

A few minutes *sharing warm boyhood memories* with Andy Rooney!

By Ann Hauprich

The wit and wisdom of Andy Rooney have earned him legions of fans across the nation and around the world.

As the author of several bestselling books, an award-winning syndicated newspaper column and a popular spot on CBS TV's *60 Minutes*, his face and voice rank among the most familiar of our times.

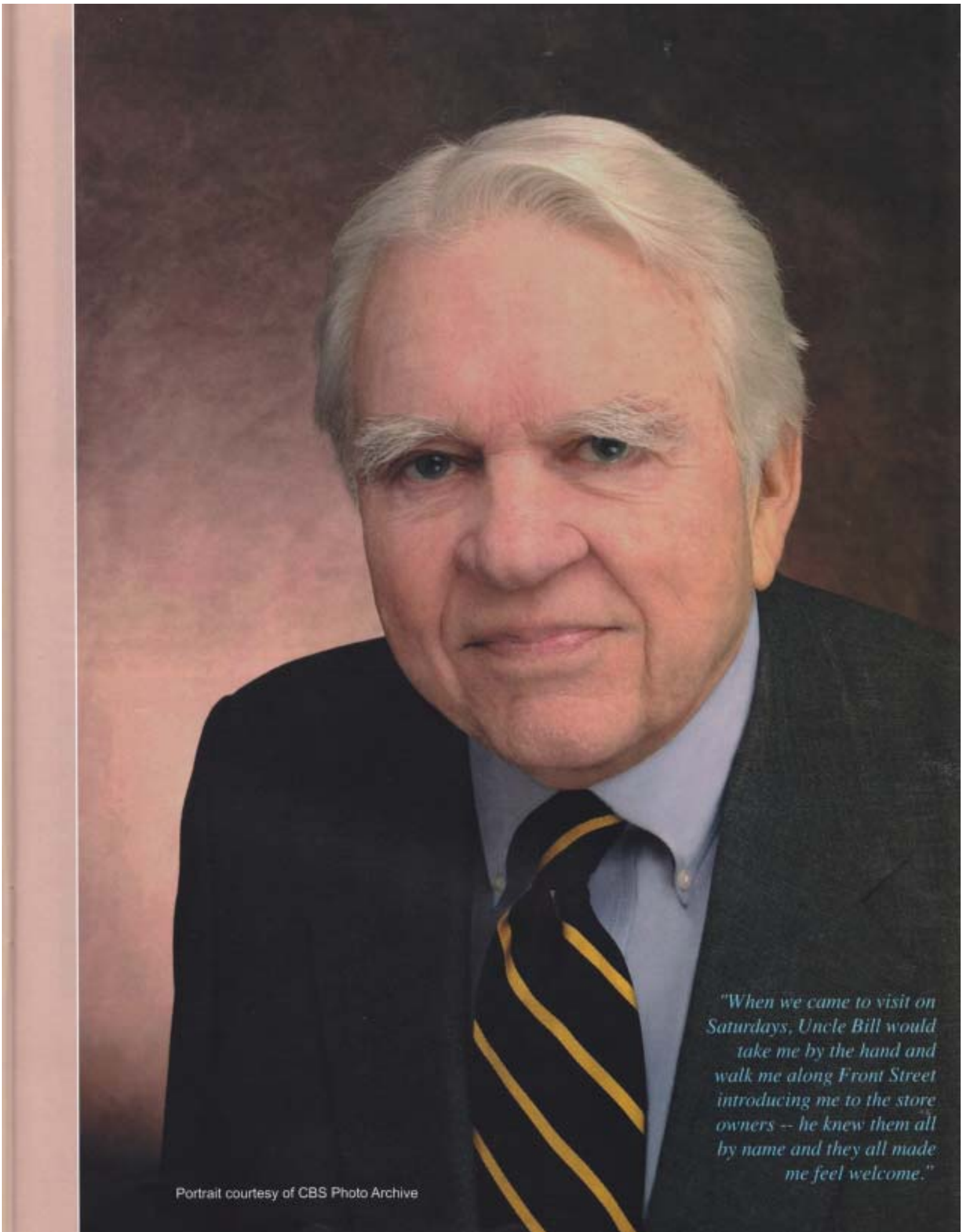
Lesser known — but equally fascinating — is the part of Rooney's life that included more than a few minutes of boyhood adventures in the greater Saratoga/Capital Region. For example, he doubts there's anyone alive who knew the barn behind 23 Church Avenue in Ballston Spa as well as young Andy Rooney.



