

One Life in Lodi November 2010

Charles Mathew Lane by Artie Maglionico, Lodi Borough Historian

Charles Mathew Lane grew up in the Borough of Lodi during a time of rapid change, both for the landscape that had become so familiar to him and the people who built their dreams there. The world around Charles and his friends was giving way to progress until all that remained of their treasured past were memories of that one life... that one life in Lodi.

Charles M. Lane was born in Clifton, N.J. on December 7, 1946. His parents, Julia Overman of Hoboken, N.J., and Fred Lane, who hailed from Brooklyn, U.S.A. They were married in June of 1934. In the fall of 1948 the couple packed their bags and traveled a few miles east to the friendly Borough of Lodi, N.J. "We moved to 82 Home Place when I was 2 years old," recalls Charles. "My older brother Fred and my older sister Linda built a pretty good life for themselves. My dad worked as a mechanic for the Hertz Corporation while my mom stayed at home and raised the family."

In September of 1951 Charles entered Roosevelt Grammar School and immediately began to develop what would become lifelong friendships... Among them were Joe Costa, Richard Luggierio, Carl Perrilo, John Mortinson, Ronnie Ingrassia, and Frank Garciafano. Most of the games they played took place on the Roosevelt School playground and they included stick ball, soft ball and base ball. The summer months found Charles and his friends building rafts on the Saddle River and sailing them down stream looking for frogs and turtles.

"Because of the chemicals from the United Piece Dye Works, the river behind what is now the Boys and Girls Club would vary in shades from green to orange," recalls Charles. "We didn't find many turtles but we found plenty of dead carp."

The winter months... which were far more intense than they have been of late... were spent sleigh riding down the First Street hill. The ride began on Harrison Avenue and ended on Passaic Street.

"The featured event of winter back then," remembers Charles, "was pushing the snow back onto the road after the snow plow cleared it away... we kept it well manicured."

Bike riding was another favorite past time for Charles and his pals. Each Memorial Day the boys would decorate their bikes with red, white and blue crepe paper and would ride in the Parade. "My first bike was a 26 inch Huffy Convertible," says Charles, "it was my pride and joy."

In the fall of 1960 Charles left the familiar confines of Roosevelt School and entered the larger than life fortress that was Lodi High School. "I was pretty nervous on that first day," admits Charles. "Having the Principal's son, Frank Gaciafano, as a friend of mine, really made the adjustment a lot easier."

As a budding teenager, Charles and his friend John Scizzaro, frequented a weekly

Canteen Dance that took place down stairs from the Police Station. By then, his companions included high school pals Tony Bua and John DeStephano. "For adventures sake, we'd dare to climb the Arnot Street water tower or to the top of the UPDW smoke stacks." recalls Charles, "It was pretty scary stuff, come to think of it and I would never attempt it today!"

It was during the High School Washington, D.C. trip that Charles began dating his then future wife, Ruth Defalco, class of 64. They were married in December of 1968.

A year later, in March of 1966, Charles was drafted into the US Army. After completing basic training at Fort Dix with fellow Lodian Mike Cardone, Charles was shipped to Wurzburg, Germany where he was promoted to Spec 4 in charge of supply. After serving as the company clerk for a year and a half, Charles won a talent contest and toured with the USO as a song and dance man throughout Germany. Once, while performing in Nuremburg, Germany in front of 5000 people, Charles heard his name being called out from amongst the crowd. The voice belonged to fellow Lodi resident Steve Paul. "That was a unique experience," says Charles, "I haven't seen him since."

Another chance meeting of a Lodi High School buddy while in the Army happened on December 22, 1966 at 2:00 a.m. during a NATO Alert drill. "I jumped out of my truck and knocked a guy over in the process," remembers Charles. "It turned out to be classmate Ernie Bonomo. Had I not bumped into him I'd have never known he was with me in Germany."

Upon his discharge from the Military in October of 1968, Charles returned to American Book where he remained for the next 15 years. He was married the following December. In 1972 Charles and wife Ruth re-located to Oakland, N.J. The couple have one child, son Mathew, who, now at 33 years of age is employed by ADP Check Company. Charles and Ruth have a two year old grandson. Ruth is a retired social worker for the the Bergen County Board of Social Services.

Charles is currently the president of his own Company... Graphic Crossroads, located in Franklin Lakes. He is also an independent associate for a company by the name of Pre-Paid Legal Services. His community affiliations include a scholarship fund raiser called "Flow Follies." The entertainment event raises money for Franklin Lakes, Oakland and Wycoff High Schools. Charles is also the president of the Harmony Singers of Wayne, N.J. He is a 1978 graduate of Ramapo College and holds an MBA in Business from Fordham University.

"Lodi was a very underrated and sometimes berated community." says Charles. "In truth, it was far better than ever portrayed by anyone from the outside... those on the inside knew that it was better."