

## ***One Life in Lodi* Published online July 2009**

### ***Ronald E. Giles* by Artie Maglionico, Lodi Borough Historian**

Ronald E. Giles grew up in the borough of Lodi during the fifties and sixties. A time of transition when dirt roads were being smothered in black top and open fields were giving way to the demands of progress. So too, the people who lived there.

The young people, later to be known as "Baby Boomers," clung with a death grip to the town that they had come to know. In doing so they created a bond amongst themselves that is evident even now. They're from Lodi!

Ronnie Giles is an integral part of that Lodi family whose roots travel deep into the sacred ground that is Lodi, New Jersey. Ronnie was born on November 13, 1947. His parents, Henry and Dolores Arguello were married in the summer 1939. Henry hailed from Boston while Dolores lived in the heart of New York City.

"My mom met my father while he was visiting friends in Boston," says Giles, "It was a blind date." The couple took up residence at 24 Long Valley Road in Lodi during the winter of 1954. By then, Henry was employed at the Bergen Sign Company, where he retired from in 1970. "My sisters Neilla, Jennifer and my brothers Gilbert, Bruce and I were raised in Lodi" says Ronnie. "Neilla was born in Boston and Bruce passed away in September of 1992

Ronnie, after a short stay at the Franklin School in East Rutherford, New Jersey, attended Lodi's Washington School, where he graduated in June of 1961. John Speziale was Principal and teachers included Miss Donnelly, known for her larger than life hat collection and Mr. Fred Alfano. "He liked my jokes," recalls Ron, "He gave me a life long love for science". Among Ron's childhood friends were Bob Rastocky, Danny Capose, Dolores Warhol, Sharon Mc Alpine, Barbara Weber, and Rudy Loria.

Grammar School games, lead by Gym Teacher, Mr. Dellabadia, better known as 'Mr. Dell' were dodge ball, and bombardment. "Bombardment was a vicious game," says Ron. "It was dodge ball on steroids." In the late fifties Ron became a member of Lodi's first Midget league football program. Ron played for the E.W. Piece Dye Works which was owned by John Bruno and coached by Mike Cottone and Tom Maggaro. Teammates included Charles Tuminelli, Bill Masopust and Eddie Schiro. "I played right guard," says Ron. "I was the smallest kid on the team."

Although the fifties and sixties were a marvelous time to be growing up in Lodi there were families scattered across the Borough that were falling short of the prosperity being enjoyed by the rest of the community. Ron's family was among them. Many were the times when Ron and some of the other youngsters would go to the Lodi High School cafeteria and receive extra food from Mrs. Della Penta and Mrs. Luciano two compassionate Lodi gals who ran the lunch room. "They knew we didn't have enough to

eat at home," recalls Ronnie, "That was Lodi, close knit, kind, and always ready to help. We were a family.

Of course growing up in Lodi during those early years meant, for most of the kids, hanging out on the now legendary and much remembered Main Street. Ron's haunts were Riggi's hot dogs on the corner of First and Passaic Streets, and Humphreys Pizza located near Hunter Street. Tony's Pool room, on Autumn St. Was the gambling mecca of the main drag. Not that anyone actually saw money changing hands . . . well it did change hands, but again . . . "nobody saw it

"It was the misspent part of my youth," says Giles. "Everyone including the 'lot boys' hung out there." Tony's was owned and operated by Tony, "Tony da da DeFranco. Among it's most celebrated visitors were Victor Lascari, Black Sal Indellootto, the Merlo's, members of the Maglionico family, and a high roller by the name of Charley Bomba. In fact on any given day, after school of course, all the cool kids on Main St. would gravitate to that dark little corner of the world called "Tony's. I thought that if I hung out there enough I'd turn into an Italian," laughs Ron, "despite my red hair and freckles."

In September of 1961 Ronnie Giles entered the cavernous halls of Lodi High School. The fresh faced kid from Washington School was overwhelmed by the very sight of it. "I felt like Charlton Heston in the Planet Of The Apes," admits Ron, "When he screamed "It's a mad house!" Ron jokingly reveals that he was amazed at the number of forty year old Seniors. "They immediately applied for social security the day after graduation!" laughs Ron.

Ron recalls the time when he threw his hat into the political arena and ran for president of the Freshman class. Ron received one vote, it was his! "Everyone told me how sorry they were that I lost and that they all voted for me," says Ronnie, "I learned about the game of politics at an early age.

The Principal of Lodi High at the time was Mr. Frank Garciafano, Vice Principal was Mr. Pasqual Maggessi. They were two gents who's offices were to be avoided, if possible, at all costs, even at that there were those, among them Ronnie Giles, who seemed to gravitate there like moths to a street light." They told me that if I applied myself I'd be an honor student," remembers Ron. "I was having too much fun doing visual and verbal humor, being center of attention.

Ron's instant claim to fame as a student of the ORANGE AND BLUE were his Tarzan calls during pep rallies and study halls, the latter awarded him legendary status as well as a seat in Maggessi's office. His LHS friends included Daniel 'Waldo' Capozzi, Mike Ettz, who in 1967 was killed in action in the jungles of Vietnam, Tom Biegle, Frank 'Roast Beef' Salimando, Richie Kwak, Austin Hawxhurst, Joe Weber, AL 'Falling

Through” Norieka, and a good looking kid from the hill named Artie Maglionico

Then there was Ron's list of 'A' list girls: Camile Lipari, Joann Catalioto, Anita Di Dino, Lucille Leone, Joan Atkins, Mary Kollarik, Sharon Elio, Loretta Cardone, and Jean Lo Scialpo

In October of 1965, 17 year old Ronnie Giles enlisted in the United States Army. He served in Vietnam from April '66 to April '67. He was a member of the Infantry, Armored Personnel Carrier Driver, Ammo, Radio Man and Tunnel Rat with "A" Troop Cavalry Twenty Fifth Infantry Division. After his discharge in 1968 Ron pursued a career in the acting profession only to re enlist in the military. This time around he served with the New Jersey and Idaho National Guard. In 1966 Ron transferred into the regular Army where he performed a wide variety of assignments. He retired in November of 2007 at the rank of Sergeant First Class E-7. In 2003 Ron served his country in Kuwait and Iraq.

Today, Lodi's Mr. Giles has two grown children and two grand children. He can be found at Curiones Pizza on Liberty Street usually on a Saturday morning with fellow Lodian James "Jimmy" Horvath. Ronnie is a life time member of the Cavalry Association, VFW, Disabled American Veterans, Vietnam Veterans of America, Lodi Moose, Episcopal Actors Guild, Screen Actors Guild, The American Federation of TV and Radio and the Lodi Library.

For Ronald Eaton Giles, his hero is his dad Henry, whose name appears on the wall of the Museum Of The American Indian in Washington D. C. Among Ron's recent film credits are: 'The Taking of PELHAM 1-2-3', 'What Happens In Vegas" with Cameron Diaz, Ashton Kutcher, and Dennis Farina. Ron also appeared in the 1986 production of "Nuke e'm High" plus leads and supporting roles in over 30 independent films nation wide. He is currently pursuing a career as a full time actor

"I wouldn't change a minute of my life in Lodi," says Ron. "I can't imagine growing up anywhere else."