GREENWICH VILLAGE SOCIETY FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

SOUTH VILLAGE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Oral History Interview

PETER LONGO

By Liza Zapol

New York, NY

May 27, 2015

Oral History Interview with Peter Longo, May 27, 2015

Narrator(s)	Peter E. Longo
Birthdate	10/22/1951
Birthplace	NY, NY
Narrator Age	63
Interviewer	Liza Zapol
Place of Interview	Porto Rico Importing Company Store, Back office, 201 Bleeker Street, NY NY
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Order in Oral Histories	16

Peter Longo at Porto Rico Importing Company, 201 Bleeker Street, New York, NY. Photograph by Liza Zapol.

Quotes from Oral History Interview with Peter Longo

"On MacDougal Street were all these cafes. I was little! If they ordered five pounds of espresso, it was my job to deliver it. I would go, and of course, I didn't want to work, so I would take an hour instead of fifteen minutes and get balled out by my parents because I took so long to get there. We used to supply all the cafes, and I would meet these folks. I didn't think anything of it, and it was a lot of fun. You met a lot of interesting characters and whatnot. I was probably eleven."
(Longo p.19)

"It was like being home walking up and down Bleecker Street. We would go to the Hip Bagel, and when we started to smoke pot we would get really high and then go to the Hip Bagel and even if you were so high where they asked you what you wanted and you went, [gibberish] they'd bring you something."
(Longo p.24)

"There's Dante's around the corner, that cafe? That café was not started, but when I was young, you went in there with your parents. You went in. Your mother would have a coffee, your father would have a coffee, you would get an almond syrup and steamed milk, and there were all the waiters from all the restaurants who were closed. After their shifts they would go to Dante and have coffee and play cards and la-la-la. You had a set of thirty parents in there."
(Longo p. 34)

"They were much older. Sidney would come to the store in a suit, and his Cadillac would be parked outside. His wife would be in the Cadillac. He would drive around to his accounts with his wife. Sometimes she would drive. Sidney had made so much money that he was able to send his girls to the Little Red Schoolhouse. When they came out of school, they would come across the street. We would babysit them, and then Sidney and his wife would come and pick them up. I got very close with Sidney, right up until the time he passed away. When he was eighty. he taught me all he knew about coffee and tea, which was a wealth, because he would say, "Oh, I'm going to sell. I'm going down the street." I said, "What do you mean you're going down the street?" He said, "Well, years ago"—he was old, but he wasn't that old—"we used to go down to Front Street, and we would see how laden the ships were, and that's how they determined the price of coffee." What? That's ancient history, man. What are you talking about? He knew a lot of little things, and I learned from him."
(Longo p. 36)

"Back years ago in the Village, I was considered the 'Longo boy' by neighborhood people like Mrs. Raffetto—and her sons, too, you know. That's one of the reasons I moved out of the Village because I had no privacy here. You walk down the street, you meet customers, you meet local Villagers, you're the 'Longo boy.' All your behavior, all your private life, is on public display. It's one of the reasons we moved to Battery Park City, which was a tremendous relief, because nobody knew me, and that's fine."
(Longo p. 57)

Summary of Oral History Interview with Peter Longo

Peter Longo (1951-), owner of Porto Rico Importing Company and a building purchased by his grandfather at 201 Bleeker Street, describes growing up in the Village during the 1950s and 1960s and operating a family business there for three decades.

Longo describes the two Italian American families of his parents. He points out cultural and socioeconomic differences between his father's formal Sicilian family and his mother's family from Naples, offering anecdotes about Sunday gatherings, children's games, and his grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts, uncles, and parents. Longo's father's family ran an Italian bakery. In one story Longo recalls an unusual incident in which one of his uncles was kidnapped by a Mano Nera ("Black Hand") mafia-affiliated bakery. Longo's mother's family did millinery work and made artificial flowers. Children in both families attended schools in the Village. Longo mentions the Little Red Schoolhouse, PS 3, and Holy Cross Academy. Longo himself attended Our Lady of Pompeii School and LaSalle Academy School for Young Men.

As a child, Longo worked for his family's business in the Village. After inheriting the family bakery from Longo's grandfather, Longo's father worked as a salesman for Fromme's and Vivo, two coffee companies, before buying the store that became Porto Rico Importing Company. Longo describes working as a delivery boy in the Village and encountering the combination of immigrant and beat cultures while learning the family business. Longo remembers working and dating in the Village as an adolescent and mentions neighborhood hangouts Cafe Wha, Figaro, the Gaslight, and the Night Owl, where he was exposed to counterculture before leaving New York to attend college in Illinois.

Longo discusses college, the process of becoming radicalized, and the culture shock of relocating to the Midwest before returning to New York and attending graduate school at the New School. He explains taking an "open-hand" approach to running his father's business, memories of his mother's business savvy, and mentors in the coffee and tea business, including Sidney Horowitz.

Longo discusses the coffee and tea industry, including grading systems, Third Wave coffee, and the legacy of café culture in the Village. Longo challenges foodie" culture and talks about its impact on the Village. Longo explains buying Auggie's, a coffee shop on Thompson Street and opening a booth at the Essex Market on the advice of Kenny Shopsin, eatery owner. He explains relocating his coffee roasting facility to Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

Before closing the interview, Longo recounts his father's failing health and his experience of 9/11 in Battery Park. He closes with the acquisition of his family's building at 201 Bleeker.

General Interview Notes:

This is a transcription of an Oral history that was conducted by the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation. GVSHP began the South Village Oral History Project in 2013. The GVSHP South Village Oral History Project includes a collection of interviews with individuals involved in local businesses, culture, and preservation, to gather stories, observations, and insights concerning the changing South Village. These interviews elucidate the personal resonances of the neighborhood within the biographies of key individuals, and illustrate the evolving neighborhood.

Oral history is a method of collecting memories and histories through recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of adding to the historical record.

The recording is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. Oral history is not intended to present the absolute or complete narrative of events. Oral history is a spoken account by the interviewee in response to questioning. Whenever possible, we encourage readers to listen to the audio recordings to get a greater sense of this meaningful exchange.

Oral History Interview Transcript

Zapol: This is the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation Oral History Project. It's May 27, 2015. This is Liza Zapol, I'm at 201 Bleecker Street, and if I can ask you to introduce yourself, please—

Longo: OK, my name is Peter Longo.

Zapol: And if you can tell me where and when you were born.

Longo: Right. I was born October 22, 1951, here, at Saint Vincent's Hospital. I was five pounds, and I was told that the umbilical cord was around my neck four times, and I came out legs first. I don't know what they call that, but that's what my aunts and my mother told me. Here I am! [laughs]

Zapol: So if you'd like to begin at the beginning, we spoke about maybe beginning with your grandparents' stories.

Longo: OK, all right. I have two sets of grandparents. I mean everybody does, but on my father's side, there was Maria and Frank—Francesco I guess—Longo, and they came over from Bagheria, Sicily, probably 1895 to 1900. They came over, and it's funny. I looked up the Ellis Island records. They were married. She was eighteen, and he was twenty-one. He was supposed to come over by himself, but she refused to let him go, and so they came over together, because she didn't want him coming here alone. It also notated that they could read. It was very interesting. They marked all these things down.

So they came over, and then on the other side, my grandmother and grandfather on my mother's side came over from a small town outside of Naples called Saint George. On my grandmother's side on my mother's side, her father was married twice, so he came over with his six children, and then his wife passed away. My grandmother, being the eldest, raised her brothers and sisters and then married a fellow from Italy, my grandfather, and had another five children. That's when they came over, and not to denigrate them, but my parents on my mother's side were in less of a good situation than my other set of grandparents. I think they were less educated, but they were very hardworking and industrious when they came over. That's what happened.

Zapol: Did you know your grandparents on your mother's side? What sort of—

Longo: Yes.

Zapol:—stories do you have about them?

Longo: I knew them better than my other set because they were still alive, and they were fun. My grandmother was a big woman, gregarious, and as a child, they lived on East Houston Street [phone sound] in a tenement, which is still there, a five-floor walk-up with the tub in the hall. When we went to visit, someone was in the bathtub inevitability. They lived there, ultimately, with their son, Frank [Mecorille], who's my uncle. He was a bit of an eccentric. He was like the bohemian of the family, and he used to tell us, all the cousins, that money was the root of all evil. He was a confirmed bachelor, and he lived in the bedroom, and he would have girlie magazines under his bed. He would let us see them, at least the boy cousins—not that he said the girl cousins couldn't, but it was just one of those things. He always had modern sculptures and all the [19]50s stuff in his room. [laughs] He was a real character. He worked for a very upscale caterer, and when you went into the apartment, you would see his tuxedo hanging after it had been pressed in preparation for him going out to work. That was interesting.

Zapol: What was your family's impression of that uncle? Or stories—

Longo: He was like the black sheep, but you know what, he was tolerated. Italians—not Italians generally, but my family takes a lot of stuff with healthy skepticism even our religious affiliation. I attended Our Lady of Pompeii School—and I went because I had to go to nine o'clock mass every Sunday—but I went to Greenwich House Camp, which was a very eclectic kind of Village-y camp. My parents were very accepting and didn't take that kind of stuff too seriously. Uncle Frank his nickname was 'Spot,' because he would make $2 bets at OTB [Off-Track Betting] or he would travel. Being a bachelor, he would travel to various racetracks, and that's how he spent his time. Besides waitering and being a bohemian, he liked to play the horses. Once I asked him, "Oh the science of horse betting," and he corrected me. He said, "Oh, no, no, no, no, no, this isn't science. This is art." He had all this literature on all the systems of how to bet the horses, and all this kind of stuff. He was a real character. **[00:05:52]**

Zapol: So his nickname was 'Spot' for—

Longo: Spot for a $2 bet, see?

Zapol: Oh, mmhm.

Longo: He would hang out in Father Demo Square with his cronies, and he lived in his grandmother's apartment. I think he paid three hundred dollars a month rent, and over the years, I kept track of him as he got older and older and older—this is Uncle Frank.

I get a call from the police. This is when he was probably sixty. He had gone to the VA [Veterans' Affairs], and he had met a doctor there. Something happened where he just fell for this woman, hook, line and sinker. He's thinking about how he's going to get into the VA. I get a call from a female patrolwoman, "You better come over. Your uncle is up here, and you need to see this." So I go to Houston Street, and I climb the five flights of very steep stairs, and I go into the apartment. There's three patrolwomen and Uncle Frank on his knees, with his head in the oven. Breathing deeply.

Now, Uncle Frank—at that point, we had turned the gas off.—and he's huffing! The girls—the girls, the women, the patrolwomen are looking at me, and I'm looking at Uncle Frank, and they say, "I'm sorry. We have to take him in because he's trying to commit suicide." I'm saying to myself, "The gas is turned off. They know the gas is turned off." Off he goes to the hospital.

Now, they send him to Saint Vincent's, and he's furious because he's on the gurney. It's very crowded. He's on the gurney in the hall. He didn't get up to the VA on 23rd Street, and he's livid. He had to stay there, I think a couple of weeks—whatever they do when you do something whacky, and they take you in against your will. That's the kind of real, [laughs] real character.

Now, fast forward to when he was ninety-six, which may have been five years ago. He was a very self-determined guy, so he calls me up—very independent—he says, "Peter Edward?" That's my middle name, and that's what he called me. "I am going to the VA. I've decided I'm no longer living in this apartment." "OK." "I'm going downstairs, I'm going to catch a cab, and I'm leaving this apartment. You take care of it." I said, "All right, Uncle Frank, I'll meet you." So I took a cab up to the VA, and they did admit him. He was older at this point. He had had a heart attack, but didn't tell anyone. There was a very nice social worker up there, and she got him into the Village nursing home, and he was there maybe three months and then passed away.

On the first day that he got there, they had given him a diaper. He had trouble holding his water, and this was a big embarrassment for him. But he was so happy that now he was in bed, He was being taken care of. He could watch TV, and he was just delighted! He wanted pizza, which I brought him pizza, and he was very happy. About three months later, he got an infection and passed away. His side of the family were very long-lived. Also on my father's side, the women are very long-lived, but the men died in their fifties and sixties. I think I have the physical traits of my mother's side, which is good cause I'm sixty-three, and I'm healthy. Hurray! [laughs]

On my mother's side, they were probably more Italian than on my father's side. On my father's side, their big thing was you had to go to the university. All of the children—my father and his brothers and sisters—went to some sort of school, college-level school, whether it was business school or whatever—while they were running the bakery, because this building used to be a bakery, the ground floor.

Zapol: So your father's family was here, at 201 Bleecker—

Longo: Yes, my father's family lived here at 201, and when my father met my mother, she was living at 190 Bleecker, which is across the street, off of MacDougal. Before my grandfather bought this building, he worked for a baker in 190 Bleecker, and the oven was in the basement. Like 1905, he purchased this building for five thousand dollars, and the office we're sitting in used to be the oven. It was a brick oven face, and the inside was all sand. Then fire brick inside, like Zito's old oven. It was a very traditional Italian oven with a boiler that injected steam into the oven to put the crust on the bread. The kids and my grandparents lived upstairs, and then they had some people who rented. **[00:10:59]**

They ran the bakery, and kids went to school—PS 3 and all of that. My mother was at [PS]190 with her brothers and sisters. She and my father met across the street, which is now the Little Red Schoolhouse, but in their day it was called the Bethlehem Chapel. I think it was a Presbyterian mission, and so diabolic. They designed the building to look like an Italian palazzo—[laughs] I guess to reduce the fear of the local Italians of going in there, you know. They played basketball and did all of these things. It was like a big social thing.

Rose, my mother, and Angelo met—she was eighteen and he was twenty—and fell like a ton of bricks. I have letters from my father to my mother, so romantic. She was playing hard-to-get, but he persevered, and romance ensued.

Here's an interesting thing. My mother's family was 'on relief.' That's what they called it back then, but it would be welfare today. The Bethlehem Chapel would have these families that would come to the Village and take you, for the summer, to the country. My mother was being taken to the country by this minister and his wife, and they took a liking to my mother—they must have done it for five or six years—and then they wanted to send her to the university. My grandmother said no. She didn't want her going away for that long a period of time. I think my mother wanted to go, but at the same time she was dating my father, so she had to make this big decision as to whether or not she was going to get further involved with my father. Her mother was asked by this couple whether they could take Rose, send her to the university, and my grandmother refused for whatever reason.

