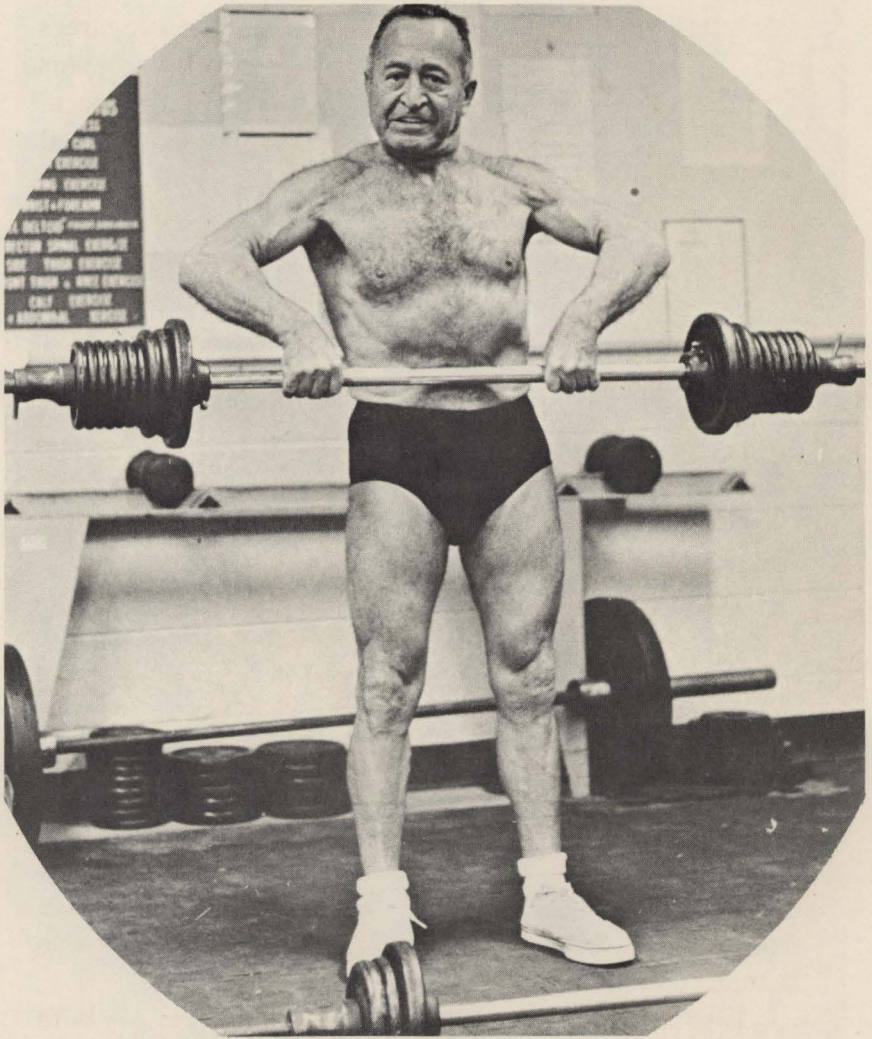


Dave Brodsky has to skip the prom in order to finish his homework and then go to work. (Courtesy of the *Home News*, New Brunswick, New Jersey.)

