LEONARD ASIANO

An Oral History Interview
Conducted by Stella Perone in 2012
In this oral history, Leonard Asiano recalls Homestead Grocery in the 1950s, one of the last neighborhood grocery stores in Mill Valley. Born in 1928 in Cleveland, Ohio, Leonard’s family moved out to Mill Valley in 1949, and his father, Joseph Asiano, immediately purchased Homestead Grocery at 15 Linden Lane, which provided living quarters and rental income for the family in addition to retail income from the store. Leonard worked at the store while studying at the University of San Francisco in the early 1950s, and in this oral history he recalls several customers and neighborhood characters from that period. Leonard also discusses his father’s quasi-professional music career as the founding tuba player of the Marin Symphony in 1952, which initially held its rehearsals in the auditorium at Tamalpais High School. Throughout his oral history Leonard nostalgically evokes the authentic small town character of Mill Valley at mid-century, all the more remarkable for its close proximity to San Francisco.
Oral History of Leonard Asiano

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Oral History of Leonard Asiano
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Please note: This transcript has been reviewed by Leonard Asiano, who made minor corrections and clarifications.

Stella Perone: Hey Leonard! So, when did your parents come to Mill Valley?

Leonard Asiano: My dad came here in February 1949. He was looking for a business to buy and stayed with my aunt and uncle who lived in Belvedere, and sister and brother-in-law. He was looking for various mercantile enterprises like a liquor store, grocery store, any kind of a business to buy. After two months of looking, he found the grocery store on 15 Linden Lane, Homestead Grocery. It is on Linden Lane between Evergreen and Montford.

Stella Perone: So it was an ongoing business?

Leonard Asiano: It had been at that location since the middle ’30s. This was in 1949. So it really was a neighborhood grocery store because it was in the neighborhood, and not in the shopping center or shopping area. So he had a liquor license to sell wine and beer. He had shelf groceries, produce, some meat. It wasn’t large; it was about the size of your — comparable to half of a 7-11 we have these days.

Stella Perone: Okay. Hey, Leonard, backtracking a bit, what was your father’s name?

Leonard Asiano: Joseph Asiano. My mother was Angela.

Stella Perone: Okay. Do you know who he bought the business from?

Leonard Asiano: He bought it from John Gates.

Stella Perone: Okay.

Leonard Asiano: He was in litigation with a person he bought it from and they were still fighting over it. He had only had it for about six months, and they were making an agreement to settle, and my dad came in and took them all off the hook. He finally bought the business from John Gates, and there were other matters that came forward, some unpaid creditors, which they finally straightened out, everyone went home happy on it. Anyway, my dad and mother had the store open six days a week and they open Sunday morning like from 10 to 12. They made some changes in the layout of the store, but it seemed that everybody in the neighborhood came to Homestead Grocery. As I say, literally, it was a neighborhood grocery store.

Stella Perone: Do you know how much he paid for the store, is that personal?
Leonard Asiano: He bought everything in one large package. He paid, let’s see, he paid $20,000 for the building. The building had an apartment upstairs, living in it alongside, and a separate apartment in the back, a separate building in the back yard. This is a two-unit apartment, three-unit actually, and the store. Johnny Cooper, one of the former owners who did a lot of work on it, he did a lot of modernizing. The store was — it went on for about 10 years after, maybe about 15 years after my dad and mother bought it. Neighborhood grocery stores were going out of style, and many around didn’t survive. So he paid $20,000 for the building, he paid $9,000 for the store plus the inventory. So it was a lot — $30,000 was a lot of money in those days. You could buy a house in Homestead Valley for $5,000, $7,500. So he took the challenge and made go of it. He got real active in the community because, you know, he joined the Homestead Valley Improvement Club. My dad joined the volunteer fire department, if you can imagine that. Your grandfather a fireman?

Stella Perone: Leonard, how old were you when they bought the store?


Stella Perone: Okay. Where did they live?

Leonard Asiano: We came from Cleveland, Ohio.

