

BERGEN COUNTY

AutumnYears

A MAGAZINE
DEDICATED TO
CELEBRATING
LIFE OVER SIXTY

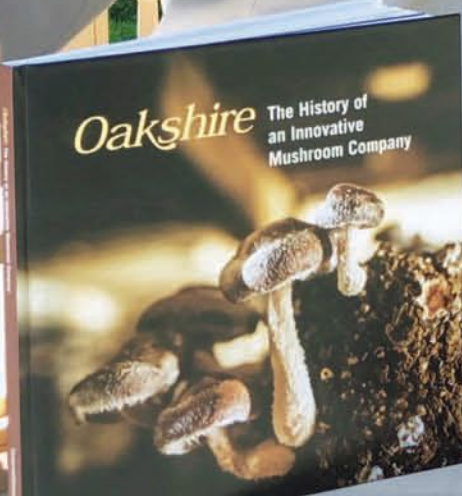
SUMMER 2020

\$4.95

Marian Calabro &
Bernie Libster

A Storybook Love Affair

AN AFRICAN ADVENTURE
ADDRESSING PREDIABETES



WWW.AUTUMNYEARS.MAG.COM

Marian Calabro and Bernie Libster

“What Is Written Is Remembered”

By Kelly Parr

Storytellers. They give life to history’s facts and figures by making them memorable and relatable, and, most important, retold for generations. Marian Calabro, 66, and her husband Bernie Libster, 79, are, above all else, storytellers.



In 2004, Marian founded CorporateHistory.net, an award-winning company dedicated to telling company histories. Marian is also the president; Bernie is vice president. While the majority of CorporateHistory.net's projects focus on publishing corporate history books, their service offerings include oral history programs, timelines, business anniversary campaign consulting, corporate identity publications and CEO tributes.

When you talk with Marian and Bernie, there is an honest ease to their partnership, a subtle rhythmic cadence of the ongoing balance, counterbalance of their personalities. Marian is petite, poised, professional and precise in her speech. Tall, slender Bernie seizes every opportunity to inject humor into the conversation. Bernie's parents were Russian-Latvian Jewish immigrants. Marian is Italian. They are proud to point out each other's strengths and successes, and neither overshadows the other. It just works.

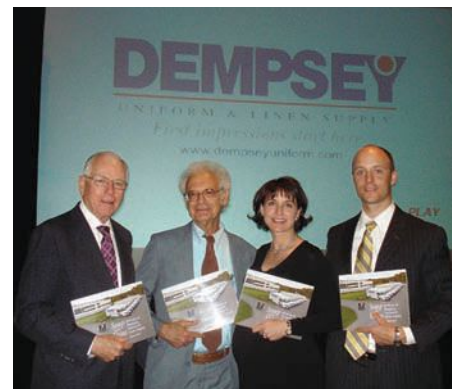


Marian and Bernie met while working at New York book publisher Grosset & Dunlap, a name that will sound familiar to fans of the Nancy Drew series. Marian was in the education division, Bernie in trade advertising. They started going to lunch together and learned they both love cats, jazz and going to plays. Lunch dates became play dates, and they eventually decided to move in together.

Marian is a lifelong New Jersey resident. Born and raised in Hudson County, Marian has lived in Bergen County since 1987. Bernie, originally from the Westchester, New York, area, moved to New Jersey in 1981. They married in 1996, 20 years after their first date. When asked why they got married after all those years, "we felt like it," was Marian's matter of fact response. Spending just a little time with them makes it clear this is the obvious and only answer.

A proud Rutgers graduate who majored in English, Marian spent the first 10 years of her career on staff at various New York City publishing houses. She spent the next 20 in the "gig economy" as a freelancer, doing a mix of corporate communications and publishing work, during which she authored several nonfiction histories for young adults, including one about the Donner Party.

While she found great satisfaction in writing for young adults, the work barely paid enough to buy toothpaste, let alone health insurance, Marian recalls. However, her combination of book-writing experience and corporate knowledge led to contracts from a New



Book launch in 2010: Company cofounder Patrick Dempsey, Bernie and Pat's children Kristin and PJ, who currently run Dempsey Uniform & Linen Supply in Jessup, PA.

England-based history publisher. Marian really enjoyed the work, and it did not take long for her to figure out why. The projects merged her strengths and her joys—history, writing, research, interviewing, publishing and storytelling. After chronicling the centennial history of New Jersey's own PSE&G, she felt it was time to stop subcontracting and form her own company. It was an "I can do this!" moment. The rest is, well, CorporateHistory.net.