My grandmother came up hard. She raised her brothers and sisters and then raised her own family. Very smart woman. Very smart woman, but a little bitter because of that double whammy. I think that's one of the reasons that she said no about letting Rose go, just something—Anyway, so Rose and my father got together, and then got married, and—

Zapol: Did they tell you stories about being children in this neighborhood,—

Longo: Yes—

Zapol: —the kinds of things that they would do?

Longo: Yes, yes, yes. My mother went to PS 3.

Zapol: Mmhm.

Longo: Now, on my mother's side, they were broke. They made artificial flowers to make ends meet, and my mother went to PS 3. She was a good writer. She won some award from the mayor back in the day for some writing thing. Then, from what they tell me, you stayed close to home and you helped with the artificial flowers. You didn't really have friends; you had friends in the building. They hung out in the building, but we talked about my grandmother on my mother's side being a little edgy.

At the Bethlehem Chapel, my Aunt Lee [Gallo] and my mother, they had won a porcelain-headed doll. Now, this has to be in the [19]20s because my mother was born in 1910—even less, so probably eleven or like that. They ran out of the Bethlehem Chapel, all excited, with this doll. They ran down the street and went up the building in 190, running all the way up the stairs squabbling over this doll. The hallways had two apartments on either end, and of course the apartment doors were open. My grandmother had to do a lot of translating from Italian to English for her neighbors. She herself was English speaking, but interestingly enough, she then married an Italian fellow, my grandfather, Joe, who was really a nice, warm fellow. Long and thin, he was a tailor—nice guy. The girls are squabbling over this porcelain-headed doll, so my grandmother comes out on the landing, and they're saying, "It's mine, it's mine, it's mine, it's mine, it's mine," and she takes and the doll and she says, "It's nobody's!" [Makes sound of breaking] She breaks the doll on the bannister—ah! Well, when my mother told me this story. We had had a few drinks—we were at Monte's—and she was there. She was in that moment when she was telling me, and you could see the hurt, the young girl's hurt when this happened. I was deeply moved by it. I didn't say anything because her contention was that 'mama was just perfect.' Mama could do no wrong. Even Uncle Frank referred to her as 'Mama.' She could be a pretty tough customer and of course the girls were shocked. They were, oh, oh, oh. That's a horrible thing to happen. **[00:16:28]**

Life for them was tough. It was tough. They were making ends meet with artificial flowers, and my grandfather was doing piecework—piece tailor work, and that kind of stuff. They came up hard, but we had a lot of fun with them. They would go to Florida every year, [laughs] my grandfather and grandmother. They would go to Collins Avenue [Miami], I guess, where all of these old hotels were—

Zapol: In Miami?

Longo: Right, Miami. I have a photograph of them standing in front of one of these pastel—Now they're pastel colored one of these hotels. Every mother's day—

Now there was a whole clutch of cousins on my mother's side, you know? There were, I think, six children, all my aunts and uncles. Every Mother's Day, we would go to Chinatown. There was a big group of us, and of course in the front were the uncles and aunts and my grandmother and in the back of the crowd were the cousins. We used to go this restaurant called

Canton Six on Mott Street. I don't even know if it's still there. Anyway, every year we'd go, and inevitably, when we got home, my grandmother would produce pieces of bowls and teacups. I don't know if you know those old heavy teacups that they used to use in Chinese restaurants. My cousins and I were amazed. Where the hell was she putting this stuff?

A few years go by, and we all, it's Mother's Day, and we all march to Canton Six. The adults are all on the staircase going up. A man sees who it is and comes to the door and goes like this. [gestures] The cousins were all in the back, wondering, what is this? It seems we were banned from Canton Six because of all the plateware and things they had taken over the years! [Zapol laughs] This news filtered back to the back of the crowd, and of course we were hysterical, because we knew what Grandma was like. It was very, very funny. We were shamed, but at the same time, can you believe it? She would come out with these bowls, which are raised, and that blue and white delved pattern of blue—with the cover! We would say to ourselves, where is she putting this, in her purse? Oh yeah. These are Depression things.

My mother and my Aunt Lee—These are the gals you would never want to invite to a buffet, because when they went, if it was like a restaurant or something, they would secret[ly take] stuff out in napkins, so they got older—they were probably in their eighties—my cousin Linda [Gallo], who is my Aunt Lee's daughter, and I and my sister Carla [Longo] took Aunt Lee and my mother to Atlantic City. We purposely took them to a buffet. [gasps] Well, they were in their glory. They left with a half a dozen little plastic things full of cake and this and that. I mean they were in their glory. They had to [sighs]—I hate to say this, but they almost had to be getting away with something for it to delight them, so we purposely took them there so they could enjoy themselves. It was very, very funny. **[00:19:53]**

Zapol: Talk to me about the artificial flower work.

Longo: Yeah, they did piecework, making the artificial flowers at the dining room table. Because they were pretty down on their luck and it was hard because they had to do their homework and make the flowers. They had all the bits and pieces like the little flowers—this is from my mother told me—on the metal sticks, and then there'd be some greenish ribbon that they wrap around the bottom. Then they were paid by the piece.

I don't know if that was attached to my grandfather's tailoring work, but it sounds like it, because it was almost like millinery work—that millinery stuff, bordering and decorative things? They were paid by the piece, so that was a constant. They were constantly doing that.

Zapol: And—

Longo: This was all before my time.

Zapol:—among the six children, where was your mother in the birth order?

Longo: OK, so, Uncle Frank was the youngest, and then there was Aunt Marie [phonetic] . She had four children. Then there was Aunt Lee and I guess my mother. I don't know who was older. It might have been Aunt Lee, and then my mother, and then Aunt Marie. Or maybe Uncle Frank and then Aunt Marie, because Uncle Frank would refer to Aunt Marie as 'the baby.' Aunt Marie married a fellow from MacDougal Street—[James "Jim"] Debarbari—MacDougal close to Bleecker. My Aunt Lee married Michael Gallo, but then they moved out. Aunt Marie and Uncle Jim moved to Pearl River, and we used to visit them. That was like going to the country. Then Aunt Lee and Uncle Michael moved to Brooklyn—I think Fourth Avenue, where he had a liquor store. Then they moved to Staten Island. [gasps] I remember going there. Aunt Lee was a favorite of mine. She was very warm. My parents sent me to her house for two weeks and behind their house, it was a new development. Behind their house [were] woods, so for two weeks, we played in the woods. It was really great. It was fun. [Zapol laughs] They were out in the country, and we stayed here in the Village.

Zapol: Talk to me some more about your father's side, then.

Longo: OK, my father's side, they were strict Sicilians, meaning my grandmother would put tissue between the sheets in the drawer when putting them away very formal. You had to wash your hands when you went to visit Grandma and Aunt Milly [Arace], who lived on the first floor. Very, very, very, very strict, and dinner was at six o'clock. I didn't know my grandfather well because he passed away before I was conscious, but I knew my grandmother. She was dressed in black, and she ran the business with her children when my grandfather, Frank passed away. They did well here. They had the bakery, and it was tough because they would start at three in the morning. This back room here is where all the baking took place. This was the oven, so all the

proofing of the dough and making of the dough was all done back here. I could hear the machinery start at three in the morning. Then they would open at eight, and then they would also have their wholesale deliveries starting at eight o'clock. Then the store closed at six in the evening, so it was a long day.

My father worked in the store, between going to school, as did my Uncle Silvi [Longo] [00:23:53] and Aunt Chris [Lovoti] and my Aunt Milly. My Aunt Milly was the oldest of the Longo kids. They lived here, and they actually just ran the business. They did other things. Way back in the day, I was told they did things like baking turkeys because you didn't have an oven in your home, so people would bring them a turkey or a chicken, and for three cents, they would bake it. They would make pizza, a Sicilian style pizza. It's squares with sauce and breadcrumbs on top and olive oil and Parmesan cheese. It was really good. When I was a kid, it was fifteen cents for a slice. In fact, I spoke to a mail order customer the other day who remembered it. She went to Little Red, and said, "Oh, I remember." We must have been the same age, but fifteen cents for a little slice. I wasn't around way back then, but interesting things did happen. You're going to love this: in 1914 my Uncle Frank, on my father's side—My Uncle Frank on my father's side was very, very bright and he ultimately went to Berkeley, but before that, when he was nine or ten years old, he was kidnapped by rival bakers in Brooklyn. He's there in their apartment, and after he's there a few days, he walks out of the apartment—walks over the bridge and arrives here at the store. My grandfather is so happy, he puts him in the window to show the neighbors that Frank has come back. [Zapol laughs] **[00:25:42]**

When I heard this, I thought they were crazy, but I looked it up in the *Times* and sure enough, there it was, with the trial. They call themselves the 'Black Hand,' and they had given my grandfather a .32 caliber police positive revolver, which was what the police carried way back then. Who knows why, but fast forward to 1975, I'm rummaging around in the basement, and there's a big trunk. I open the trunk and in the bottom of the trunk, wrapped in what looked to be old shirt material, is this .32 caliber revolver. I bring it upstairs to Aunt Milly, who lived on the first floor above the store. I said, "Look at this! Look what I found in the trunk!" She said, "Oh yes, that's grandpa's revolver." It was a popgun, you know? But I guess back then, this was serious business.

Anyway, in the *Times* there's the trial, and Uncle Frank is quoted as saying, [imitates a child's voice] "I was so frustrated. I was in their house, and I tried to teach them English, and

they wouldn't learn. I wanted to kill myself by hitting myself on the head with a broom." [Zapol laughs] He walked out and walked here, you know.

But [sighs], yeah, family history. Then they hung out at the Bethlehem Chapel and played basketball and all this and that—went to school.

Zapol: Was it explained to you why that kidnapping happened really? I mean—

Longo: Yeah, they wanted to extort a ransom, and they must have thought he was successful.

Zapol: Mmhm, mmhm.

Longo: I don't know any more than that about it, but they were bakers there, so I don't know [Zapol laughs]—who knows, you know? Very strange.

Zapol: You talk about a sense of your father's side being more well-off. How did you know that—

Longo: Yes—

Zapol:—how did you sort of—

Longo: Well, because they were in business. Here's a good example: My grandfather passed away early on. I think he was like sixty, so I don't think I was even born yet. I was very close with my Aunt Milly. She was like my second mother. She never had children. She was married to Uncle Harry, and they lived on the first floor above the store. Anytime any of my sisters and I went up and down the stairs, we stopped in to visit Aunt Milly. I became very close with Aunt Milly, and she was very proper, but very loving, too. But she wasn't demonstrative loving. You knew because she would do things like grab you, wash your hands and face, sit you at the table with a big cloth napkin around your neck, and make you a soft-boiled egg, you know. She was very, very sweet, but hard tough In fact, when I took over the store, she would complain, because I was getting a discounted rate to rent the store. She would really give it to me in spades! Anyway, it doesn't matter, that's the way she was.

I forgot the point. Oh! So they were in business. You have my grandmother. This has to be in the '50s. She wrote a letter to Saks Fifth Avenue— I found this in her papers—because they had credited her by accident. She was writing to tell them that, in fact, this credit was

incorrect. I guess she knew bookkeeping and whatnot, but very formal—handwritten, you know? Obviously, they shopped at Saks, which at the time, in the [19]40s and '50s, must have been a big deal—and the girls and boys were always well turned-out—just cleanliness and clothing and all of that. When my Uncle Frank went to Berkeley, my Aunt Milly and my grandfather rode out on the train to take him to school. so they had more money than the other side did. But the other side was warmer. [laughs]

Zapol: You said also that education was important to them—

Longo: Very.

Zapol: How would you know that? How was that manifested? **[00:30:03]**

Longo: Because they insisted we go to school. They insisted above all else that you go to school, and then you go to the university. That was very, very important. In the case of my sisters, they went to nursing school. In the case of my cousins, one of them became the bursar of the New School, Jim Debarbari, so everybody was educated. Even on my other side—because Jim came from the other side, my mother's family, they were into this, going to school. It was very important, and they stressed that you speak English. No Italian. They spoke Italian on my father's side only when they didn't want us to know what they were saying. Other than that, it was English, and they insisted that we speak English. They wanted us to assimilate.

Zapol: On your mother's side, were there Italian speakers? They were another generation, right?

Longo: My grandfather was an Italian speaker, but my grandmother, being here for her own brothers and sisters, and then her own children, she was American speaking. She could speak with my grandfather, but I didn't hear her speak Italian much, only if they went back to Italy, or if she wanted to communicate with Grandpa. But even then, it was English.

Zapol: Were there any large family gatherings on your father's side?

Longo: Every Sunday. Yeah, between the two families, Sunday was the big meeting day. [laughs] In the case of my father's side, we would have dinner at different people's homes. A lot of times we had it at Aunt Milly's, and of course there'd be a table set up in the living room, and it would stretch into the little dining area, this little dinette. That was fun. On my mother's side,

we would travel. Sometimes we would visit Aunt Lee and Uncle Michael in Brooklyn, and they had a very long apartment. It was huge! At least I remember it as being huge. It was fun on both sides. What would happen is—on my mother's side, they would have loaves of bread, and everything was prepared. The women were cooking, and the men would sit around and play with the kids or help them out or whatever. But if you went to take a piece of bread, Aunt Lee would fork you, "No! No, you have to wait." Then you would have dinner, and they would bring out the different courses, and then afterwards, everyone just sat around. Ultimately what you did was you would go from uncle to uncle, who would tell you a story or some business, and you'd laugh. It was a lot of fun.

Then on my mother's side, when we went to visit Aunt Lee's, the kids would put on a play, and then it would get close to nine o'clock and *Sea Hunt* was on. My sister loved Lloyd Bridges, my sister Carla, who's six years my senior. She loved Lloyd Bridges, so we had to watch Lloyd Bridges, and then after that we went home.

That was kind of fun. On the other side, my father's side, it was a little more formal, but you learned [laughs]—You'd have dinner, and let me think now, you'd have an antipasto and then you'd have pasta and then a salad, and then they'd bring out the roast beef. [laughs] That was thinly cut—so thinly cut—and it was like leather, but it was fun and potatoes and all of that stuff. It was fun, too, but on my father's side, they were a tad more formal. They weren't so rough-and-tumble. You had to have your hands and face washed, and you had to wear Sunday go-to-meeting clothes. On Sunday on my mother's side, you had to dress, but it was more casual. There were a lot of family gatherings.

