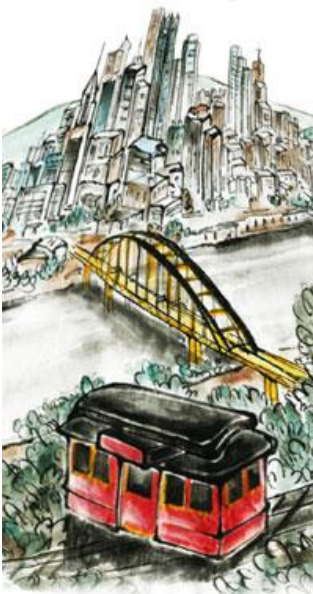


Pittsburgh Oral Histories

Pennsylvania Department
Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh



LA

Interviewed by Barry Chad

Interviewed at his apartment in Squirrel Hill, Pittsburgh

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Interviewer's Note

A businessman turned world-traveler, a man open to the experiences of life. A good enough hypnotist to have put on shows...attuned to the wisdom of Dale Carnegie...an instructor at Pitt...and, most significantly, a man who in his travels is convinced of the basic goodness of all people, who, in his own humility, in his willingness to listen and to learn has been rewarded around-the-world in kind—from the Serengeti to Mount Fuji, from Kilimanjaro to the Andes, from Timbuktu to the Alhambra. What a treasure trove of memories and adventures—and leavened with a great sense of humor. A true American good-will ambassador.

Interview

bc: One of the other interviewees felt you would be an interesting candidate to talk to.

Are you from Pittsburgh?

LA: Yes.

bc: You were born here?

LA: Yes.

bc: In what part of the city?

LA: In Munhall, that's a suburb right across the [Monongahela] river.

bc: So you grew up in Munhall?

LA: Yes.

bc: And when did you come to live in Pittsburgh?

LA: I moved into Pittsburgh after I got married. That was in 1940. I've lived in Pittsburgh ever since.

bc: When you lived in Munhall, where did you go to school?

LA: I went to the Munhall Public School and Munhall High School. While I was still living there, I went to the University of Pittsburgh.

bc: And you graduated from the University of Pittsburgh.

LA: Yes.

bc: In what?

LA: Metallurgical engineering. I worked at it for three years until I went in the Army. I was in the Army for four years. On active duty. But I was in the Reserves four years before I went in the Army. And I was in the Reserves four years after I got out of the Army. But after I left the Army, I never went back into metallurgy. I

went into business processing syrups, flavors, toppings and ingredients for the ice cream industry and also for the baking industry.

bc: How did you make the transition from metallurgy to the ice cream industry?

LA: I'll tell you exactly what I told one of the deans at the University of Pittsburgh: what I learned primarily was how to make changes and adapt myself to anything that comes up. People have a great ability—if they wish—to make changes and to adapt themselves to different situations; however, it is much easier if they have a background that leads them into it. In taking metallurgy I had quite a bit of chemistry, physics, some mathematics; all those subjects and other engineering subjects sort of gave me the ability to look at things, plan them out, and work them out. So, when I went into business, there was that particular correlation between the two: you have a problem, what do you have to do? Sit down, figure it out, and work it out. So, from that point of view, there is some similarity. That was how I went from one into the other. Of course that did not only apply to me, it applied to my two partners—one of my brothers and a brother-in-law. One of them was a pharmacist and the other one was in Liberal Arts. But we all got along pretty well.

bc: Other gentlemen I've interviewed also wouldn't let themselves be pigeon-holed; they could adapt.

LA: Right. As a matter of fact, I take the attitude that there were many many things that I could have gone into and I think I could have adapted myself to them. (I'm not saying everything, but I think there were many. But that's the way I feel. That's the way I feel: that I could do it if I had to.)

bc: What did your parents do for a living?

LA: My father was born in Romania. When he came over here, he already had a family of five children. (I was born here.) One way or another it led him into a business in which he supplied ingredients for people who had horses and cows and chickens. He was in the hay, grain and feed business in those days. (I'm going back quite a few years.) I was born in 1914. So, in those days I can still remember a lot of horses, a lot of cows, here and there [people had] sheep and even goats. Many many homes in the Munhall area—a lot of people—had chicken coops in their yards in those days.

bc: So Munhall and Homestead, aside from being very industrial, they must have also been kind of rural.

