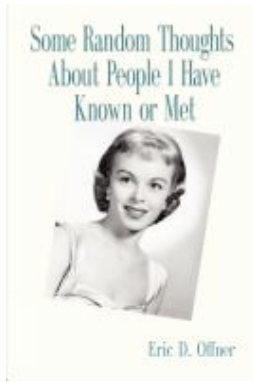


Some Random Thoughts
About People I Have
Known or Met



Eric D. Offner



In this collection of personal sketches, Eric Offner shares thoughts and reminiscences about the wide array of people, both private and famous, he has encountered. From escaping war torn Europe, to teaching law school in the United States, from being called America's number one soccer fan, to helping preserve the artform of New Orleans jazz, these stories represent a life lived with passion and compassion.

Some Random Thoughts About People I Have Known or Met

Order the complete book from

[Booklocker.com](http://www.booklocker.com)

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/6500.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**

Your Free excerpt appears below. Enjoy!

*Some Random Thoughts
About People I Have Known
or Met*

*by
Eric D. Offner*

Copyright ©2012 by Eric D. Offner

ISBN: 978-1-62141-732-3

Library of Congress control number 2012937565

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Printed in the United States of America.

Published by Fieldston Press.
2012

First Edition

www.sidneybechet.org

Cover photo: Julie Offner, wife of author

Author's Preface

In this book, I limit myself to specific people and while each encounter and story is a unit by itself, the combination of units, in other words the whole story of my whole life, is more significant than each of the parts. It helps understand who one is.

The most significant person in my early life I met in November 1938, when Austria had been annexed by Germany. A Dutch relative, Eugene Fresco, advised my mother and I to take a train to Holland to escape Hitler, which we did. What do I remember about Eugene Fresco? He was a good looking man, played our piano, and sang jazz. Later in my life I realized that his growl sounded like Bessie Smith. And this happened in 1938. My mother and I stayed at the Fresco home at The Hague until I received a visa to go to England. Holland was a country, for me, full of beautiful cheeses and foods and very flat, and I saw the ocean for the first time in my life.

After a bumpy journey over the North Sea to England, many significant people I met in England shaped my life.

The most important was a family called the Halseys, who took me in at Northampton, where London schoolboys and girls were taken in by the local population.

My foster father, Mr. Halsey, was a Northampton Football Club secretary, and he took me to the games every Saturday afternoon.

My journey from Northampton continued. My uncle, Kurt Delmonte, from Rio de Janeiro, arranged to get us – that is, my whole family – visas to go to Brazil. We took the train from London to Southampton. This was wartime, and we were attacked by German airplanes. The train was never hit. In Southampton, we gave up our gas-masks, and went on a 14,000-ton unarmed vessel, The Highland Princess. During World War II, English ships zig-zagged from Southampton to Rio de Janeiro. There were other British vessels in the convoy. We were attacked by a U-Boat and an airplane at the same time. Our ship was not hit, and having lived in blacked-out Europe, I now arrived in Rio de Janeiro, which was certainly lit up and festive.

I lived with my uncle, aunt, and two cousins in Rio. My uncle paid for my education at a very expensive American school called Escola Americana de Rio de Janeiro. There were very small classes taught in English, and Portuguese was a language learned. My team in Rio was Botafogo, whose colors are identical to Newcastle. Almost every day I went to the Copacabana Beach to watch beach football.

The home was beautiful. We lived in a high floor in Rio's only skyscraper, which was between Ipanema and Copacabana. In the summertime, my uncle had a house and large farm in Petropolis, which was also the summer home of the President of Brazil, Getulio Vargas.

I was very delighted when my parents told me that we had a visa to come to the U.S.A. We traveled on the SS Brazil, a 33,000-ton liner from Rio to New York, and arrived on April 21, 1941. On the next day, my parents sent me, as a 12-year old alone, to enroll in a school called Boody Junior High School in Brooklyn. It was a very tough, Italian-neighborhood school. The person who interviewed me wanted to place me in 7A. I explained that I had several languages, algebra, and other courses which enabled me to start in 9A. I'm glad I skipped two years. A very kind classmate, Arnold Nodiff, bought me an ice-cream sundae as a means of making me feel at home in a new country.

My next school was Abraham Lincoln High School. My seminal experience was in the cafeteria. I didn't know anyone. A boy had a chess set. I asked him if I could play chess with him. He agreed. I beat him. He told me he was captain of the chess team. This boy eventually went to Yale and played chess.

In planning for college, I had two choices – namely two free colleges: Brooklyn College and City College. I chose City College's Bernard Baruch College, on 23rd Street. My father convinced me to go to law school. How did I choose my law school? When I was a waiter at Camp Graylock in Massachusetts, I met a young woman who had a T-shirt, on which it said "Cornell". I asked her what that meant. She explained that Cornell was a beautiful school. That was the basis of my choice for Cornell Law School.

My interview at Cornell Law School was quite interesting. I was scheduled to meet the secretary of the law school I thought that was a secretary, not the Secretary.

