



Storytellers @RPL
Interviewer/Interviewee: Lou Lembo
Interviewee/Interviewer: Linda Lembo
Facilitator: Sarah Kiefer
Recorded on June 16, 2016

SARAH: My name is Sarah Kiefer. Today is June 16, 2016 and I'm speaking with husband and wife, Lou and Linda Lembo. We are recording this interview in the Bolger Heritage Center of the Ridgewood Public Library. So I'm going to pass the mic over to you Lou.

LOU: Thank you.

LINDA: I just want to ask you some things that you might remember growing up in Ridgewood since you've been here how many years?

LOU: About 68.

LINDA: When did you actually come to live in Ridgewood?

LOU: It was in May of 1948, 47 or 48, I'm not sure which but I think it was 47.

LINDA: And why did you move here?

LOU: Well my dad worked for the Village, as well as my grandfather.

LINDA: In what capacity did your father work?

LOU: My father was a policeman, but my grandfather worked for the Village for 60, 60 years plus.

LINDA: And what did your grandfather do?

LOU: He was the foreman on the street department.

LINDA: Do you remember any interesting facts that your grandfather may have told you, working on that street department?

LOU: Well I used to ride with him, in the truck. It was quite a long time ago, but you know, I remember working on our street, on Van Buren Street when we lived there, and whatnot.

LINDA: I remember you telling me some stories about the horses that used to draw the?

LOU: Yeah, Nellie, Blue and Bill were the horses. They destroyed, they put the horses to sleep over near, I think it's the Orchard School. My grandfather had a little plot of land that he used as a farm. And they brought them over there, and they destroyed them there, and there was a monument. There were three trees planted, three fir trees that were planted in their honor.

LINDA: I think there's a park there now.

LOU: There is a park.

LINDA: That designates the horses in tribute of their service to the Village. Do you remember any other interesting facts even if I may have told you about the roads and how the roads were back during that time?

LOU: Not particularly about the roads but I knew he rode a bicycle from Paterson to work.

LINDA: So obviously he did have a driver's license. [laughter]

LOU: Well he did get a driver's license after awhile. And they bought truck. I remember him telling me one time that they, he had to choose a truck for the men to work with, and he picked the one with the electric starter rather than the crank, it would've been easier for them.

LINDA: That was nice to have him do. Do you remember the building of Graydon Pool or when Graydon Pool was built?

LOU: I don't remember the building of it, but I remember my grandfather told me he was one of the first lifeguards.

LINDA: I think that was a work project by the..

LOU: It might have been a W.P.A., or work people's projects.

LINDA: And your grandfather was one of the first lifeguards?

LOU: He was the first lifeguard, yes.

LINDA: That was nice. What about any interesting facts of uptown? You know the town probably has changed a lot since you were a kid.

LOU: Well, the, I remember Cobs where we got our scouting supplies. And Hood-Stevens, you know, the town, the layout of the town hasn't changed much but certainly the, what the stores are up there now have changed a lot. A lot of restaurants, a lot of banks.

LINDA: So there were more retail type stores? [crosstalk]

LOU: More retail type stores, yeah. More so than banks and restaurants as there is today.

LINDA: And, what about the lighting of the Christmas tree?

LOU: Well I remember at Christmas, it was, it was a happy time. I remember that.

LINDA: I can remember when they first started the lighting of the Christmas tree and it was became a tradition for us as a family, and we would come up every Christmas and we would first would have dinner, and then we go to the lighting of the Christmas tree. We had dinner in town, our kids actually even came home from college early sometimes just so that they could be part and continue to be part of the lighting Christmas tree. And to this day they still like to come to the lighting of the Christmas tree. Even our daughter who lives in Washington Township, you know, brings her daughter, daughters, over. What about your family and their children?

LOU: Well I have three children, two boys and a girl. They all went to Ridgewood High School. And, I guess they're successful today, we have a federal agent, a policeman and a teacher.

LINDA: And what about your grandchildren are they going to continue on with the tradition of going to the Ridgewood schools?

LOU: Besides driving me crazy? Yeah I think they will, they're young yet. My two oldest are 16, but the three, one two three, four, four, we have we just have a new one now. They're, they're growing up to be a handful, I think they'll fit right in.

LINDA: I'm sure they'll continue probably going to the Ridgewood school systems to.