LA: Yes, they were rural because—especially after World War I—very many people came into that area because of the steel works. They came over from Eastern Europe; and very many of them were accustomed to living that way, which suited them very well—the way they lived in Europe. They all had their chickens and, not only chickens, they had geese and sheep and so on; here and there someone had a cow. In the era I'm talking about I can still remember blacksmith shops—two of them especially on the main street, on Eighth Avenue, where the horses would come in and they would have them “re-shoed.” I remember the blacksmiths' shops very well. I remember the horses; [he chuckles] I certainly remember the horse droppings all over the street. Even now, while I'm talking to you, I can visualize a man with a big broom, a special broom for cleaning up the street. But that's the way it was and that's the way people lived and that's the way people accepted it.

bc: When I was growing up in Philadelphia in the '50s, we had a huckster—Louie the Huckster—who had a horse-drawn wagon. So I'm quite aware of what you're talking about. That was just part of the way of living.

LA: That's the way it was. I remember sometimes in the street the horse would have to stop and urinate, and, when they urinated, sometimes it looked as though they were flooding the street. Of course I'm talking about when I was four- and five-years-old back in 1918 and 1919. But I'm not going to say "those were the days." Everyone, no matter when he lived, where he lived, each person has his so-called "good old days." Everyone has had his share of it even though they were all different, but they fit the pattern. [People reflect on the past and say] "Those were the days." [We both agree.]

The "Blue Laws" [Pennsylvania laws which regulated what kind of activities could be engaged in on Sundays and which were printed on blue paper] affected a lot of what we did as young people in Munhall. I remember back in 1927-1928, the PA Blue Laws made life on Sundays very very boring: we could not go to the movies; we couldn't play ball, we couldn't have dances.... For a boy of my age, it was horrible.

On Eighth Avenue in Munhall there was an empty lot we used for baseball—boys ages 11-15 playing ball on Sunday. And one Sunday along came "The Law"—Mike Timko. He told the boys he was taking them to jail, which he did. Back then the jail was at Andrew and Eighth. He put the boys in different cells and called their parents. He told the parents that the boys were "ruining the town" of Munhall!

The Blue Laws affected so much: one summer we had a dance marathon in the basement of the Stahl Theater. This marathon lasted several days—often these marathons lasted more than a week—and, when Sunday came, everyone just went to the Monongahela River and they got on a riverboat and they danced on the riverboat on Sunday. When Sunday passed, everyone went back to the Stahl.

The theaters were closed because you couldn't show or watch any movies. There was no opportunity to see Elmo Lincoln, Tom Mix, Wallace Beery, Jack Holt—any of those stars.

When I was growing up, the theaters in Munhall had no toilets. Back then the films were silent films and, when the piano player came in—usually late in the afternoon—as the piano player played,

he tinkled out the score;
and some of the youngsters
tinkled on the floor!

bc: You're kidding!?

LA: Oh no; not at all.

bc: You did four years at Pitt....

LA: Well, actually it took me seven years to complete a four-year course because I had to work in the meantime while I was going. That was during the...

bc: ...Depression...

LA: That's right; you hit it right on the nose. That was during the Depression.

bc: How did your family deal with the Depression? You had a relatively big family.

LA: Well, by that time, some of them were already grown up and they were on their own. [My family] did the best they could—like everybody else; they managed to squeak through. Like everybody else...but better than some people. Getting a job was a difficult thing. I got out of high school in 1931—the jobs were extremely scarce. But, everyone did what he could.

bc: What kind of odd jobs did you do when you were going to Pitt? and during the Depression?

LA: Well, I worked with my Dad at his store; but I had a little period when there weren't any jobs available so, at the age of 17 or 18, I became a Fuller Brush man.

bc: Really and truly?

LA: Really and truly, I was a Fuller Brush man. I was not the kind of Fuller Brush man that Lucille Ball was. [We both chuckle.] But I was a Fuller Brush man. I did very well in getting orders. But, when I went to deliver the orders, they didn't have the money to pay me so those sales didn't mean anything. Well, because of that I had to drop out.

bc: I'm curious about your salesmanship. Did your customers already know what they wanted or did you lay out your wares...?

LA: In those days it was not uncommon for many people to go from house to house. So usually, if I were to go into a territory, I would go there late in the afternoon previous and leave a little note and a little brush as a gift with a note that I would be there the following day. In those days, salesmen such as I and others were accepted much more readily [than a door-to-door salesman would be today] and very very seldom did I have a problem getting into someone's home. Very seldom. I got in and I showed them what [I was selling] and I took orders. I didn't get orders everywhere I went, but when you took an order, you had to get the merchandise and then deliver it and they had to pay you for it. Well, when you came around to deliver the merchandise and get the money, a lot of them didn't have the money. So the sales went to naught. That [pattern] became too frequent and I quit. Yes, I was a Fuller Brush man at a very young age.

bc: What kind of skills did you pick up doing that?

