

One Life in Lodi : Anthony De Rosa

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He was 78 years old at the time and as of this re-write still possesses that boyish charm.

Lodi's Anthony De Rosa was born on October 22, 1919 and has two sisters, Josephine, born in 1914 and Margaret born in 1912. His father Charles arrived in America with his parents from Naples Italy in 1906. In 1909 Charles married Rose Cavallo of Park Place in Lodi and took up residence on Burns Avenue. "Burns was a dirt road with no sidewalks," recalls Anthony. " My parents made their own cheese and sold it along with fruits and vegetables from a roadside stand."

Both of Anthony's parents worked at the United Piece Dye Works in Lodi as did most of the Italian immigrants who arrived in the USA at that time. "Sometimes they took the trolley car to work," says Anthony. "It used to run up and down the Arnot Street Hill."

At age 5. Anthony entered the Columbus School and the classrooms of Miss Manfred and Mrs. Dupree. His early childhood, as he recalls, was spent playing games such as marbles and base ball played at a field called the French Oval where today stands the Hilltop School on Woodside Avenue. There was also roller skating on Lawrence Avenue which was one of the few streets in town that was paved. In winter, that same street was used as a hockey rink. The competition was so fierce that Anthony was breaking in a new pair of skates every 3 weeks. "We also used to sleigh ride down the Arnot Street Hill " recalls Anthony. " It took us all the way down to main street." Meanwhile the kids from Burns Avenue and the surrounding neighborhoods were making their own snow ski's out of wine barrel slats. Not unusual for kids of that era since imagination and resourcefulness were part of what it took to survive especially during those brutal winter months.

"We used to make many of our own toys" remembers De Rosa. "We even made our own base balls out of chord and electrical tape. They didn't have much bounce but they kept us playing." Antony's cousin Jules Russo built a miniature golf course on Westervelt Place and it was there that Anthony and his pals from Burns Avenue were introduced to what would become their favorite pasttime. Golf! "I was 8 at the time" says Anthony. "I've been playing ever since."

Anthony graduated from Lodi High School in 1937. During those four years he spent many a carefree hour palling around with his friends Joe De Simone, Frank De Salvo and Sam Locasio. Together they would frequent the dance scene over at the Presidents' Palace located on Monroe Street in Garfield NJ. The dance craze at the time was the Jitterbug and many were those Saturday nights when Anthony scorched the dance floor as he tripped the light fantastic.

During that time Anthony had fancied himself quite a horn player. It wasn't long before his saxophone and clarinet expertise found him playing at area night spots such as Butlers Hall on Nicholson Street across from Puggies Luncheonette. "I even did vocals" recalls Anthony. "We made three or sometimes four dollars a gig which wasn't bad money in the 1930's." Marriage put an abrupt halt on Anthony's musical career. For the young man with a horn, family came first.

Anthony's memories of Lodi's crowded main street includes places like Rudolpho's Hall, Glavins Butcher Shop, Chickens, Calamines Men Shop, Sorrento's Pastry shop, Sam the Butcher, Dave's Hardware , Lodi Trust, Wool worth's, Macarones Barber shop, Tom the Greek's Italian Market, a Chinese Laundry, the Municipal Building, and everyone's favorite hangout, The Lodi Bowling Academy . The summer months were spent swimming in the then pristine waters of the Saddle River. "The beaches were clean and sandy." recalls Anthony. "People would travel far and wide to enjoy these beautiful surroundings."

In 1943, during the height of WWII, Anthony was drafted into the United States Army and was immediately sent to Camp Croft South Carolina. While waiting with his fellow recruits for overseas duty, Anthony found himself alone wondering why his name was never called. " It turned out that the Army had me listed as AWOL" says Anthony. " They got me mixed up with a kid from Brooklyn with the same name." Because of the Army's mistake, Anthony stayed behind while the rest of his Battalion was sent to Europe to fight what was called the Battle of the Bulge. While waiting for his orders, Anthony delivered mail to the troops and was eventually given instructions as to where he was being shipped. It wasn't over to Europe to fight the Nazi war machine. Instead Mr. De Rosa, along with fifteen other GI's , were being sent to New Orleans on a top of the line Pullman train compliments of their Uncle Sam. From there Anthony was shipped to Panama only to be greeted once again by good fortune. " They were looking for musicians" says De Rosa. "I spent the duration of the war in a sixteen piece Army Band." Anthony received 2 dollars per hour for playing and one dollar extra for singing. "We seldom had to eat in the mess hall" he says. " We played with Bob Hope, Jerry Colona, Frances Langford and for the Armed Forces Radio Program."

After being discharged in December of 1945 the young Lodi musician entertained the troops coming back from Europe. Their numbers included two ship loads of W.A.C.'s, the Women's Army Corps. "The girls were swooning" says Anthony with a sheepish grin. "I thought they were going to jump out of the portholes."

Anthony married his wife Fran a year after he was discharged from the military. The couple moved into their Burns Avenue home while Anthony worked for M.D. Leather Goods in NYC. After 12 years he jumped ship to Halo Carbon Products in Hackensack NJ from which he retired in 1985. The couple, as of this January 2, 2013 re write, are celebrating 63 years of marital bliss. They have been living at their Westervelt Place home since 1956.

Anthony continued to express himself on a musical level and became a member of the Terrible's Restaurant house Band. There he played until the building was destroyed by fire in 1962. "That's where my wife and I had our reception" says Anthony. His Lodi ancestors include

his Uncle Tony De Rosa who owned Lodi's first gas station in 1925 and his Uncle Louis De Rosa who became a Lodi policeman after returning from Europe after WWI.

The De Rosa's have two children, Carmine, married to Janet Liccardo and son Gary. They have four grandchildren Jon , Kate, Emily and Angie. Also they have two great grandchildren Sara and Gabriela.

“ Lodi has been a great town for us” says Anthony, “As it grows it gets better still.”