



After graduating from Liberty, Lou was unsure about furthering his academic education. Although he was not the most “bookish” student, he knew a college degree had a myriad of benefits including more job opportunities that paid higher salaries. Lou decided to take some high school post-graduate courses that would enhance his likelihood of college acceptance. In September of 1961, three months after receiving his high school diploma, he returned to Liberty to take additional courses. He also took summer courses at Moravian Preparatory School. Lou's post-graduate work helped him gain admission to Moravian College where he majored in Economics and Business Administration. While at Moravian, he was a member of Sigma Phi Omega social fraternity and served as president of the Inter-Fraternity Council. Lou also became a member of Alpha Phi Omega service fraternity, a fraternity organization that promotes leadership, friendship and service.

Lou graduated from Moravian College in 1966. The war in Vietnam was escalating and he was scheduled to be drafted into the United States Army three months after graduation. Rather than wait, Lou opted to enlist and was

assigned to Fort Jackson, South Carolina for basic training. The Army, recognizing that Lou had the qualifications to be a commissioned officer, selected him to attend Officer Candidate School (OCS). Following completion of OCS, the new 2nd Lieutenant was assigned to Fort Sill, Oklahoma for eight months of artillery training. After Fort Sill, the Army stationed him at Fort Dix, New Jersey as a training officer. Lou also received orders deploying him to Vietnam no later than April of 1968. The orders were never issued, so he remained at Fort Dix and was discharged in 1969 as a 1st Lieutenant.

In 1969, Lou was hired by Humble Oil and Refining Company (Esso, which today is Exxon Mobile) as a marketing representative, requiring a move to Pittsburgh, PA for training. Following training, he was assigned a sales territory in the northern panhandle of West Virginia. Lou worked at this job for 8 years, during which his marriage failed and he was left as a single parent to raise his 4 year old son, Jay and his 2-year old daughter, Kristin.

The real estate field was booming. Banks and other financial institutions developed what was called “creative lending” which proved to be quite lucrative. Eventually the real estate market weakened and suffered considerable financial loss, compelling Lou to approach the market from a different direction. He decided to search for distressed residential property that could be renovated. This required considerably more time, so in 1992, he sold all his automobile service stations and with his step-sons, Randy and Bob, established Metrogroup, Inc, a Real Estate company located in Orlando. Metrogroup specialized in purchasing, rehabilitating and selling distressed and bank owned properties. As the business became more successful, Lou focused more on constructing rather than rehabilitating properties. Today he is a partner in Classic Homes, Inc. and Sunvest Homes, Inc., both builders of speculation and customized homes.

In 2001, Lou and Carla moved to Mt. Dora, Florida, a city that retains the charm of a small, historic town. Mt. Dora is located in Lake County, an area that has numerous freshwater lakes and is considered a boater's paradise. Lou became involved with the Sunnyland Chapter (Florida) of the Antique & Classic Boat Society, an association dedicated to the preservation and restoration of antique and classic boats.

Each year, the Society sponsors an antique boat festival, attracting antique boaters from as far away as California, Canada and France, and which has become the largest antique boat festival in North America. Aside from having an integral role in organizing the show, Lou saw an opportunity to introduce boating to young people. Along with a friend, he developed a successful boat-building program named SCAMPY (Sunnyland Chapter Apprentice Mentoring Program for Youth) where young people from ages 11 to 15, are mentored in the process of building a simple but very functional boat. The materials are supplied at no cost and the student gets to keep the boat; however, each student must complete a boat safety course, a hands-on operational training session, and display his/her boat in the water. SCAMPY partnered with the Associated Marine Institute (AMI) Kids School in Jacksonville, FL. AMI Kids is an organization that gives youth, including those who are troubled, the opportunity to discover their potential and change their lives. To date, the "local kids" built 4 boats and plan to expand the program into public schools. In addition, these "at risk" kids can earn a high school diploma or complete their GED, obtain scholarships to nationally recognized boat-building schools, and be eligible for job placement.



Life has been very good for Lou and Carla. They traveled throughout Virginia, West Virginia, Alabama, Ohio, Massachusetts, Hawaii, Mexico and Canada. In 1986 they went to London to meet Carla's daughter, Beth, and did a two-week tour of Europe by train. Italy was so enticing that they



have been there twice more since 1986. For their 25th wedding anniversary, Lou and Carla traveled to California and flew throughout the Napa Valley wine country in a hot air balloon.

Today, the Ronca's own a cottage on Lake Beauclair (outside Mt. Dora) which they rent out to vacationers, but plan to move there when their "old age" catches up with them. Their children are doing well; Kristin is a physical therapist in Columbus, Ohio, Jay is CFO of a real estate development company in Gunterville,

Alabama, Randy (Lazarus) lives in Longwood, Florida and is Lou's partner in the construction business, Amy (Lazarus-Humphrey), the mother of three children, lives in Wheeling, West Virginia, Beth (Lazarus-Khoury), a graduate of Columbia University, lives with her family in Boston, Massachusetts, and Bob (Lazarus), a home builder and father of three teen-aged children, lives in Celebration, Florida.

Lou seldom gets back to Bethlehem, although he and Carla did attend his 55th reunion from Liberty High. Lou and his sister, Bonnie Hodge, toured the city, saw how it has changed and what is left of the once vibrant Bethlehem Steel Company. Looking back, Lou has many memories of growing up in Bethlehem and memories of those things that have affected him as a person; but most important are the memories of friends, friends that helped shape his life and champion his dreams.