Stella Perone: Did your dad own a similar business there?

Leonard Asiano: He owned a macaroni factory back in Cleveland, Ohio with two other Italian gentleman. He had a liquor store before that and various other businesses. So he was experienced in running all other types of business. The macaroni factory — he made enough that he could sell everything out and move to California, which he did.

Stella Perone: Did they live in one of the units on the property?

Leonard Asiano: Yeah, they lived in the unit alongside the store. If you look at the building now, the store is on the left and on the right there is a smaller rental with a gabled roof; that is where they lived. They had two bedrooms, one bath, a living room and a kitchen. It was right there, convenient.

Stella Perone: Yeah. Okay, you were 21. What were you doing at the time that they bought that property?

Leonard Asiano: I was admitted as a sophomore to the University of San Francisco.

Stella Perone: I’m sorry, you were what?

Leonard Asiano: I was admitted as a sophomore to the University of San Francisco. I had gone to John Carroll University in Cleveland for a year, did my freshman year there and then transferred out to USF and I finished up there in three years.
**Stella Perone:** Where did you live at the time they bought the store?

**Leonard Asiano:** I lived in the living unit alongside the store where my mother and dad lived. There were two bedrooms there; I had one and they had the master bedroom.

**Stella Perone:** So you lived in the same place?

**Leonard Asiano:** I lived in the same place, yes. I worked in the store, I helped. I painted the building. My dad wasn’t very handy, and he said, “This building needs painting,” which means I am going to paint it. So my cousin Colonel is out here, my cousin from Cleveland, he was about 16. We were painting the building, literally. We didn’t know what to do but we had ladders and scaffolding. It took us about a month to paint it, but he said we did a good job.

**Stella Perone:** Hey, Leonard, tell me more about the merchandise they sold in the store, like where they got it, the meat, where they got it.

**Leonard Asiano:** Oh, the [unintelligible] driver came in, Hostess cupcakes, all the major bread companies, bakeries. We bought from Coast Grocery, which is a grocery wholesaler. They had canned goods and fruits and vegetables and beverages and soaps and everything. It was a pretty general store. There wasn’t a lot of inventory but they had enough of the stuff that people needed every day. Some people came shopping every day because that was in the day before we really had supermarkets. In 1949, it was right after the war, things were still shorted.

**Stella Perone:** Did people have refrigerators in their homes then?

**Leonard Asiano:** Yes, they did. That is another thing. I made a lot of deliveries and delivered right into their home, right into their kitchens. People were nice, it was a family, everybody knew each other and everybody had lived there all their lives, practically. I’m trying to think of who you might have known that lived in the neighborhood. Anyway, it was quite an experience for me because I was able to gather business experience, help my dad in the store, stock up and help him, wait on customers, make deliveries.

**Stella Perone:** Hey, something you said before intrigued me. You said they were open six days a week and then you said they were open Sundays 10 to 12. Does that mean they were open six days a week regularly plus Sundays 10 to 12?

**Leonard Asiano:** A regular six days a week, plus Sundays.

**Stella Perone:** Okay, got it.

**Leonard Asiano:** Sundays was like a milk day, run out and get a quart of milk for breakfast.
Stella Perone: Go ahead. So why did your father come out here to Marin?

Leonard Asiano: My father’s sister, Dolores Mantegani, who is married to Peter Mantegani in Tiburon, and they knew a lot of people out here and knew there were a lot of businesses. Peter was very helpful finding him businesses to buy because he knew a lot of people and he knew people that wanted to sell their businesses. So they were really helpful and they were instrumental in finding Homestead Grocery. So when he bought Homestead Grocery, Pete helped him out in the inventory and the stocking of the store. He had worked at his father’s grocery store, Mantegani’s Corner Market. He had been working there since he was a boy. As I said, the Manteganis were very helpful in helping my dad get started, get settled, and gave him good advice on what to buy.

Stella Perone: Where did the Manteganis live?

Leonard Asiano: In Tiburon.

Stella Perone: Where?