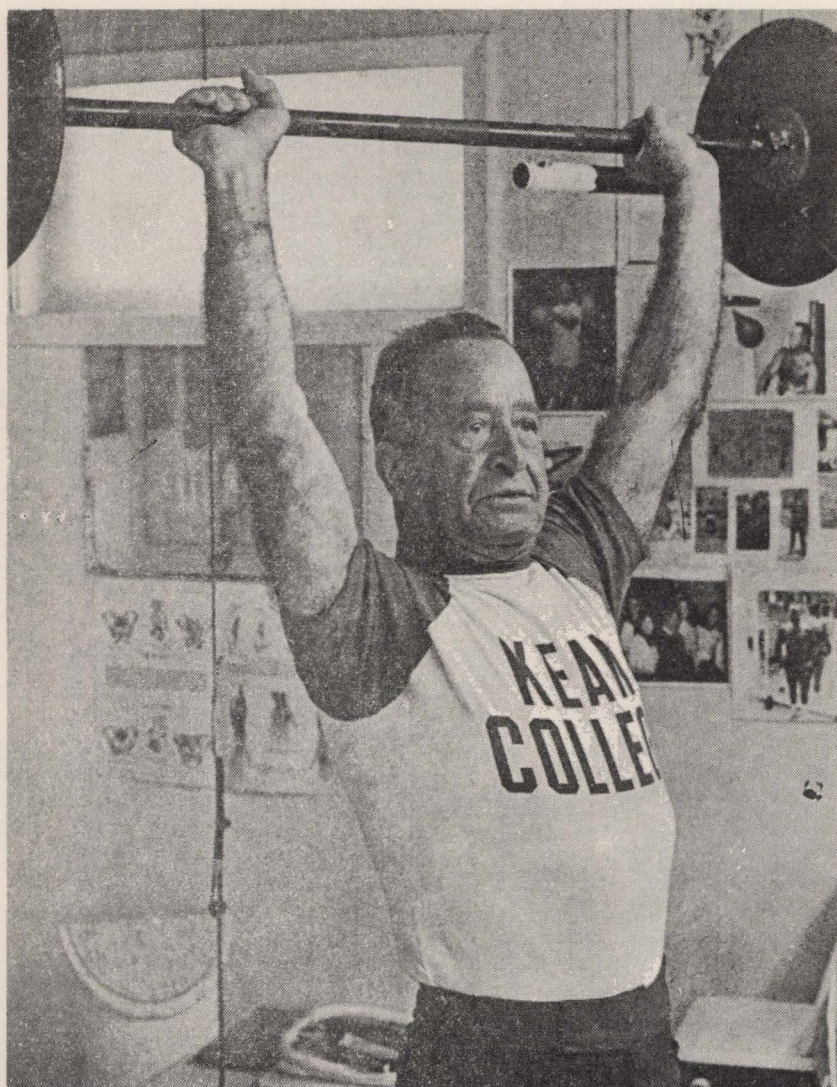
up like a dude in a white linen suit, because I thought that college was big as far as respectability was concerned. When I looked around the classroom on my first day in the summer of 1971, I saw the boys in dungarees and T-shirts and the girls dressed in shorts or jeans with open blouses or tube tops. I really felt out of place. The attitude of the younger students in school had differed from those in my day. Education had become too commercialized. The students picked their own courses to study, and it was mostly for vocational purposes, not for education per se. Students of today care very little for an education. They feel they just need it for a job. In my days, students never thought of protesting over a course or an examination; now students protest all the time. I prefer the old ways because they allow for more respect for students and professors alike.

I also felt inferior to my classmates due to the fact that I lacked a high-school education. However, I had a dedicated English instructor who detected my feelings and had me stay after class. I explained the situation to her. She told me not to worry and that she would pay special attention to me. I was very fortunate to have an instructor who was very helpful. I passed English I and II. My first regular semester at the college began when I enrolled in a course of study in the rehabilitation program as one of 200 students. To my disappointment it did not include physical therapy, which would have tied in with my own interest in physical fitness. I was then called the oldest teenager in the school.

I would rise at 6 A.M., make breakfast for my wife and myself, and be ready for class by 8 A.M. I carried a full program and did my homework in the afternoon before leaving for a forty-hour work week at night. Aside from this, I interned one day a week at Middlesex Rehabilitation Hospital, in East Brunswick, for one semester and at John Runnels Hospital for Rehabilitation, in



Dave keeps in shape by lifting weights. (Courtesy of the *News Tribune*, Woodbridge, New Jersey.)



Lifting weights is part of Dave's daily routine for fitness.

Berkley Heights, New Jersey, for another semester as a physical therapist. I still attended the temple on Saturday morning, leading the congregation in prayer. Weekends were also the time for me to do most of my homework. As for a social life, there was no time. I only slept four to five hours a night.

I liked the idea of the girls addressing me as Dave. The biggest surprise of all was when a committee of girls gave me a surprise seventieth birthday party in the cafeteria of the college. Ninety percent of my faculty and the students in my department—the rehabilitation program—attended. I received many gifts from the students as well as the faculty. I couldn't understand why the girls gave this party for me. I cried like a baby; it overwhelmed me.