Some Random Thoughts About People I Have Known or Met

In 1952 I joined a firm now known as Ladas & Parry.

My mentor was Dr. Steven P. Ladas, considered the dean of the trademark bar. He wrote a book and he also taught law school before heading the aforementioned firm. I aspired to be like him. Everyone should have a mentor. I had an excellent mentor.

After five years, I joined Haseltine Lake, a firm that originated in England, and when I left, the name of that firm was Haseltine, Lake & Offner. In 1979, I formed my own firm, which lasted until my wife Carol had lung cancer, and I wanted to be with her instead of practicing law when she had four months to live.

I resumed my practice and am continuing to practice law at age 84 in the year 2012.

I tried to achieve what Dr. Ladas achieved. I taught law school most of my adult life; I wrote several law books in my field; and I lectured all over the United States, China, Japan and Europe. I loved the work I was doing, and I am very grateful for the opportunities offered to me.

In my personal life, a highlight was the birth of my son, Gary, who is very successful and who is the father of three lovely children, my grandson Grant, my granddaughter Avery, who died in 2009, and my granddaughter, Kelly. All of them make me very proud.

My life has been greatly enhanced by my partnership with Mary Ann Lang, who I have known since 1984, and who constantly offers me joy and happiness.

My life has been shaped by major political events, forces of nature, war, and of course, the people I have met from whom I have learned so much and who have created who I am today. I am very grateful.

Eric D. Offner

The Sidney Bechet Society Concerts

One of the early concerts at The Children's Aid Society brought together Byron Stripling and Wycliffe Gordon. It was one of the spectacular concerts bringing together two giants of the jazz world who did not know each other. Their scattin'g is still remembered by some members. After the concert, the following day, each of them called me to thank me for introducing each to the other. I'm happy to say that in September of 2010 I was able to arrange for a reunion at The Kaye Playhouse of Hunter College.

In the year 1997, five persons and I founded the Sidney Bechet Society to commemorate my hero in the music world, who was literally unknown in the United States while probably the most famous musician in France. Sidney left the United States in 1949 and until his death, on May 13, 1959, was god to all the French people because of his musical playing. He played clarinet and soprano saxophone, and was the most famous musician in France in the jazz world. He made many, many movies in France, had a street named after him, had a subway station in Paris named after him, and his wedding to a German woman, who he knew from a long time ago, made Life Magazine. Sidney Bechet rode in a Cadillac car in that wedding, thanks to the royalties of a tune he wrote called 'Petit Fleur'.

I had the idea of forming a Sidney Bechet Society, primarily for the purpose of raising the consciousness of America of a great American artist, Sidney Bechet. I called Walter Schaap, a jazz historian who was very enthusiastic about my idea, and would support it. He, in turn, called Bill Gottlieb, the jazz photographer, and I called two friends, Donald Gardiner and Phil Stern. The five of us met at a restaurant, where Bross Townsend, the jazz pianist, was playing, and we were the founding members of the Bechet Society. I was elected president, Walter executive vice-president, Bross Townsend vice-president, and I'm not sure whether we voted on the other two positions that were originally filled by Dick Smolens and Bert Levi.

Some Random Thoughts About People I Have Known or Met

The progress of the Bechet Society is something I can be proud of, since we are in our 15th year. We publish the Bechet Quarterly, we present a minimum of four concerts a year, which are well attended.

Our original concert to found the Society was held in Rebecca Weller's home. Rebecca Weller produced music at Lincoln Center's Midsummer Night Swing, and she opened the doors to her apartment to fifty people to start the Bechet Society. I asked Bob Wilber, Sidney's most famous student, to play at the concert, and we had many, many volunteer musicians, including the aforementioned Bross Townsend, Vince Giordano, Bob Wilber's wife sang, and the other singer was the great blues singer Gwen Cleveland. I was very happy that the great Benny Waters, in his mid 90's, who had come back from Europe, was also going to perform for us. It was the initial concert and also included Bob Barnard, a trumpeter from Australia, and Cynthia Sayer on guitar and banjo.

The original permanent theatre for the Bechet Society was on Sullivan Street, at the Children's Aid Society. It was very small and held only a hundred people. Pretty soon we had two concerts on the same night because we were able to get about two hundred people. Please bear in mind that there were no promotions, no advertisements for the concert, and it was word-of-mouth. We had an illustrious Board of Directors, including people like George Wein, Jack Lesberg, and a list of people that you can see from the letterhead of the Bechet Society.

There have been many outstanding concerts such as the above mentioned first meeting of Byron Stripling and Wycliffe Gordon. Two other people who played together, with, of course, a rhythm section, were Bob Wilber and Evan Christopher, another example of that type of concert. We've had a number of great singers in addition to the musicians, and of course Wycliffe Gordon and Byron Stripling sang and did a lot of duet singing, which produced some of the best sounds that we have heard at Bechet Society concerts. The number of artists who have performed is substantial. Some can be heard on four recordings of The Sidney Bechet Society.