Leonard Asiano: Oh, they live on the road going out from Tiburon, I can’t remember the name of it. Their store was on Main Street in Tiburon and they lived out — going out of town by about half a mile on the right side, I can’t remember the name of the street.

Stella Perone: How long did it take your dad to find the business when he came out here?

Leonard Asiano: It took him three months.

Stella Perone: Three months.

Leonard Asiano: He made a deal June 1st. He had been out here since March.

Stella Perone: That is 1949.

Leonard Asiano: 1949, yes.

Stella Perone: Okay. When did your mom come out?

Leonard Asiano: We had to sell the house in Cleveland, move all the furniture out, and move everything out. She came out June 17th, 1949. I came out about two weeks before that so I could help my dad with the store and getting everything ready and getting everything restocked.

Stella Perone: Okay. Who was your Aunt Rose?
Leonard Asiano: My Aunt Rose was my dad’s sister. She lived in San Francisco with her husband who sailed for the US Military Sea Transport Service. They moved out to a house on 17 Ethel Avenue, which is right off of Throckmorton going up toward the library. So they bought a place there after my dad bought his place. So they were more close to the family. My dad’s two sisters were out here, my aunts. They were real helpful, helped us get settled, gave us good advice about moving and about California living and the way people do things here, which is quite different in some ways than we experienced than when we lived in Cleveland Ohio, believe me. People are very progressive out here. Cleveland is still stuck back in the Middle Ages.

Stella Perone: Leonard, can you tell me more about the other two units in your store? The store had three units, can you tell me more about the other two?

Leonard Asiano: Yeah, the store’s main building had the unit alongside, which is two bedrooms, two bathrooms, and a living room and a large-sized master kitchen. Then there was a unit upstairs, which is a one bedroom, one bath. There was a separate building in the back, which is one unit, which is just a one bedroom, one bath, no kitchen. It was like a sleeping room. That was rented to a gal named — I can’t remember her name. Anyway, she was there when we bought the place and she stayed as long as we had the place. And then the upstairs was rented to Bill Greerbill who was one of the owners of the 2am Club which was still functioning; it was a pretty busy place, the 2am Club. This is right after the war. I think it had been there since the war, or before; it’s still there, so you have an idea of what business they’ve done. It’s like a neighborhood hangout.

Stella Perone: Any idea what you rented those units for?

Leonard Asiano: The separate unit outside was $35 a month. I think we got $50 to $60 for the upper unit; it was one bedroom, so a little more. We lived in the house, in the living quarters alongside the store. That would have rented for around $75 a month, had we rented it — a lot of money in those days.

Stella Perone: Right. Hey Leonard, the people who shopped at the store in those days, anybody that you remember who you still know, anybody that was interesting?

Leonard Asiano: Oh yeah, Ron Iavarone and Lorraine, his wife, they lived around the corner on Evergreen. Lorraine’s father, Louie Ferrari, built the Mill Valley shopping center where Whole Foods is now.

Stella Perone: Was that Whole Foods building there in 1949?

Leonard Asiano: Yeah, it was built right after the war, he called it the Mill Valley Shopping Center. It was a pretty big store, had a lot of units in there. Now he probably gets monthly rent — I don’t think they paid more than $30,000 for that building, God knows what it is renting for now, Whole Foods. But the Iavarones were — or Louie Ferrari — Lorraine’s father built that place and operated the store for a long time. They
were helpful too, they were helpful to us. And of course everybody knows Ron Iavarone; he says, “I am the garbage man here.”

**Stella Perone:** What do you remember about the neighborhood here? You know where Leanne’s house is?

**Leonard Asiano:** Yeah.

**Stella Perone:** I had heard that the guy that owned that property was combined with another lot and he had kind of a little farm there. Any comments along those lines?

