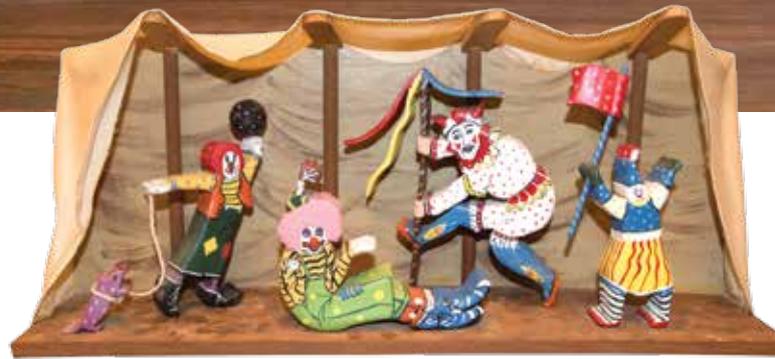
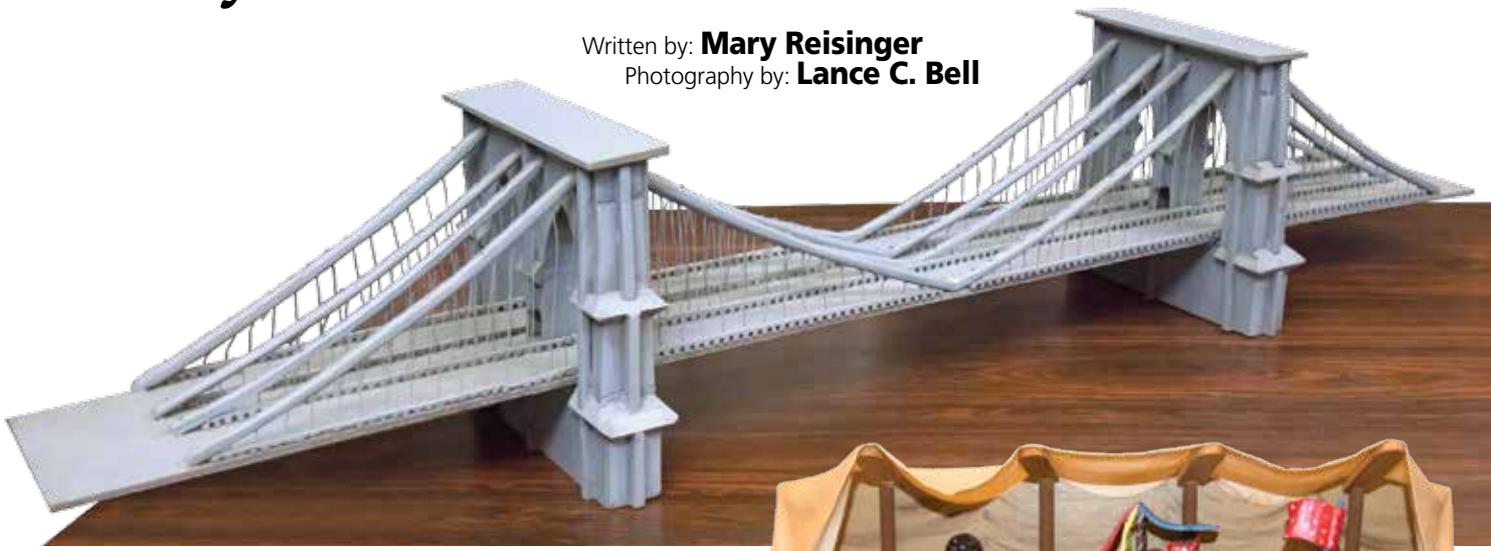


The Art and Adventures of Uncle Bernie

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Bernard Ravitz, known to friends and family as Uncle Bernie, embraced new experiences. He said his family would “go anywhere and do anything,” and it is easy to see how Bernie came by his adventurous spirit. His father emigrated from Russia as a young man on a cargo ship, and married an American woman. The couple settled in Brooklyn NY, and raised Bernie and his older brother. Even with limited income and full work and school schedules, the family took frequent trips.

Bernie was only 11 when his father died. His mother sent the boys to visit a farm for a few weeks until she was able to get her life in order, and then she worked to support her children, and continued the family enthusiasm for travel. When Bernie and a friend decided to fly to Nassau, she cheerfully accompanied them in a small plane, and kept smiling through bad weather and a rocky landing.

Bernie was born on August 14, 1920, with a small hole in his palate; it was surgically repaired twice, but re-opened each time. He showed a talent for artistic expression and craft from an early age. He remembers working alongside his father, a jeweler, making silver rings for his girlfriends in elementary school. He went to Hebrew Technical Institute in Manhattan and took special courses in areas such as auto mechanics. When he reported for the draft examination during WWII, he was rejected for military service. Though he never knew why, he suspected the reason was his cleft palate. He also had impaired vision in one eye, so this could have been a factor.

