

Gene Bunge

By Ken South

It was a time when fewer people in the US lived on farms than in cities. But farmers were also getting used to the transition from horses to machines. The WPA was launched to employ thousands to do big things, like build the Hoover Dam, and FDR signed the Social Security Act into law, it was 1935.

In that year, on one of those farms, near Eitzen, Minnesota, (pop 140), Mr. April was born the first child on May 4th, with a brother and sister to follow. A prosperous farm of 400 acres, it was large enough to hire men to help in the fields and a woman to help in the house.

Mr. A's primary education was in a "Little Red Schoolhouse" with his five classmates each day. He graduated from Caledonia HS, in the 40-member, Class of 1953. As the highest graduating senior boy, he was awarded a full scholarship for his first semester of college.

Scholarship in hand, Mr. A enrolled in Hamline University in St. Paul, majoring in Theatre Arts, and graduated in 1957. As Broadway lights beckoned, Mr. A found himself in NYC landing a small role in "Hamlet" in a not so memorable production. However, Uncle Sam loved him, because in 1960 he got an invitation (draft notice) to join the Army!

Unable to refuse, he accepted the 2-year agreement to serve his country. It turned out to be a marvelous, theater arts master class! He was assigned to the APC (Army Pictorial Center) where he learned the crafts of movie making and TV production, acting and directing. His second-year assignment in Seoul, South Korea, was for the Armed Forces Network (AFN), directing various variety shows and appearing in a Saturday morning children's show for military families.

Returning to the States, he followed a career in TV production. His focus was with Public Broadcasting Stations, working at KTCA in Minneapolis, WTTW in Chicago, and NET Nebraska. He really enjoyed his work with documentary and cultural affairs programming. Over the years, he got to work with many personalities, just a few include Valerie Harper, Henry Fonda, Yo-Yo Ma, Robert Shaw, Dick Cavett, Count Basie, Vincent Price, Ruby Dee, Thomas Hart Benton, and Marcel Marceau. After 25 years of service, he retired in 1998.

Mr. A was married to Sharon for 25 years, having two children together. Around 1991, he came to fully accept himself as a gay man, no longer to remain in the marriage. During "pillow talk" one evening, he said to his wife; "Sharon, I'm bi-sexual", and she said; "I feel like I'm on Oprah Winfrey." He proceeded to pop out of the closet, sharing this revelation with his children, his siblings and his work colleagues. He is grateful that he still enjoys a warm relationship with his close and extended family.

He celebrated his new life by seeing the world. He visited many of the great museums in this country, western Europe and Asia, floated down the world's famous rivers, bungee jumped in New Zealand, climbed the Himalayas, skied the Alps, and even scuba dove off the Great Barrier Reef.

In Nebraska in 1997, during a "wild" party in Omaha, he met his partner Jerry. The couple courted for several months, as Jerry, the younger of the two, was also an actor, they found lots in common. In late 97 they moved in together and in 99 they purchased a house in Wilmington, DE. Later, they bought a condo in Florida for winter escapes, and in 2005 moved to Hallandale, FL to make their condo their home.

Mr. A continues his love of theater by periodically taking on acting roles in South Florida theater, film and commercials. At the age of 70, he joined the *Actors' Equity Association*. He and Jerry are looking forward to *Prime Gentlemen's Monday night mixers* opening up again.