**Leonard Asiano:** You know, that was the Maguires: M-A-G-U-I-R-E. Red Maguire’s family owned that corner lodge for years. His bachelor brother lived with him, single brother. They had the whole lot, which went down Linden Lane. He was kind of the neighborhood character, Red was. They used to go up country —

**Stella Perone:** I’m sorry, what?

**Leonard Asiano:** They used to go up country hunting.

**Stella Perone:** Oh, up country.

**Leonard Asiano:** They’d bring their hunting dogs down and train them on this lot, they’d run them around and have them run around and simulcast hunting — he’s kind of a character. The neighborhood, you saw the same people every day because they came down to get bread and milk. The kids would come down to get cereal because there were not that many master shopping centers in those days. I can’t remember a store around Mill Valley — well, the one that’s still there, across from the bank, they were there at the time, Mill Valley Market.

**Stella Perone:** Oh, Mill Valley Market.

**Leonard Asiano:** They were there, but it wasn’t as big as it is now.

**Stella Perone:** So Mill Valley Market, was that your basic competition?

**Leonard Asiano:** No, I guess Mill Valley Shopping Center was.

**Stella Perone:** So there was a grocery store where Whole Foods was?

**Leonard Asiano:** Yeah.

**Stella Perone:** Oh, that close to you?

**Leonard Asiano:** Yeah, he started out, Louie Ferrari built that, I think it was right after the war. It was a grocery store but it had departments, a drug department, a produce
department, and he had tenants that ran each department. So it was kind of a cooperative type thing. But they were there since the war. Lorraine can tell you more about that.

**Stella Perone:** Okay. Well, that’s interesting that they had two grocery stores basically three blocks from each other, two blocks.

**Leonard Asiano:** Well, we weren’t competition, we were just like a mom and pop corner grocery store.

**Stella Perone:** Okay. Hey Leonard, how long did your parents have that business?

**Leonard Asiano:** Eight years.

**Stella Perone:** Okay. And then what did they do?

**Leonard Asiano:** Well, they sold out the building, business, everything, and then they bought a new home in San Rafael. Then my dad bought the liquor department of a Kentfield market up in Kentfield, right by Kent Woodlands.

**Stella Perone:** Is that the current Woodlands Market?

**Leonard Asiano:** Current Woodlands Market, yeah, he had the liquor store department, it was a concession that he ran. But he had to rent from the owner of the grocery store.

**Stella Perone:** Okay. Hey Leonard, your parents sold the store after eight years. Do you remember who they sold to and did they keep operating it for how long?

**Leonard Asiano:** Yeah, I can’t remember the name of the people. It was an older couple. But they kept it for about five years after. Let’s see, ’57, yeah, they had it for about five, six years after. Then they just closed it up, and now it’s converted into a residence. The store was in front and the residence was in back — the side, sorry. So what they did is they maxed out the store and made that the living room and gave it a bigger location. Where the store was now is a living room, dining room, kitchen — so they made it into living quarters. I lost track; I didn’t see many people after that, after the people that sold the store after my dad, I didn’t see many people after that, kind of lost track.

**Stella Perone:** So Leonard, the people in the neighborhood, where did most of them work?

**Leonard Asiano:** They mostly worked in the city, like PG&E, Shell Oil, Standard Oil. They mostly took the bus in, commuted. I used to see a lot of them on the bus when I went to school in the morning.
**Stella Perone:** Did you take the bus into school also?

**Leonard Asiano:** Yes.

**Stella Perone:** What kind of bus?

**Leonard Asiano:** It was a Greyhound bus. Greyhound ran a line out of here, which they have since given over to Golden Gate Transit. It wasn’t the greatest line, but it had to do, nobody was buying cars in those days, you either walked or took the bus.

**Stella Perone:** Okay. Did you have a dog?

**Leonard Asiano:** Our dog Flip came into our house one night as a stray, literally. We were sitting around the coffee table visiting. Flip came up to the door alone, nobody with him, and he came up to the house and went to everybody and got petted and then he turned around and lay down under the coffee table and went to sleep. So Flip was our dog for the next 10 years. He literally came in and imposed himself on the family. He was real friendly; everybody loved Flip. He never barked and he was always friendly. The kids loved him too; he had a lot of hair. He was a neighborhood dog.

