

expensive star sapphire, to the more affordable zircon with some preferring no stone at all. (Interestingly, now 50 years later, all of our friends wear proudly their "BFR," showing the world that they graduated from one of the world's great institutions.) Quoting about my Ring Dance from my 1963 yearbook Lucky Bag, "At 1900 (7 pm), our distinguished guests arrived and we sat to enjoy a delicious roast beef dinner in the tastefully decorated Mess Hall with soft violin dinner music and orchids and miniature ring charms for each girl."

After dinner we went poolside where Japanese lanterns decorated the fringes of the dance floor and the music of Cy Zettner's band floated from the seaward end of the pool. The Ring Ceremony consisted of Suzanne, wearing my ring around her neck, and me entering the giant Class Ring where she dipped the ring into a vat holding waters from the world's seven seas. With



**Suzanne and Joe C.**  
at the 1962 Ring Dance

that done, Suzanne removed the ring and placed it on my finger, where it has remained all these years. Some couples had dual rings (a miniature for the lady) to be cherished for a lifetime. After the ceremony, lots of dancing by the pool, followed by a return to Suzanne's June Week cottage for a brief party before saying goodnight and rushing back to Bancroft Hall

(the world's largest dormitory) before the clock struck midnight.

**This brings me to 2012** and one other new USNA tradition, the "Link in the Chain" program, which ties my Class of '63 with today's Class of 2013. (I'm told that West Point, famous for its "Long Gray Line" tradition, is the Naval Academy's model for the Link in the Chain.) In the spring of 2009, when the Class of '13 was beginning its life, representatives from my Class of '63 were invited to meetings and spoke to parents and entering Plebes about the Academy, what they might expect over the next four years and what their "beyond" life might hold if they manage to handle four years by the Severn. The Link in the Chain program has featured other events participated in jointly by the Classes of '63 and '13.

My reason for writing this episode centers on this year's Ring Dance for the Class of 2013. My Class of '63 was invited to join the festivities on May 19th, and a group of my 21st Company good friends, including Joe and Bonnie, decided to return to Annapolis and participate. Among the group of ten with hotel reservations are my "best friends" who attended our Ring Dance in 1962 and are still married to the ladies who dipped our rings into the "sacred" water. The close ties we've built over the past 30 years deserve a separate chapter but, suffice it to say, that for the past few years our group has spent a week each summer together in Pocasset, on Cape Cod, reliving the old days with laughter and joy, thinking about too many of our dear ones lost in the service of our country. That's the territory for graduates of the U.S. Naval Academy, called to serve and pledged "... to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States ..."



**Suzanne and Joe C.**  
at the 2012 Ring Dance

— Joe Collins



The mission of the **Association of MIT Retirees** is to provide opportunities for members to engage with the Institute and to develop programs and events that will be of both interest and fun. We strive to be an active component in the MIT family by keeping our members in touch with each other and with the Institute, and to forge new friendships.

**Nancy Alusow and Joe Collins** are chairs of the Association. The organization is supported by Traci Swartz and Chris Ronsicki of the Community Services Office.

Your suggestions for activities are welcome.

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## THE ASSOCIATION OF MIT RETIREES



### MEMOIR COLLECTION

September 2012, #4

#### ABOUT THE MEMOIR CLASS

*The Association of MIT Retirees introduced a memoir writing workshop for members in February 2011. This class of dedicated writers is led by **Nita Regnier**, Association advisory committee member and former instructor in MIT's Program in Writing and Humanistic Studies in the Writing Center. The writers have produced fine work which they wish to share. This year, the Association is featuring work by each class member. While the stories represent a wide range of experiences and generations, some reminiscences may resonate with you and perhaps inspire some memories of your own.*

**New members** are welcome to join the class! Please contact the Association at 617-253-7910 or [retirees.assoc@mit.edu](mailto:retirees.assoc@mit.edu) for information.

*Our fourth featured work is by **Joe Collins**. A native Bostonian, Joe graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1963. After more than six years on active duty, he served in a variety of Naval Reserve assignments, retiring as a Captain in 1985. Joe came to MIT in 1969 and spent seven years in the Office of the Chairman, engaged in Government and Community Affairs. In 1976, Joe joined the Alumni Association, spent 20 years as Director of the MIT Alumni Fund, followed by time in Resource Development during MIT's \$2 billion campaign. He retired in 2006. Joe serves on the Board of the Quarter Century Club and is co-chair of the Association of MIT Retirees. Married to Suzanne with five children and 17 grandchildren, he lives in Cambridge.*

#### WHY WRITE A MEMOIR?

Several years prior to retirement, I began to think about writing a memoir. Hoping that some of my family might be interested, my primary motivation came from a lifetime interest in writing and the desire for more time spent in personal reflection and less in "doing." Our memoir group has been meeting for over a year and, guided by Nita Regnier's gentle

mentorship, has bonded. We are all MIT retirees from different sectors of the Institute's administration but by "age and stage" share common memories of life in the latter half of the 20th century.

