

This Is What Foxwood Village is All About

**The man next door was a grouchy old recluse.
Or so I'd been told by a friend.**

In 2000, my husband and I were in our new home in a retirement community in Calverton only about a week when we saw this neighbor being dropped off by his daughter.

He stood 6-foot-1 and had a shock of gray-white hair. I called over a hello. The man turned in my direction and headed across the lawn. He introduced himself as George Mellina. In a friendly, matter-of-fact way, he told me he was legally blind from macular degeneration and had a hearing problem. From that day on, we became friends.

George was a widower who lived alone. My husband and I invited him to dinner once a week, and I'd visit him at least every other day. We would sit at his kitchen table for two over tea or a Coke. We talked about everything -- his parents from Italy, food and children.

George told me about running a food products company decades earlier when he and his wife were raising four girls and three boys in New Hyde Park. After one of his sons took over the business, George and his wife retired to Hampton Bays. Not one to sit still, he spent \$10 on a bucket, a squeegee and some soap and started cleaning windows for local stores. He was a smart man.

George never got a high school diploma as a teenager, but pursued a college education later in life, as did I -- he at 65, me at 45. We both loved learning, which might be the reason we connected. Starting with his GED diploma at Adelphi University, he went on to earn his associate, bachelor's and master's degrees there, the last in 1990 at age 74. Courses in art took George to France and other interesting places. He made beautiful sculptures, as well as tile work and paintings, all displayed with pride.

George was 84 when we met, but as spry as a colt. His son-in-law told us the only time George was out of commission was when he hurt his shoulder doing push-ups in his early 80s. We tried to get him down off a ladder once while he cleaned out his gutters. He thought nothing of shoveling snow and planting flowers.