**Stella Perone:** Did you ever go to the 2am Club?

**Leonard Asiano:** Yes, after I was 21, of course. [laughs]

**Stella Perone:** Was that popular with your friends?

**Leonard Asiano:** It was popular. People would play a lot of — they used to play the — I can’t remember the name of the game they played.

**Stella Perone:** Pool?

**Leonard Asiano:** Yeah, they shot pool mainly; yeah, they shot pool. It was a working man’s club. They had the regulars down there who you’d see all the time. I didn’t go there that much, I’d just go in the evenings sometimes with friends. But it was a neighborhood hangout. As I said, the owner lived upstairs from us, he rented an apartment from us, so he was never around that much. He worked seven days, you know, until two in the morning. It was quite a business, a lot of people hung out there, it was their meeting place. There was other places too. The other thing open in Mill Valley at night in those days was Sequoia Theater, so you would go to the Sequoia Theater and then you get out and go down the street down Throckmorton to where La Ginestra is now and there was a place called — it was an ice cream parlor. There was a motto on the window in the front and a sign that said, “Quality is never cheap.” There was an Italian family that owned it. It was the only place that you could go after nine o’clock in Mill Valley because no bars — well, there were bars, but no restaurants to speak of. There were a couple of bars — so if you wanted to go out, you go to this place and get some
coffee and a donut, but that was the only place that was open after nine o’clock. I am trying to remember, Esposti’s was the name of the place.

Joe Asiano [Leonard’s son]: “Quality always wins.”

Leonard Asiano: “Quality always wins,” right.

Stella Perone: Was there a strong Italian community here in Mill Valley in 1949?

Leonard Asiano: There were a few, yeah, not that many. There were some, but there were a lot more Americans, as my mother called them. Mainly people that lived here, locals — you didn’t see many people that came in from Iowa or back East, there weren’t that many. Usually everybody was born and raised here, especially Marin County. It was only 12 years after the Golden Gate Bridge was built, so we were still a little isolated. We only had 70,000 people in Marin County in those days. Now you have four-lane traffic and can’t get out of Mill Valley. Where did all these people come from to Mill Valley?

Joe Asiano: Back East.

Leonard Asiano: Jesus, amazing. There were a lot of characters that came into the store. One of them, I remember, was Mrs. Thompson who lived right next door. She would come first thing into the store because she always wanted the fresh stuff, got there before everyone else. She would have a story about everyone who came in: “Watch her, she steals, she doesn’t pay for everything.” She used to gossip about everybody, didn’t have a good thing to say about anyone. She lived with her son and her daughter-in-law — I don’t think they got along too well. But she would tell stories about during the war when rationing was in and people would come they would bustle around the line to get stock before it was sold out. Then there were other people like Betty White who lived up the street. She was rather unsanitary. She would come in, you’d have to get downwind of her. But hey, she was a nice lady. She bought a bottle of wine every day, the same bottle of wine. That was all she ever bought, then she’d go home with it and drink it, and then come back the next day. But people were nice, though. They were appreciative. You got to know them pretty well. It got personal, you knew about their kids. They all thought I was going to Tam. I said no, I go to USF. “Oh, you do, oh man, that’s great.” They go, anybody that goes to college, by god. Everybody is going to Tam and that’s it. They say, “You go to Tam?” I say no, USF. So there’s a lot of that going on.

Stella Perone: Hey Leonard, a question. How many kinds of wine did you sell? Did you sell red wine and white wine?

Leonard Asiano: Yeah, red, white, mainly Napa Valley. Nothing out of the country yet, mainly California.

Stella Perone: But did you just sell one wine or did you have like 10 different kinds of wine?
Leonard Asiano: We had various kinds of wine that we were selling. Martini Rossi, Angelo Martini, and of course all Gallo — we had all kinds of wine, California wine. It sold pretty well; we had a good turnover on wine. People drank wine a lot. They still do.

Stella Perone: You made deliveries. Any special properties that you remember, whether they were really great or really weird?