LA: The only "skill" would be that you're willing to accept the fact that: you knock on somebody's door and people say "Hello" and you say "Hello" and you talk to them and they wouldn't let you in.... To talk to a stranger became less and less strange and became more of a normal thing to do. Let's say it helped me to become somewhat more sociable with people, somewhat more understanding. I went in so many different types of homes that, at the end, people were people regardless of who they were.

bc: One of the ways I know about this American institution of the Fuller Brush man is through cartoons. I think that Walt Disney did a cartoon of The Three Little Pigs where the Big Bad Wolf comes to the door disguised as the Fuller Brush man.

LA: One thing I remember as a sales gimmick—now I'm going way back quite a few years—brushes were made out of genuine bristle from wild boars in China.

That was exactly one of the sales pitches in those days. (A lot of people didn't even know what a boar was—unless I came in and I was a bore...b...o...r...e...instead of...b...o...a...r. But, they had good products and a lot of people were already aware of the name "Fuller" and that's one of the things that made it easier to be accepted.

bc: The company had a reputation.

LA: That's right, the company had a reputation and it was a good reputation.

bc: So you worked as a metallurgist for three years. Where was that?

LA: I was working in the steel works at Homestead, Homestead and Munhall. They made all types of steel. They did not make specialty steels or tool steels at Homestead. They made basic steel plate and armor for ships and many many other things of which I am not aware.... When I was there, the largest batches that they had were the hundred tons. At the time that I left, they built another open hearth plant and the batches of steel that were produced were much larger. Anyhow, the place is closed now.

bc: Were you at all saddened by the disappearance of steel from our local economy?

LA: Not from a personal point of view, but strictly from a national and economic point of view and especially for this area, yes. It's not that I personally missed it. I was not "attached" to it. Although I could very well have gone back when I came out of the Army—just fit right back in. As I said before, I feel I could have gone anywhere and worked. Yes, I felt that the general Pittsburgh area had lost a lot because, when [the steel mills] closed, they closed all over the area and there's only very few of them [the mills] that are still operating.

bc: You said you were in the Reserves. Was it then what it's like today?

LA: Primarily in the Reserves I went to camp in the summertime. I looked forward to it. I enjoyed being part of the Reserves. Although today somebody would think I was crazy for feeling that way about it. As a matter of fact, I stayed in the Reserves about four years after I left the Army and I would have stayed in longer except that the family had been urging me to drop out because I already had a family with three children.... So I eventually dropped out.

bc: You were drafted.

LA: No, the word "drafted" would not be proper in this instance. I was merely called to active duty because I was already in the Reserves. I was stateside for two years and then I went to India. When I was in India, I saw no action. I took this attitude: I went where they sent me and I went when they sent me; I asked for no favors. I left it strictly up to the Army and the orders that I had and that was it.

bc: There was no action in India, or am I wrong?

LA: Not in India *per se*. But, when I got into Calcutta, they still had blimps, way up in the air, with nets, [barrage balloons], just in case any Japanese planes came over. I was in India approximately a year-and-a-half. I left India on New Year's Eve [in 1945]. I got leave only one time and that was after the War was over with Germany. I got leave and I went up in the Himalayas up to Darjeeling. I was supposed to have two weeks leave and, about after a week, I got a telegram to come back because my unit was leaving India and going into China. So, by the

time I got back, they had already gone into China and other orders had been issued and, based on those orders, I remained in India. So I was in India the entire time: although I did also get into the province of Assam—that's the most Eastern province of India. I was under American command but the British were still in control of India.

[One other story about my time in India is something that, I guess, you could call the tale of “the incarcerated cows”: it was the end of 1945 and the War with Japan was over. Americans in China were going home through India. Salua airbase, initially used for B-29s, was about 90 miles from Calcutta. Prior to returning home, men were being billeted at one of the recently abandoned/closed bases. Cows were allowed to wander onto these bases. The entire base was a veritable dumping ground for dung, so men with officers were sent to clean up. But, once cleaned up, the cows kept coming back and “doing their business” all over again. The cowherds were warned to keep the cows away, but, as it continued, the cows were impounded and put in the stockade, stayed there for several days and then finally released because the arriving soldiers were sufficient to keep the base clear of cows.]

bc: Before we got started with the interview, you mentioned being in Mexico. What were you doing in Mexico during the Depression [1938]?