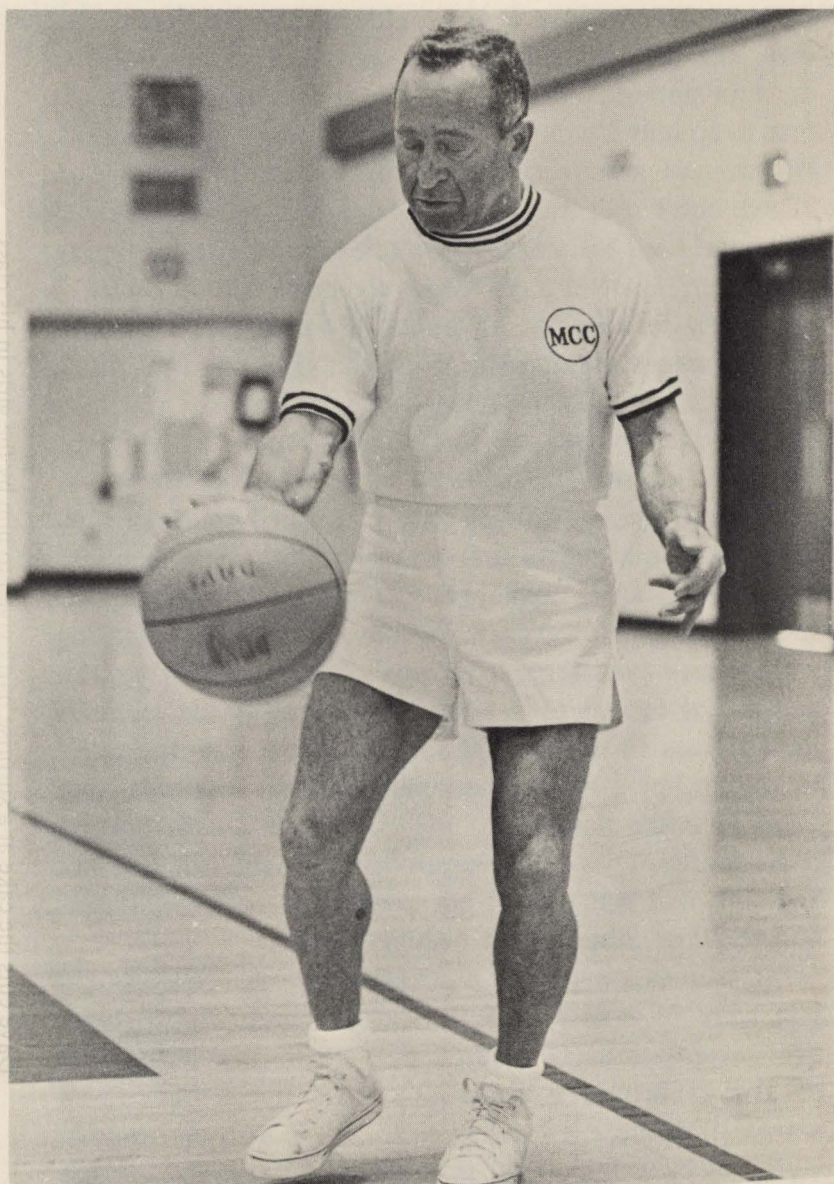
My toughest course was Human Anatomy and Physiology. I failed and had to take it over again. Then I found out that I could not hear well enough at the lectures, which meant that I did not have the correct notes to study. At last I passed all my courses and was told that I could graduate. I did so with seventy-nine credits, getting an associate degree in applied science in rehabilitation. The feeling of being a graduate marching along with all the youngsters and getting the applause from the strangers was something out of the ordinary for me. A million dollars could not have made me any happier than I was to be a graduate.

The key to my vigor appears to be my devotion to physical fitness. I work out regularly in my fully equipped gymnasium, in which I installed a sauna. In fact, at one time I contemplated becoming a licensed physical therapist. I learned that it would involve traveling around for four hours to New York University, but because of my internship at the two hospitals I was qualified as an assistant physical therapist.

Who would ever think when I studied rehabilitation



Dave cuts the cake at a surprise party given to him by the girls in his class.



In the Middlesex gym, Dave is never left behind when a game of basketball is being played. (Courtesy of the *News Tribune*, Woodbridge, New Jersey.)

therapy that my wife, Rae, would get a stroke that would leave the left side of her body immobile? She would be my first patient. At the moment, it left me stunned. At first I thought I wouldn't be able to finish my education. However, I was very surprised to hear my wife say, "Dave don't quit on my account. I will get along somehow, and I am sorry that I won't be able to do your typing anymore. You will have to get someone else to do it." I felt guilty leaving her all alone in the house. However, she did assure me that she would be all right. I prepared the meals, cleaned the house, went to school, and then left for work putting in forty hours per week. May she always be blessed for letting me finish my education.

