

One Life in Lodi

A brief biography of George Warchol

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On Friday August 17, 2001. Mr. Warchol has since passed on.

George Warchol is among that group of Lodi men and women who, as concerned citizens, embraced their community, nurtured it and carried it into the future. Today, at 80 years of age, MR. Warchol is able to look back at his life with the satisfaction of knowing that he played a vital role in the development of the town he loves.

George was born on May 20, 1921. His parents Andrew and Theresa met in 1895 on a ship that was carrying them to America from Austria/ Hungary. After their marriage the couple settled in Passaic NJ. The following summer they purchased a home on Bloomingdale Avenue in Garfield. There Andrew and Theresa raised their children Peter, John, Michael, George, Andrew, Mary and Olga.

“My parents worked at a Garfield dye house.” Recalls George “They worked hard to buy bread on the table.” In those days a loaf of bread was a dime while baloney was considered expensive at a nickel per pound.

Though the Warchol family put their roots down in the nearby city of Garfield young George would often ride his bike down the Lodi hill and into the heart of town. “Back then Avenue D to Essex Street was all farmland.” says George “ that included the Wisse farm and further east Pop May’s farm.” George’s childhood friends from that end of town were the Turpak brothers, The Durace boys, the Byrne family, the Volpe family, the Leone’s and the Gugliotta family. “We played football every Sunday morning on an old driving range on Essex Street.” recalls George. “No one had the money to play golf so we took over the vacant field. Later it became Modell’s shopping center.”

George and his pals, which also included the Patti’s and the Vandervliet brothers, used to meet at Volpe’s corner store on Avenue D before each game. While most of his friends attended Lodi schools George was enrolled at the Garfield # 1 school on Commerce Street then Junior High at the #8 school on Cedar Street. At the age of sixteen George left the classroom and became a member of the work force. His first trip into the work a day world was at the Modern Bakery on Palisade Avenue in Garfield. He was employed there from 1936 to 1938, the prime of his teenage life. It was during that time when George, while hanging out at Volpe’s store, met his then Future Bride Bertha Bulwin. “She wanted a ride on my bike.” Says George”, she became the love of my life. I struck a gold mine.”

In 1938 George left the bakery and joined his brother Michael, a metallurgist in Detroit, to learn the foundry business. A year later he returned home and into the awaiting arms of his beloved Bertha. Upon his return George went to work for Wrights Aeronautical in Fairlawn NJ... Then, with the USA in the throes of WWII, George Warchol enlisted into the Navy. “ I remember standing in front of Mamola’s Store on the corner of main and Garibaldi with Tony Leone, Joe Piela, and Eugene Bonnana.” Recalls George. “We were angrily discussing the bombing of Pearl Harbor and saw fit to join the Navy. A week later I was in Illinois training on the Great Lakes. I didn’t see the other guys until after the war.”

No sooner was basic training over when the dashing young sailor rushed home to marry his sweet heart Bertha. “That was 1942.” says George 58 years of good living.” After a short honeymoon George kissed his wife goodbye at the front door and left for the British West Indies where he was stationed at a repair base. A year later George was shipped state side to the Brooklyn Ship yard. There he joined the crew of the supply ship USS Venango AKA 82.

George then decided to enter deep sea diving training school. With hard hat and canvass suit in tact George scored a whale {thank you very much} of a test score and received honors among the class of 30 of the

Navy's finest. For his troubles George sailed to Honolulu on the same supply ship delivering much needed cargo to our boys in Guam, Manila, Philippines, the Marshall Islands, Marianas Islands and the Solomon's. From there Georges ship became involved in the invasion of Okinawa during the height of the Kamikaze raids. "We saw many American ships getting hit." says George "Our ship was heading back to port to re-load supplies."

The USS Venango was then assigned to duty on the China Sea. George recalls looking across the stern as observing ships as far as the eye could see. "We knew that something big was going on." says George "We found out later that we had dropped the bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Japanese surrendered shortly after in 1945." In November of that same year First Class Petty Officer, Metal Smith George Warchol was honorably discharged from the United States Navy. Upon his triumphant return George moved into his wife's family home on Avenue C in Lodi.

After working as a welder for Bordens Dairy products George started his own business on Keasler Avenue in Lodi called Supreme Auto Body. During that time George and Bertha moved into the Defalco home on Avenue B. Finally the couple built their home on Wilson Street in Lodi where they have lived happily ever after for the past 47 years.

In 1962 George became active on the political scene. His service to his community includes Vice President and Director of the Boys and Girls Club of Lodi, six years as a member of the Board of Education and two years on the Borough Council. Mr. Warchol served as Lodi's Mayor for one year and had become known as "the peoples' Mayor." George is also a past member of Kiwanis, Moose Lodge, Joseph M Lane post 136 American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars post 5082. " I had the honor of being a part of many positive changes in Lodi." says George "we refurbished all the schools, built the Hill Top School, and presented the new High School plan to the people."

George and Bertha have two daughters Dolores and Georgeann. They have two granddaughters and one great granddaughter. "I love the town of Lodi and am proud to have been a part of this community and its development." says George "Once you earn the respect of the people there's nothing you cannot accomplish."

George Warchol is quick to add that he has had an enjoyable ride in his 80 years. "I thank the man upstairs for watching over me and my family." He says

Mr. George Warchol is one life that has touched many lives including this writer's.