LA: I belong to a honorary fraternity and they had a convention down in Austin and that was for one fellow to go and they gave him money [to go and come back]. The way we worked it—he got the money and a friend of mine had a car. (In those days having a car was something.) So five of us drove down to Austin, Texas. Well, this fellow was a delegate; he and another fellow stayed there in Austin. In those days you didn't travel so far...we figured we didn't want to stay here [in Austin]...we were so far away from home, we got back in the car and went all the way down to the Southern tip of Texas to Brownsville. Across the Rio Grande in Mexico was Matamoros. That's where I was over New Year's 1937-1938. To us, in those days—young men just about to graduate from Pitt—that was a very adventurous trip.

bc: Mexico must have been incredible back then.

LA: Well, the only thing we saw was the town of Matamoros. We had a good time just walking around, just looking around. None of us knew any Spanish. We saw this one place and we read it based on our knowledge of how you read English—“juzgado.” In Spanish, that was not “juzgado;” that was “hoosegow.” That was the jail. (A lot of the prisoners were sitting outside.)

I went in in 1942. I got out of the Service in April of 1946. That's when I was officially “separated”—I didn't say “discharged,” I said “separated.”

bc: And when you came back, did you have work?

LA: Well, as I said, I went into this business—providing syrups and toppings and paper products and many other items. [We were headquartered here in Pittsburgh.]

bc: Did you service big ice cream companies like Reinhold's?

LA: Mostly the smaller ones and medium-sized ones. We mostly sold [to] these soft ice cream stands, like Dairy Queen and Tastee Freeze. They were just opening up by the dozens every year. They were just opening up all over. [Back] then every drugstore you went into had a soda fountain—every drugstore, every restaurant, every snack bar, and the ice cream manufacturers. So we had quite a few people to whom we could sell.

I was putting in so many hours I finally said to myself, What am I doing here? All I'm doing is working. So, I started to make a change for myself. I would look in the newspaper and I would see that there's some lecture going on and I would go to the lecture—no matter what it was. After a few of those, there were the travelogues [at Carnegie Music Hall]. After the travelogues [ended for the season], I wondered, What else can I do? I just felt I had to do something besides working. I saw an ad for the Dale Carnegie course [How to Win Friends and Influence People]. People don't realize that that was an excellent course. It was excellent. So, I took the course [of] about 15 sessions. I followed that up with the Advanced Course. I was very well pleased with what I learned there, very well pleased. There's so much that I've learned. So much. It would be difficult to explain it. After that, I'm [still] wondering, What else am I going to do?

I was looking in the newspapers and I happened to see an advertisement—“Dewey Deavers Teaches Hypnosis.” So I looked at the paper and looked at the paper and I called him up. He invited me to come down. He gave me a few demonstrations. So I took his class on hypnosis. When I was through with that, I took the Advanced Course. I had a few shows here and there.

bc: What kind of a show did you do and where?

LA: One particular show that I had was a high school group which was graduating from high school and then another one was at some kind of a social club. I put on about four or five shows—that's all. But then here and there I gave a few talks on hypnosis just to discuss it. I thought the talks that I gave were fairly good. So I got through with that and I'm [still] wondering, What am I going to do now? I looked in the newspaper again and I went back to Pitt and I picked up some catalogs to see what they had that could fit in with the way that I worked. By that time I was interested in languages and figured maybe I should learn a little Philosophy, a little Psychology. Anything at all—didn't make any difference. I knew that whatever I would take I would enjoy it. That's the way I felt about it. So, I started with Psychology and I stuck with it: I got a major in Psychology. Then they told me that, if I wanted to keep on going, I'd have to enter Graduate School. So I took the exam and I went to the Graduate School in Education. When I got through there, I had my choice: either write a thesis and get a Master's Degree in Science or don't write a thesis and just take some courses in Education and get a Master's Degree in Education. So I took that 'cause I didn't have any time to start doing research [and] so I got a Master's Degree in Education. I went through the whole gamut. In addition to that I still did a lot of reading. They asked me if I wanted to do a little teaching. I taught for about three semesters at night—one course—and I could have done more, but one thing I've always wanted to do was to travel, but I couldn't do both. So, I quit the teaching and I went into traveling.

That, to me, was one of the greatest things I ever did. I traveled all over the world. I missed a couple of things, of course, but I've been to places and I've seen things—and I go to places where you don't usually find tourists. I very seldom took a tour; I would go on my own. And, when I would go somewhere, they would have something for tourists because [you couldn't go to some places without being part of a tour. But, most of the time, I was on my own] with one exception, in 1981, when I went to China. I couldn't go to China on my own; I had to take a tour. But, as it worked out, the tour was wonderful. I was on the Great Wall of China. I was up in the Andes Mountains a number of times. I was up in the Himalayan Mountains. Out on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro. Out on the slopes of Mount Fuji. I was in the geographical center of Australia. I was all over the place. And here's a place I went: [people thought of it as a mythical city like Shangri-La]. But it isn't. I actually got into Timbuktu. It's remote and inaccessible. [I suppose the sensible question is] What in the world do you want to go there for anyhow?! [LA laughs.] That's the reason I wanted to go! That's why I went!

bc: What did you find in Timbuktu?