Bernie's career segued from book publishing to advertising. By the time Marian founded CorporateHistory.net, which became an LLC effective January 3, 2005, Bernie was a creative director with Grey Direct, a division of Grey Advertising (now Grey Worldwide), where his clients included IBM, Citibank and AARP. As the only AARP account team member with silver hair, Bernie's likeness was used for a life-size cutout that was part of a campaign. Ironically, just two weeks shy of his 65th birthday, Bernie was let go in a downsizing. However, this timing proved impeccable.

Arguably, advertising is less about marketing products and more about

telling stories. Bernie's strong writing, editing, printing and production, interpersonal and storytelling skills made him a perfect fit, and asset, for CorporateHistory.net. He has served as vice president ever since.

In 2005, the Internet was not brand new, but it was just starting to reveal its powerful potential. "It changed everything," recalls Marian. "We could compete for jobs in California from New Jersey. Geography was no longer a barrier."

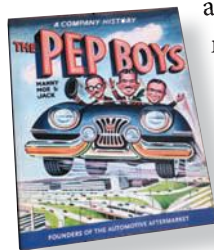
A visit to the CorporateHistory.net website reveals an impressive portfolio of work for companies large and small, including Farmers Insurance; The Clorox Company; The Libman Company; The Pep Boys® Manny, Moe & Jack; and Towers Watson. These projects have taken Marian and Bernie onto factory floors and hip deep into company archives. They have interviewed hundreds, ranging from CEOs to 6th generation family business owners, to long-term employees, to get the full picture of a company's culture.

While researching a 60th anniversary book for Superior Linen Service in Tulsa, Oklahoma, Bernie found himself up and about by 4:00 am. He rode along with truck drivers delivering linens to clients ranging from restaurants to health care providers and learned nuances of the business, like the fact that some companies have to swap out to a clean Welcome mat daily. This project was a referral from another satisfied client, Pennsylvania-based colleague Dempsey Uniform &



U.S. Marine photographer Lou Lowry was the first to capture the raising of the American flag (manufactured by Annin) on Iwo Jima, an iconic image later that day recreated by Associated Press photographer Joe Rosenthal.

Linen Supply whose 50th anniversary history book was published by CorporateHistory.net.



Marian was project manager and author of a book for Annin Flagmakers. Headquartered in Roseland, New Jersey, and founded in 1847, Annin is the oldest and largest flag manufacturer in the country. It has been making American flags since before the Civil War and for every war thereafter, including the War on Terrorism. After 9/11, demand for American flags increased significantly, particularly those made in America, and Annin again rose to the challenge.

While researching the Annin book, Marian came across an original telegram from President Teddy Roosevelt to Annin's president regarding a civic cause. She also found a faded, familiar looking sepia-toned photograph bearing a note from Lou Lowry, a U.S. Marine photographer in World War II. Under enemy fire, Lowry was the first to photograph American forces rais-

ing a small but impressive U.S. flag on Mt. Suribachi in Iwo Jima, Japan, on February 23, 1945. His note explained how Associated Press photographer Joe Rosenthal observed this event and recreated the photo a few hours later, after borrowing a much larger flag from an American ship. Rosenthal's iconic "Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima" won the





When you talk with Marian and Bernie, there is an honest ease to their partnership, a subtle rhythmic cadence of the ongoing balance, counterbalance of their personalities.

1945 Pulitzer Prize in Photography. Since Annin manufactured the first flag planted that day, Lowry thought the company should have his original photo.

With the exception of Marian and Bernie, all CorporateHistory.net team members are subcontractors. Many have worked with them since the company's inception, like art director/book designer Christine Reynolds. Each company designates an in-house point person who helps with interviews and approvals. "We are a boutique shop," explains Marian. "At most, we have three projects in progress simultaneously, meaning our clients are assured full attention." Marian is generally the project manager on those books she does not write. Of the company's 30-plus publications and campaigns, Marian has written or cowritten about half of them and Bernie has authored 4. They contract with other writers when ongoing, geographic proximity to a client is deemed a benefit.

CorporateHistory.net books generally take one to two years to publish, start to finish, with an average timeframe of 18 months. These books are richly illustrated in "coffee-table" style, but are also deeply researched. Most are between 96 and 128 pages, and print quantities range from 500 to 22,000. Books are typically distributed to employees, leadership, boards, stakeholders, retirees, analysts, trade associations and local, state and federal government officials.

CorporateHistory.net has also produced e-books and inserted USB drives containing oral histories in some printed projects. Over time, Marian and Bernie have seen how quickly technologies can evolve. They come and go. Books, however, persist. "It is so much easier to share a printed book," notes Bernie. "The printed book is a timeless technology."

