Lodi History Highlights

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Miss Lodi 1933: Mildred Rembish (published May 2013)

I was at the Lodi Memorial Library recently, looking through a stack of early photos of our Borough. The photos had been donated by the family historian, the late Mr. Lawrence Tuscano. The photos, some of which date back to the early 1900's, captured the quintessence of Lodi New Jersey: the people, places and indeed, the community at large, frozen in time forever.

I have always felt a connection to those early settlers of our fair Borough. I sense that I have passed that way before, in a past life perhaps. As I was sifting through Lodi's past, I discovered a photo of Miss Lodi circa 1933, the lovely Mildred Rembish. Mildred was born in Lodi on March 2, 1916, and was raised at her home on 28 James Place.

One look at her beautiful smile, and I became instantly mesmerized. I felt myself being drawn into the photo as if my spirit self was taking a joy ride through time. Somehow, some way, I had met this girl before. Now we are destined to meet again here on this webpage.

Gathering information on Miss Rembish was difficult at first. Eighty years had passed since last we met . So getting to know her again was not an easy task. Mildred, however, was determined to meet me on the lines of this story. Neither distance nor time would get in her way. Miss Lodi 1933 began making things happen. The beauty queen led the way and I, not having any choice in the matter, followed gladly.

On the following Sunday at a monthly breakfast given by the St. Joseph Church in Lodi, I met a resident by the name of Antoinette Luciano. Though she doesn't look it, Ms. Luciano was a teenager back in 1933. Neither of us had ever attended this monthly gathering. For some unexplained reason, on this one Sunday, we both showed up. As soon as I mentioned that I was doing a story on Mildred Rembish, from across the room I heard the voice of Mrs. Luciano saying "I know her sister." Faster than I could say "Miss Lodi", persons unknown handed me a pen and paper as if they knew that I'd be needing them. If you don't believe me, ask my cousin Anthony. The next thing I knew, I was writing down the address and phone number of Mildred's younger sister, Amelia Rembish Hartman. I was one step closer to meeting my dream girl.

The next morning, I was back in the Library staring into Mildred's photo. She is standing on a stage which is most likely at the American Theatre on Main Street (long since gone). Next to Mildred is Miss New Jersey 1933, Gertrude Christman, who is also very pretty. Both girls are petite, though Gertrude is the slightly taller of the two. In the background, peeking from behind a backstage curtain, is a handsome young fellow in his early teens. He has dark hair, a boyish grin on his face, and he is wearing a white short-sleeved shirt and black slacks. His right hand is over his heart. It is safe to say that he's not reciting

the Pledge of Allegiance. Rather, he's trying to keep his heart from beating through his shirt pocket. Who knows? That boy may very well be me staring back at myself 80 years later.

In the photo, Mildred is holding the Miss Lodi Loving Cup, grasping it in her left hand, while her right arm is at her side. She is clutching the trophy at the neck, just above a black inverted base. Miss Rembish is wearing a ring on her middle finger of her left hand and there's a watch or a bracelet just above her wrist. She is wearing a white V neck, floor length, short sleeved dress. Around her neck can be seen the faint outline of a delicate chain.

Our Miss Lodi 1933 is blessed with soft angelic features ...a cute nose and almond-shaped eyes that radiate a peaceful inner beauty. Based on the fairness of her skin and the highlight in her hair, I would guess that the color of her eyes was hazel. Mildred's hair is parted slightly to the left with no bangs. The length reaches barely to the center of her neck and is softly curled on both sides, framing her exceedingly pretty face. Her girlish smile reveals a trace of dimples. That's my Mildred Rembish.

During 1933, Miss Lodi also won a beauty contest at a Vaudeville extravaganza in nearby Teterboro, New Jersey. As the Miss Lodi pageant winner, Mildred was awarded an all-expenses paid trip to the Chicago World's Fair. Her sister Amelia revealed to me that Mildred was also an accomplished cellist for the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra. Mildred attended Garfield High School since Lodi High School did not open until 1934. There she had a weekly column in the school newspaper and in the Lodi Messenger. Miss Lodi graduated in June of 1933.

After marrying her husband of 51 years, Victor Dragon, Mildred became a real estate broker for a firm in the neighboring town of Hasbrouck Heights. The couple resided on Washington Place in Lodi where they had three children: Mildred, Susan and Victor. Mildred's community service included being President of the Lincoln School PTA, President of the Hasbrouck Heights Woman's Club, and an active member of the South Bergen Hospital Auxiliary committee of Hasbrouck Heights.

Our Miss Rembish, Miss Lodi 1933, passed away in her Florida home in December of 1990. She was 74. I'm sorry I never got to meet Mildred, but then again I did! It was 80 years ago at the Miss Lodi Pageant where I was peeking through the backstage curtain. By the way, Amelia told me that Mildred's eyes were indeed hazel. I was right! There are certain things in life a kid doesn't forget, since I gazed into those hazel eyes.