LA: What I found—I found myself in the craziest place in the world. The place wasn't crazy—don't misunderstand me. I found myself in a remote and inaccessible place and they even had a plaque up there that, supposedly, [commemorated the last Americans to visit], from 1926, a couple of Americans were there. Timbuktu...Timbuktu.... It was alright. It was okay. When I got there, their generators had broken down; they had no electricity; they had no lights; they had no refrigeration; they had no pumps to pump water. So, I got there “at the right time.” I stayed there only the one night; I wanted to stay another night, but they wouldn't let me because the one airplane they had that might do the job, was leaving the following day and you had to get on that plane. Anyhow, I was in Timbuktu for one night. I thought I was never going to get back. In Timbuktu there was a hotel, but it was more like a motel without any automobiles. It was seven rooms. There was no such thing as a private bath. There were seven rooms; on one side was the restaurant (supposedly the restaurant) and the administration [building]. At the other end were the toilet rooms. The rooms were long and narrow with high ceilings—that's [so] it wouldn't be too stifling. All the rooms had was sort of a skylight way up high and no windows. It so happened [that] I was the only one there. But, before that, there were people there and I heard something [that sounded] like tom-toms. I asked someone where the tom-toms were. So someone took me down into the central part of town—such as it was. [It turned out that] a couple of Arabs had gotten married and they were having a little celebration. But, there was no electricity and they had some kind of lamps with a yellow glow, and they were just playing the tom-toms. There was a whole crowd of people and they were walking along and I got mixed in with the crowd. And, with the tom-toms going, it had sort of a hypnotic effect where you get into rhythm with the tom-tom and you get into rhythm with all the people and I started just sort of stepping the way they were. And, while I'm there, a few teenagers came over. They were Arabs. There were Black people in the area, Tuaregs and Songhays, and there were Bedouins. [The teenagers came over] and

they started talking to me. (Of course I knew what they wanted to know.) I said, *Je suis Americain*. (I had spent about \$125 learning French before I went.) When I told them I was an American—and this was in 1979—remember, 1979!—28 years ago! Hey! We're so happy to meet an American! (Not like today.) They shook hands with me; they all wanted to shake hands with an American! [LA laughs.] I couldn't talk to them; I just smiled. In a way, it was pleasant. So, the fellow took me back [we] walked back through narrow lanes to this so-called hotel/motel.... There was nobody there...nobody...zilch. Just on the edge of the town and [he left me there.] That's where he left me and there I am—all alone, on the edge [of town]. No lights, no electricity. No nothing. No people. The only light came from a sliver of a moon. There were not even any stars. (While I'm talking to you, I'm visualizing it.) So I went in and I looked around thinking, What the did I get myself into? There was a bunk, some kind of a robe, and a stool. The room was dark. (Before I went to Timbuktu though, I took two bottles of water—I bought them in Bamako, the capital city. Two bottles of water. And, man, I don't know why I thought of it, but was I glad I had that water to drink! Evian water. And, along with that I had some Hershey miniatures and some crackers. Somehow—based on my previous experiences, I figured I had better take something with me because how do I know what I'm going to find in Timbuktu?) [So, there I am all alone and] I didn't get completely undressed; I'm just lying propped up in bed. And, again I'm thinking, what am I doing here? What did I get into? Here I am—all alone—[there's] nobody around—[when] all of a sudden I see a flash of light outside. So, I got up and I looked outside and I saw a [shadowy figure] with a flashlight. I didn't know who he was and I sort of indicated to him to scram. When he left, I went back in [my room] and I'm thinking, What do I do now? Well, the first thing I did: there was some kind of a dresser in there and I pushed it up against the door and put the mattress on it so that if he came in, I could hear the noise. Then, afterwards, I thought, No, I'm locking myself in.

(Let me tell you what entered my mind: two things entered my mind: number one was I've always heard [that] the best defense is an offense. Keep that in mind. Number two: when I was a kid, over in Munhall, when you went to the movies, there was always "cowboys and Indians." And, in a couple of those movies, the concept came up that the Indians believed [that], if they saw a white man, that he was crazy. If he looked like he was crazy, leave him alone 'cause, if he's crazy, he's embedded with evil spirits. These spirits enter his body; he's dangerous; get away from him. And that was in my mind.)