The inside cover of the printed Libman Company book includes a card that can be popped open and inserted

into a USB port to access the e-book as well as interviews with long-time Libman employees and family members. In 2019, this book made CorporateHistory.net the only corporate history publisher to earn Gold honors in the international Hermes Awards competition, which is sponsored by the Association of Marketing and Communications Professionals. The company has earned many other awards, including Graphic Design USA honors for its history of American Water, a book commissioned for the company's 2018 move to an innovative new headquarters in Camden, New Jersey.

Marian and Bernie have seen some amazing things during their research, like watching water from the Delaware River get processed into potable water at one of American Water's South Jersey facilities, but what stands out most to both of them is not a product or a process. It is a feeling. They have been pleasantly surprised to witness the importance of loyalty—loyalty workers feel for their jobs and companies, and the loyalty companies have for their workers. People are proud of what they do.

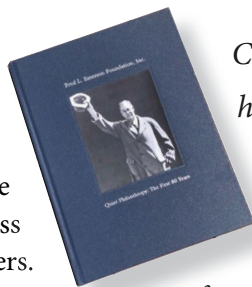
When asked to reflect on her favorite book, Marian said, "That would be as difficult as asking a parent to choose a favorite child." Marian and Bernie have no human children, but they have always had two cats. And, the cats are always rescues. The two felines currently ruling the roost at their Hasbrouck Heights home are Gracie and JoJo, who spend a lot of time in Bernie's and Marian's offices while they work. One of Bernie's proudest skills is open-

ing cans of cat food very quickly. “Lucky for Marian,” quips Bernie, “we don’t share an office. My level of neatness is diametrically opposed to hers. I’m a mess.” When Bernie laughs, every feature of his face smiles.

Marian’s hobbies are mainly word-related. For 15 years, she has led creative writing workshops for the Adult School of Montclair. She is also a competitive Scrabble® player at sanctioned clubs in Teaneck and Springfield. A self-professed “theater nut,” Marian has had productions of her own short plays done by community theaters in Fair Lawn, West Orange, Hoboken and Manhattan.

Bernie’s interests gravitate towards the spiritual and healing. He was a Grace Healthcare hospice volunteer for 11 years and is also a Reiki Master who volunteers in healing circles at organizations such as the Harm Reduction Center in New York City. He is also very interested in past lives regression and has studied his own extensively through hypnosis. Bernie, who has a bass singing voice, has taken voice lessons for years. However, storytelling often occupies his time away from the office. Bernie is a member of the New Jersey Storytelling Network and has presented at storytelling festivals throughout New Jersey and the nation.

Bernie and Marian treasure numerous friendships made during decades of cross country skiing, hik-



Challenges and crises, like the coronavirus, are part of a company’s history, and Marian and Bernie have documented many.

ing and biking. Their favorite travel destination is still Italy, where they once biked from the Adriatic Sea to the Mediterranean Sea. Bernie speaks several languages and has a professional fluency in Italian. Both Marian and Bernie enjoy the works of Italian author Gianni Rodari, whose children’s books often include fables enjoyable to readers of all ages. “Rodari is well known worldwide, but there were not many English translations of his work,” notes Bernie. So that more Americans can learn to love Rodari, too, Bernie has translated seven of his works and presented them at storytelling festivals. He also recorded a CD that features them.

Marian loves to converse in what she calls “enthusiastic, error-ridden Italian,” noting that “our willingness to study and speak the language has enriched our travels.” The couple has a short list of yet-unvisited regions in Italy they hope to visit after pandemic travel restrictions are lifted.

We are all living through what will likely prove to be one of the most historic events in our lifetimes. Challenges and crises, like the coronavirus, are part of a company’s history, and Marian and Bernie have documented many. The Northwest Community Hospital book, for example, highlights its first-responder role in identifying the Tylenol® poisonings. The book published to celebrate the 100th anniversary of The Clorox Company highlights the numerous times its disinfecting products have helped the world combat viruses, like California’s Bakane virus, a crop disease.

Without doubt, many companies are today rising to challenges the pandemic presents. Their histories are yet to be written. Without doubt, Marian and Bernie, through future CorporateHistory.net books, will ensure their histories are remembered and retold for generations. As it states on the CorporateHistory.net website, “What is written is remembered.”



Marian and Bernie at the Puye Cliff Dwellings in Espanola, NM, in 2016.



Bernie and Marian played hide-and-seek in Bardolino, Italy, in 2012, behind some of the grapes for which the Veneto region is famous.

DEBBIE ANIANO