Since he couldn't serve as a soldier, Bernie contributed to the war effort by taking photographs for the Civil Defense

The Historical and Transportation Museums in Oakland, Maryland, display several of Bernie's carvings. Above: The iconic Brooklyn Bridge familiar from Bernie's early years and one of his carvings of a circus scene.

Office. After the war, he remained a photographer, freelancing for many New York newspapers and building his own business doing publicity photographs. He met quite a few famous people while doing this. Collections containing his photographs from this era are still maintained by various libraries and museums in Brooklyn.

Bernie spent most of his life in Brooklyn and Long Island, working for over thirty years as a photographer and then, for fourteen years, as a cabinet maker with a partner. During all these years, he crafted wooden toys and models, selling them and giving them away as gifts.

Bernie never married; he and his mother made their home together until her death. A few years later, at age 72, he decided to take his nephew's advice and move to Garrett County in Western Maryland, where he could “live like a gentleman.” Undeterred by several snowy visits when house viewings had to be cancelled, he found a house and arrived with three vans transporting his furniture, tools, and a small plane he was constructing. He made himself

two promises: to walk his beloved dogs two, three, or even four times a day; and to write his memoirs.

Raised by Jewish parents and grandmother, Bernie remained religiously observant all his life. On Long Island he created a large wooden menorah for display outside Temple Beth Chai. When it was replaced twenty

years later, Bernie felt that was not bad for a plywood menorah made in his basement. He also designed and built other religious furnishings and artwork for the synagogue. After moving to Maryland, he travelled to Cumberland to worship. He even managed to eat kosher food by having some things shipped to him by friends in New York, or by driving to kosher shops in Pittsburgh. Still, he happily created Christmas scenes for the seasonal shelves at the local library.

Bernie referred to his retirement years as his “adventures in Maryland.” He embraced the area and the people, eagerly visiting as many places as he could, and doing as many interesting things as he could find to do. His memoirs recall seeing his first llamas, watching cows being milked with machines, hiking through the C&O Canal Paw Paw tunnel, going with a forester to cut and haul dead wood out of a remote area, and climbing to Hoyer Crest, the highest point in Maryland. He was thrilled to have the local arts council exhibit some of his black and white photographs from mid-Twentieth Century Brooklyn. He invited new friends for Seder dinner. He gardened, cooked, and volunteered for Community Action. He continued to take photographs and make functional furniture, but Bernie especially enjoyed crafting wooden folk art pieces.

He created sets of wooden figures for the Ruth Enlow Library in Oakland, carefully researching these items to make them accurate. His Conestoga wagon came complete with barrels and chests, oxen in harness, and a young ox trailing along behind. In one case, he waited for thirty minutes with a camera glued to his eye as a television show on the little drummer boy provided him with the model he needed to carve one for the library. Other items he made were inspired by his own experiences or the interests of others, such as the wooden horse he carved for a friend whose daughter was an equestrian. In addition to wood carving, he sewed and painted to complete his pieces.



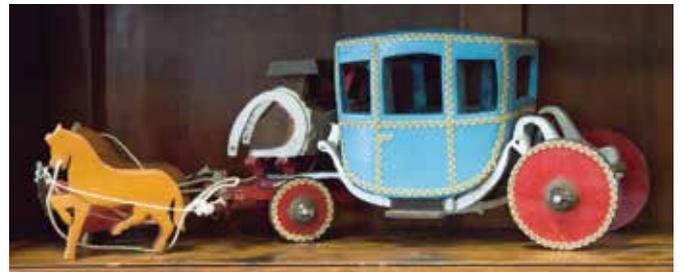
Bernie's folk art carving of a colorful carousel can be seen at the Historical Museum in Oakland.

When Bernie died in 2015, he left behind photographs, reflections on his life and other writings, and many handcrafted wooden items.

One of his friends donated some of his work to the Garrett County Historical Society. The history and transportation museums

in Oakland display several of his pieces: a model of the iconic Brooklyn Bridge so familiar from his early years, a horse-drawn carriage, a trolley car, a colorful carousel, and scenes from a circus. His notebooks of writings, clippings, and photographs are currently housed in the history museum.

In one of Bernie's pieces, he wrote that the “wanting to do” was still part of him in his eighties, and he hoped it would last as long as he did. Judging by his accounts of his adventures and the many pieces of art he left, his wish came true.



Bernie's horse-drawn carriage and trolley car can be viewed at the Transportation Museum in Oakland, MD.

Garrett County Historical Society Museum
107 South Second Street, Oakland, Maryland 21550

Garrett County Transportation Museum
108 E. Liberty Street, Oakland, Maryland 21550

www.garrettcountymuseums.com