On my father's side, there weren't too many cousins. There was my cousin, Tommy [Lovoti], and then my two sisters, oh, and my cousin Marilyn Lovodi. They were older than me, and older than my sister Carla, so it wasn't the play where it's rambunctious play. On my mother's side, there was a whole bunch of us, all around the same age. When we got together, it was a lot of fun, and we became very close as cousins. When we would visit Aunt Marie's house, which was in Pearl River—which was the country—they had a big basement. We would play this game called Chinchilla, and the person who was 'It' had a blindfold and a stick, and they would say [laughs]—This is very silly, and I haven't thought about this in a long time. They would go, [in a sing-song voice] 'Oh chinchilla!' and they would bang around with the stick, and then they would say freeze. You'd have to stop, and then they would touch you with the stick

and realize it was a person, and then they would have to feel your face and guess who you were. But that lended itself to all sorts of silliness, and that was fun. [Zapol laughs] On my mother's side, the cousins were a lot more fun—a lot more fun. **[00:35:21]**

Zapol: What happened when your mother and father got together from these two different families?

Longo: Oh, big scandal.

Zapol: Yeah, what was the—

Longo: OK, my father was the baby. Angelo was the baby, and his sister, Antoinette [Macnamara], Aunt Toni, was like the cock of the walk on Bleecker Street, between Sixth Avenue and MacDougal. She gave my mother a very hard time, but my mother was very smart and also very beautiful, and Angelo was smitten. He really was. I mean these love letters are just amazing. No matter she, my Aunt Toni squawked about it, my father ignored her, and ultimately she was accepted. Of course, Aunt Milly chimed in and said, "No, no." They were very protective of their baby brother. They really were.

Zapol: You've told me this already, but were there other sons in the family, or was he—

Longo: So my—

Zapol: Yeah.

Longo: There would be Uncle Frank, who was the oldest; Uncle Silvi—I don't know who was older. Aunt Chris, Aunt Toni, and then Aunt Milly. I don't know who the baby was, but Aunt Milly was up there. Maybe she was second to Frank, or third to Frank—Silvi and then Aunt Milly, but Aunt Milly was pretty senior.

They were pretty straight-laced, this group. I talked about putting tissue between the sheets, and the table was set. See, they didn't have a lot of children. Aunt Milly married late. She married Uncle Harry, and they were childless. Their table was all cloth and cloth napkins and butter dishes with a glass top. It was all very-very [*indicates with hands*] and when you entered Aunt Milly's apartment, you washed your hands and face.

Zapol: What was your mother's relationship to your father's family?

Longo: [sighs] Personally, I think my mother was in competition with Aunt Milly and I don't think my mother ever felt comfortable with my father's family. I think she resented it, right up until the very end, although she outlived them all, and her son gradually bought the shares of the building, so she, in her mind, was triumphant. But I don't think she cared for them at all because whenever she would visit Aunt Milly, she would call through the stairs to my sisters and I, "What are you doing? You're supposed to be going—go, go, go!" She didn't like us visiting, but you couldn't help it. Stopping off at Aunt Milly's in the morning meant breakfast—toast with cinnamon and sugar on it because they were childless. They were like Cosmo and Henrietta Topper, which is, I don't know if that's before your time, but it was a television show. They were very proper. Aunt Milly worked for Air France which was Idlewild—what we now call LaGuardia—so they traveled all over the place. They were childless! They'd come back, and they traveled a lot. They were pretty special, but I don't think my mother cared for them.

Zapol: Similarly, your father's relationship to your mother's family?

Longo: They loved him. They loved him. They loved him. They got along pretty well, but my grandmother was brought up hard, and it showed. She couldn't ever really relax. She always wanted to make sure that she had the American cheese loaf. On the relief, you would get a loaf of American cheese, which was about this big, and she knew how to get those things and was so used to scrambling for it that that was her—Even later on, when they had plenty of money she was always security-conscious. **[00:39:57]**

I bring up a story. It's a little embarrassing, but this is a good example. I expanded the store to the size it is now, but this used to be two stores. When I was growing up, the little store was a shoemaking shop, and the other side was the bakery, which went all the way back and opened up to the back where they made the bread. When we moved the store from across the street, we had the small store. my father and I are in the store, and Grandma comes in and says, "I'm going to bring you lunch." "OK, Grandma." She comes back in a half hour later, and we get sandwiches. Yahoo! You kind of almost lived in the back of the store—not quite, but you did. [We] opened up the sandwiches, and there were chicken's feet in the sandwiches. Now, I don't eat chicken feet, and my father didn't eat chicken feet, but we couldn't insult Grandma. I'm looking, and he says, "Look at that, they're chicken feet. This is a chicken feet sandwich! [Zapol

laughs] There really is, look at that, ew!" We wrapped them up, and I don't know what we did with them. This was her head, she was still eating that kind of thing, which is not to say it's bad, but culturally, I wasn't there and neither was he! I don't think they ate chicken feet sandwiches, you know? But that, to my grandmother, was a big deal. But it was between two pieces of rye, and I chuckle to myself I say, "This is New York. It's rye bread! And those are chicken's feet. Look at that, ugh!"

Zapol: So tell me about where you lived in the house.

Longo: OK, I lived on the top floor with my two sisters and my parents. I went to Our Lady of Pompeii School, but before that, I went to Children's Aid Society. There were five of us in a two-bedroom, and it was fun. You didn't know that you were crowded, and you waited for the bathroom, and also, stuff like this: If my sister Carla was taking a bath, she would pull the curtain, and you'd go in. Over time, you got used to[it, and] it was familiar. I can remember when my father would come back from work, he would be on the commode. I would be sitting on the hammock in the bathroom, and we would be chitchatting. The thing is, he would sit for a long period of time after he had finished what he had to finish, and he would read the paper. It was the *Journal-American*, I remember. So we'd converse!

My father was easy. He was not the typical baby, but he was easy. He was not a disciplinarian. My mother was very strict, and being as hyper as I am, I would get under my mother's skin. My father would come home, and she would say, "Ang, you have to take him into the bathroom and give him a good beating!" "Yes, Rose, yes." So we would go into the bathroom. I was afraid I was going to catch it, so he says, "OK," so he takes off his belt, and he says, "All right, start to yell." He began to hit the tub with his belt! Well, I knew I was home free then. "Oh, oh! Oh, oh!" you know. We never said anything, but that's what bonded he and I together. [Zapol laughs]

Zapol: What would [your mother] do when you got in trouble?

Longo: Well, she stabbed me with a fork. The worst thing she would do is she would give us a look. She would give us a look, and she would flare her nostrils. She would say horrible things, like, "When I call you're—ready?—you're to break your legs running so fast to come to me." I

would say to her, "Now, wait a minute, let me get this straight: I'm supposed to run so fast that my legs break? You know, that doesn't make a lot of sense." Then she would get infuriated.

At other times, she would take the dust mop. My sisters would be behind her, making fun, and you'd be on the end of getting it. She was very strict, so strict that we were not—you're going to love this. We were not allowed to go south of Houston Street because my mother was so upwardly mobile, she wanted us to go to school and make something of ourselves, so we were not allowed south of Houston Street—didn't know why, but we weren't allowed to go south of Houston Street. Not only that, but south of Houston Street were a lot of social clubs where some kids my sisters knew hung out. We would have to lie to get out of the house. My sister would say to my parents, "I'm going to the *novena* at Our Lady of Pompeii School." She would come downstairs with me in tow because I was littler. She would come downstairs and change her clothes behind the stairs, and then we would go out. She had a boyfriend, and we would go south of Houston Street, and we would visit the social club on Sullivan Street where they would dance and have fun. At nine o'clock, we would come back, she would change, and we would go back upstairs. [Zapol laughs] **[00:45:37]**

Zapol: What do you think, now in retrospect, was south of Houston? Why weren't you allowed?

Longo: Well, in my mother's eyes, that neighborhood was less upwardly mobile, and she probably didn't think of it as gently as I said it. She didn't care for that neighborhood because it represented to her working class sensibilities, and she was fighting to escape that. She really was; I think one of the reasons she married my father—he was attractive because just in the neighborhood, he came from a little bit of a higher station, and this represented upward mobility. In fact, for her it was, because they had a very nice life together. They did a lot of traveling, they worked hard, and she was very influential in making the business successful. She was a very, very good businesswoman. She was driven to succeed, and to do well, and she wanted her children to escape the poverty that she came from, very much so. That was a big thing for her. She groomed us, and she was tough about it. She was a tough, tough, tough taskmaster, but she is responsible for my success. I have my father's personality, but my mother's drive. When they purchased the business, she was very good at merchandising, and—really good. She always worked. Before that she had worked at Forbes, and then before that she had worked at Macy's, so she was an experienced retailer. She was striving to escape that poverty. I think they felt—not

that they were second-class citizens, but they felt that they were struggling. They knew they were poor. That really stayed with her, right up until she passed away, but at that point, she had had such success that—You'd think she would have been less driven, but no, that wasn't the case.

Zapol: So talk to me about the transition from the bakery into Porto Rico [Importing Company].

Longo: OK, all right. My grandfather ran the bakery from whenever he bought the building, 1905, and my uncles and aunts, specifically my father and Aunt Milly, ran the bakery. Then my father married, and he continued to run the bakery. Aunt Milly then worked for Air France and so moved out of the bakery.

My father decided that the baking business was too hard, so he rented out the bakery and tried to make his living as a salesperson. It was after World War II, because during World War II he was a quartermaster at the Navy yard—the Brooklyn navy yard. He had circulatory issues. My father's legs were always discolored. I don't know if he was diabetic, and his brother, my Uncle Frank, was diabetic. His health was good, but not a hundred percent.

Long story short, at some point after World War II, I don't know exactly where, he is operating the bakery, decides that it's too much, and becomes a salesman. Because of his personality, he was good at it. He worked at Peck's Shoes, and he worked for a company called Contadina, which was an Italian products company. He sold Presto Bleach. I know this only from hearsay. I came around only when he was working at Contadina. He would come upstairs with a big sample case. My sister Mary, who's eleven years my senior, would get very upset that my father was carrying this big heavy bag. He would say to us, "Oh, look! Look what I made this week!" and pull out a big wad of cash, and we were all so happy. **[00:49:56]**

Ultimately, he worked for a coffee company called Fromme's. Fromme's and Vivo were the two canned brands they made. Back then, which had to be the '50s, many small coffee companies were a husband and wife team with a team of salespeople. They would have routes, and their salesmen would go out and sell coffee to supermarkets and restaurants, in their route.

My father was doing this, and then his company was purchased by—I may have this backwards. They were purchased by Greenwich Mills, and then Greenwich Mills was—no, I have it backwards. Fromme's was purchased by Eppen Smith, which was a bigger coffee company. Then General Mills bought Eppen Smith. My father saw the handwriting on the wall, and he had about thirty wholesale accounts. Now, at the time, Porto Rico Importing Company

was at 194 Bleecker, across the street. Patsy Albanese, who had founded the store, wanted to sell. He was a local family, just like us. In fact, I went to school with his grandchildren, the Musante's at Pompeii. One thing led to another, and my father decided to purchase the store and bring with him his wholesale accounts.

This had to be 1960. I remember being told about it because I was standing on the hump in the backseat of a car. You know how years ago there was that little hump, and it made me reach the top of the seats in front of me. So I'm like this, and they said, "Oh, what do you think about having a store?" "Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah!" He purchased the store from Patsy, and the store was like a cornucopia of Italian products. We roasted coffee. We sold olive oil, dried mushrooms, a variety of dried spices, things like Ferro-China Bisleri and Fernet-Branca. All these items that Italians were used to getting at home, they were able to get through this store. The store was founded in 1907, and he purposely supplied a lot of the items that the Italian American immigrants were used to.

In addition, we used to send unroasted coffee back to Italy. I guess, after the war, they didn't have very much, so families here would send their families in Italy care packages of green coffee, so they could get it there and roast it. They would have coffee and all of that kind of thing. Over time, that stopped. I mean we don't do that so much anymore. What did happen though, I would say, up maybe as late as ten or fifteen years ago, we had many Eastern European families coming in and sending unroasted coffee to their family in Eastern Europe.

He was running the store with my mother, and my mother began to merchandise the store and began to increase the number of teas and the different blends of teas that she would make up—things like 'Morrocan Mint.' She would give exotic names to these blends. The combination of—not the hippies, but the Beat generation and NYU—people would come into the store and ask for different items. They had been traveling, especially the bohemians. My family was friendly. They were personable behind the counter, and it just was a synergy. It was a neighborhood place like it is now! They would come in and ask for different things. Many of them were artists and well traveled. We would bring different coffees in and different items in, and still, to this day that's the fun of it, bringing new stuff in. It grew and grew and grew, and then when I got old enough, they put me behind the counter, which I enjoyed. I worked there. It started with sweeping and things and then going behind the counter, but mostly packing the

wholesale orders in the back. I was like the slave, and my sister, Carla—we were slaves. That's what happened.

Zapol: Around what age were you, you think, when you started working—

Longo: Well—

Zapol:—in the store? **[00:54:50]**

Longo: When they bought the store, I was nine. I was nine or ten, because I was born in [19]51, and this was like [19]60. I was in the Boy Scouts, and I remember being able to cross the street alone. I went on a camping trip. I was eleven. I packed my pack and walked over by myself, so I was probably in there eleven-ish.

Stuff like this would happen: On MacDougal Street were all these cafes. I was little! If they ordered five pounds of espresso, it was my job to deliver it. I would go, and of course, I didn't want to work, so I would take an hour instead of fifteen minutes and get balled out by my parents because I took so long to get there. We used to supply all the cafes, and I would meet these folks. I didn't think anything of it, and it was a lot of fun. You met a lot of interesting characters and whatnot. I was probably eleven. I was always in the store, even when they first bought it, but I wasn't working. They would make me sweep, or stuff like that.

Zapol: You wouldn't get paid for that—or would you?

Longo: In the beginning, no, but when I was like ten or eleven, you'd get a quarter or fifty cents. But that was a lot of money. Also, when I got into high school [sighs]—you're going to love this. I worked at Ohrbach's, which was a department store on 34th Street. I wanted to strike out on my own. My first job was working for an office after school called Pulp and Paper Magazine. I knew nothing. It was my first job, and they hired me as a mail boy. They asked me to do a mailing on my first day, and I knew nothing about mailing. Of course, it all came back. The woman who hired me took me aside and said, "Listen, we have to re-mail all of these things that you sent," I was in trouble. Well, that job didn't last too long. They didn't fire me, but it was boring. After that, I was working three days a week in the evenings, late afternoon and early evening, at Ohrbach's. I would make $28, $30 a week.