So, I knocked everything down—I figured there's no use staying in here, stuck. I put my clothes back on. [I figured the best defense is a good offense and also, if I look a little crazy—maybe these people will have the same idea.] So, I picked up the stool and I held onto that stool like that was the world's only weapon and I walked outside. [LA laughs.] I walked outside to meet my enemy, whoever he was. I walked sideways with my back towards the wall. (I didn't see anybody.) And then there was like an "L"-shaped [area outside the hotel], and I'm walking sideways, holding onto that stool, looking around, this way, that way; and, finally, I came to the administration building. [There's a screen door and I open it.] I

didn't see anybody there, but, all the time, you know, my heart was pounding, and I had that stool...I'm holding that stool. And I'm wondering, Who I'm going to run across? What I'm going to run across? I had no idea. And I just hollered in there, Anybody here? (Not that anybody could understand English, but I hollered.) And sure enough a voice came back and [LA smacks his hands together] right then I realized, That's the guy with the [flashlight] and he's a guard. He was a guard. He was no enemy. But all this didn't happen as fast as I'm tellin' you—it was slow and dragged out somewhat.... So, I waved like this to him, [beckoning him]; and he followed me and he came to my room and he saw that I had the mattress there—it was so stifling hot inside—and he picked up the mattress and he took it outside and put it out on the patio. And he took a couple of sheets; he put one sheet over the mattress; he put the other sheet on just like you do in a hotel; he put the pillow on just so; he had a cover there and he turned it just like in a hotel. And he “said,” Here you are, sir. (He didn't say it, but he sort of implied it.) So that I could go to sleep. You can't believe the way I felt. I couldn't believe what I saw this guy doing—he was doing it like this was his profession or something! And this was the guy that I thought was out to get me! So what do you do? I'm standing there and I had some cigarettes. I offered him a cigarette; he took a cigarette. I took one. I spoke to him in English, which he didn't understand. And he spoke to me in Arabic (I presume), which I didn't understand. But it didn't make any difference whether we understood each other or not: the tone of voices indicated we were friendly. [LA chuckles.] Anyhow, I laid down outside [and slept]. [When I got back to Bamako, the capital of Mali,] and I told that [story] to a friend whom I had made there, he said that fellow must have been trained by the French and he had to be a Tuareg. He said they taught the Tuaregs how to do that and not the Songhays or other Black people. So I'm laying there under the sliver of a silvery moon. (Sounds like a song.) In Timbuktu.

[Timbuktu—where briefly] I became the Pied Piper of Hamelin, as it were.

Bc: How so?

LA: I'll tell you how so. [Once again we're] in Timbuktu, but this is when everyone was around in that so-called plaza or marketplace; and I had a Polaroid camera. And I was taking pictures and, not only was I taking pictures, I would give them to people. At that time I had a lot of film. I was taking pictures of this one and that one. They were overjoyed—especially the young people—and they started to follow me. I had the camera and I'm walking out and they're all following me; and I thought of the Pied Piper of Hamelin with his flute, or his pipe—[when those children in the story were following him.] I'm thinking, I'm the new...I am the new, the veritable Pied Piper...the Pied Piper of Timbuktu.... That's what entered my mind at the time...at the time that I was walking around and all these people—mostly kids—but some of them were older.... They had never seen anything like that apparently. They were walking around and following me.

bc: During a good portion of the time that you were actively traveling, the world was a “safer” place.

LA: I wouldn't go to some of those places [today] I went to [then]. I went to Turkey. Of course, Turkey isn't any problem. I went to Malaysia—Kuala Lumpur [the capital]. I never really ran into problems. Wherever I went, I was treated very very nicely...generally...no matter where I went. I stayed at the home of a couple in the Andes Mountains: I couldn't get a hotel room; it was a holiday; and it was a resort area. I stayed there about two or three nights, and, when I left, the woman said to her husband—she didn't speak English—and he said to me when I was leaving, [My wife] said it's a pity you have to leave so soon. (I got along very well with people no matter where I went.)