Eric D. Offner

Brian Glanville

When I lived in Ardsley, in the late '50's, I was friendly with the Editor of Sport magazine, Al Silverman, who hired Brian Glanville to write a soccer article. In Al Silverman's contact with Brian Glanville, he talked about me as being the number one soccer fan in the United States, knowing all the things I did relating to soccer.

During that time – actually, in the early '60's – I was working in London with a patent and trademark firm called Marks & Clerk. The founder of the firm was Lord Marks. When I was in London, the head of the trademark department was a gentleman called Joe, who was a fanatical soccer fan. The firm was large and fielded a soccer team wearing the colors of West Ham, and Joe, my friend who founded the soccer team, took me to a West Ham game, where he had season tickets. After the game, I asked Joe if I could go to the press box in case Brian Glanville was covering this particular game in London. It was my luck that Brian Glanville was sitting in one of those boxes. I walked up to him after I waited for him to finish his report on the match, and said, "Brian, I'm Eric Offner." Brian Glanville answered, "Oh, the number one soccer fan in the United States!" From that day on, we used to meet regularly whenever I came to London and I had the pleasure of visiting him in his home in Holland Park.

When I visited Brian Glanville one year in his home, I was in London with my father. My dad, who supported Arsenal in England, was a fanatical soccer fan and was grateful that he could meet Brian Glanville. When we met, my father reminded Brian Glanville that Hakoah, an Austrian team, was the first continental side to beat an English club in England. They beat West Ham United in London, and my dad, being a Hakoah supporter, was very proud of this result in the year 1929. Brian listened carefully and said, "But did you know that West Ham fielded a reserve team?"

Many years later, when my son Gary was working in London, the three of us – Brian, Gary and myself – had lunch at a restaurant the three of us liked a lot, namely Rules, on Maiden Lane. Brian took a

Some Random Thoughts About People I Have Known or Met

bicycle to that location, and my aim was for Brian to know three generations of Offners.

I subscribe to World Soccer, and of course, Brian Glanville is the most important commentator in that famous magazine. His column appears at the front of the magazine each month, and of course that is the first article I read. I have, over the years, read many columns by Brian Glanville, particularly when he was a writer for the London Sunday Times. He was a good writer, and only from time to time did I disagree with his choice of English players who, he thought, ought to be playing for the English national team and who I did not think were worthy of selection. Nicky Barmby was one such player, who now plays for Hull City.

Brian wrote many novels and authored a television show called "That Was The Week That Was", one of several writers.

Emil Scheller

Emil Scheller has a similar background as mine: born in Vienna, escaped Hitler, and then wound up in New York and attended Columbia Law School. Married a lovely woman, Nina, from England. We have a long, personal and professional relationship.

Recently, I received the following letter from him, which I reprint below:

Emil Scheller

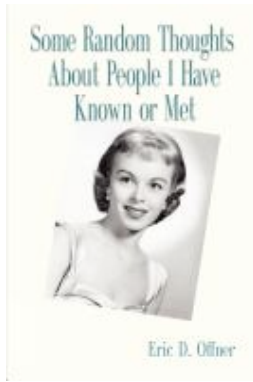
December 18, 2011

Dear Eric,

I recorded the enclosed DVD in September with the intent of sending it to you but then forgot to send it. It is a recording of a New Orleans Jazz concert, followed by Mahler's Symphony No 2 in C minor, "Resurrection", which Alan Gilbert conducted to mark the anniversary of September 11, and to honor its victims. I hope you will enjoy watching it on your giant screen.

As I send this I think of the many years we have known each other and how as we look back on our lives we cannot help thinking of our accomplishments and what we will leave behind. In the end the things that really count are the accomplishments that outlast us and that serve as a testimonial to our lives. These give us immortality.

You have had many accomplishments in your lifetime, professionally and personally, but the one that I think will forever be a testimonial to your accomplishments is your founding and building of the Sidney Bechet Society. It is my fondest hope that you will manage to find a way to make it outlive both of us, so that future generations will be able to enjoy it as much as we have. When I think of that first concert in a Village apartment with, at most, fifty people in attendance, which in itself was already a significant accomplishment, to the concerts that are now attended by ten times as many, I find myself truly impressed. I think that the success of the Society is a testimonial to your skill, dedication, and musicality. I hope that we both will attend many more, but no matter how many we attend, the real achievement will be how many will attend after we and our generation are long gone.



In this collection of personal sketches, Eric Offner shares thoughts and reminiscences about the wide array of people, both private and famous, he has encountered. From escaping war torn Europe, to teaching law school in the United States, from being called America's number one soccer fan, to helping preserve the artform of New Orleans jazz, these stories represent a life lived with passion and compassion.

Some Random Thoughts About People I Have Known or Met

Order the complete book from

[Booklocker.com](http://www.booklocker.com)

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/6500.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**