Well, at the time, I was dating a girl named Laura Jean [Dormaruno] whose parents owned a restaurant on Spring [Street] and Sullivan [Street]. She was like the princess of the Village, Laura Jean. In fact, her nickname in our circle of friends, because we were all kids, was the *contessa*. See? We started dating. I would be able to take her out and go to the movies and have dinner with no problem on the $28 a week.

My mother hated Laura Jean because she was from south of Houston Street. However, Laura Jean's family, unbeknownst to us, owned all of Spring Street, from Sullivan down to like West Broadway. There were a lot of people involved, but her grandparents were very smart, and her parents were even smarter, and they were loaded!

Long story short, this was my first romance. Her first romance, it was. We were the prince and princess of the Village. It was really something. Then I went off to college, and she went off to college, and that was that.

Zapol: What was dating like in this neighborhood? What would you do? Where would you take her out?

Longo: It was fabulous! I used to think of it. It was like the world was your oyster! We would do things like go up to Second Avenue. There was an ice cream parlor called the Flick, so you'd have dinner somewhere. You'd take a cab up to there, and it was very romantic! Oh, man, it was so romantic! It was—oh, OK. All right, you ready? [Zapol laughs] You're going to love this.

We were very close, her and I, and her parents lived on Spring Street. They had a building on Spring Street. My best friend, Jim Horne, and Laura Jean's cousin, Julie Anne —the two couples would date a lot. As our romance progressed—and remember, we're Italian American and very Catholic, so nothing happened fast, but over the course of a year, one button and another button and da-da-da.

What would happen, ultimately: On a Friday night, you'd go out on a date, and we'd end up at Laura Jean's family apartment, because her parents would go to the Jersey Shore on the weekends. **[00:59:48]**

So Julie Anne and Jim Horne and myself and Laura Jean would spend—Well, you couldn't spend the night. That's the point of my story. What would happen, you'd leave at three in the morning. I'd walk home. We were so in love, I would call her from a phone booth on MacDougal. It's one block down on MacDougal. I don't remember the street, but right on the

corner there was a booth, and I would call her. We would make romance, and then I'd come home.

Then I would get up at like eight that morning, and go to this deli, which used to be next to Ottomanelli's, where Ottomanelli's is now. It was a really good deli, and we would buy turkey sandwiches. Jim and I would go back and wake the girls up, and we would have breakfast or lunch or whatever, and we would have fun and be together. We were playing house. It wasn't—That was our weekend.

So dating, we would go to the Hip Bagel, which was on MacDougal Street all of these places. She had a customer who was Japanese, and he introduced us to Japanese restaurants, that whole cultural thing. It was great. It was really—and the Village was fun. Not that the Village isn't fun now, but you could just roam around, and things were less expensive than now. But that high school period from sophomore to senior, it was heaven. It was really fun.

Zapol: So—

Longo: Although my mother hated me going down to south of Houston Street. She hated it!

Zapol: What would she do?

Longo: Oh, you're going to hate this. You're going to hate this. [sighs] OK. Now we fast-forward. My mother's poverty, and we go to the '60s, '70s. We're making some money. My father buys a little cottage in Bradley Beach, New Jersey. We've hit the big time. I think he paid $13,000 for it. It was a fortune. My mother was able to—and this is awful. I'm embarrassed by saying it—she was able to hire a housekeeper. She worked during the day, so they hired—

[END OF FIRST AUDIO FILE, 'Longo_PeterOralHistory1.mp3'; BEGINNING OF SECOND, 'Longo_PeterOralHistory2.mp3']

Longo:—hired a housekeeper who was very nice named Victoria. What does she call Laura Jean when I introduce her? Oh, Veronica, that was the name. "Hello, Veronica." Laura says, "What?" "Veronica." Now I knew what she was doing. She was calling Laura Veronica, who was the housekeeper's name. How nasty, nasty! I couldn't believe—my jaw dropped. Well, when Laura Jean found out, she was livid. Then when Laura Jean's mother found out, oh, it was horrible. It was horrible. My mother was such a bitch, that my wife, Catherine [Longo], who I've been

married to for twenty-five years and dated for ten years before we married, she called her "Veronica," when we were first dating. Horrible.

Zapol: Wow.

Longo: Yeah, I know, wow. Just unbelievable! She just had such disdain for what she—I don't know. I suffered all those years because of her horribleness. Ugh. I laugh about it now, but it was terrible, terrible, terrible, terrible.

Zapol: Did your mother, or even both your parents, did you feel that they treated you differently than your sisters, that they had different expectations?

Longo: Yeah, well, my mother was demanding for all three of us. She put a lot of pressure on all of us to do well. Here's an example. They didn't treat us differently in terms of what they expected from us, because they expected excellence from us, period. We had that in common. But the way they—not my father so much. He grew up in a family of strong women and men and, not that they didn't differentiate. They did have specific female and male rules, but they were very—what's the word—directive. They were not afraid, the Sicilians, to be directive in a cool, intellectual manner.

They would do stuff like this with my sisters: My sisters went to Holy Cross Academy, which was an upscale private Catholic school. In their junior and senior years, the girls would have dances and socials with sister and brother schools,. That was the thing. They would take trips down to the naval academy to meet students at the naval academy, and in fact, my sister Mary met one and married him. This was considered, I guess, their way of going upscale. Now, they also went to the university. In her case, she was a nurse, but her girlfriends and whatnot became professional. Some of them became professional, but they would date or look to date what they considered upscale men. They would target them.

So is that treating us differently? Yes, yes. But it was interesting because they would target guys—not plumbers even though they're loaded. No, this kind of thing. I saw a lot of that, but I saw a lot of it with all of the kids in Our Lady of Pompeii.

Zapol: In what way?

Longo: Well, there was a mother's club and a father's club, and the kids were expected to go to college. It was different from Saint Anthony's, and even in the Italian American neighborhood, depending on where you went to school, you were in a certain clique. The kids at Saint Anthony's hated the kids at Pompeii and wanted to beat us up because they considered us to be snobby. But Saint Anthony—Saint Joseph's, which is further up Sixth Avenue was even considered snobbier than us, see? Very interesting, this pecking order. The kids in Saint Joseph's, some of them branched off to Saint Luke's, which was a Presbyterian school, which was the top of the heap.

Zapol: Were there kids that you weren't supposed to play with when you were growing up, or—

Longo: Not me. Not me. My parents never said, "No, you can't play with—" This was a very mixed, mixed neighborhood. I had friends, all different friends. Bohemian, very straight, Anglican and they tried to fix—Yes, yes, we were allowed to see [socially]—but as I got older, and I hit high school, my mother started with this south of Houston Street. **[00:05:11]**

My father was easy, so I would go to him and say this, that, and the other thing about my mother, and he would say, "Oh, she's your mother—" and this and that, and he was very easy about it, but she was really stuck on the south of Houston Street thing and she wanted us to be upwardly mobile. She didn't care. That was it for her. That was her big issue.

Zapol: You started to tell a story about going for deliveries at the cafes nearby.

Longo: Right.

Zapol: So tell me about what was happening at that period, maybe some of the customers that would come in—

Longo: Right, right, right.

Zapol:—and who was living in this neighborhood? What was this exchange? You said that it was very mixed in terms of your friends, but—

Longo: Right. Yeah.

Zapol: Yeah, we can pause for a sec.

[INTERRUPTION]

Zapol: We were talking about the—

Longo: MacDougal Street?

Zapol: Yeah, MacDougal Street and this sort of mix of people here.

Longo: Right. When I was young-young—when I say "young-young" I mean eleven, twelve, and even before that, when I made these deliveries. I would go to the Cafe Wha [phonetic] [00:06:26]. I would go to the Figaro. I would go to the Gaslight. The Gaslight was my favorite, and it was downstairs. The manager of the Gaslight was a guy named Kevin, and he had a big mustache. He was always very nice to me. He was warm. He was very nice, and I did know it, but Bill Cosby was doing stand-up there. What did I know, I just saw people practicing and then when I got older, a friend of mine, Joe Marra, owned the Night Owl, which was on 3rd Street. The Lovin' Spoonful played there, so we were in there all the time. Then I got friendly with John Sebastian, only because he would come into the store, and he knew me by name. We weren't friends or anything. So I was familiar with them, and I could walk up—It was like being home walking up and down Bleecker Street. We would go to the Hip Bagel, and when we started to smoke pot we would get really high and then go to the Hip Bagel and even if you were so high where they asked you what you wanted and you went, [gibberish] they'd bring you something. It was really fun, but that was later.

Zapol: Later being?

Longo: I would say fifteen, sixteen, seventeen—later, probably seventeen.

Zapol: When were you first introduced to pot? What was that story?

Longo: Yeah [laughs], it was so stupid. I wanted to smoke pot when I was thirteen, because we all heard about it, but we didn't have pot, and we didn't know anything about it. There was an incense place on 3rd Street off of MacDougal, so we would buy incense and be very psychedelic. I was probably twelve years old, thirteen, fourteen. It wasn't until like sixteen or seventeen that I actually smoked a joint, and then I realized what it was.

A big scandalous thing that happened was when the Figaro, the original Figaro closed, they had a big party that lasted like a day, and my parents went to the party. I knew that people were smoking pot at this party, so I asked my father, and he said, "Oh, yeah, this is nothing new. Back in the [19]20s it was a big deal. We didn't do it, but it's always been around," and [he] poo-poo'd it like it was nothing. I was shocked that he knew all about this stuff, you know?

The only thing he ever said to me was—In college I was a hippie. I took a tremendous amount of acid in college. He called me once, and he knew I was partying and carrying on, but we were looking for Nirvana, you know? He said—the only thing he said to me was, "How are you?" "Fine. I'm doing well." "I hope you're not doing anything to hurt yourself." I said, "No, no I'm not. I'm being careful." "OK." And that was it. Never told me about my hair, never screamed or yelled or got excited, just asked me that and expected that you had more respect for yourself than being a jerk about it. If you were a jerk about it, you paid the consequences for it. I was impressed when he said that, because I expected lectures, and this and that, and very quietly he asked me that over the phone, and that was it. **[00:10:03]** It was interesting.

Zapol: So where did you go? You were at Our Lady of Pompeii—

Longo: Right.

Zapol:—and then where did you go after that?

Longo: After that I went to LaSalle Academy School for Young Men, on Second Avenue and 2nd Street. It was an all-boys school. This was a school filled with middle class or working class boys whose parents wanted them to go to college. It was a Christian Brothers school. You had to wear slacks with cuffs and a jacket and a tie, and it was very, very strict. We were allowed to smoke cigarettes a block away from the school, and that's where I met Jim Horn, and it was fun. I mean, we fought with the Brothers all the time, but they didn't allow you to grow your hair. They'd pull your hair and say, "Oh, get a haircut, Longo!"

There were kids from all over the city—very, very mixed. Many of their parents were working in the millinery trade in what is now SoHo, before that it was all millinery. You had women making all of those millinery things, or there were guys from Little Italy whose parents owned restaurants. They were pretty well heeled, because their parents owned restaurants. A lot of small business people, a lot of people whose families were broke and skimping to send their

kids—to pay that five hundred dollar-a-semester tuition to have their kid in this private Catholic school.

Zapol: Did you have any friends who made that transition with you, from Our Lady of Pompeii to LaSalle?

Longo: Yes, yes. There were about eighteen of us. Eighteen of us, and, and then, actually more, probably about twenty-three of us. When I went to college, I went to a Christian Brothers school in Illinois outside of Chicago. About nine of us went out there, and that was a shock because we were used to a very multi-racial and multi-sexual group. When I was in high school, as you grew up, you knew who was gay and who was straight, but they're your friends, so it didn't matter. You would just pick—it wasn't just—You naturally picked whatever you were sexually, and that's what you followed. But you didn't break off your relations with your friend who was a big queen, because you knew who he was. You couldn't be an asshole and tell him something obnoxious. He'd knock your brains in, and you just accepted it. You saw people develop from very young and whatever their natural—and I'm not saying that because this is what you say nowadays. You knew once you became sexually aware—and we didn't become sexually aware until we were like sophomores or juniors in high school. But you knew. After the fact, you'd say, "Oh yeah, of course he was gay," or "Of course she was gay."

I was at a party across the street. It was a birthday party, and it was in grade school. The girl whose party it was had a brother who was a Marine, and he had returned home from being in the Marines on leave, so he was orchestrating the party. We were young. We were eight, nine, ten and he made us play spin the bottle. At one point I got selected, and this girl Barbara got selected. I went to school with her, so I knew her well. Barbara was very good-looking, and probably the most mature, mentally, as a man and a woman goes, than the rest in the class. She and I had to go into this closet for whatever it was—thirty seconds. I didn't know anything.

We go into the closet, and she tripped over something, and she said, "Oh, my ankle!" I was being pleasant. I said, "Oh, let me help you with your ankle." They expected us to do whatever they expected, so we said to each other, "Listen, let's just stay here in this closet, and then when it's time to come out, we'll come out, and it'll be fine." "Great, OK." That was our plan. You didn't think anything of it so—You asked me something. I probably digressed, I'm sorry.

Zapol: We were talking about your high school—

Longo: Oh, and moving.

Zapol:—and moving—

Longo: Moving, moving, right. **[00:14:50]** A whole bunch of us, maybe twenty-five of us, went over to LaSalle. It was an easy thing to do. Some of the better schools, you had Xavier—so if your grades were really good, and your, whatever the test was that you took in eighth grade was really good, you could end up at Xavier or Regis was another one. But I wasn't in that group I was so distracted.

I had a very good sense of humor, and I got along with some of the nuns. But some of them were very contrary, because I was always late. I don't know if I'm ADD or what I am, but I'm like two hours behind real time. I was late every morning in grade school, and Sister Tarsissus used to make me kneel at her office with my hands out, because I was late. I was late like a half hour every morning. One day, I was kneeling, and she said to me, "Longo, you're going to be late for your own funeral." Well, I heard her say this, and I remember thinking to myself, that's such a—so I said to her, "What, that sounds like a wonderful thing." She was so disgusted, she said, "Oh, Longo, go to class." Then she never made me kneel again after that.