At the age of seventy-one, I enrolled in Kean College, matriculating for a B.A. degree, this time in political science, as a challenge to combat the "Watergate shenanigans." However, I did have difficulty in hearing the lectures even though I had the use of a hearing aid, and I was forced to get help from one of the students in my class in order to write my notes. I reciprocated by giving her a box of handkerchiefs, an umbrella, and a book. After passing all my courses, I finally got my B.A. degree. I was very happy to graduate, but was not as happy as I was when I got my degree from Middlesex. Somehow or other it had become routine.

The question people have asked me is, "Why would you want to earn a college degree at your age?" Until age seventy-three, I hadn't paused in my active life to give a proper explanation. Recently, I have been showing people a letter sent to me by Governor Brendan Byrne of New Jersey, when I earned a bachelor's degree from Kean College. I framed the letter that bears a gold seal letterhead. The governor's letter begins: "I believe the greatest joy in life comes to those who never stop living their lives to the fullest. I must therefore commend you heartily for living an inspiration to all of us on the



Dave helping his wife, Rae, with her physical therapy treatment. (Courtesy of the *News Tribune*, Woodbridge, New Jersey.)



Dave watching the motion of Rae's leg treatment. (Courtesy of the *News Tribune*, Woodbridge New Jersey.)

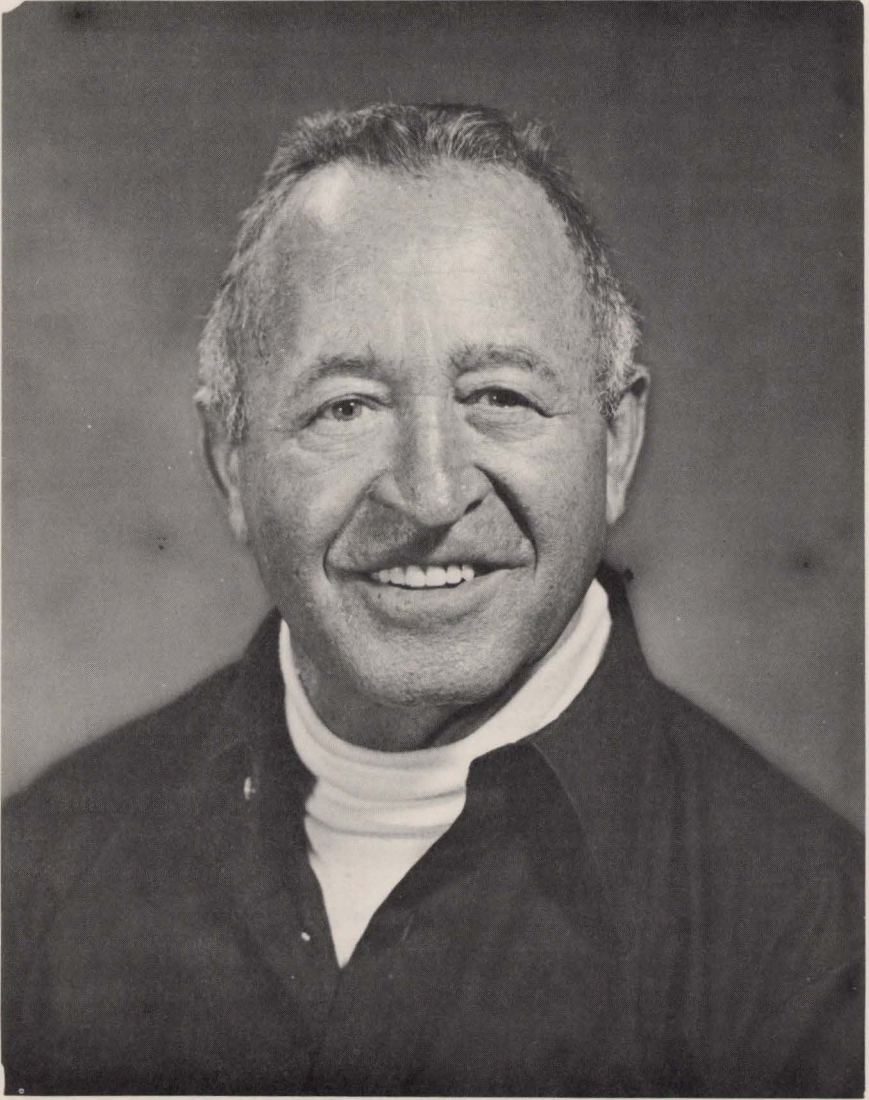
agelessness of an active body. Your pursuit and attainment of a bachelor of arts degree from Kean College at the age of seventy-three is a great accomplishment, which speaks favorably of yourself, your family, your college, and your state.

