

## Bob Nation By Ken South

President Harry Truman signed the Marshall Plan into law in 1948, while NYC hiked its subway fare to 10 cents. Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated by a Hindu extremist, and Israel declared independence from British rule. And, on June 10<sup>th</sup> a new star, Mr. May, was born, the only child of a couple in Forest Hills, Queens, NY.

He was born into a "show biz" family, his mother, Frances, being one of "The Byrne Sisters", a song and dance trio, that became the opening act for George Burns, Milton Berle, and Jack Benny on the vaudeville circuit, a career the sisters enjoyed for two decades, (his father was their chauffeur).

As a young child, his Mom took him to a Broadway show every Friday night. The first was "Peter Pan," starring Mary Martin. Mom escorted him backstage—his first celebrity introduction. He told Ms. Martin he truly believed in "fairies" and they hugged.

At that tender age, he was "hooked" and asked his parents to be enrolled in piano, singing and dancing lessons. The family moved to Fort Lee, NJ where Mr. M continued private classes while attending Fort Lee HS and was busily engaged in the performing arts programs—music and drama. A youthful highlight was his piano solo of "Rhapsody in Blue" in the NJ pavilion at the 1964-65 New York World's Fair. He was just 13 years old, but he did wear white tails like a "Liberace wanna be".

Mr. M graduated in 1966 with a successful college audition to Glassboro State College. Continuing his studies in the arts, he earned an undergraduate degree in speech and drama there, followed by a graduate degree in theatre from Villanova University, Philadelphia. He taught acting and directed hundreds of shows at Cherry Hill HS East, in NJ over a 37-year career, and was the recipient of several awards for his exemplary musical theater directing.

However, in the evenings, he was off across the river to Broadway. He earned his Actor's Equity card and got to work back stage at numerous theatrical productions like "The Fantasticks". He even became a member of the creative team for the new musical, "A Tale of Two Cities" which first opened in 2008 in Sarasota, FL. After hiring a new director, the show opened at the *Hirschfield Theater* on Broadway, but only ran for 4 months.

He was with that production for over two years and recalls that the disappointment of an early closing truly motivated his retirement from the Great White Way, as well as from teaching., Mr. M decided to move to southern Florida (where his parents once owned a vacation home in 2010). Here he has continued his passion for the arts by teaching theater at Charles Flanagan HS in Pembroke Pines for several years, while opening a black box theatre in Ft Lauderdale--

*Andrews Living Arts.* After Hurricane Irma ruined the building, he spent time writing a couple of plays and searching for a new venue to keep alive his Mom's legacy of preserving 20<sup>th</sup> Century Broadway Memorabilia. His search materialized with the opening of "Behind the Scenes Theatricals" in Ft. Lauderdale, which is home to the "Artist Sanctuary of Ft. Lauderdale", a non-profit theatrical museum and resource center, along with a small performance space. At this location he also has a theater costume rental business with more than 7,000 Broadway costumes and props, mostly collected by his Mom over her long career in show business.

Mr. M believes that the real measure of a teacher's impact is how well his student's fare in their life's journey. He is very proud of the dozens of his students who have succeeded by becoming Tony nominated performers in major Broadway productions like "Phantom of the Opera", "Once" and "The Lion King".

You can chat with Mr. M most Tuesdays at the Prime Gentlemen's social and learn more about his amazing life in the theater and his enthusiasm for sharing his love of Broadway with South Florida.

