

Session One: Introduction

Michael Forbes Wilcox, M.A., CFA

Michael grew up in Stockbridge, where he graduated Williams High School (WHS) in 1963. He played center halfback (as it was called in those days) on several WHS County Championship soccer teams.

He excelled academically, became an Eagle Scout by age 14, and was a leader in his church youth group. He befriended many of the notable adults in his community; Norman Rockwell was a close friend, and he often visited Reinhold Niebuhr, author of the Serenity Prayer.

Despite these fine credentials, Michael felt socially isolated and apart from those around him, often getting into trouble for various infractions. It wasn't until 40 years later that Michael figured out that he is autistic, and that his childhood experiences, accomplishments, and troubles were very typical for autistic youngsters.

Michael's interest in indigenous people began early. As a youngster, he would often visit his grandmother, Grace Bidwell Wilcox, in the Stockbridge Library, where she had started what was then known as the Historical Room. She regaled him with tales of the Stockbridge Indians and the early days of Stockbridge, as well as stories of her own grandfather, who had been an abolitionist, a surgeon in the Union Army in the Civil War, and a founding Proprietor of Vineland, New Jersey; a Utopian community where she grew up.

Interrupted only by a 30-year career in computers, economics, finance, and investments, Michael has devoted his time to being a community and political organizer, and an advocate for radical causes and minority groups. From his student days as a Civil Rights activist and the President of a national student organization opposing the War in Vietnam, Michael has moved on to more recent stints as a Democratic Party operative and a Disability Rights advocate.

In the past few years, Michael has served on the Massachusetts Special Commission Relative to Autism, the Cross Disability Advocacy Coalition of the Massachusetts Disability Law Center, as Vice President of the Board of AANE, and as President of the Board of Autism Connections. He also spent 6 years on the Board of the Massachusetts Moderators Association. He is currently the Alford Town Moderator.

This Is Michael's third stint as an OLLI instructor. He previously offered a course on autism, and one on Berkshire history.