LOU: Incidentally, the two boys live in Ridgewood, and my daughter lives in Washington Township, as you said.

LINDA: Well, one of your sons happens to be a sergeant on the police force.

LOU: So he'll be here for awhile.

LINDA: So he's carrying out the traditions of your father, so he's, and your grandfather's being a servant of the public of Ridgewood.

LOU: My father actually worked for the street, worked for my grandfather before he went on the police department, a couple years [crosstalk], after he got out of the army.

LINDA: And you said your grandfather had like a little plot of land that he used farm?

LOU: Behind the Orchard School, yeah, that belonged to a, actually was a hermit named Jake, and my grandfather and I used to go there periodically. Drove a 37 Plymouth I remember that.

LINDA: I also remember your father telling the story about the, the gentleman who owned the Stable and how he used to be, he was a wealthy attorney?

LOU: Wealthy attorney, from New York. He died, I remember when he passed away. He owned all that property at Graydon, it was Mr. Graydon I believe?

LINDA: No no his name wasn't Mr. Graydon, it was, Hester.

LOU: Hester.

SARAH: Lester.

LINDA: Lester.

LOU: Lester, Lester Stable right. And everybody thought he was just the caretaker but he really owned all that property.

LINDA: Right, he didn't want anybody to know that he was really the owner of the property. But he died actually at Valley Hospital, [crosstalk] quite a few years ago. What about any volunteer work that you do now, you know, for the town?

LOU: I, well I don't volunteer for the town, but for Habit for Humanity in Paterson. And I've been doing that since I retired in. And it's quite fulfilling, there's a good bunch of guys that I work with. And, I'm at the store now in Wayne, but we did a lot of building in Paterson, and it got to be a lot, a lot of work, a lot of extra climbing ladders, so a bunch of us are at the store now. We repair furniture and get things ready for resale.

LINDA: But you do actually volunteer for the town, you do the Parks and Rec.

LOU: Well, I'm on the Parks and Rec committee that's true yes.

LINDA: You've done that. And we were both a project pride.

LOU: Project Pride years ago, yes. And we just had, one of, what's interesting is one of the girls that volunteered for Project Pride, Mary Beth Lane, she was a volunteer as I was. She became the head of Project Pride and volunteered on a lot of committees. We just had a dinner for her, she's moving out of Ridgewood to the eastern shore of Maryland. And she was, so we had a fun time at La Lanterna a restaurant in town.

LINDA: Do you see a lot of changes in Ridgewood over the years? [crosstalk] I know uptown you know [crosstalk]...

LOU: Well, of course there's more restaurants and banks now. But being on the Parks and Rec committee that's involved with Graydon Pool and I see that there's a trend people, there are over 800 swimming pools in Ridgewood. That's what they tell me. And people want a smaller pool, they want racing lanes for the swim club, for the swim team rather, and it's changing so I think we'll see a lot of changes. Now there's controversy about the parking garage. You know I think it is changing. People are, we have a very good school system, and I think that a lot of people perhaps move into town and leave after the kids graduate from high school.

LINDA: One of the things I noticed is that when we first moved here there was a trend that people were having more smaller homes. You know, they were happy with the smaller homes and now you're seeing people, you know, imploding these these smaller homes into these [crosstalk] big mansions. People are wanting the bigger homes and an interesting fact in the newspaper just recently they were talking about in Bergen County that prices of homes today are either going down or staying the same where in towns like Ridgewood and I think it Alpine and Tenafly or something they were saying they are actually increasing the property values of the homes. So Ridgewood is keeping you know with the trends. And one of the things that is very important I think is the train [crosstalk]. At the train station people are coming in here by train from New York and they do go out to other towns you know Ho-Ho-Kus, Glen Rock, areas like that but a lot of them are staying right here in the Village area and we have one of the true real true village type of towns. I think you, you know you would attest to that. You know, we have a movie theater, we have a lot of eating places, retail stores.

LOU: The YMCA is a perfect example. A lot of people, you know Ridgewood has a YMCA, none of the other towns had one, until I think Wyckoff built the YMCA.

LINDA: And a hospital we have a hospital right in town which is nice. I know there's a lot of controversy over the hospital but when you think about it if you're sick you know it's nice to be able to have it right down the street from you so to speak.

LOU: Interesting thing about the hospital was the school owned all that property before it was. And now they'd love to buy it back, but I think one of the things that's held back the expansion of the hospital has been because the schools next door.