In grade school, I could remember them teaching grammar, and I had my book open, and I didn't know what they were talking about, and the page was swimming. I just didn't understand what they were saying. Math I was good at, science I was good at, but English, I hadn't a clue. I could read very well, so I was reading a lot of novels, which gave me big trouble, too, because on the second floor of 201 there was a television cameraman whose last name was Rothbart and his wife. I babysat, and this is when I was like thirteen—twelve or thirteen, I babysat for them. They had no television, and they had just books, books, books. At that time, *Lord of the Flies* and *Naked Lunch* and all of these were coming out, so I was reading this stuff, and I was like, wow, this is like, wowee!

I was at recess at our Lady of Pompeii on LeRoy Street, and I was reading *Lord of the Flies*, and one of the nuns took it away from me. That was seventh grade. Then in eighth grade, I had Sister Mary Joseph, and she and I clicked very, very well. She was very smart. She encouraged me to read this stuff.

A whole bunch of us did move over to LaSalle. The Christian Brothers are very, very straight, and they were difficult, but you managed to get around it. Also, there was such a diverse group of guys, you learned how to handle yourself in the hallway. You had guys who were thugs, and you had guys who were nerds, and it was a big mixture. It was really a good experience, because you learned how to negotiate all that stuff without getting beaten up, or without getting threatened to be beaten up.

Zapol: You mentioned growing your hair long—

Longo: Yes.

Zapol: When did that start?

Longo: Oh, this was after high school.

Zapol: OK, that was later.

Longo: After high school. When I got to college, I did very poorly in school. A few semesters I did very well, and they put me in the honors class, and then I just didn't care.

Zapol: This was in high school, or college?

Longo: This was high school. In grade school, I was just so overwhelmed by it all that I didn't do well. I did a lot of reading, but I don't know. Looking back at it in hindsight, it's neurological, but it doesn't matter. Then I went off to college.

Zapol: Should we pause?

[Interruption]

Zapol: Go ahead.

Longo: Yes?

Zapol: Mmhm.

Longo: I did not do well in high school, so I didn't get into any of the colleges that I planned to get into. A Christian Brother named Brother Cantwell came from Illinois and said, "We have this

college, Lewis College, and we invite the students of LaSalle Academy. Because it's a Christian Brothers school we'll lower the requirements if—" They interviewed us and looked at our grades and really put us through to determine what we were like. I made the cut.

Zapol: Mmhm.

Longo: I knew nothing about Illinois, but I was desperate to leave New York. I wanted to see something totally different. One of the reasons was my sister had married this naval officer, so every summer, my parents shipped Carla and I to visit Mary wherever they were stationed. I had gotten a taste for travel. **[00:20:14]**

Before that, my friend Michael Badaglino and George Romanella, we had taken a trip. We were like fifteen and wanted to go on a trip. Our parents let us go. George was a year or two older than we were. We traveled to Puerto Rico, and we spent, I don't know, must have been four or five days in Puerto Rico. Oh, and it was a big deal, and I really liked traveling. Plus, my mother had been very difficult with this relationship with Laura Jean. She was really giving it to my sisters and I. At one point, to my father, I referred to her as "that woman." I said, "How could you have married that woman?" He said, "Oh, she's your mother." Then I [sighs]—I was young when I said this to him, ready? I said, "But she does not deserve to be called *mother*," meaning—Mother? I was young, I don't know where I got that from, but in my mind she didn't deserve that moniker, because she was like a fascist, you know?

I had had enough, and Laura Jean and I had broken up, and I wasn't going to marry Laura Jean. Not that we had talked about marriage, but she was going to college here at Lehman. I wanted to leave the city, so I went out to Illinois.

The first year, the first time I went, I had on a suit and a car coat and my suitcase. In high school, you dressed in a jacket and tie. I was prepared to go to college. Well, I get to college, and I had never met boys like this. They were Midwestern. They referred to me as a "dago." They were deathly afraid of anyone who was black, and they were very anti-gay. I went to Illinois with maybe fourteen guys, half of whom were big fairies—I mean they were just gay-gay—whom I knew well![1] So we went, and we had to keep it on the down-low, except my friend Michael took up with one of the baseball players, who was very macho—very macho, macho, macho. He had

[1] Peter Longo stated on 9/9/15 that he would like it to be noted that he is referring to these friends as "fairies" with affection, and would like to avoid any misunderstandings.

to keep it on the down-low, so we're snickering. We get out there, we're getting this 'dago' thing. Eventually, I met a group—a little more artsy group that was more like I was. Then I grew my hair long [laughs], and we looked for Nirvana. A whole bunch of us, we had this group of like eighteen of us that hung together, and it was wonderful. I'm still friends with them to this day.

It was exciting, and the only thing I knew about Illinois was a picture of a man on a tractor in a cornfield in a geography book, so when this guy, Brother Cantwell, arrived and started talking about Illinois, I said, "Oh, this—" In hindsight, if I knew about University of Hawaii or other places, I might have picked a different place, but I was so under-the-gun to escape that. This was an opportunity that I could pursue my degree because my parents were hot for me to get a degree. I chose it.

Zapol: Growing your hair long, experimenting with drugs—was there also some politics around this?

Longo: Absolutely! I—

Zapol: What was happening then?

Longo: I became radicalized. Well, here in the Village, we used to go up to 8th Street because on 8th Street and Sixth Avenue is where all the politics was debated. I had been exposed to all kinds of people in the store—the War Resisters League, people who were very right and supporters of Goldwater. I went from very young, being conservative to, in college, I became what I considered radicalized. I look back on it and I laugh because it's so romantic, but we were. We did the protesting and went into Chicago. We were a little late for the Days of Rage, but it was linked to all of that, Students On Strike and all of that. I would say my junior and senior year, but you know what happens in your senior year. You begin to get busy, and then you're going to graduate, so that kind of tails off. But I would say middle of sophomore year to first semester of senior year I was very political. Very, very political. **[00:25:19]**

Zapol: What kind of groups? You said Students On Strike—

Longo: Yeah, we had, what was it—Student Mobilization For Youth—and we would travel into Chicago. We would march, and on campus [sighs] I was on the newspaper.

Zapol: Would your friends there also come back to the Village? Was that a part of the—

Longo: Some did, some didn't. Michael, my friend Michael, did, and I would say maybe a half a dozen came back. Some were from Little Italy, some were from here. There were a few Ukrainian guys from Second and First Avenue. Some of us came back. Many of us stayed there because the quality of life in Chicago is very, very good. It has a lot of what New York has, but it's less stressful.

Zapol: What happened senior year? What were your choices? What decisions did you have to make?

Longo: Yeah. I had begun dating a gal in, I guess, my junior year, and I graduated., and I wanted to come back. My degrees are in sociology and education, and I had read about Summerhill [School] and got deeply immersed in it and wanted to come back and found a school. I was very idealistic. I had taught school for a while there, and I came back here. I was teaching reading at, I think at Haaren High School, it's now John Jay [College].

At the same time, I was working in the store part-time, and I had come back. Laura had come back with me, and we began to live together. I worked more and more in the store, and I began to do my graduate work at the New School. Then my father got very sick, and I stepped in to operate the store. This was kind of difficult. He got into a situation where in the afternoon, I would send him up for a nap. His health was very frail, but he insisted on working and carrying on. It was very upsetting for me, because I really cared for him a tremendous a lot, amount, and we were very close. He was easy to love, he really was. I stepped in, and we worked together for a few years. I was really solicitous, and he said to me finally, "Listen." This was in the back of the store. "Listen. You have to understand something: I want to go out in the midst of regular life. I don't want you to worry, and I don't want you to always be watching out for me and coddling me. No, when I go I go, and I'm OK with it, and I want you to be OK with it." I was really worried about him and would send him up in the afternoons to take a nap. I would make him a martini. He wasn't well, but he didn't want—and it wasn't like he wasn't admitting he wasn't well. He knew what his status was, but he just didn't want to live the life of a sick person. He wanted to live the life of a normal person, and then when he becomes incapacitated, he's incapacitated. But his hope was that he went out walking, you know?

Before that, it was very stressful. Very, very stressful. Very, very stressful because I would get so upset because he was so sick. Laura, the girl I was dating, unbeknownst to me—she was in New York and I was in Illinois, but when I came back here it turned out that she had come from a vast amount of wealth, which I didn't know. Her family had access to very good doctors, so I sent my father to one of these doctors at Columbia Presbyterian.

Here in the Village, you went to the local doctor, then he referred you to Saint Vincent's. The quality of the health care was OK, but it's the difference between going to see someone who went to whatever a normal medical school is and someone who went to Johns Hopkins or Harvard. It's a different—It really, really impressed me how money changes things in terms of the quality of your health care and all of this stuff. **[00:30:13]**

Not to get political. Anyway, so I sent him up to see this fellow, and he protested. It was very expensive, da-da-da-da, but the doctor was very nice, gave him a thorough examination, and called me and said, "Don't you know what's wrong with him?" I said, "If I knew, I wouldn't have sent him to you." Not to be obnoxious, but because the local doctor gave us general—well, he has a heart condition, and all of this and that. Long story short, his circulation problems had caused trouble with his heart and his kidneys, and it was compounding. He explained to me what it was, and I had a clear understanding of what was wrong with him. I was happy because I knew what was going on for once. He didn't know what was going on, other than general stuff, like, "My heart," and "I can tell my circulation is bad. My legs are dark"—this vague stuff. Of course they gave him different medications and didn't watch out for contraindications, and one time I found him passed out in the hallway. It was very upsetting. So that's what happened.

Them he ended up in Saint Vincent's. He had just bought a new car, and he wanted a Lincoln, but he didn't have the nerve to spend the money on a Lincoln, so he had gotten an LTD. I picked up the car, and I brought it to Saint Vincent's, and he saw it out the window. No, actually, he was at Cabrini [Medical Center], and he saw it out the window. He was in the hospital for about three weeks. I would visit him and this and that, and our arrangement was that I should take over the business—not even 'take.' He didn't say that. What he told me was, "Take care of your mother." That's what he said to me. "Take care of your mother." I said goodbye to him that night, and then early that next morning, I got a call. I went up to the hospital, and it was as if they had fought this huge battle. There were EKG tapes, and all of—it was just horrible, and there he was, and he had passed away.

That was a real, real blow for me. A real blow. That was tough. That was tough. [sighs] you asked me something, and I digressed.

But, anyway, so then I started working, and Laura and I opened a store on Lexington [Avenue] between 73rd [Street] and 74th [Street]. We ran that for a while. I opened up a store in Chicago with my roommate from college, Steve. We saved our student loan money, which was like two thousand dollars each. We kicked it in, and we opened a store in Old Town, Chicago, which is like the Greenwich Village of Chicago. He sat in the store for a year and a half, and we just plowed the profits back into it. Now it's forty-five years later, and he still has the store and a little warehouse and the roaster, and he's raised his family. We didn't want to get rich-rich, but we wanted to be independent, and that's what the businesses have afforded us. We're kind of sidestepping real life and the corporate life. This is a lifestyle business, so you make money, and you can send your kids to school, and you have good things, but it's not oodles of money, you know? It's been good, and it's something you have to work at. It's really a lifestyle business.

Zapol: Oh, I just wonder about some stories about some challenges in terms of learning the ropes when you started to take over the business.

Longo: Well, I knew nothing. I had no accounting experience. He didn't really teach me, but I gradually—Well, one of the things was learning the calendar of business events, like your taxes and your sales taxi fumbled around with that for a long time, but he had systems, so he had taught me the systems. I didn't know exactly what the meaning—or not the meaning, the significance—of it was, but I knew the systems. He would tell me, he said, "This business is designed like a big business, only it's little so you have to do this, and you have to do this," and I learned by watching. He had had retail experience because of the store and also had business experience, so I followed what he taught me. Plus he exposed me to different parts of the business over time without me even knowing it—like writing up the wholesale bills and getting the orders out in the morning and having someone to make the deliveries. On a number of occasions, I made the deliveries, so I came in contact with the customers. Customer service, he was big on that, as my mother was. You learned that everyone is a potential customer. It's an interesting thing. **[00:35:28]**

You have a private life, but that's at home. When you're in the business, you've got your business persona on, not that it's fake, but you need it because it protects you. People who

comment about your hair, your weight how long they know you, they make all kinds of assumptions, because you have this total positive regard approach. It's an open-handed approach, because you want to do commerce. Not that you're full of shit, but you learn that in the business, everyone is a potential customer, and you learn how to be social without high-pressure sales.

Interestingly enough, many of his friends were in the service business, because when I was little—There's Dante's around the corner, that cafe? That café was not started, but when I was young, you went in there with your parents. You went in. Your mother would have a coffee, your father would have a coffee, you would get an almond syrup and steamed milk, and there were all the waiters from all the restaurants who were closed. After their shifts they would go to Dante and have coffee and play cards and la-la-la. You had a set of thirty parents in there. A lot of the men were maître d's because back in the day there were maître d's and captains and all that kind of stuff. Some of my father's good friends were restaurant owners and maître d's, so I would hear them talk, and they would tell funny stories.

There was one fellow who was a maître d at the El Morocco. He made a lot of money. He told a story about a woman in a gown—whole bunch of very highbrow individuals. [She was] loaded and had a low-cut gown on. She had bent down, and one of her bosoms had come out of the dress. My father said to him, "Well, what did you do?" You know, we're all listening. "What did I do? I took a napkin, and I put her bosom back in her dress and sat her up." [Zapol laughs] "Well, did you get a big tip?" "An enormous tip, from her husband." Oh! Stuff like that. I was scandalized. Scandalized, you know.

You learned this kind of stuff. You learned that grace under pressure. You would see these men. I saw them.

We used to go—A friend of mine, Joe, his father owned a restaurant. I'm only giving you the first names. He lived on Carmine Street, and we went to visit his family in the summer. They had rented a cottage in White Lake, New York, we so we took the bus up, the two of us. We're young, and we go into the house. There's Joe's mother, who's like a second mother, and, "Oh, hello, hello, hello, hello, Mr. Mauriello, How are you?" blah, blah, blah, and "Who's there?"

We didn't know who he was, but some guy who was visiting them with his family, and his mother said to us, "Have you eaten?" "No." We'd just arrived. This man stood up, took a chicken, cut it up, and sautéed it. I didn't know at the time, and it was out of this world. You took it for granted, because your mother did that, and you saw your friends' parents do it and whatnot.

Turns out, we didn't know, [but] he was the chef at La Scala, which at the time was a famous Italian—What did we know? We were just little Italian boys. You were brought up in that kind of thing, which was kind of fun.