Although able to recall several phases of my life, at present I'm focused on my years in the U.S. Navy, especially the ten years between 1959-69. Hope you'll enjoy this chapter.

#### MY GOOD FRIEND SAMMY JOE

**August 12, 2010**, while awaiting the arrival of Tom, Jack, and Wink for their annual week on Cape Cod, I received an email from Joe, saying that he'd been diagnosed with vascular dementia and asking us to visit him while he still remembered us. Our small "best friends" group of United States Naval Academy Class of 1963 has committed itself to periodic visits with him and Bonnie since then.

Joe was raised in Washington D.C., a first generation son of Italian immigrants, and was a fine student-athlete at Walter Johnson High School. His football prowess attracted attention from the U.S. Naval Academy and the athletic director told him that he'd likely be admitted to USNA if he could get a Congressional appointment or an "alternate" position. So Joe went to Congress, knocked on doors, and received a fourth alternate slot from an Alaskan congressman. This was good enough for him to enter the Class of '63. Strong and solid, Joe packed 150 lbs. on his 5' 8" frame. Direct in manner and strictly no nonsense in approach, classmates were drawn to him. One knew that this man would cover your back in a tense situation.

Some 50 years ago we Navy Midshipmen met and were assigned with 45 others to the 1st Company. Of this group, 40 of us graduated in 1963. One of our best stories concerns how Joe, Jack, and Bill bumped into each other upon arriving at USNA's Gate 3 on Induction

Day, July 7, 1959. Before Fidel Castro took over in Cuba, Bill and Jack had spent time together in school in Havana while their dads were working there; Bill's father with Squires, and Jack's with Esso. For reasons lost in time, Joe spent a summer in Havana and became friends with Bill but he didn't know Jack. The three chose to room together for Plebe year. (After Castro's takeover, Bill's dad was forced to leave Havana; that would have been sometime around our Second Class year in 1962.) After graduation, Bill became a helicopter pilot. He survived a tour in Vietnam, then died in an automobile crash while on leave in California.

At a recent mini-reunion in San Diego, we determined that eight of our company mates died, four in war-related incidents, including Mickey (a former Youngster Year roommate of mine; I was also an usher at his wedding just prior to his deployment) who died in the mysterious disappearance in 1968 of the submarine USS Scorpion. Another who died heroically was Steve, lost on USS Liberty during the Six-Day Arab-Israeli War in 1967, when the ship was attacked by an Israeli aircraft.

Over the course of our four years at USNA, roommates changed (Wink and I roomed together Second Class and First Class years) and friendships developed, but upon graduation we all went separate ways. Jack became an Air Force pilot while Joe, Tom (among our group the highest ranking Midshipman in our company, and Company Commander First Class year), Wink, and I were Surface Navy officers. In 1969, I was destined for a Swift Boat command in Vietnam, but was fortunate in that my orders were overruled by my CINCLANT Command, (CINCLANT stood for Commander-in-Chief Atlantic, a joint command overseen by a four star admiral).

Some of us dated during our Annapolis years, so our girlfriends, Bonnie, Dolly, Yvonne, and Suzanne knew each other. For three years, during the Academy's June Week, we rented a group cottage in "Sherwood Forest," a housing community located just outside of Annapolis, where the girls would bond and someone's mom would be in charge as chaperone. Joe, Tom, Jack, and I married our sweethearts within ten days of graduation and remain married today. I was an usher at Joe's wedding, entrusted by Bonnie with the care of her mom.

In the years post graduation, it was difficult to stay close — family matters, ship deployments, wartime service in Vietnam, etc. But in 1983, at our 20th reunion in Annapolis, we all signed up late and were therefore relegated to a motel several miles from the Academy. Suzanne had stayed home in Massachusetts with our five children; but when all the rest of the wives were there, Joe called her and urged her to take an early plane the next morning, which she did. The bonding achieved at that 20th reunion triggered deep friendships and periodic gatherings, now more frequent as we all are retired.

**From 1963-83**, I had opportunities to stay with Joe and Bonnie in their home in Potomac, MD. Sometimes I had dinner with them while on work assignment in D.C. Once, my two-week Navy Reserve active duty time brought me to Washington and they offered me their guest room. I recall that Bonnie had a function in Baltimore on a Friday night, so Joe and I drove to West Virginia for a night at the race track. I always liked Joe and was sorry that we never roomed together at the Academy. Joe is a great friend, a real doer, with little patience, especially for politicians. He spent seven years on active duty, then left to join an insurance brokerage.

