

Profile

John 'Babe' Sargent

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BY KATHE THEALL

GEORGES MILLS—Pick one word to describe John "Babe" Sargent and it would have to be, imaginative.

From his earliest years his imagination led him to go places and do things, both real and on stage, that have abundantly enriched his life and the lives of those who are fortunate enough to know him.

"My brother Howard used to read stories to me," Sargent said. "One of them was called *Babes Lost in the Woods*. Apparently my imagination was working even then because I would cry when he would read that story. He began to call me Babe and it stuck."

"My middle name is Winthrop," Sargent said in his best blue-blooded, lock-jawed, Mr. Howell accent, "and I always thought that if I ever reached that higher elevation in life that I would be addressed as Mr. Winthrop Sargent."

Accents and acting are two things, among many, that Sargent does with style. He's been acting since grade school, when his teacher Mrs. Dudley Colcord recognized his talents and enlisted him in the children's class productions. By seventh grade he was appearing in Sunapee High School's plays.

Wanted to Clown

"Clowning and making people laugh was always what I wanted to do," Sargent said. "I love to tell stories, I love to watch people react to the stories I tell and I love to mimic the British. It has been a great outlet for me."

Sargent learned to fly in 1946 before he learned to drive.

His father, being a true New Englander and horse trader told Sargent that if he wanted to fly, he would have to make it pay. So they began an aerial photography business. Sargent would remove the door to the plane and sit in the back to photograph homes around Lake Sunapee. They would then sell the prints to the homeowners.

"We took a picture of Maxfield Parrish's home and we did meet him," Sargent said. "Later my dad did a portrait of Parrish and when Parrish saw it he told my dad that if dad was a student of his, he'd have given him a 'B.'"

"I still fly, but not as much as I used to," Sargent said. "I have part ownership

Sargent's high school graduation and subsequent enlistment in the Air Force brought an end to the aerial photography business.

Lack of a Degree Hurt

Although he could fly, his lack of a college degree kept him from a commission. It didn't keep him from doing what he loves to do though, entertain. Sargent was assigned to Special Services in the Hawaiian Islands, where he organized the Hickam Theatre Group, staging on-base theatricals and performing in them.

"One of the plays we did there was *See How They Run*," Sargent said. "I had a great time playing the bishop. I like to play anything where I can step out of me and into someone else."

In 1954, Sargent returned to Georges Mills with his wife, Pricilla Partington, to help his ailing father with the family business, Sargent's Marina and Cottages. While back home, Sargent was able to continue his acting career with appearances at the New London Barn Playhouse and in Newport.

In 1973, friend Bruce Cronin, asked Sargent to be in *The Wild Goose*, a script that Cronin had written for a film making course at Boston University. Cronin obtained sponsorship from the Lions Club and pledged the profits to the Sullivan County Home in Unity, it's chief locale.

Sargent starred as Henry Phipps, a cantankerous inmate of a nursing home, who escapes from the home in a wheelchair. Sargent's role was pantomimed and he only spoke when he doubled as a hefty woman who recites poetry for the home inmates. Partington and her sister played two frustrated nurses that attempt to catch the Wild Goose.

Henry Goes Skiing

The second Bruce Cronin film starring Babe Sargent was *Henry Phipps Goes Skiing*. This time, Henry wins an all expense paid weekend at Snowflake Ski Lodge. Thrust into the sparkling world of sun, snow and dashing ski instructors, Henry silently bumbled through his weekend, winning a medal for skiing in the process. Monday morning finds Henry, once again, endlessly stamping towering stacks of shoe boxes, but he is not quite the same old Henry.

Henry Phipps Goes Skiing won first prize in it's category at the Fifth Annual International Ski Film Festival in New

shot," Sargent said. "Right on my face. Bruce cautioned me that any flicker of an eye or anything that would indicate my not being totally involved would be seen by the camera. It was a completely different experience than being on the stage. I became very conscious that the camera was right on my face. I had to slowly bring my eyes up to where Henry had hung the medal and smile a little knowing smile. It took a couple of takes but we got it. The film had a lot of pathos in it."

Taught Himself to Paint

While operating the family business and serving the people of Sunapee as a selectman and the State of New Hampshire as a member of the Airport Users Advisory Board, Sargent was teaching himself to paint. Always interested in art, he began to seriously apply himself to painting.

"My dad and mom's enthusiasm for the little things in art that I did, always stimulated me to do more," Sargent said. "I wish my dad had kind of pushed me a little more, but they enjoyed what I did do."

"I tell parents who have kids who are interested in art not to jam it down their throats, but to enjoy the things they do and make enough fuss over them so that the child gets excited and thinks 'I can do this,'" Sargent said. "Getting recognition from your parents is very encouraging."

Sargent is currently concentrating on historical paintings, particularly Lake Sunapee steamboats. Influenced by the work of Eric Sloan, Sargent said he is trying to keep his work from becoming too photographic. He also said he would like to be more organized, more scheduled about his painting, but he enjoys getting out and meeting people and even square dancing with his wife.

"Get involved," Sargent said, "that's what makes your life interesting, being