That's how I learned just by being around him and him showing me the systems, and then my mother was good at the merchandising. She did stuff like she would take espresso, grind it up, and then she would give me a spray bottle of Sambuca extract, and I was to spray it and mix it and then repack it in half pound bags, and we would stack them on the counter and sell them. It was new. People didn't know this, so she would say, "Hey, this is new." They would say, "Oh, I'll try it." They would bring it home, come back and say, "Oh, Rose, that was fabulous." It was very, very hands on, and we still kind of do that.

Or, she was a whiz behind the counter. She would take—We still sell a lot of spices, but she would take dried orange peel and cinnamon, and she would make a big deal out of breaking them up. Then she'd mix it in the coffee and pour it in the grinder. They would have this flavored coffee with cinnamon and orange peel, because she used cinnamon and orange peel, she used it to blend our orange spice tea and, it was a hit. My father would get so pissed off, because everything that went into the grinder afterwards tasted of it, but she said, "No, no, Ang, this is good. We'll put some coffee, and we'll clean it out," you know, so she was very, very innovative. That made it fun, too, because then you could make up stuff, you know? If it was well-thought-out—that was the thing—and it sold, oh, that was great. Let's try that again!
[00:40:44]

It kept the business fun, and, so that's how I learned. I just watched, and I continued to do what they showed me to do. Then my personality took over, and I did what I knew. I learned that you should expose yourself to as much as you can about what you do. My father had a lot of friends who are older in the coffee business and tea business. I was very lucky because these men and women—When sales people are younger, they're very competitive, but I've found as they get older, they don't care anymore. They're willing to share. What happens is they become your mentor, because you're not threatening them. They're older; they're successful.

My father was forty years my senior, as was my mother. Their contemporaries were older. A guy like Sidney Horowitz, who was a real tea expert and his brother—I can't even think of his brother's name. Damn, and I was so close to them. They were much older. Sidney would come to the store in a suit, and his Cadillac would be parked outside. His wife would be in the

Cadillac. He would drive around to his accounts with his wife. Sometimes she would drive. Sidney had made so much money that he was able to send his girls to the Little Red Schoolhouse. When they came out of school, they would come across the street. We would babysit them, and then Sidney and his wife would come and pick them up. I got very close with Sidney, right up until the time he passed away. When he was eighty. he taught me all he knew about coffee and tea, which was a wealth, because he would say, "Oh, I'm going to sell. I'm going down the street." I said, "What do you mean you're going down the street?" He said, "Well, years ago"—he was old, but he wasn't that old—"we used to go down to Front Street, and we would see how laden the ships were, and that's how they determined the price of coffee." What? That's ancient history, man. What are you talking about? He knew a lot of little things, and I learned from him.

Zapol: Can you give an example of something you might have learned?

Longo: Oh, gee whiz. OK, you've got a lot of different grades of tea, from fannings—dust first. That's the junk, then fannings, which they use in traditional tea bags. Now they use long leaf teas. Then you have OP [orange pekoe], BOP [broken orange pekoe], GFOP [golden flowery orange pekoe], golden flower, orange pekoe, stuff like this. You ready? When you make tea bags, because he was a tea packer, if you want really good quality, you use five pounds of tea per thousand tea bags. If you want to do it cheaply, you use four pounds of tea. In the coffee and tea business, there's a lot of different levels. The lowest level is like hospitals, nursing homes and prisons. You would use the four pounds if you were packing tea for them. You would have a hundred tea bags per box and ten to a case, all of this kind of stuff. Or here's a good one: Many restaurants use little bags of coffee. They're like three ounces or two and a half ounces or one and a half ounces. That's for ten cups of water, those glass bowls that you see. Well, in the past, they've referred to that as a 'bottle brewer.' That's an archaic term, but if you're down in South Carolina, you would use one and a half ounces of coffee for one of those. In New York, you use three ounces. The reason is, and this gets into coffee, New York is a big city, so when you hear the term 'a city roast,' or 'a big city roast,' what they're doing is they're not roasting it to an American roast. Their roasting is just a little darker. The reason is there's more people in New York who have a cultural reference to coffee. They like it darker. Down in South Carolina, they want a light roast, an American roast, and they want the volume per eight cups to be only an

ounce and a half. If they drank three ounces, it would be [gags], and they'd fall down dead. So stuff like that. **[00:45:21]**

Here's another one. This is a tricky one. When you pack your cases of these little fractional packs—and this is like a trade secret. No, it's common knowledge, OK. You pack them in boxes. Now, do you make them ten pounds a box? No. You make them fifteen pounds a box. Why? Well, if they want ten, they have to buy fifteen, and if they want twenty, they have to buy thirty. I heard this, I said, "Oh, my god, this is trickery!" [Zapol laughs]

A lot of that stuff is very old school. Some of it is not used anymore, but today it's different techniques. They learned to flake coffee, so now when you go into a store and you see twelve ounces in a bag or in a can, that can used to hold sixteen ounces of ground coffee. Now it holds twelve ounces of flaked coffee. They don't call it 'flaked coffee,' but volumetrically, it's bigger. They're fitting—and that's trickery. That's trickery. Stuff like that.

Zapol: The relationship in America to coffee has sort of shifted in the time that your family has owned the business—

Longo: Yes, absolutely, absolutely.

Zapol:—too.

Longo: OK. I am kind of old school. When I was growing up, there was the Pioneer Supermarket on the corner. I remember when they had televisions in there, and they had cooks on TV. When things began to develop, like with the Food Channel, I poo-poo'd it because I thought it was just flash. Not that it wasn't going to last forever, but what annoyed me was a different type of customer began coming into the store. Someone who didn't have a cultural reference for coffee or food, but learned their reference. They had no experience, and just cold could recite to you recipes without any soul, you know? So I considered it—

I got a call from the Food Channel, and they wanted me to do something about coffee. I poo-poo'd them. I poo-poo'd them. I was cut off since then, but I'm happy. I didn't want to become their coffee guy, even though I probably would have made a lot more money—but I don't have the temperament for that. I don't know what would have happened. I don't think it would have been very positive for me. I probably would have self-destructed because of the fame or some wackiness, I don't know.

But I poo-poo'd it. The reason I got annoyed was—Here's a good example: When you make pesto, there's a cultural reference to it. Any ethnicity has their cultural references to their items that they make. It's tough when someone comes into the store and tells your mother how to make pesto when she's been doing it for a hundred years. Not that it's sacred, but she understands it from a cultural standpoint, you know? That just rubbed my fur the wrong way. It took me a while to get used to foodies.

In fact, recently, at the store on Essex Street—I'm pointing to Essex Street—Yelp had an evening of reviewers, and they came to the Essex Street Market. They walked around, and we had to man our booths. I met many of these people—they're very nice, and they mean well, but you get stuff like, "I'm an expert on such and such and such." You have to hold your tongue. My experience in coffee is pretty advanced. I don't ram it down anyone's throat, but I know all about coffee. I keep up with it, too. You get people who say, "I'm an expert," and they're very judgmental, and that kind of rubs my fur the wrong way.

When the foodie thing developed, I was annoyed. I was happy, but I was annoyed. Then I decided to position myself as the antihero and the small David to Starbuck's Goliath, which was good because we rode the crest of the wave of coffee popularity. in my view, there was already a culture of coffee, but only limited to bohemian areas, so the fact that it's now generalized to the city in general, and then to the suburbs. Hallelujah, because my customer base expanded. I didn't have to do the hard sell. **[00:50:17]**

What would happen here and how we developed our mail order [is] we would keep the store open until nine. Here's how we would develop our mail order. Either a customer who's a resident is leaving, and they say, "Oh, can I get coffee far away?" "Absolutely," and we send it. Or a man and a woman go to Monte's. It's a Saturday evening. They have a nice meal. It's very romantic. They put a bag on, and now they're walking around the Village. They happen into the store. You're nice to them. You maybe give them some coffee covered espresso beans. They're a nice couple. You chitchat, blah, blah. They might not even buy anything, but you give them a card and a little brochure. Two or three weeks later, you get a call. "Hey, I was in your store." Now, we answer the phone with a person. They're personable, and they're friendly, and they're warm. "Really, I was in your store two weeks ago." "Oh, really, how did you like it?" "Fine." "Did you like the music? Were the kids behaved?" you know, yeah, yeah, yeah, blah, blah, blah—"You know, my wife and I had dinner at Monte's, and it was so nice. We came into your

store. Could you send us coffee?" "Absolutely." Then what happens is when they call back, there's someone who says, "Yes," and they look you up on the computer, "Yes, Mrs. McGillicutty, how are you?" That kind of thing, which is really an extension of what my mother and father taught me. It's accurate. It's very, very accurate. You take Kate, who's the retail general manager, the woman who was here. She is a theater background person, doing scenery and stuff like that, but she managed Aphrodisia, which was a spice store on Carmine Street for a long time. I've known her for a million years, so realizing we share the same sensibility, I asked her to help me run the stores. That's what she does. You need that sensibility, and that's what makes it successful without being bullshit. You hear, customer service, rah, rah, rah, yeah, but this is real close-up magic.

Does that relate to what you were asking?

Zapol: Yes, yeah I was interested in some of the trends around coffee and how it has affected the store, so I think that that—

Longo: Yeah, there's the 'Third Wave'—that's what my son Matthew calls it—like Blue Bottle and Stumptown [Coffee Roasters]. I don't poo-poo them. However, there are men and women who are forgotten 'coffee cuppers'—who know more about coffee—[They] have forgotten more than I know. I hold them in high regard because in the industry, the highest paid people, especially for the big firms, are the blenders. Their job is to cup coffee and keep Folger's the same year after year. That's a tremendous skill. They're paid big bucks for that, because they're using different coffees to achieve the same taste profile year after year after year, even though these companies can go out and buy their year's worth of coffee in one fell swoop.

It takes that trained palate and the palatal memory to do that, which is quite a skill. When I see on television some kid at Stumptown who's pictured cupping coffee—No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. I was trained by rote by people like Sidney Horowitz and Irving Lerner. These are all men who were very experienced and what they do is they sit you down and you cup a certain coffee—let's say Colombian—over and over and over again. They give you different varieties, and then you recognize it. It's just memory and you recognize it. Then you build up a repertoire over time. That's how you do it. You can't do it overnight. You can't become an expert by cupping it or going to the SCAA [Specialty Coffee Association of America] and taking their cuppers' course and learning it. Yeah, you'll get the rudimentary skills, but you've got to do it

over and over and over. There's a lot to know. There's a lot to know, and there's a lot of nuance, too. That used to bother me more than it bothers me now, but I don't fight it anymore. I used to, and my partner Steve's the same way. Because we're hippies, we think, you assholes, but you can't say that. [sighs] **[00:55:09]**

What am I supposed to say? There's a roaster in Red Hook, which is a tall roasting outfit. They have some roasting equipment there, and you can go and use their equipment. They had a tasting. There were a lot of men and women from all different cafes, and we were cupping coffee. These coffees that they were offering. a lot of them were very effected. I've been cupping coffee a long time. Yes, there's a way to do it, but it's not so formal. I know guys— owners of big, big coffee companies—who are slurping all over and getting it on their ties. It's a whole thing. These young people were very formal about it to the point where, I didn't say anything, but I was hot. [laughs] I was. I was hot. You know the old thing of 'know thy enemy.' I wanted to be amongst them and see, even though I felt very old because they're all in their twenties. I don't fight it.

The popularity has been good. I can't complain. It's been very, very, very good. We've maintained our niche, and we're still doing the same thing: excellent quality coffee at a reasonable price and teas. It's what we do, so it's good. I'm happy. I don't think I've sold out, so I'm lucky in that regard.

Zapol: Talk to—

Longo: What?

Zapol: Go ahead.

Longo: No, I was just going to—No, go ahead. You—

Zapol: Talk to me about over the years then, how you've managed the store, some of your favorite stories about—

Longo: Can I talk about the building for a minute?

Zapol: Yes, absolutely.

Longo: OK, this has to do with my father's mother.

Zapol: I'm going to pause just for one second.

[Interruption]

Longo: Yes, go ahead.

Zapol: I'm sorry.

Longo: We talked before about me rummaging in the steamer trunk downstairs in the basement? One of the things I discovered was that in 1941, my grandma other on my father's side contracted De Lorenzo and Son from Grand Street to change some of the beams on the building from wood to iron, including this courtyard. This used to be a courtyard between the two buildings, and it's covered over. They changed it from wooden to iron. Well, fast forward to like ten, fifteen years ago, I'm friendly with the grandson, Tom De Lorenzo, who is now an engineer and has done work for me doing engineer things, like when we built the roaster and all of this stuff. That's kind of cool. It was his grandfather, then his uncle and his father, and now him! Only they're no longer in the iron business.

But you talk about neighborhood stuff—They had this building on Grand Street, between Sullivan and Thompson, and they recently sold it for like a bazillion dollars, and they're so happy. Now he's doing his engineer work, but the father and the uncle, they're in heaven now! They can't believe it! It's interesting, going back that far. That's an interesting piece of history.

Zapol: Yeah. Tell me about other relationships to other businesses in the area that you've developed, some of the older—

Longo: Raffetto.

Zapol:—families. Yup.

Longo: The Raffettos. Now, my parents know them very well, but Mrs. Raffetto, she and I have a little thing going. This is terrible, but whenever she's—[sighs] She was friends. The families are friendly. Her husband, when my father passed away and I was operating the business, I got very depressed. The weight of it was great on me. I was very close with my father, and it really knocked me out. I started seeing a therapist, which helped me tremendously. In fact, I still see her, twenty-one or twenty-two years later—something crazy. We laugh about it. **[01:00:01]**

When I needed help, I went to Mr. Raffetto, and he gave me very good advice. I went to Sidney Horowitz, and again, I had someone who gave me very good advice. Another guy, Sterling Gordon, who's an older coffee man, I do business with his children, now. We kind of grew up in the business together. Karen and David Gordon—When I was floundering—not floundering, but when I was beginning and taking all of this responsibility on, I had to go to these folk. Many of them steered me very nicely, in a nice way. That helped me tremendously. Tremendously.

There's the issue of the building. When I was growing up, the story was my grandfather, Frank Longo, had owned this building, and he had also invested in mortgages. People would buy buildings, and he would loan them the money. Of course when the stock market crashed, he lost a lot of that, but he retained this building. I don't know where I got it, but I thought, gee, it would be nice to keep Bleecker Street, because Bleecker Street is home! You know, I always considered this building home. My sisters consider it home. I didn't know how I was going to go about buying it.

