

Vito Peraino – WWII Veteran

By Artie Maglionico

I wrote this for the August 3, 2001 issue of the Weekly News. I interviewed at least 35 or more Lodi citizens who went on to serve in the Armed Forces during WWII. Vito Peraino was among them and this is a firsthand account of what life was like if you were a young man from Lodi who was about to march off to war.

Vito “Spike” Peraino exudes the same youthful spirit that he possessed as a youngster playing for the Rigors softball team back in the late 30s. His zest for life is contagious and the fondness that he displays for the town of Lodi is as deep rooted as the boroughs strongest tree.

Vito, nicknamed” Spike” as far back as early childhood, was born on August 30, 1922. His parents Joseph and Maria, along with their daughter Carmella arrived in New York City from Sicily in the early 1900s. In 1923, after a short stay in Chicago, the Peraino family moved to Lodi. “We moved to Summer Street” said Vito “By then the family had grown to three kids - Carmella, Frances and myself.”

Once settled on Summer Street, Joseph went to work at the United Piece Dye Works in Lodi while Maria became employed at a Washington Street dress shop. By the early ‘30s Vito was attending Roosevelt School where he graduated from in 1935. His childhood memories of Lodi include Buccaro’s ice cream store, Joe Noffo’s grocery and Matorano’s Bakery. “I grew up next to St Joseph’s Church when Father Falzone was pastor.” Recalls Vito. “That’s where I received communion and confirmation.”

Street games for Spike and his friends the Sesto’s, the Perrone brothers and many cousins included Sheeny, pitching pennies and baseball. The team was called the Dragon AC’s and the playing field was on Lafayette Street near Lincoln School.” My team mates were the Boggio brothers and Joe Macaluso”, remembers Spike.

After graduating from grammar school, Vito went to work for the Lodi Pants Co. on Home Place. It was during that time when the youngster helped his dad tend the goats at the banks of the Saddle River. “Sometimes the goat would end up on the dinner table.” Says Vito, “Families harvested their own food in those days.”

During his teen years Vito frequented the Lodi pool where his two cousins Vito “Cherbie” Peraino and Mike Bucarro worked as life guards. His social life extended into the dances at the Columbus Auditorium on Union street. “My memories of the old Main Street are very clear.” Says Spike. “I could still picture Peraino’s butcher shop, Murrays luncheonette, Tripodi’s fruit store, Rocciola’s Funeral Parlor, Humphreys Pizza, Manzella’s Barber shop and Bucarro’s shoe maker shop.”

In 1941 Vito became a member of the Rigors softball team where he doubled as Pitcher/outfielder. Rigors sport shop was a Hackensack based company that sponsored Lodi youth. The 1941 season found the boys beating teams from Passaic and Bergen Counties and eventually went on to win the state championship. The team was managed by Dick Piazza. Unfortunately, Vito's athletic career was interrupted by WWII. He was drafted on February 3, 1943.

After attending boot camp at Fort Dix, Vito trained as a medic with the 232nd station hospital at camp Pickett, Virginia. He was then sent to England in late 1943. Vito's outfit would meet the trains and ships to bring in our countries wounded. "I later became a mess sergeant." said Vito, "When I was on duty our boys insisted that I made macaroni and meatballs." Rumor has it that even the Nazi prisoners used to help in the kitchen so they could sample Spike's famous Italian food.

In January of 1946, Vito was shipped back home. After returning to the Lodi Pants Co. for two years, he went to work for General Electric in Clifton, NJ. "I worked there for 24 years." says Vito " I then went to work for the borough and retired in 1988." Vito " Spike"

Peraino met Josephine Monaco at a dance at the Polish Peoples Home in Wallington in February of 1955. They were married on June 11th of that same year. The couple moved to Hunter Street where they raised three children; Jenette, Joseph and Maryann. They have four grandchildren and one great grandchild. Vito has been a member of the Lodi VFW for 50 years and is a Parishioner of St Joseph's Church. His military awards include the WWII Campaign Medal, Good Conduct Medal and the WWII Victory Medal.

"I was born and raised here" says Vito "I love this town and its people. I'm glad that I'm still around to share this information."

Spike has since passed away but his memory lives on within the lines and paragraphs of this story.