"You have led an illustrious career, turning the virtues of your family's humble beginning into an ever-aspiring life of hard work and commitment. Clearly you have also carried with you the virtue of 'Country Wisdom' and that wisdom has led you to fulfill the words of Shakespeare in Henry VIII. 'He was a scholar and a ripe and good one, exceeding wise, fair spoken, and persuading.' Long live it and congratulations."

Again I was asked what the purpose of an education at my age was, and my reply was: "The education was to broaden my own knowledge of the world and to gain a sense of achievement, regardless of my age." I have convinced myself that life does not end at sixty-five, and it serves my own intellectual and personal well-being to remain active in the business and academic fields. I derived much pleasure from being in school, not only because of the warm reception I received from fellow classmates, who are a quarter of my age, but also because I am exposed to new and developing perceptions of the world.

Understanding today's world takes more than the archaic beliefs of my time that my age group is accustomed to. The world is constantly changing, and if you fall behind in these developments you can easily be discouraged from keeping pace. I find that my interpretations of the newspapers and debates in the United Nations are much different than before. The courses that stimulated my attention most were foreign policy and public law and the general area of politics.

If I had not experienced this myself, I would never have believed that enrolling as a freshman in under-



David Brodsky, a graduate of Rutgers University at the age of seventy-seven

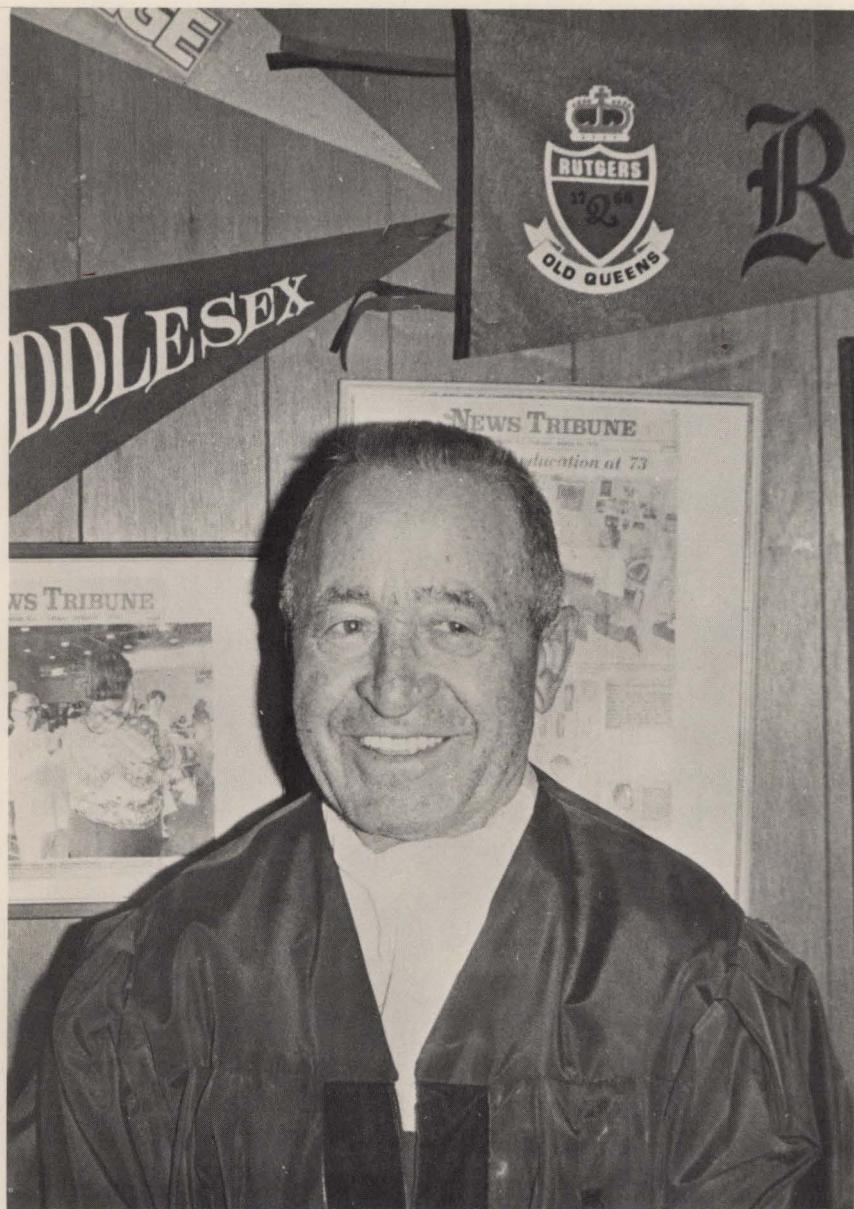
graduate school could have been so well accepted by the college community. I would have been cynical of anyone else describing what I have been through. This serves as proof that different age groups can communicate on a common level and age poses no real barrier in the academic world. I was more than pleased with my performance in school because I maintained a B average and by this was inspired to continue.