The Church Avenue house and barn originally belonged to his paternal grandparents (Charles P. Rooney of England and Annie Aitken Rooney of Portobello, Scotland) who acquired the property in 1905 when Rooney's father, Walter Scott Rooney, was in his late teens. Walter and his two older brothers, Fred and Bill, had spent their earlier years in residences on Ballston Avenue and Malta Avenue.

By the time Andrew Aitken Rooney came along on January 14, 1919, the Church Avenue property had become the matrimonial home of his beloved Uncle Bill and Auntie Belle. The couple initially moved in to help care for Rooney's widowed paternal grandmother and stayed there until their own deaths in 1950. Although Uncle Bill was better known throughout the area as William C. Rooney, a highly respected and community-minded attorney-at-law and Auntie Belle (nee Annabel Cole) earned accolades as a civic volunteer, their nephew admired and respected them for other reasons.

The house and barn at 23 Church Avenue in Ballston Spa hold many happy memories for Andy Rooney pictured riding his tricycle in the driveway beside the residence and perched on the lap of his father, Walter Scott Rooney, in the sitting room. The photograph of an even smaller future media giant was snapped while on a 1920 vacation with his mother, Ellinor Reynolds Rooney, and her sister, Anna Reynolds.



"When we came to visit on Saturdays, Uncle Bill would take me by the hand and walk me along Front Street introducing me to the store owners -- he knew them all by name and they all made me feel welcome."

Portrait courtesy of CBS Photo Archive



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This 1898 photo, taken in the parlor of the Ballston Avenue home where Andy Rooney's ancestors lived before moving to 23 Church Avenue in Ballston Spa, shows his father, Walter Scott Rooney, as a young lad playing marbles while an older brother reads. At right are the CBS commentator's paternal grandparents, Charles P. Rooney and Annie Aitken Rooney, who came to America from Portabello, Scotland. That's also Andy's father (below) practicing his ball playing skills -- and then pausing to rest -- around the same time period.

"Uncle Bill was the best friend a young boy could ever have," Rooney told *Saratoga Living* during a recent telephone interview. "I never lived in Ballston Spa . . . my parents moved to Albany before I was born . . . but we frequently came up from Albany -- and always spent Thanksgiving there. Dad's mother was still alive when I was very young and we'd come to see her and other relatives and friends who lived in the village."

"The first thing Uncle Bill did when we came was take me up Church Avenue to see his friend, Frank Winney. Frank had a butternut tree in his backyard and, if it was the season when the nuts were on the ground, we gathered them up and took them home. They were good in cookies, but the meat was difficult to extract from the shells."

Frank Winney ran the dry goods store on Front Street between Joe Sweeney's drug store and Uncle Bill's upstairs law office at 22 Front Street.



While the late merchant's name can still be read in the tiles outside his once thriving store, no markers were left by Uncle Bill who later moved his practice to a building on Low Street opposite the Civil Sam statue by Wiswall Park. "When we came to visit on Saturdays, Uncle Bill would take me by the hand and walk me along Front Street introducing me to the store owners -- he knew them all by name and they all made me feel welcome."