Salesmanship was not his strongest suit and he took over as office manager. Joe was a great cook and he took care of Bonnie as she worked full-time as a school librarian at one of Washington's elite private schools for girls. They were blessed with one child, Ann, a really neat individual, published author, and now living nearby helping Bonnie to care for Joe. She has one son, Sammy, who brings much joy to Joe when he visits.

**Around ten years ago**, with his decision to retire early, Joe put together a plan to rent an eight-bedroom villa in Tuscany, "Casa Tara," for May and June, and he invited friends he'd met along the way to join Bonnie and him by signing up for a week or more. The first time we went, Suzanne and I were joined by our children, Tim and Jessica, and we stayed for two weeks.

This was a wonderful time with two of our five adult children, which added to the celebration. Tom and Dolly came, as did Jack and Yvonne, plus some of Joe's insurance colleagues. Joe picked us up in Florence, where we had spent two days seeing the sites. He attended to all aspects of the villa, especially shopping and

cooking, activities he enjoyed. He was the master chef with all residents participating as sous chefs, table setters, or dishwashers. Cocktails featured local red wine and appetizers, frequently including bruchetta; dinners were typical Italian food, with leftovers used for next day's breakfast.

Lunch was on our own. Several of the guests had cars, so we traveled independently. The first year, we visited Pisa, Luca, Sienna, San Gimignano, and more. The setting of Casa Tara was perfect, surrounded by hill country-farms, vineyards, and small towns. The highlight was a wedding of Joe's Maryland friends, Tammy and Phil, who spent the week selecting wedding wine from area vineyards. It was hard to say goodbye when Joe and Bonnie dropped us off at the airport. Some weeks later, after all his bookkeeping, Joe presented the bill for our vacation stay, a very modest \$700. During lulls at the villa, Joe spoke of his plans, when Bonnie retired, to open a small unimposing diner on the coast of Maine, where he would cook breakfast and lunch. This plan suited Joe's interests and skills but did not come to fruition.

**In 2004, Joe once again** rented Casa Tara, but this time he, Bonnie, and his brother Vinnie expanded their stay and decided to visit the village in Sicily where his dad was born. This trip we went in March, accompanied by our Milton friends Leo and Miriam. We rented a car in Florence and enjoyed the freedom to select our own daily destinations. Fellow residents during our stay included Wink and Carol; Tom and Dolly; Jack and Yvonne; and their daughter Stephanie and her husband Gary. We travelled to Vinci, birthplace of Leonardo da Vinci; Volterra, home of the Etruscans; and Assisi, as well as Sienna, and others. Again, Joe was a cordial host, doing everything to make his guests comfortable.



**Best friends** at Casa Tara in 2004, (top, l-r) Tom, Joe C., Sammy Joe, Jack, and Wink; (above) Sammy Joe and Joe C. in Tuscany

Our next major time together was 2006 at the 45th reunion in Annapolis. By now, Joe's diabetes had become problematic. I well recall one day when the girls had gone to lunch and Tom and I were alone with Joe. As we approached the Naval Academy Club for lunch, Joe became faint. We assisted him to a table and Tom got some orange juice as Joe's blood sugar had become dangerously low. As Bonnie recounted later, Joe had begun to fall and required use of a cane. Despite Joe's disability, they purchased their Maine home and, after Bonnie's retirement, began to summer there. In 2010, Bonnie made a special plea to our group to come and visit. Wink and Tom did so, while Suzanne and I had family visiting and weren't able to make the trip.

As a result of his vascular dementia, Joe and Bonnie moved from Bethesda, MD to Leesburg, VA and "Leisure World." During our last visit in late September 2011 in conjunction with the Navy vs. Air Force football game, Joe seemed to be holding his own, using a cane and able to follow the conversation and add his "two cents" worth, occasionally.

While dwelling on Joe's issues, it is fair to say that the others in the group have their own health problems. Wink, who captained a Swift Boat in Vietnam, as well as a large modern guided missile destroyer, suffers from polymyositis, a crippling lung illness. (There seems no link to Agent Orange and his Vietnam service.) Tom and Jack, both of whom did time in Vietnam, have arteriosclerosis (and have stents). One wonders if wartime stresses had anything to do with that. As for me, health has never been a major issue. I'm most appreciative and pray for continued good fortune. Now as spring 2012 approaches we have another opportunity to gather together our "best friends" group.

The U.S. Naval Academy is steeped in traditions. Among the traditions is the Ring Dance, the highlight of Second Class year during June Week, when we received and began wearing our treasured Academy class ring, imbedded on one side with the Class of '63 crest, (a feature of many cocktail and wine goblets, ashtrays, and coasters located in our Milton, Cape, and Cambridge homes). The other side of the ring has the Academy's crest, imbued with the logo, "Ex Scientia, Tridens" (translation: "From Knowledge, Sea Power"). Each Midshipman had the opportunity to select his own stone. (There were only males at USNA in my time.) The stones ranged from the