It could be considered a great accomplishment receiving a bachelor of arts degree in political science at this age, as Governor Byrne's letter expressed. But yet I feel I can still achieve. My potential has not been actualized because of the vitality I feel within me. Continuing my education until I am convinced that I have done enough would make me feel more at ease with myself. I hope that, in turn, this will serve as an example to others in my position to make use of their full energies.

The most wonderful feeling I experienced as a student was sitting with young people who didn't consider me a senior citizen: I was a student, and I took my education seriously. Maybe I wasn't the best student, but I was a student who tried his best. I caution people not to waste their time. You can really educate yourself!

Education is something special to me, valued most for its personal enrichment. Because I had obtained the B.A. from Kean College I gained more confidence in myself and enrolled in Rutgers University Graduate School in political science. It took me two and a half years to complete the course work for the M.A. degree on political science. I was very surprised when I was awarded a plaque from the Political Science Department.

After finishing my course work for the M.A., I was called to make a statement at a Task Force Committee on Adult Education. Answering questions on whether it was difficult to sit in with youngsters, my reply was



A man of all trades, David Brodsky just before completing his master's program in political science at the age of seventy-six

“no,” and then I had this to say to senior citizens: “We are considered an intelligent group, yet most of us are treated more like a dishrag. Why? Because we are not educated or aware that we have the same right, as any other minority group. We realized that it is time to take action. I have learned in political science that the organizations and different groups have a great deal to do in urging certain legislation. But how do we do it if we don’t educate ourselves.

At present, our minds are clear but our horizons have been diminished because of our advanced years and the attendant restrictions. Nevertheless, we should take the time to educate ourselves to keep our minds alert.

“Education is the very basis of our democracy. Unless we have an informed, enlightened voting public, we face a grim future.”

I remember reading an article in the *Daily News* wherein Hugh Downs said that aging does not mean you go downhill from fifty to eighty years of age, and, in fact, Americans over fifty-five have the best education, are most financially secure and are the healthiest Americans. Of course, you have heard the saying *you can’t learn anything new*. That is probably the worst myth and biggest lie. When older people are properly motivated, their intelligence does not wane. In fact, the ability to organize one’s thinking may increase as one gets older. Many a person in his fifties, sixties, or even eighties, like myself, can go through college with greater efficiency than at eighteen, and does. Older people may seem to think more slowly—but for other reasons. For example, if you ask an older person for a considered opinion he or she has to sift through a lot of experience before you get the answer. When you ask a fifteen year old an opinion, the response is instant because there are fewer mental files to sort through.

Hugh Downs also said that retirement, uselessness, and inactivity are killers. A feeling of uselessness can produce inactivity and decline, but it can also occur the other way around. They both coincide, and eliminating one may cause the other to abate. Aging is more sociological than physiological. In America, social attitudes condone older people sitting in their rockers and just accepting their lot, and our condoning this situation only makes it an actuality.

When we wake up to the fact that all of us are aging all the time, and that advanced age need not be a time of uselessness and misery, our attitudes will change. We will be moving toward a better community to get old in. Perhaps, it is best to end with a congratulatory message from my sister Rae, who thought I was as nutty as a fruit cake for entering college.

What she stated in her message sums it all up. The pride that others had for me and the feelings of self-esteem within myself made my whole experience in obtaining an education all worthwhile.

*As a brother you are sensational;
You are really terrific.
Most golden agers sit around;
Your mind remains prolific.
You've reached a mighty goal in life,
Degrees and knowledge, too.
Your family is very proud;
They think so much of you.
Continue living like a youth.
Don't vegetate like most.
The world will be your oyster,
So I offer you this toast:
May you live to be one hundred;*

*May you glory in each day;
Find time to do the things you want;
Find time to laugh and play.
Soon we will be together
And warmly we'll embrace.
I will have a great reunion
And kiss your smiling face.*