When young Andy Rooney wasn't at home on Partridge Street in Albany or visiting relatives at 23 Church Avenue in Ballston Spa, he and big sister, Nancy Reynolds Rooney (above) made memories with their parents at the family's camp on Lake George. With Rooney in early 1920's lake side photo is his boyhood friend, Jack Skinner. At upper right is Rooney in his Albany Academy Class of 1938 senior portrait. Popular Saratoga County photographer J.S. Wooley took the portrait below of Rooney's Uncle Fred and Uncle Bill with his father.



Heartfelt thanks to the Rooney family and Chris Morley of Ballston Spa for sharing the priceless historic photos in this section with our readers. Portraits of Andy Rooney on pages 17, 25, 26 and 27 courtesy of CBS NewsArchive. Color photos of houses on pages 23 and 33 by Antonio Bucca.

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That's Auntie Belle posing in front of the Church Avenue barn in the early 1900s. The barn that was so loved by Andy Rooney in his youth also served as the backdrop in the 1930s when Rooney's father, flanked by brothers Bill and Fred, visited the old homestead. Each of the Rooney brothers died in his 72nd year.



Best of all, though, were the times young Andrew (as family called him) shared with Uncle Bill at 23 Church Avenue, across the street from the Verbeck Mansion, now the offices of Canty Financial Management.

"I think he missed having children of his own and he enjoyed doting on us," reflects Rooney, with reference to himself and his older sister Nancy (see sidebar page 28). "I must have explored the house and the barn from top to bottom a hundred times between the ages of seven and 14 with Uncle Bill."

Adding to the excitement at 23 Church Avenue was the fact that Rooney's late cousin Bob, who was 15 years his senior, had electrified the barn one summer while he was a student at RPI. Bob and his brother Charles lived with their father, Fred Rooney and his wife, Ella (nee Clements), on nearby McMaster Street.

Although the horse and buggy had gone the way of the dinosaur by the 1930s, Rooney insists the barn still smelled like horses when he entered.

And despite the fact that the historic structure was big enough for two cars, Uncle Bill never put his Reo inside "because the barn was filled with other treasures more valuable."

Earlier this year, Rooney recalled those treasures as including such artifacts as "old tools and an old horse saddle with various leather pieces."

Old steamer trunks of part wood, part leather and clothing of bygone eras provided endless hours of discovery and play in the barn's attic.

"Uncle Bill never threw anything out," muses Rooney, a self-proclaimed "world class saver" of all manner of things sentimental and nostalgic as well as of things that might come in handy and/or come back into style one day.



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Auntie Belle, meanwhile, had what Rooney dubbed "all the traditional virtues of a grand aunt. She was very loving and always had huge amounts of food prepared for us which we used to call the groaning board because it was always bad. Auntie Belle was a wonderful human being, but a lousy cook."

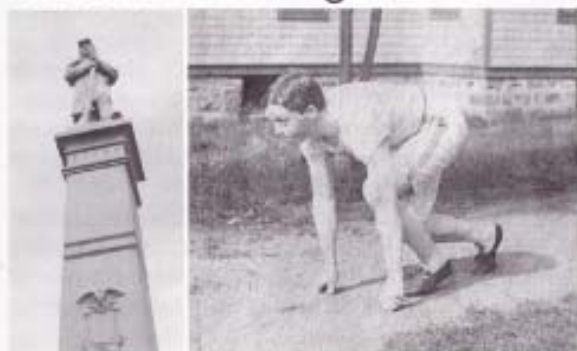
In those days, Rooney recalls, "There were gardens all around the house with squash and pumpkins that my aunt later kept in storage with other farm fresh produce in a cool part of the basement."

The saddest day for his beloved aunt and uncle was the day the Haight House, once a palatial mansion complete with expansive servants quarters and outdoor tennis courts at the corner of East High Street and Church Avenue, was sold.

Half of the magnificent landmark (originally occupied by Theodore Haight of the American Hide & Leather Company) was dismantled to make room for a gas station right next door to Auntie Belle and Uncle Bill. The gas station is now a laundromat. The remaining half of the Haight House still stands on the south side of East High Street. (Turn page to see photos of The Haight House as it looked in the early 1900s and as it now stands.)



