

# **Toolin' Around Town: Building a life together for 75 years**

*Sid and Gerry Lipton, partners and co-travelers for three-quarters of a century*

By Harlan Osborne, Petaluma Argus-Courier, November 10, 2022

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As project manager for a large construction company responsible for erecting dozens of buildings in Sonoma and Napa counties, Sid Lipton has assembled an impressive legacy. Included in his work are wineries, schools, hospitals and office/industrial complexes. Among the more visibly appealing structures are opulent wine country estates like Domaine Carneros, Robert Mondavi Winery, Domaine Michel and Chateau Rothchild, overlooking acres of lush vineyards.

Closer to home, Lipton's employer, Wright and Oretsky Contracting, oversaw the construction of Petaluma Valley Hospital, Petaluma Veterans Memorial Building, St. Vincent de Paul High School and Petaluma Junior High.

While the importance of each development cannot be understated and many of the buildings will stand long into the future, it's not those material objects Lipton is most proud of. That honor goes to his 75-year marriage and partnership with wife Gerry.

Their story has a unique beginning, one that might not have happened without the post-World War II lure of Petaluma's thriving chicken industry, which brought their families together.

Born in San Francisco, Lipton, 96, was one of Sam and Rose Lipschultz's three children. (Sid later changed his name to Lipton.) His father was a house painter. As a teen, Sid worked at an upholstery shop and for a locksmith before taking a job at a produce stand inside the Chrystal Palace Market, earning 50 cents an hour.

"I was in the 11th grade in 1943 when military recruiters – who were looking for 16-year-olds to learn a trade, earn money and get a high school diploma – came to my school," Lipton said. "I decided to become a machinist and started my apprenticeship February 3, 1943." (Lipton remembers the dates of every important moment of his life.)

After months of training, he was stationed in Guam, in the South Pacific. Meanwhile, his parents left San Francisco and relocated to Palm Avenue in Penngrove, where they started a new life as chicken ranchers.

Raised in Chicago, Gerry Borenstein had completed the 11th grade when her parents bought a Petaluma chicken ranch in 1945. Both Sid and Gerry's parents were members of the Jewish Folk Chorus, which led to their introduction.

"I met Gerry on the front steps of the Jewish Community Center, in September 1946," Sid recalled. "We were married in San Francisco, June 8, 1947. I was working for Les Rosen at Tip-Top Cleaners and Gerry worked at Woolworth's as a window decorator until we were married. She then worked in the business office at Carither's Department Store."

In March 1949, the Liptons bought a 3-acre chicken ranch on Roblar Road where they raised 12,000 meat birds every 10-15 weeks and sold them in San Francisco.

"When the poultry industry began dropping, it became less important to me," Sid said. "I went to work for Ben Oretsky Construction as a carpenter."

After the proposal for Santa Rosa's Montgomery High School came up for bid in 1957, the job was too big for a local contractor and an out-of-town company was chosen over the city's two major contractors, Wright Contracting and Oretsky.

"The two companies merged," continued Lipton. "Wright and Oretsky was a union shop and we did lots of big jobs in San Francisco. We built College of the Redwoods in Eureka, did work at Humboldt State College and built the Marin County Veterans Auditorium. In 1981, we built the Wells Fargo Mortgage building in Santa Rosa, a \$10 million job, and went on to do all the work for Kendall-Jackson Winery. We built a lot of wineries. My final job was at Petaluma High in 1997, the year I retired."

After that, Sid began volunteering with Meals on Wheels, which he did until 2020. He helped out Rebuilding Together for 10 years and has been on the board of PEP Housing since May 1993, but plans to retire next May. He volunteered at the B'nai Israel Jewish Center food pantry for six years and was in charge of building maintenance for 40 years.

Sid and Gerry lived on their Roblar Road property for 35 years, raising their children Marcus, Linda and Deborah there. In 1984 Sid and Gerry moved into town.

"I needed sidewalks," Gerry said. "This is my dream home."

After retiring from her 20-year career at the Emporium in Santa Rosa, she began volunteering with Petaluma People Services Center and Petaluma Valley Home Care. She volunteered at Kaiser Medical Center for 30 years.

World travel has played a big part in the Liptons' lives and a wall of photos in their home reminds one of National Geographic world tours. When work versus travel became an issue, Gerry devised a plan.

"I had a hard time getting Sid out of the office," she said with a smile, "so I'd book a tour he couldn't back out of."

In good health, bright and independent after 75 years together, the Liptons still fondly display adoring kindness and patience together.

*Harlan Osborne's "Toolin' Around Town" run the second and fourth Friday of the month in the Argus-Courier. You can contact him at [harlan@sonic.net](mailto:harlan@sonic.net).*