LINDA: And you lived across the street from the hospital for many years.

LOU: Since 1967 before that we lived on Van Buren Street.

LINDA: Van Buren Street. And our son, one her sons, lives on Van Buren Street now right near where [crosstalk] you grew up.

LOU: Right down the street.

LINDA: Which is an interesting fact. Where did you work when you, before you retired?

LOU: I worked at the Valley Hospital for 35 years full-time and then I worked about another six. I relieved the girl there whenever she needed a day off, or week off.

LINDA: I remember you telling the story that when they found the cornerstone at the hospital. What did they find in there?

LOU: I remember that. Mike Azara, the president had called me to the office. My grandfather's picture, excuse me, was on the front page. Giving a donation.

LINDA: He was, he gave one of the first donations to the Valley Hospital. So it was actually given to the auxiliary [crosstalk]. He's handing it up to him. That was really neat, so when they were having, I think it was their 50th anniversary.

LOU: 50th anniversary.

LINDA: They had these big posters made of all different things through the years and that poster, in fact we have it in our attic.

LOU: It was in the cornerstone of the original Phillips, Linwood Building.

LINDA: The Linwood Building. We saw all those buildings down.

LOU: Saw them go up.

LINDA: There is also that the building that was behind the hospital, the CP center.

LOU: The Kraft House.

LINDA: The CP Center.

LOU: The cerebral palsy center. They relocated that to Fair Lawn.

LINDA: Right, and his grand, his father played Santa Claus every year for the cerebral palsy children. That was another he did as a policeman some of the policemen would go there with her their families and they would serve, you know, cake you know to the

children and that was a really, treat. We brought our daughter there when she was about seven or eight years old? And she helped serve the kids. That was very interesting. What about, you know, looking ahead, you know, how can, what would you like to say to like your grandchildren? Is there anything special about the town?

LOU: Well, I would hope that they, it's special. I hope that they take advantage of all the opportunities. The library, the clubs in town, and the pool. All this seems to be a thing of the past, but the, Graydon Pool was a great asset for me.

LINDA: Do you remember the Opera House?

LOU: I remember when they tore it down. It was never in operation as a kid, I remember.

LINDA: But there was an Opera House?

LOU: There was, right where Davis's Drug Store is, it isn't Davis's anymore, it's a luncheonette. Across from the, on the west side, West Ridgewood Avenue on the corner. It was, a couple doors in, and they tore that down.

LINDA: And we both remember there's been a lot of tragedies, you know, through, you know, Ridgewood, you know, over the years. There's the, there was the burning of the Red Cross building.

LOU: Oh yeah, that was terrible.

LINDA: It was a huge fire.

LOU: The Opera, Ridgewood, the church.

LINDA: The church, that was another you know, real real tragedy. Then there was also, oh how about when the that man came and he was, the police, the postal. He came, and he had killed some coworkers.

LOU: I was walking the dog that morning and I saw all the police activity. We lived almost in town, and I saw all the police activity around the post office. I just didn't think anything of it. I went back and I heard on the news that there was a sniper they thought it was in the building.

LINDA: It was actually disgruntled employee and you've heard the saying going postal? That's where it comes from [laughter]. Really. It's a terrible thing, our claim to fame going postal. But that was, in the fact one of her friends was supposed to come to work that day, and she was scheduled for work, but she was reading the newspaper and she got engrossed in an article in the newspaper and she was she was late and if she'd been on time she might have been one that was killed.

LOU: Yeah.

LINDA: That's kind of a scary thought. But there were, you know, a number of issues like that. Any other things you think of? I think one of the most beautiful things is the High School graduation. They still to this day the girls wear the long white dresses and the gentleman wear the white tuxedos and they come down down the stairs, and the girls wearing, carrying their long stemmed red [crosstalk] roses. I used to stand at the overpass by the the bridge with the kids when they were little, and I would say if you are really good you'll get to do that someday [laughter].

LOU: If you live that long [laughter].

LINDA: Let's see if there's anything else you would like to mention Lou.

LOU: Ah well, looking ahead, lifetime goals. The support of my family has been great. Linda's at it a lot. And I don't know what else to say. I think it's a good town, changing very quickly. And that's about it.

SARAH: Well thank you so much to the both of you for doing this today. We appreciated, and loved hearing your stories. Thank you.