Record-breaking news and a foot (ball) note



Andy Rooney's Uncle Bill set a record when he ran a race in Madison Square Garden around the turn-of-the-century. Then a Williams College student, Bill completed the 60-yard dash in record time. After finishing college and law school, the future lawyer coached the Ballston Spa High School football team. At the time, Rooney's father, Walter, (holding football) was a player. Date on ball should be '05, not '03. Later in life, Bill would look out on the statue of Civil Sam at the corner of Front and Bath Streets from his law office.



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The Old Iron Spring on Front Street as it looked when Andy Rooney was young. He's the knicker-clad lad at left with family at a 1926 gathering at Lake Pleasant. Sister Nancy Reynolds Rooney stands behind him in stylish full-length raccoon coat and ladies' hat.



Happier memories for Rooney include accompanying his mother down to the Old Iron Spring along Front Street.

There he sampled the village's then popular mineral waters -- though he is quick to add that "the charm of its taste escaped my young palate . . . I hated it!"

Although he occasionally stopped at the Old Iron Spring for nostalgic reasons when passing through the village later in life, Rooney is adamant that the taste of the mineral water did NOT improve with age.

Sampling the sulfur-like water is one of the few unpleasant memories Rooney has of his mother, born Ellinor Reynolds in Albany in 1886. (NOTE: In the course of our research, we found Ellinor's name written by census takers and other record keepers as Eleanor and Ellenor.)

When she was a small girl, Ellinor's British-born parents, Annie (nee Colvin) and John William Reynolds, moved their family -- which also included sons Charles, William and Ralph and a second daughter, Anna -- to Ballston Spa.

"My mother was raised in a big brown and yellow house known as Deer Park on Ralph Street. Her family had moved out

before I got there," explains Rooney.

The Deer Park property -- now called Kelley Park -- was known for its beautiful orchards and the Jersey cows kept by the Reynolds family. Rooney's sister, Nancy, says the Reynolds also kept pigs which were nourished solely with corn grown on the premises and milk from the Jersey cows.

Originally owned by Harvey Chapman in the 1840s and later run as a farm by Merritt J. Esmond, the Ralph Street property was purchased by the Reynolds in 1900 from Charles and Cora Blittersdorff.

When a fire damaged the house on New Year's Day 1914, Grandfather Reynolds sold what remained of the structure to Frank S. Hathorn and his wife Helen. When the property was subsequently used by the Catholic Church, the house was converted into a nunnery.

In the 1960s, a barn on the former Reynolds family homestead (in which Nancy recalls having seen the year 1860 in the slate roof) was burned to the ground by vandals -- ironically while a village fire pumper was being stored inside!

With the Civil War era barn went a piece of history Andy and Nancy's mother liked

to relate involving the year a circus came to Ballston Spa.

According to Rooney, one of the circus ponies broke his leg and their mother's brother Charley brought the little horse home and put it up in a sling in that barn hoping to save the horse's life. Sadly, the pony perished.

Rooney insists his maternal grandfather was "the principal source of brains" on his mother's side of the family. Having made his way from Redruth in Cornwall, England, when he was just 16, John William Reynolds went on to establish a successful foundry in Ballston Spa.

Grandfather Reynolds also patented half a dozen inventions including a tool with a handle whose opposite end fitted into an indentation in one end of the round iron lids of a wood stove. The handle had little ears near the base that acted as a fulcrum.

Several years ago, Rooney checked around Ballston Spa and was delighted to find there were still some manhole covers in place in the village which had been made in his grandfather's foundry.

All were clearly imprinted with the name REYNOLDS.



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The Haight House as it appeared in the early 1900s (above) and as it looks today. Situated the corner of East High Street (Rt. 67) and Church Avenue (Rt. 50) in the Village of Ballston Spa, the historic property once had tennis courts in the backyard.