While I'm rummaging in the trunk, I come across this agreement that my grandmother wrote in 1951. What she did was, she left a formula and some rules that her children could not sell outside the family, and they had to use this formula to dispose of their shares. It's a very fair formula. The seller gets an appraisal, the buyer gets an appraisal, and you split the difference.

Now that was very forward thinking, because when I was growing up, I saw—

[END OF SECOND AUDIO FILE, 'Longo_PeterOralHistory2.mp3'; BEGINNING OF THIRD, 'Longo_PeterOralHistory3.mp3']

Longo:—nightmares, where the principals would die, and the children would inherit the properties or the business. It would just turn to shit. When I read this, I said, "This is fabulous! So I went to Aunt Milly. I said, "Hey, did you know about this?" She said, "Yes. We're not allowed to sell outside the family unless we get the permission of everyone, and it's a cooperative thing." So, it took me twenty-eight years to buy the shares from each of my father's brothers and sisters. It was this slow thing. Part of it is luck. You know the old saying that 'the best-laid plans of mice and men,' blah, blah, blah? I guess keeping good relations—and not false good relations, but being open-handed, just like in retail—really helped, because I would say to them, "When you're ready, if and when you're ready to sell, let me know." That was it. Years

later, you'd get a call. All my life that kind of thing has happened. It happened when I bought the store on Thompson Street from August Cognetta. He had this little coffee store there, similar to this. Years and years and years ago, there were little coffee roasters on every street. There was Charm Coffee [phonetic] [00:01:25] and his store, and there was Gatto on Bleecker. Because there were so many Italians, you had these little stores—a cornucopia of coffee and tea and spices and things that they were used to getting on the other side. I forgot the point of my story—see, that's from smoking all that pot. Anyway—

Zapol: It was being open-handed—

Longo: Oh, right—

Zapol:—about sort of—

Longo:—being open-handed. I would go to my aunts and uncles and say, "When you're ready, call me." Sure enough, as they got older and they wanted to cash it in, they would, and it would leave me cash poor because then I had to get the money to pay them. Over the course of twenty-eight years, that's where my money was going, plus to the children, which is another story.

Gradually, I was able to buy the building. I felt so happy, because then it secured my place here. That was really good for me. It was good for my personal family. I have two sons, and [sighs] the two of them had difficulty.

Well, the first one was very, very sick. My wife had a placenta premia, and was on total bed rest for three months. I spent a lot of time at the hospital. We were having a second amniocentesis when the heart rate began to diminish and Dr. [Ming] Yeh, who over the course of three months we had come to know very well, said, "OK, wheel her down the hall. We're going to take the baby out now." Said, "What?" "Yeah." Down the hall, I wheel Catherine, and she says to me, "Where are we going, for lunch?" I said, "No, no, no, no. You're going to have your baby." "What!"

They take her in, emergency C-section. They lift this little baby out of her, and run across the hall and put the little baby in the tray, who's blue. He turned pink and blue, and pink and blue, and they gave him—They were kibbutzing, "Do this, do that; do this, do that," and they finally got him up and running. Then he was in the ICU for fourteen days, and while he was in the ICU, one of the doctors says, "Listen, we've done all we can do. The rest is voodoo." You

had better make preparations, and then two days later they said, “Oh, he’s turned the corner. You can take him home.” We were like [exhales deeply].

Anyway, now you’ll see him. He’s two hundred and forty pounds of strapping beast, smart, in the business, just got engaged—is like, oh, wow!

The second one—So we’re shell shocked, right, and eighteen months later, Catherine and I are feeling good, and we’re at a baseball game. “You want to go home and make a baby?” “Oh, yes, ahhh.” Just feeling after she had gone through all this shit, Catherine and I can touch each other and get pregnant. It’s that kind of thing. So she gets pregnant, and again, she’s on total bed rest. There’s all this spotting, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Matthew is born.

Fourteen months later, Matthew is on my shoulders on Halloween, wearing alien things, and I notice that he’s—he used to say ‘dada,’ ‘mama,’ and all this stuff. No more ‘dada’ and ‘mama.’ I say to Catherine, “He’s going backwards.” Now we were already hyped up after Peter, and luckily we were being attentive, so we saw he was doing a lot of toe-walking and hand flapping and babbling, ba-ba-ba-ba-ba-ba-ba. He began to lose speech.

We brought him up back up to Columbia Presbyterian—there’s Columbia Presbyterian, again—and the people who had taken care of Peter, they looked him over. They said, “No, no, no, no, no.” They sent us to a neurologist. They tested him, and they said, “Oh, this is infant autism.” **[00:05:32]**

We didn’t know what to do. at the time, and this is going back twenty—He’s twenty-two, so this is twenty-one, twenty-two years ago. Behavioral therapy was just beginning. A doctor named [O.] Ivar Lovaas in California had developed it, and it was poo-poo’d because it was thought to be Pavlovian. This is abusive. We didn’t know what to do. We went to every agency. There was nothing available, nothing, nothing, nothing. We heard—we were clutching at straws. We heard about it, and we called, and he said, “Yes, we could do something, and here’s what you do: I’ll send a student, a guy named Michael Wolfe, and what you’ll do is you will train five therapists.” We went to Stuyvesant Town High School, and we got some students there. Then some women who were college students, they were trained by Michael Wolf, and every day one of them would come to the house and put Matthew at a little table and begin to rebuild his body of knowledge. The issue is, if they plateau because of neurological difficulties, you’re done. In Matthew’s case, he never plateaued. We did this for about five years. He was prone to just temper tantrums, the likes of which—because they can’t speak, so they scream! [knock on door]

What?

[Interruption]

Zapol: OK, so after—

Longo: So—

Zapol: You were talking about plateauing.

Longo: Right, so Matthew's getting this therapy, and he was prone to explosive fits of anger. Because he can't speak, they have to point for stuff, even if they're even cognizant—"juice" and all those words go. These women and Michael Wolf gradually built up his repertoire of information, but his communicative skills were very low. He was doing better—better, better, better—but in the meantime, we're dealing with him, and we had to maintain this therapeutic environment at home. Then what did we do—we got him into—They were very nice, Children's Aid, and Little Red. I can't say enough about them. Both schools allowed us to have him in their classes with a shadow—at Children's Aid. Then we had him go across the street at Little Red, and gradually, he did better and better, until he—The last school he went to was the Rebecca School.

The downside of all this is that the cost of it was crippling. The Rebecca School was $70,000 a year. Talk about keeping you broke. Luckily, with the city, you pay the tuition. There's this thing that you do where you sue them. If you can't get services within the school system, they allow you to get services outside, and then they give you half back. That allowed us to continue this. At the end of the Rebecca School. It's time for high school. He applied to a school in Whitestone, The Summit School. They were excellent.

So he's in Rebecca, and I said, "Oh, next year is high school. You're going to have to be prepared to change classrooms every period—" This would freak him out. "—and you're going to have a different teacher, but there is support." He said, "Dad, I'm ready to try this." Very brave. "OK, you're ready?" "Yes." "OK." So off he goes to the Summit School, and they were great with him. They have things like when they get very stressed and overwhelmed, they have a quiet room.

He did four years at the Summit School, and then he applied to Mitchell College in New London, and now he's getting B's and A's. A success story! Two of them! Two success stories—it's a miracle! **[00:10:29]**

My wife and I are very, very happy. We're broke, but we don't care. [laughs] I got no complaints. Now, the one is twenty-three, the other's twenty-two. They're big strapping boys, and it's great.

Zapol: So tell—

Longo: But I lost seventeen years in the process. That's, I guess, the point of my story. We surfaced about two years ago, my wife and I. [We] said, "We're done. Oh! What do we do now!"

Zapol: Tell me about where you live now, and where you have lived.

Longo: I live in Queens. I like it. It's like the suburbs, only in the city, and I'm not a suburban person. In fact, I'm not a house person. My wife, Catherine, grew up in East New York in a house. I grew up in an apartment, although, this is like our house—but not really, because you had tenants.

So we moved. We buy this house, and we looked in Douglaston. We wanted to be close to the Summit School, but Douglaston doesn't have—Guys and women in the coffee business, some of them lived in Douglaston, some of them lived in Queens, so you get suggestions. We need to be close to Whitestone because his bus trip was only a half hour. From here in Manhattan, it's an hour and a half, and that stressed Matthew out. We looked in Queens and Douglaston. Before that, how we got to Queens and Douglaston was we were living in Battery Park City. We lived there for eleven years. We were across the street from the World Trade Center. On the morning of the World Trade Center, my wife and I are having coffee, and we hear this tremendous explosion. I had stayed home just to have an extra cup of coffee. You know, sometimes you're with your mate, "Oh, I'm going to have an extra—" Next thing we know, we hear this explosion, and I said to her, "That's a very big explosion. Either that or it's far away," because the sound was ba-boom. It was two.

The phone rings. We go out to the living room to answer the phone. It's her brother, Phillip, who says, "Have you seen what's happened?" You know, and "You need to leave your

apartment and go the opposite way of the plume." What are you talking about? We turn on the TV. Oh, my god, eee!

Now, out our window, Catherine sees a plane, and she turns white as a sheet because she can't see any windows. We were twenty-five stories up, and she thought it was coming towards us, but it was higher. We hear the second crash, and from down below, twenty-five stories, we hear a collective, "Oh no!" from the crowd. My hair stood on end. I said to her, "We've got to go, " and we rush out of the apartment, go down twenty-five flights, and we get out onto West Street. We look up, and there's this flame across the top of this building. I said to her, "That's red fire. It's red black fire. We can't stay." People downstairs are so shocked, they're looking up, cheek by jowl. It was like being at the San Gennaro Feast when you're like this [gestures]. I said, "We've got to go because the top is going to fall off." It looked so hot.

We run up West Street. We get to Houston. We go across Houston. We come out where the fire station is. The guys at the firehouse, I'll never forget it. They looked like horses, so excited to jump on the fire truck. They're putting on their gear. These are all strong-looking young men, and they jump on the fire truck all excited. Off they go to their doom. We run up Sixth Avenue, and we're on the corner. We turn, and they collapse. Ya-ee! It was just craziness. **[00:15:10]**

Peter's at school. I walk up to his school, on 94th Street. He's in an LD [learning disabilities] school up there. I was wearing clogs. I walk up; I pick him up. We're walking down, and halfway down, I couldn't—I was wearing clogs. I had rushed out of the house. I went to a shoe store with a million other people, and I bought a pair of sneakers, which I never wore since. that night.

We're at my mother's apartment on the top floor here. We had no place else to go. Matthew was stuck in Queens. He was with a cousin. You know how it was; it was a mess. That night, Catherine's getting Peter ready for bed, and he tells his mother, "Mommy, Daddy when he came to pick me up, we stopped in a shoe store, and I heard him say something." "What was it, Peter?" He says, "He said the F-word." He said, "These fucking clogs." [laughs] They were killing me.

After that we lived here on Bleecker. Then we decided, let's try it again, because that neighborhood was made up of young families like us, with young children, and the kids would play together, and there are the rocks down there. It was a real community. A lot of people from

the Village had moved down there—Little Red [Schoolhouse] people. It was a whole group of—It was like the second Village. [sighs]

We went back down there, and the neighborhood had been wiped away. People just left. They scattered all over. It was tough living, and so we decided, well, let's move. We didn't know where to go, and Catherine knows Queens a little, so we had heard about Douglas—I went to Douglaston. There's no public transportation and this and that. Then we found Forest Hills. It was beautiful! It's wooded, and this and that, and we looked and looked.

We had a certain budget. Here's an interesting story. We looked at five or six houses, and during that period, you'd go to an open house, and that evening it would be sold. It was crazy. We had a certain budget. I saw this little house that was cute, and it was for sale, but we were not allowed to see it because the woman who owned it was ill. I said, "OK, well, can you make an appointment, and we'll see it."

A week later, I go to the house. Catherine couldn't go. It was perfect. It was just quirky enough for us. It was a lot of wood inside with little cubbies and little turns, and it was perfect. I go down into the kitchen, and it's Geraldine Ferraro! Holy shit. I met her. I met her and her husband.

I brought Catherine to the house, and they were very nice. She was not well and wanted to move to an apartment that was all one thing, and they had brought their kids up there. It was a three-bedroom, and so one thing lead to another. She told us, "Look, we want to get what we're asking." It wasn't unreasonable, but we had budgeted less. We found the money, and we purchased it, and then we all moved in there. That's how we got to go to Queens.

Oh! The thing that got me at Queens was it's a house. There are windows on the ground floor. We moved in I said, "Catherine, anybody can walk into our yard and look right in the window." It's unlike an apartment where they can't. They have to ring the bell and walk up the stairs or take the elevator, you know. [Zapol laughs]

We're still there. We have three cats, and that's where I am now.

Zapol: A while ago you mentioned Thompson Street, the store there, but I don't think we finished that story.

Longo: Right.

Zapol: You don't have that store anymore, is that right?

Longo: This has to do with people moving out. I said that Tom De Lorenzo's uncle and father, they sold the building. Now they're all in New Jersey. Zito did the same thing. I don't know why they're moving to New Jersey, but that's where they're going. Auggie ran this little coffee store, and I said to him, "Auggie, when you're"—again, not, "Sell your coffee store," but "When you're ready to sell, let me know." Maybe six years later, I get a call from his wife. [She] says, "We're ready to sell!" I said, "All right, OK, I'll come over." "Well, what are you going to do?" "We're moving! We're moving to the country." "Where are you going?" "To Staten Island!" [laughs] I said, "You've got to be kidding me!" You can't poo-poo it, but they were moving to Staten Island, and they were very excited. She and Auggie moved out to Staten Island with their son. **[00:20:29]**

I took over the store. The store became a den of iniquity, because our customers at the time, they're all artists dressed in black, and you're not allowed to smoke. At Auggie's they would roll those cigarettes—what is it, the American Indian tobacco—and they'd be smoking. I'd tell them, "You can't smoke in here." They'd smoke anyway.