Leonard Asiano: I used to go up to Tamalpais Canyon, where you’d go around where — the place where they have the meeting places with the trees, two rows going through like that.

Stella Perone: Montford and Laverne where they meet at the end, Park Drive, way back in the redwoods across from the grove? Okay, I know where you’re talking about.

Leonard Asiano: Yeah. We used to go around there. We’d have to get out of the car and then hike up halfway up the mountain to deliver this lady’s groceries. But she was infirm and old, she couldn’t get around, we’d help her out. She would tip me. A lot of people didn’t tip in those days, but she did. Nice lady. We were glad to help her out, poor thing.

Stella Perone: Do you remember her name?

Leonard Asiano: Uh, what was her name? Mrs. Thompson was next door. I think it was Betty White — oh, that was the other one.

Stella Perone: If you make deliveries, do they call up on the phone and put the orders in?

Leonard Asiano: Yeah. My dad would take the orders and I’d put the order together and make the delivery.

Stella Perone: And then he billed them every month or something?

Leonard Asiano: Yeah, or they’d pay him. Generally they’d pay. We didn’t have many open accounts, not too many. There were some, some had an open book, and they’d pay every month. It was like your country grocery store, everybody knows everyone. As I say, it got pretty personal because everybody talked to everybody and knew things and gossiped — not for better things to do. But it was a nice neighborhood. I was sorry when we had to leave, because I knew a lot of people.

Stella Perone: After that, when did you move out of the store with your parents?


Stella Perone: Okay.
Leonard Asiano: It was three years after I came out here. Then I went to New Jersey to supply school, I was there for six months. Then I went to sea on a destroyer for two years.

Joe Asiano: So that’s probably an easy transition from going to a grocery store to a supply officer, the same thing.

Leonard Asiano: That’s right, yeah. It was a good experience. It’s a good experience meeting people. You work in a grocery store or any retail, you really get to know the customers a lot, pretty heavy into that customer relationship. My dad was pretty friendly, he talked to everybody. My mother was too. So it really helped them in their business.

Stella Perone: Actually that brings up another question. Your mom worked in the store also?

Leonard Asiano: She worked too, yeah. My brother Bill got married, my dad went back to Ohio for the wedding and my mom stayed here and ran the store.

Stella Perone: You’re kidding.

Leonard Asiano: It was pretty good for her because she wasn’t really all that active. You had to memorize the prices because we didn’t have any marker or anything.

Stella Perone: Did you have little tabs on the shelves that said what the prices were?

Leonard Asiano: Yeah, but the kids usually would take them off, so you had to memorize the prices. I remember, a quart of Arden ice cream was 33 cents and Cream Freeze was 28 cents. That was the price of a quart of ice cream, which was pretty cheap in those days.

Stella Perone: Did you have little tabs on the shelves that said what the prices were?

Leonard Asiano: No credit cards. We had open accounts. If people wanted an account, we’d let them charge and they’d pay once a month or whenever we’d catch them. But mainly people paid in cash. One guy used to come in and go in the back and pick out his own box, he’d come fill it in, come to the counter, help himself, and pay and leave. So everybody had their own thing. “You know, Joe, I’ve been coming here for 20 years, seen a lot of owners.” Everybody tells stories about everything that happened. Anyway, it was truly a small town feeling and yet we were 10 minutes away from San Francisco — the part I liked about it.

Stella Perone: So Leonard, tell us about your dad.

Leonard Asiano: My dad, as you know, was a grocer at Homestead Grocery. He had been a musician all his life. From the time he was raised as a boy in Italy he played the trumpet in a band. Every little town had a band and they would take them all over and
play concerts and play some functions. So he was a musician all his life and never stopped playing. He started playing the trumpet, but he ended up playing the B-flat tuba. One of our neighbors, Gene Maguire, M-A-G-U-I-R-E, played the cello and they had a connection with one of the music teachers at College of Marin, so they decided to form a unit called the Marin Symphony Company, Marin Symphony. So my dad was one of the founders, he was the founding tuba player. Gene Maguire and other people we knew also joined. They first rehearsals were at Tamalpais High, and they were able to play concerts all over the county at various high school auditoriums. After the Marin Auditorium was built, that became their home. So that was further community activities that he did. He was thrilled to be a founding member of a symphony because he had played all his life and this was the first time he was in something organized like that.