Legend has it that Andrew and Nancy Rooney's grandmother's father came to America "after being run out of Scotland" for trying to start a union in a paper mill a ferry's ride away from Glasglow and that "Grandma Annie" didn't come to this country until two years later because she initially didn't want to leave her homeland.

Given this colorful family history, it's not surprising that the union between Ellinor Reynolds and Walter Scott Rooney would produce children and grandchildren of distinction!

On August 29, 1911 -- a year after Walter graduated from Williams College -- he exchanged wedding vows with Ellinor in an evening ceremony at the home of her parents on then rural Ralph Street in Ballston Spa.

A newspaper account described the bride as "one of Ballston's most attractive . . . and popular . . . young ladies."

"She had unlimited love and forgiveness in her heart for those close to her. Neither my sister nor I ever did anything so wrong in her eyes that she couldn't explain it in terms of right. She assumed our goodness, and no amount of badness in either of us could change her mind. It made us better," says Andy Rooney of his late mother, Ellinor Reynolds Rooney, who grew up in Ballston Spa.



The Rev. Arthur T. Young officiated at the ceremony which was witnessed by Walter's brother, Bill, and Ellinor's close friend, M. E. ("Bess") Kerley. According to the newspaper, Miss Cassie Galloghly of Albany "played the strains of the wedding march" as the bridal party -- including bridesmaids Bess Valentine and Lucy McCreedy -- descended the stairway.



Close friends of the Rooney family lived here



The house at 53 Church Avenue (above) once belonged to merchant Frank Winney. It was in that backyard that young Andy Rooney enjoyed gathering butternuts with his Uncle Bill. The Kerley family, meanwhile, lived in the grand yellow house with the circular front porch at 72 West High St. The structure later served as the offices of *The Ballston Journal* newspaper and the residence of publisher C.H. Grose.

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Ellinor Reynolds Rooney is seated second from left at a 1909 church social.

In a moving tribute published in 1980 following Ellinor Reynolds Rooney's death in her 94th year after a prolonged illness, Rooney noted that his mother had won the girls' high jump championship in Ballston Spa 1902 and that, throughout her long life, she "did a million kindnesses" for her loved ones. "There were a lot of things she wasn't good at, but no one was ever better at being a mother," he wrote, noting that she had "unlimited love and forgiveness in her heart for those close to her. Neither my sister nor I ever did anything so wrong in her eyes that she couldn't explain it in terms of right. She assumed our goodness, and no amount of badness in either of us could change her mind. It made us better." On the lighter side, Rooney added that his mother, who was educated by private tutors, earned a reputation "for driving her old Packard too fast and too close to the right-hand side of the road."

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Less has been written about Rooney's father simply because, he says: "I didn't know him as well as I knew my mother. He traveled a lot. . . he was away three weeks out of four every month and only home one week a month."

Rooney chuckles that his mother "didn't let my father in on things my sister and I did that might upset him. For example, she didn't dare show him my report cards; she signed them and sent them back to school before he came home."

He's quick to add that his father, while quite demanding in many ways, also had an excellent sense of humor and spent quality time with his young son when he was not away on business. "Dad played on the Ballston High football team when he was a teenager and my friends all thought he was wonderful because he could always seem to relate to what we kids were going through at various stages of life. My sense of humor definitely came from my father."

In a commencement address to the 1998 graduating class of The Albany Academy, Rooney told students: "I never come up the driveway out front or enter this building without being flooded with great memories. I spent eight of the best years of my life at the Academy, one in the annex on Elk Street,



Andrew A. Rooney (back row, circled) looks both confident and dapper in a portrait of Colgate University's 1939 Debate Team, published courtesy of the college's photo archives.

one in the original old Academy building and six great years here in this building (on Academy Road). I know you wouldn't think so looking at me, but I know every nook and cranny of this building as well as all of you in uniform do."