If I had to pick maybe the most exciting day of all my travels—it's hard to do this—but there's a place known as Ngoro Goro. It's not too far from the Serengetti. Ngoro Goro is a caldera. It's about 100 square miles. It had an ecology all of its own. The walls were still steep and when you're looking in there and you travel in there, you can't believe what you see: hundreds and hundreds of gnus, giraffes, lions, hippopotamuses.... There were some animals that were not there, of course. [But] there were crocodiles, elephants.... And you go into some areas and you get out [of your vehicle] and you stand around—[it's so thick with animals], you can't believe that you're there. And we were among the lions but, with the lions I didn't get out of the car, of course.... I rented a car with a guide. (It turned out that the guide drove the car, but [in effect] I was the guide; he wasn't; he knew nothing [or] let's say he didn't know enough.) We were in the Serengetti and, the first day we got there, he and I decided on our own to go traveling around and see if we could see lions. So, we did a lot of driving and, where we went, there were no lions, but we kept on goin' and goin'. And, finally, we came to a stream that we couldn't cross. When we decided to go back, we didn't know where we were. Coming in there we had a map. When we'd left the "general headquarters" of the Serengetti, I remembered from the map [that] we'd gone south a little bit. And then, after having gone south, we made a left turn. There was an air strip. From there we kept on goin' and goin' and goin'. [We didn't have a compass; so we retraced our steps relying on the sun.] And all the time we were going, I'm thinking to myself, How much gas have we got left? Fortunately we had enough gas. We came to a place where there was a herd of giraffes and the whole herd was off to the right. But there were four giraffes—and we assumed they were males—very very tall [and] in a line right where we were coming and the sun was behind them. That scene itself was priceless. They undoubtedly were doing what they could do to defend the herd. Finally I happened to see something that looked like a shed—I didn't know what it was. [And, after a lot of driving,] we got to the shed and, right next to the shed, was an airplane! Talk about being a "pilot"—I was A#1! So, we got back on the highway and went back to the area where we were staying overnight in some tents. The next day we went out where there were lions. Only the two of us. (That was 1970.) At that time Toyotas were small—we were in a Toyota. We came across a whole pride of lions: big ones, little ones, medium ones. We knew this—sit in the car and mind your own business. Don't get out of the car! But, [as it is], the lions ignore you. Finally I said, Let's get out of here. The following morning, I opened

up the flap of the tent and I looked out and, in the distance, there were seven Thomson's Gazelles. What a beautiful sight!

[I have visited Brazil. I've seen the Bayeux Tapestry in Normandy, France. I've been to the home of the Baha'i Faith in Haifa, Israel. I visited a Synagogue in Nairobi, Kenya, but it was closed. I've been to Masada and to King Solomon's Mines. In Spain I've been to the Synagogue of Toledo, to the Alhambra, and to the Museo del Prado in Madrid.]

bc: Are any of these artifacts around your apartment from your trips?

LA: Oh absolutely. Do you see that Buddha over there? I bought that in Macau. It so happens [that] I was in Hong Kong and I took a tour to Macau. (At that time Macau was still under the Portuguese.) The reason a lot of people went to Macau was [that] at that time China was "closed." So, merely to go to Macau and look over and see China was, in itself, an event. You saw China; you couldn't get in. Like everywhere else they had people selling stuff [in Macau and this one fellow had that Buddha.] So they had these Chinese fellows selling stuff. I looked at [the Buddha statue] and they give you a price. (You're already indoctrinated with the idea that you don't buy anything at their first price because, if you do, you disappoint them.) You have to give them a friendly argument. So I started off at \$100 and, when I say a "dollar," over there the dollar was not an American dollar; it had a different value. [I made him an offer and we went back and forth; and we were having a good time—we were smiling, we were laughing.]

And finally I said to him, to this Chinese fellow,

I'll tell you what I'll do:

I took out a coin. (He understood English.)

[I said, I'm going to toss the coin and whoever wins—either I'll pay the 100 or I'll get it for nothing.

I said, Okay?

He said, Okay.

And I said, Here's how we're going to work it: 'Heads I win; tails you lose.' Okay?

He says, Okay.

bc: You didn't pull that on him, did you?

LA: Wait a minute, [LA laughs.] Let me tell you the story.

Sure enough it came up heads.

I said, I win!

He looks at it; he looks at it; he looks at it. He thinks; he thinks.

He said, Do it again.

I toss the coin again.

I said, You lose!

He thinks for a while, then he starts to howl and laugh.

Finally he caught on to the trick.

He called all his friends over. He called all the guys over.

He took the coin; he told them exactly what happened.

And, of course, they all thought it was funny.

And they all laughed and we all had a good time.

Anyhow, we [agreed on] a price and I bought it.

bc: That's an old joke, like an old Abbott and Costello routine.

LA: That's right. It's old to us, but it was new to him. And I guarantee you he's probably used it 20,000 times since then.

Listen, you have no idea how many places I went to and people were laughing and we shook hands and they were glad to meet me. I kibitzed around with all of them. I enjoyed it and they enjoyed it.

bc: You've obviously been everywhere—or almost everywhere.

