



Robert Macy Gelpke

I always knew that a New England Fall was upon me when my morning walks would have a sharpness of cool air and my strides through a freshly-fallen blanket of multi-colored leaves made a distinctive crunching noise as I playfully kicked them aside. A touch of frost would often confirm that an innocent, safe, family-centric Summer of my youth was behind me.

Even though raised in Sharon Massachusetts, my memorable summers were spent in nearby Westport. Those were certainly carefree times when my mother (Amanda Macy Gelpke, 1913-2007, age 93) had to find creative ways to keep me and my three siblings (Paul, Ann, and Catherine) entertained, educated, and connected. My father (Karl Adelbert Gelpke, 1914-1993, age 78) commuted from his job in Walpole, so was not heavily involved with our weekly schedule. Those were easy summers with much time spent at the beach or boating on the Westport River.

We would frequently pile into our summer car, a 1950 faded-blue, 4 door, stick-shift Buick. It was forgiving enough to allow all 4 siblings to learn how to drive 'a stick'. Our family outings would often head to the 'big city' of New Bedford. A movie was a common activity as was shopping at the Star Store with those wondrous pneumatic tubes whisking our payments to the mysterious bowels that were obviously full of cash and needed to be carefully guarded. Buttonwood Park and The New Bedford Whaling Museum were also on that circuit. The Museum was of special interest and Mom was our personal guide and docent and loved trying to immerse us with all matters of Macy everything.

She did have cause to be intimately involved as she was born and raised there (260 Maple Street, just north of Buttonwood). Her father, William Chase Macy (1874-1945, age 70), was a local dentist and married a local woman (10 years younger than him) by name Augusta Wilder Pittman Macy (1884-1945, age 60). She ironically died the same day that I was born, May 12th.

Dr. Macy's dental practice gave him the means to buy property in Westport and allowed his family to summer there. The property was then passed to my mother and her summer traditions then were passed down to her own children. We affectionately called it The Farm, as its 10 acres were originally, but not during our time there.

The genealogical connection slowly percolated when I realized that my dentist grandfather was the son of Captain William Jenkins Macy (1827-1903, age 76). He was a whaling ship captain on two different ships, the President and the Lancer between 1859 and 1873!

This whaling connection sat in the back of my mind for decades as I pursued a career in aviation as a

USAF pilot flying transports to include a combat tour in Vietnam. I was fortunate to retire (at age 42 as a Lieutenant Colonel) from that and then took my skill set to the commercial side and retired from Delta Airlines at the mandatory age of 60.

My professional flying and worldwide cruising with my wife Carolyn Marie Gelpke (August 8th, 1945) literally took us around the world several times and around the Americas to include the Northwest Passage, as we visited more than 120 counties in the process. The importance of whaling in world development was increasingly evident as we touched remote ports in the Arctic, Antarctica, South Georgia Island, and more familiar ones in the US, Canada, England, Japan, and Norway.

The more I traveled the more I realized that this was my historic destiny and felt connected to my ancestors who did the same thing many years prior as whalers. I was a Captain commanding my airship over vast distances and using the same nautical terms and procedures. Also increasing was my desire to honor and protect this heritage in a meaningful way. Education was the key, the local community the place, the Museum was the guardian, and my wife and I, a financial resource.



It took several decades for all those pieces to come together synergistically. My mother initially vigorously waved the whaling/Macy 'flag' in my face, my USAF career brought honor, duty, and respect into the equation, travel gave me the visual evidence, a family focus on education added scope, and the fortunate purchase of land 50 years prior gave us the means.

That connection manifested itself over time through the Museum as a matched pair of scrimshawed whale teeth were donated. They have 100% Macy family provenance and deep personal family meaning as we could physically examine them and imagine the specific story that was buried in their past. They were our genealogical touch stone – literally. We also sustained our membership, made visits wherever possible, and finally, the capstone - the creation of the Robert Macy Gelpke and Carolyn Gelpke Endowment: The Macy Learning Legacy Fund. It will be used to support the Museum's work with students K-12 by supporting activities related to and engaging students and schools and create enriching programs at the Museum and/or school classrooms.

For us, it brought a great sense of satisfaction that we were able to make a difference. As parents, we instinctively knew the children and education were the key to long-term sustainment and that the Museum was the perfect guardian.

It was all really quite simple; doing the right thing at the right place at the right time for the right reasons. Right?