As part of the same speech, Rooney told the Academy's 185th graduating class that he often dreams about what he'd do if he had two lives to live and that he'd be mighty tempted to start "right here at The Academy. I'd start all over as a freshman, and, I can promise you, I'd be a much better student the second time than I was the first. I'd be better because I'd know it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

One of the other things he said he'd do with a second life is go back to college. After graduating from The Albany Academy with the Class of 1938, Rooney attended Colgate University, but his studies were cut short at the end of his junior year in 1941 when he was drafted into the US Army.

While stationed at Fort Bragg in March of 1942, he wed Marguerite ("Margie") Howard -- whom he had met at Mrs. Munson's dancing class in Albany at age 13. The daughter of prominent Albany orthopedist William P. Howard, Margie graduated from Bryn Mawr College in 1941. Quips Rooney: "She always points out that she's a year younger than I am, but was a year ahead of me in college."

In February 1943, he was one of six correspondents who flew with the Eighth Air Force on the first American bombing raid over Germany. Some of his earliest writing was published in a military periodical where his editor was "a stickler" for accuracy.

Return to civilian life saw the Rooneys welcome four children -- Ellen, Martha, Emily and Brian -- while Rooney tackled assignments for popular CBS programs including "The Arthur Godfrey Show" (1949 - 55) and "The Garry Moore Show" (1959 - 65). From 1962 to 1968 he collaborated with the late TV correspondent Harry Reasoner on a number of CBS News Specials, including an award-winning script on Black America. Somehow, he also managed to work in writing a twice-weekly column for Tribune Media Services. The column appears in 200 newspapers as well as a variety of magazines across the nation.

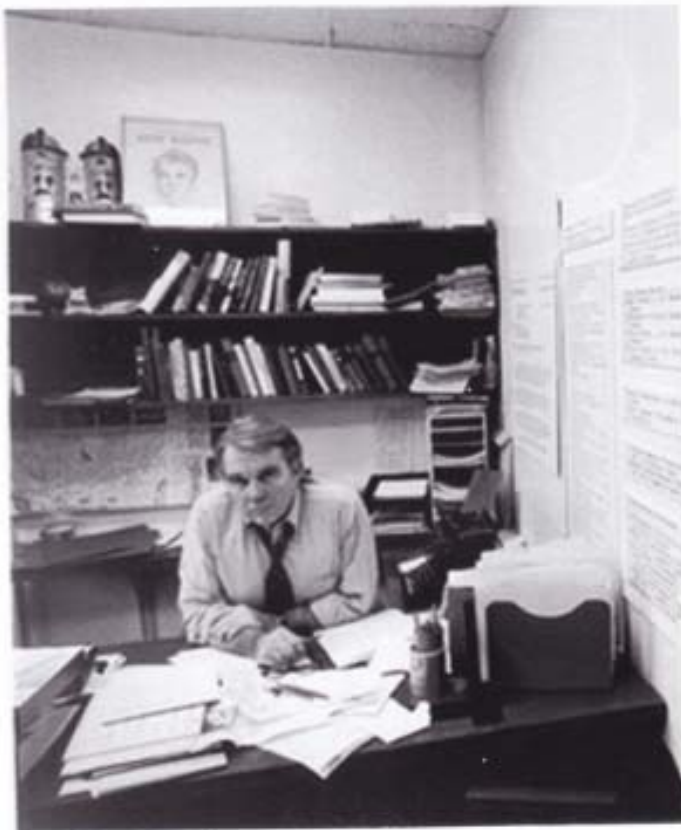
Although his 12th book, *Common Nonsense* just hit book shelves and Internet stores a few months ago, Rooney is already working on another full-length manuscript due out this fall. Titled *Years of Minutes*, the book is to include pieces of past *60 Minutes* spots drawn from his 25 years of commentaries on the highly rated Prime Time CBS News magazine. (This year marks the program's 35th anniversary and Rooney has been featured on a variety of shows paying tribute to the milestone.)