LA: Well, quite a few places.... I've been to Ayers Rock and Alice Springs in Australia. I've even been—it was 1984—to a Dairy Queen in Kotzebue, Alaska!

bc: And you always come back here. So, let me ask you, In your lifetime how have Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania changed?

LA: First of all, the changes have been so gradual, I didn't particularly give it great notice...but naturally I was living here.... After World War II there were dramatic changes occurred Downtown. Let's say I am "Pittsburgh proud." I am proud of anything that Pittsburgh does. I like to see Pittsburgh progress. I like to see them make changes. And, as they made the changes, it's all been done gradually. And I'm very happy to see it. Even little things I notice quite a bit.

The steel mills they really employed a lot of people. Since the steel mills went down, there have been other large international corporations that have left the Pittsburgh area. And I think the Aluminum Company of America [Alcoa] is about to do the same. Westinghouse is really here no longer. Many of them have gone.

bc: If you were in your twenties today, would you want to start a business here in town?

LA: I can't answer that because when you say "start a business," there are so many different businesses.... I wouldn't be in a position to say "yes" or "no" because I would have to stop to think of what all there is and what all the potentials are. But, the potentials here are less than they are in many many other cities in the country. That's the only thing I could tell you. Whether or not I would start here or not, it all depends on what I have in mind or what I want to do.

There was a sad cartoon in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* within the last few days by Rob Rogers. It showed the skyscrapers in downtown Pittsburgh and showed the windows in a lot of the buildings and here there was light on and here there was a light on; most of the windows are dark. And the caption was: "Will the last person out please turn out the lights." He's referring to the fact that Pittsburgh is still losing population. That was in the paper recently. When I saw that, it did leave a sad feeling.

bc: Do you think that computers and medical technology are our salvation, locally?

LA: I would say we're doing very well at it. I don't know about "our salvation" although the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center has certainly become quite a factor in the country, a tremendous factor.... [All these advances in technology] are certainly a plus for the city of Pittsburgh. I remember, [once], wherever you went, you had factories—factories that people don't even know about [today]—

not only in the city of Pittsburgh, but in all the suburbs. There were factories here where they refined metals that people never heard of—molybdenum, for one. And many many other things. Pittsburgh used to be a center for glass, at one time, and aluminum. And, of course, steel, iron, coal. As a matter of fact, at one time, in its own way, Pittsburgh was known for cork.

bc: You've got some really neat things here; you really do. You have an eye for collecting.

LA: Let me tell you one story. The epitome of foolish modesty. I happened to be in Turkey. I was looking in a shop and there were all kind of gadgets in there—primarily all kind of smoking pipes: everything made from meerschaum. So, I went inside and I bought four little things. I think they cost me either \$16 or \$18 each. And the [shop owner] said to me, Let me take your picture; I'll make one of those with your face on it for \$40. (You know I went all the way over to Turkey so it had to cost a lot of money to go there—hotels and ships and planes and everything.) I thought it would look foolish to come home with my face on there. But that [attitude] was absolutely asinine. I should have had it done: for \$40 that would have been the world's biggest bargain. That would have been one of the greatest conversation pieces.

[I'm a believer that "when in Rome, do like the Romans do." When I visited Spain, I took buses and a train to France to Lourdes, stayed overnight, and carried a candle just like all the other "pilgrims." It was drizzling a little bit, but there was a shield to protect the candles and I walked to the grotto. You see, when I travel, I believe I'm a guest in someone else's country and I behave that way. I shaved every day and I dressed properly. I felt I was an emissary of the United States.]

bc: [In measured tones, LA brings our interview to a conclusion, reflecting on the mystery inherent in his wanderlust.]

LA: In September 1973, after having visited Bangkok, Malaysia, and Singapore, I wound up in Hong Kong.

I stayed in Kaloon and then went on to Hong Kong island and from there to Aberdeen.

Walking around I saw a dock with a small ferry boat, not new, with a canvas top going...where? What would be wrong if I got on and I didn't know when I'd be getting back?

The boat pulled me and pulled me.

The people looked at me and smiled.

Unfortunately, it was a very short trip and everyone got off.

So here I was.

Where?

There were many chandler shops for ships.
I walked around looking at junks.

A Chinese, caulking, called me over in Chinese. We smoked cigarettes. Neither of us spoke the other's language. Neither of us understood what the other was saying.

Finally, I decided it was time to go back.
The ferry boat came and took me back to Aberdeen.

Am I crazy? Or am I just a nut coming out of his shell? If so, well and good....