Stella Perone: Leonard, do you know approximately what year he and Gene founded this?

Leonard Asiano: 1952, it was founded.

Stella Perone: And they moved to the Marin Auditorium, do you know roughly when?

Leonard Asiano: Well, that was built, let’s see, about 20 years later. It was when they built the rest of the Civic Center, they built the Marin Auditorium and the building behind it. I believe the first director, conductor of the Marin Symphony, was a gentleman named Gastone Usigli, G-A-S-T-O-N-E-U-S-I-G-L-I, who was a task master and got the most out of his symphony players, when you consider they are mostly amateurs, some professionals. But in time Marin Symphony built up as a major organization today in the Bay Area and we are kind of proud of it because it started at Tam High in the auditorium. It was the only venue they had to play in those days.

And there are some offshoots from that, there was a Marin County, there is a band they have now, I can’t remember the name of it offhand — I can’t remember. Anyway, it was pretty heavy community spirit and they expanded to half a dozen concerts a year. And when the Marin County Civic Center was built, they took over the auditorium and that has been their home for the last 25 years. But it was local and everybody was proud of it. There were a lot of good musicians there, a lot of music teachers from the College of Marin and a lot of people that were active in music all their lives.

The store building and residential units of Homestead Grocery were bought for $19,500. The store itself was $9,000 plus inventory. What happened was he got a loan from B of A, I think he put down about $7,000, and then he got a loan from the seller of the grocery store, he gave him something down and then came up $6,000 short. So my uncle, Pete Mantegani, went to the bank in San Rafael that lent $6,000 to my dad and then Pete guaranteed the loan but then my dad paid it back. That was the first thing he paid back, he didn’t like to owe any money. But he was on a shoe string, it was a lot of borrowed money in those days. But he came out all right and paid everything off except the building. When he sold it about 10 years later, everything was paid off except the building and there wasn’t much left on that, so he did well.
Stella Perone: Do you know what he sold the building for 10 years later?

Leonard Asiano: Yeah, let’s see. I think he got $35,000 for the building, plus he sold the store to the guy who bought the building. Yeah, I think he sold it for $35,000, and he sold the store for five [thousand] and then went on to buy the liquor department, Woodlands Liquor. So he got to be a successful retail businessman. He always wanted to go into the liquor and wine business — my dad was a wine salesman in earlier years, he really knew his wine. So he developed something from that and then he bought the Woodlands liquor store in 1958, and then he kept it until 1971.

Stella Perone: Was this Woodlands liquor store, was that right near where the Woodlands Market is right now?

Leonard Asiano: Yeah.

Stella Perone: Just out of curiosity, would you have any idea what his annual revenues or annual profits were of the store?

Leonard Asiano: Homestead Grocery?

Stella Perone: Yes.

Leonard Asiano: I think he grossed around $36,000 a year, then around $9-10,000, plus other perks: free rent, free groceries — not free, but you can do a lot when you are the owner. After he sold the store, he moved to Kentfield, the street right behind the College of Marin. He stayed there and bought the Woodlands liquor store which is right down the street. He stayed there until — I’m trying to remember, I think it was — 1971. Yeah, he was there quite a while. Then they returned, moved up to San Rafael near the Northgate shopping center, and moved to a house up there, bought a house there, stayed there until they left, and finished up at the Redwoods. So he had a nice retirement and the retirement was well-funded. They had a good retirement, 15 to 20 years, so he came out all right. He said coming out to California was the best move he had ever made. The economy is so dynamic, things are always changing — Ohio it is stagnant. In Cleveland, Ohio it went from 900,000 population to 450,000. So you can see how they haven’t fared too well. So this is the best place to be.