I ran it for maybe twenty years until the rent got so crazy. The landlord was very good, because in the last year we ran up a big real estate bill. People do have souls, and these guys are loaded and very experienced real estate guys, but they let us pay it back monthly. It took us about eighteen months to pay it off, but they were not crazy about it. That was a fun, fun, fun store. It was tiny, but it was the same size as the original store, which is why I fell for it. It was seven feet long and thirty-six [feet] long, and we had a tapestry of Elvis in it. When I went to renovate that store, they wouldn't let me renovate. The customers rioted—"You can't!"—because you'd want to paint and put in modern—no, no, no! All right. [Zapol laughs]

Zapol: Talk to me about the other stores that you've opened—

Longo: Right.

Zapol:—in the city.

Longo: The store on Saint Mark's came [sighs]—god. My partner from Chicago and I are partners at the store on Saint Mark's. It's [got to have been] there twenty-five years, and that probably was second after the store up on Lexington Avenue. When Laura and I broke up, we closed the store on Lexington Avenue. I was so distraught that I sent a manager up there to close

it, because I just didn't have the heart to go up there. I thought I was going to be married, but we came from different backgrounds. She had had a number of different marriages. I had come from one marriage of forty years, so I was used to it. It wasn't a problem for me; it was a problem for her. We broke up, and I take full responsibility for it. It was my fault, but I was broken-hearted, even though I screwed it up.

After that store closed, then I opened up Saint Mark's, and then I bought a building in Williamsburg, where I installed the roaster—a little factory building about two blocks from the Williamsburg Bridge. This was when the Williamsburg Bridge was in disrepair, and the city didn't have the money. I'm not claiming that I was hip to it, and I'm a real estate mogul. It is luck. I was looking for the most inexpensive building I could find that would fit the roaster in our production, but an interesting thing happened when I was looking for buildings. It relates to meeting people. I met so many interesting people selling their buildings, like old men who had nothing to do but sit at their building in a chair, and this was their nest egg, and they were selling it. You'd hear their story, and blah, and you'd cock and bull, and it may work out, but it may not.

It so happened that the guy who sold me this building was an artist, but he made these big stone sculptures. He lived there, too, so it was like a squat, but not really a squat. He wanted to move to Texas. I took my life savings, and I gave him half of the price of the building, which was low, and he took back a note for ten years, because he needed the income. That was good. Then I used the rest of the money to put the roaster in and get all the equipment going. We moved the wholesale from the back of the store to there, so instead of preparing the orders in the back of the store, and then wheeling them out into the van, like we did for a million years—and like the bread store did—now we had a high-low, and it was really good. **[00:25:10]**

I opened the store on Grand Street in Williamsburg, and then Kenny Shopsin, who used to have a place on Morton—I used to live on Christopher and Greenwich.

I lived there for a while; it was my first apartment, and I lived there for a while. That was a fun, fun building! We nicknamed the building 'Leather Flats,' because there was a group of guys who liked to dress in Western, you know? The main guy, this guy John, who I've known for a million years—big, strapping, studly man, but he dresses in Western—his friends dressed in Western, and they would hang out at the Silver Dollar coffee shop, which is—was—on the corner of Greenwich and Christopher. What would happen is we would go out dancing, eleven o'clock at night, and come back eleven o'clock the next morning. Everyone would meet up at the

Silver Dollar, and then I would get the lay of the land from John. Their big thing was they would go to bars, and then they would fight. What is this? It always morphed into some party but they were all big and strapping and western gear, and off they'd go. Oh, it was crazy. I lived there, and then I began dating Catherine, and we dated from there.

Zapol: Shopsin.

Longo: Oh! Thank you, thank you, thank you.

On my way to the store, I would pass Kenny Shopsin's. What happened was over time, Kenny and Evie became like a second set of parents. I would stop in, "How are you? What are you doing?" la-la-la. The kids weren't born yet, and he had the twins. I remember him sitting in front of the store with one in one arm and one in the other, and he'd be belligerent. He'd be so funny. Anyway, long story short, so years go by, and I get a call from Kenny, "I'm here at the Essex Market." I say, "What are you doing there?" "Well, I moved," because he moved from Morton Street to then Carmine Street, and then he goes to the Essex Street Market. He says, "You've got to come down, Longo. You've got to come down here!" So I go down there, and sure enough, it looked great.

I remember the Essex Market when I was a kid. We used to dare each other to run through it, because it was funky and black and dirty—eee! I said, "Oh, look! This is great!" I got a stall at the Essex Market, and I bought my stall from an ex wrestler. A Santo Domingan [Dominican] guy who wanted to retire, a big, strapping man. We're talking. We agreed on a price. You're not supposed to buy and sell those stalls, but the tradition over the last fifty years is, if you have a business there, and you want to get in there, the city gave their permission. Money would change hands between the vendor and the buyer, and that was the payoff for the vendor. This guy wanted to retire, and we get to talking, and, "Well, what are you going to do in Santo Domingo?" "I'm going to be a professional wrestler. I was, and then I opened up the store."

It turns out he was one of those guys who wears the mask. He gave me a photograph of himself with the mask on and the cape. It's fabulous! I bought his little kiosk, and we opened the store, and we've been there since. The manager of Auggie's—I moved him to the Essex Market—Lucas. I tend to keep my people for long periods of time. Lucas went from the den of

iniquity—and he is like an old punk rocker tattoos, argh rah-rah. He's running the Essex Market now.

Zapol: Your roaster is now in—moved?

Longo: We just moved it. Williamsburg, over the last twenty years, went from being a bucket of blood to very fancy restaurants. The reason I bought the building there—it was a bucket of blood, and the yard next door had a chop shop in it. There were needles everywhere, but next to us was a building filled with Puerto Rican families. I would see the moms in the morning take their kids to school. Across the street was all vacant, but these two buildings on the other side of the yard were stable. They were moms bringing the kids to school. It was normal. I said, "Well, this is stability. I can live with this." I got rid of the chop shop, and we operated there and it was good. We put a bench in front of the yard, and the women would come down. They would just sit on the bench and chitchat, and they liked that. We got along well. **[00:30:10]**

Then it became more high-priced, high priced, high-priced.. I began to get calls [from] these companies that buy real estate, telling me things that I didn't quite know. They were offering money based on buildable square feet. I got these calls for about six months, and I didn't understand what they were talking about, but gradually, I began to investigate what these things meant. I continued to get calls and continued to get calls. In the meantime, across the street from us, gradually, they built all of these fancy apartments. Then I began to get complaints for the smell.

The city sent an inspector from DEP [Department of Environmental Protection]. Very nice guy. As it turns out, he came to visit us about ten times. He never saw any smoke—because our equipment gives out no smoke—except hot air, and so we never got fined, which is lucky, because the fines are tremendous. But the handwriting was on the wall because I was getting complaints left and right. They'd send him, and after a while, you'd offer him a cup of coffee. You saw him every other week.

[To] make a long story short, although it's an interesting story, how it took place, I sold the building, and I purchased a new warehouse in East Williamsburg. We moved there. We also bought a building in Gowanus. When I first started looking, the prices were reasonable, but the real estate interest, it just burst into flame. I was bidding on buildings and would lose them because it was just crazy. I found this one on Withers [Street], and I found another one on 8th

Street, and I saw 8th Street and Third Avenue in the Gowanus section of Brooklyn. I used to roast coffee on Third Avenue and 3rd Street. It was in a totally industrial neighborhood. When I drove down there to look at this building, the building I used to roast coffee in were apartments. Holy smoke, look at this.

I purchased the building on 8th Street. It was a guy retiring. He and his wife ran a granite and marble cutting company. Very interesting. They had a huge cutting machine, like twenty-five horsepower. It was a huge machine, and oh, that's where we put the roaster and all the green coffee storage. Then our offices and the mail order production and the wholesale production and storage are on Withers. That's where we are now. That's our whole evolution.

Zapol: So—

Longo: But it's been interesting. Yeah! [sighs, laughs]

Zapol: So thank you—

Longo: Oh, you're welcome!

Zapol:—thank you for also taking me through the different spaces. I mean, I wonder what are your thoughts about the future for the business here.

Longo: OK.

Zapol: Anything you don't want to share I advise you not to share, but anything you want to share, go ahead.

Longo: Is any—you have to advise. This is all public knowledge, so I don't care.

Zapol: OK, perfect.

Longo: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Maybe the boys might be a little embarrassed that their father is mooning over them, which I do. I'm a horrible father. I'm so doting, I can't help it.

Zapol: Sounds like you take after your father.

Longo: Yeah, it's true. I don't care. I make them kiss me, and they're so embarrassed! Although Matthew doesn't care, but Peter—although, when you get him privately, he's a mush. They're both mushes.

Peter is in the business already. He's just like me. He's got a good personality. He sells well. He likes it. In fact, I was questioning him. I said, "Listen, you don't have to make the"—and I tricked them. Here's what my parents did. My parents said, "You must go to the university, but we're going to teach you all about the business, and you will operate it when we go on vacation." So that's what happened, but I was teaching. I was making no money, then he got sick. Argh, just ah. I accepted it because it was like home.

Well, fast forward, I did the same thing with the kids. We do not give them any money. We pay for their schooling—like when they were in high school and their clothes, and all of that stuff—but any extra money, they work in the store, and then they're paid for it. They learned right away. They're good with it. I didn't realize what the situation was, until Peter, I said, "Listen, are you sure you want to come into the business?" because he announced, "I'm ready to come into the business. I would like to do it." I said, "OK, but it's a commitment, and it's a lifestyle business," and all that kind of stuff. He said, "But Dad, it's like home." I said, "Oh, you're hooked." Done. He's in. **[00:35:37]**

He met a girl, who was working at the Peculier Pub as a waitress at night. She's a graduate of BU [Boston University], and she's a theater major. She's writing a play and is involved with putting on a play. She's really nice. So they're dating. They've been dating for a while, dating, dating, dating. Peter never brought home a girl. Never. Did a lot of dating, I guess. In fact, [he] is so private, he never shared anything. We mind our business.

One day he comes to me and says, "I'm getting engaged," so he and Ali are engaged, and now Ali is working here part-time while she pursues her art, and I make sure she's pursuing [it] because I don't want her to get stuck here. Getting sucked into the family thing can be very overwhelming for someone who's not used to it. But he's in it. It's been a tremendous relief because I have a family member presence in the store along with Kate and Jeff and the other managers who run the other stores, who've worked in the other stores for a long, long time. Not that I'm taking more time off, but it's nice having another person you can depend on.

My wife has come into the business, too, doing collections and some bookkeeping, which she's good at, just enough to keep her busy. I told her, "It's as much, or as little as you want." In

the beginning she wanted no involvement with business, and so I backed off. I said, "Fine," but gradually, she got into it. She and I are able to take time off. The kids are gone, so we're relaxing more. Then when Matthew finishes school—he's taking this business degree with a minor in theater—I don't know what's going to happen. We'll see. He works here in the summer, and he's more the anchor to Peter, being the kite. He's like Catherine. He's a little more cerebral, less out there, so he may be good in the back office, you know? We'll see. I don't know.

Passing the business to them, it may, it looks like—but in the meantime, it's good. So, we'll see what happens. It's exciting.

Zapol: Thank you. I wonder if there's anything that I haven't asked you about that you wanted to share—would like to share—about the Village, about the family business.

Longo: This has to do with my Uncle Frank. It also has to do with my mother and my Aunt Milly. I've been very close to a lot of people, and as they got older, they entrusted me with their money and managing their things while they pursued their lives. My Aunt Milly did it first. She was very close with my Uncle Harry, and when he fell ill, she came to me and said—after being strict with me all these years—said, "Listen, here's where my money is. I don't want to be bothered with it. You deal with it—" and it wasn't a lot of money. It was middle class, blue-collar money—"You deal with it, and you pay my bills," and this and that. "I want to concentrate on Harry." They were married for a long time, and they were older—childless. Uncle Harry got sick, and ultimately passed away, and poor Aunt Milly was left without Uncle Harry, but she lived upstairs.

Long story short, [she] gets older and older and older and older, and I brought on an aide to take care of her. I developed a very good relationship with this aide. Then over time, she got older and she passed away. The aide, Dawn—My mother was getting older, and Aunt Milly died at like ninety-six. Then Dawn began to take care of my mother. Again, my mother trusted me, like Milly did, to handle her finances, and when she ultimately passed away at a hundred, Dawn retired. [laughs] **[00:40:15]**

Those two women trusted me completely, and I was deeply impressed by their trust of me. I got to know them intimately, which is really a window because the era they came from and just their attitude—My mother looked down at my father when he passed away in the coffin—and by the way we've had every funeral in Perazzo's next door, which is another story. She

looked down at him, and she said, "Ang, how could you do this to me?" You know, that he left her. I mean, it was like, [gasps].

They trusted me. I'm tickled by that. The same with my Uncle Frank, you know? I didn't do anything heroic, just, "If you'd keep an eye on him when you walk to Father Demo Square. He's there with his buddies." They would stop in, use the men's room. There was a time when Aunt Milly had lost it, and she would wander down the back way into the store. She'd be speaking in Italian to angels. I don't know who the hell she was talking to. What did the kids do? They got her a chair! She would sit back here and be yapping, yapping until she was done, and then she'd go back upstairs. So—[sighs] [Zapol laughs]

I'm honored that they put such trust in me, and I never betrayed that trust. Didn't take advantage of them. When Uncle Frank passed away he came to me and said, "I'm going up to the VA." I said, "But why? Why at this point, because you're healthy generally." He said, "Well, all of my buddies are gone." All of his cohorts, one by one, they passed away, and when the last one passed away, he had had enough. That was it. Done, done. That was kind of sad, you know? That's kind of a mushy story, but—[sighs] My wife and I hope that because the boys have seen how we handled people older than us, they'll treat us in the same manner, although they keep telling us they're going to put us in a home.

The thing is my mother and Aunt Milly told me, "We do not want to go in a home. We want to stay at home." Trust me. I was true to my word.

Zapol: So many generations in this building.

Longo: It's true. It's true. When my father passed away, it got very heavy. It was a big, big burden, and I had to really work through it. It was a lot of responsibility. It probably was perceived on my part more than real, but your grandfather and then your father—[sighs] Back years ago in the Village, I was considered the 'Longo boy' by neighborhood people like Mrs. Raffetto—and her sons, too, you know. That's one of the reasons I moved out of the Village because I had no privacy here. You walk down the street, you meet customers, you meet local Villagers, you're the 'Longo boy.' All your behavior, all your private life, is on public display. It's one of the reasons we moved to Battery Park City, which was a tremendous relief, because nobody knew me, and that's fine. So, very interesting.

Zapol: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]