Once described by TIME magazine as "the most felicitous writer in television," Rooney is also among its most honored, having won the Writers Guild Award for Best Script of the Year six times -- more than any other writer in the history of the medium. His unique commentaries also earned him Emmys in 1979, 1981 and 1982.

On May 19, 2002, Rooney made headlines when he presented his 800th segment of "A Few Minutes with Andy Rooney."



Andy Rooney met his future bride, Margie, (nee Marguerite Howard) in an Albany dance class when both were in their early teens. The newlyweds were photographed at Southern Pines, North Carolina, in March of 1942. By the time the 1967 CBSNews Archive portrait (above) was taken, Andrew A. Rooney was well on his way to becoming a broadcast journalist of national distinction.



Photos of award-winning "60 Minutes" commentator Andy Rooney at work (above in 1975 and far right in 1984) courtesy of CBS News Archives. Photos at bottom right provided by The Albany Academy.

Earlier this year, he found himself in the eye of the storm for criticizing the Bush administration's "shock and awe" campaign in Iraq. Responding to thousands of letters he received in response to his anti-war statements, Rooney was quoted as saying: "I'm in a position of feeling secure enough so that I can say what I think is right and if so many people think it's wrong that I get fired, well, I've got enough to eat."

Still an early riser at 84, Rooney's alarm goes off promptly at 5:27 each morning. Why 5:27 rather than say, 5:30? "I hit the wrong button one day and never bothered to change it."

Over the decades, Rooney -- who resides in Connecticut -- has crafted many beautiful pieces of furniture and other functional and decorative objects in his woodworking shops at his vacation homes in Rensselaerville and Lake George.

The Rensselaerville woodwork shop measures 25' x 25' and is just 20 feet away from The Pentagon, a five-sided building (eight feet on a side) he built in 1988 so he would have a quiet place to write when vacationing with the family.

Although he contends he "can get tired of writing and be cutting wood in under a minute," the fact is that three of Rooney's books were written in the solitude of The Pentagon.

Because of surgery on his right arm to correct Carpel Tunnel Syndrome, Rooney hasn't been tackling many woodworking projects lately. "I don't think it's a good idea to get too close to a saw blade just yet," he laughs.

Having also had his leg injured last Christmas on his way to buy a newspaper in a blizzard, Rooney says he's content to be able to hold a racquet and play tennis a few times a week.

This summer, Rooney hopes to spend as much time as possible with Margie, their children and grandchildren and his sister, Nancy.

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Although proficient in computer usage, Rooney insists he still prefers to hammer out letters on the same old Underwood No. 5 typewriter that was used to type his Uncle Bill's legal documents in the 1930s.

at the tranquil camp on Lake George's Pilot Knob that has been in the family since 1926. These vacations will, no doubt, yield ideas for more than a few minutes of fresh television essays, newspaper columns and letters to friends and loved ones.

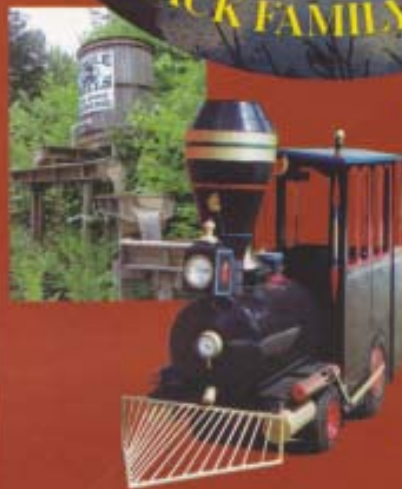
Who knows? He may even be inspired to draft a bestselling book about some of the fascinating "faces behind the places" that captured a very young Andy Rooney's heart and mind right here in Saratoga County!



"I never come up the driveway out front or enter this building without being flooded with great memories. I spent eight of the best years of my life at the Academy . . . I know you wouldn't think so looking at me, but I know every nook and cranny of this building as well as all of you in uniform do." Rooney said in a commencement address to The Albany Academy in 1998, exactly 60 years after he graduated.

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