



Mister B.: Living With a 98-Year-Old Rocket Scientist

A. Lynn Byk

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Timely **Mister B: Living with a 98-Year-Old Rocket Scientist** charms the bejeebers out of the space-age and greatest generation. Like Aesop's fables, a comedy of helped and helper explodes the busy lives of adult children of aging parents. The 2016 Pinnacle Award Winner.

Joseph Byk begins his early schooling in rope-tied-baggy-pants-poverty. He is every teachers' dreaded student. Ending his senior year at Woonsocket High, R.I., however, he begs a high school counselor to help him make up the deficiencies in his missing math education. Why? Because, suddenly, he aspires to design vehicles that defy gravity. Mister B eventually helps design the space shuttle Gemini, the first moon landing gear for Apollo and the beginnings of Google Earth.

Joe Byk's high school counselor helps to enroll him into Auburn University-(Alabama Polytechnic) to hone up on his math deficiency. Graduating from the University of Alabama, Mister B's career begins on the back of a good ol' boy's business card, with a reference to work for Vultee, in Downey, California. There, he helps design basic trainer war planes. When, at the beginning of WWII, he transfers to the Glen Martin Company in Baltimore, Maryland, he continues to perform stress analysis on space craft throughout the cold war.

"Great story. I was enthralled right to the end," reports Sue Lockwood Summers, author-teacher of: *Get Them Thinking! Use Media Literacy to Prepare Students for State Assessments*. Arm chair philosophers, book clubs and would-be scientists will appreciate Mister B's wry interactions with his in-laws who move into his home to help him after the death of his wife. The ol' man decides to teach these younger caretakers a thing or two: specifically that, his newest design is to live forever.

The reader is carried from tragedy to hilarity as his companions seek to please him with foodie experiments while coaxing Mister B to upgrade his 44 year-old home. Too bad the only non-controversial place to renovate the HUD-styled real estate is in the weedy backyard. If only the younger couple had not promised to save their 97-year-old Polish father from the nursing home! A triangle forms as they study, and, tentatively approach one another. The ol' man and his new companions gradually redesign a dry acre into a flowering conversation piece where mushroom collecting and the sources of hydrogen and iron are discussed. Interior design must take a back seat while the scientific engineer challenges them to consider theories of deflection, accuracy, stress variables, and material strengths. With all the delicacy of designing a

conical intersection onto a space capsule, the threesome focus on integrating their relationships in 3-D.

Joseph Byk received his PhD in aerospace engineering from the University of Alabama. He taught pilots in the air corps with Spartan Company and then worked through WWII and the cold war with Martin Company performing projects for NASA and the Department of Defense. With a shot of respect, Mister B's bygone family ideals confront the independence of a younger generation as he reveals a lifetime of secrets. Mister B's family gains more than a conversationalist. They gain a friend.

For curiosity seekers of the aerospace industry wondering, *how did it all start?* For students of math and science, for story lovers of the Greatest Generation and World War II, and for family members caring for aging parents... Mister B brings to you a genuine Americana storyline. You can now find Mister B in the Grumpy Old Men section of the library.



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