

LONGTIME AREA RESIDENT RUSS LORENZ CONTINUES TO SWAP YARNS AND GOSSIP

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I had a call the other day that jogged my memory and brought me up to date with an old acquaintance. It was Russ Lorenz, fellow coffee aficionado and raconteur.

Russ goes way back in Old Forge history and is well known by all who have lived in the area for any length of time. He was an annual visitor in his youth, boarding with local families. His father boarded his four sons and they kept out of trouble as much as possible caddying and doing odd jobs.

Originally from Chittenango, he learned his early trade as a contractor, and his preference for this area eventually brought him here.

Russell's grandfather was Henry Stappenbeck, a German immigrant who arrived in this country with \$300 in his pocket. With hard work and ingenuity it was parlayed into a multi-million dollar empire. Starting with a horse and wagon, he collected bones and meat scraps, which he turned into a prosperous fertilizer business.

On December 1, 1920, he donated the Stappenbeck Mansion in Clinton to the Lutheran Church. Today it has become the Lutheran Home on Utica Road.

Russell's father moved the family to the area and started the White Diner, which was located directly across from the present Helmer business. His four sons, Gilbert, Don, Russell and Harold, then became full-time residents. Harold graduated from high school here. Stepmother Ina was a great cook and very instrumental in making the diner a success. Brother Don carried on the tradition with the White Manor. It was a similar eating establishment where the present Keyes' Pancake House is located.

My relationship with Russ was principally one of swapping yarns and gossip in local diners (and an occasional bar). Russ knew everybody and his brother from Forestport to Raquette Lake and beyond. He admits much of his socializing in the early days took place in Lil and Jerry's saloon in Raquette. It was a popular spot that Joe Bird nicknamed the Greasy Spoon. Joe made it famous by using every means possible to detain patrons as long as possible. Rumor has it that some were detained as long as three days. Jerry Olsen told me of having to crawl out a bathroom window to get away! If you

came in with a tie they cut it off and nailed it to the wall. It reigns as a still popular watering hole by the same of South Bay Tavern.

Russ has been out of circulation for quite some time now and old Father Time has hindered his mobility. I was pleasantly surprised to receive his phone call. He was listening to Kenny Youngs' radio show on WBRV Boonville and heard him mention switzel, an old farmer's thirst quencher. Russ called to share his experiences and observations on the drink.

I stopped over to see Russ the other day and we had a good visit. We reminisced about Jake and Shirley Berkowitz and the Maple Diner. He mentioned the time when he operated the diner for them while they visited their daughter Harriet and son-in-law David in Belgium. The talk turned to how Jake would have reacted to the various controversies swirling about on the local political scene. We were both certain malfeasance in office would have been mentioned and threatened to be pursued. Our visit ended with him reflecting on how much enjoyment he received from arguing with Walt of Walt's Diner on the subject of proper terminology one should use when discussing partridge. For the record, Walt, the proper word is not grouse, it's "Partridge."

Russ would appreciate a visit or call from all of his friends. If you visit, one word of caution: Do not attempt to pet Elsa the Attack Cat. She lives up to the title.