Interview with Kevin Klose

Chris Klose: Can you tell us who you are and how you got to be in Red Hook.

Kevin Klose: Yes. My name is Kevin Klose. I was born on September 1, 1940 in Toronto, Canada. At that point, the third of three children of our parents, Willard and Virginia Klose, who were producing a show in Canada for the CBC, the Canadian Broadcasting Company. They were American citizens, and they were up there producing that show for CBC.

They came back to the states in 1942. They lived in the suburbs of New York City for about a year, and were thinking about finding a farm somewhere within about a hundred mile radius of Grand Central, the great station in New York City, and they looked in that circumference and found here, just outside the village Red Hook, a farm, a white clapboard house on a rise above water, which was in our father's thinking, as a kid he'd been on such a farm in the summers, and they bought it. They named it Echo Valley Farm. They bought in 1943, and it's been in the family ever since. I was raised here basically.

Chris Klose: What do you recall best of your childhood during the war and post-war, so say the late '40s. What was it like being on the farm?

Kevin Klose: Actually my earliest memory of the farm was, of all things, what was known as VJ Day, when the actual second world war ended in August of 1945. I remember that very clearly. We'd been at the farm for two years then, and it was a time of great release. That's what I remember.

What I remember at the farm from the 1940's, from the earliest time, there were draft horses. Duke and Bill were the matched draft horses, and there was a blind mare, Maude, and they were in the horse barn connected to the main barn in the farm. The farm had about fifteen or twenty milk cows. There were some chickens. There were pigs, and there were orchards. The orchards were almost all yellow delicious apples.

Our dad worked in New York. Our mom and the boys, and then you, or my younger brother, Christopher, came along in 1945, and two more siblings in 1947, Debra and in 1950, Victoria, so all six of us and our parents were at the farm, and although our father had work in New York, and in another time in Chicago and in Detroit, the farm has always been in the family.

Chris Klose: What was the farm like, what was Red Hook like in the 1940's, when you were nine, ten years of age. What was the feel, and the look, and the sound of the [crosstalk 00:03:04]?

Kevin Klose: First of all, the school, Red Hook Central School, was a lovely place I thought. I went there as a kindergartner in 1945, and I have very clear memories of being in kindergarten with that class, what became the class of 1958 when we all graduated. It was a lovely school. It's still in existence, as we know, and the teachers, I can remember almost every one of them by name. It was a very significant part of my life, and many of the classmates are still in my life, those who are here, still in Red Hook. I can remember almost at least half by name of my class. We just moved through after another ...

The other part of the school, which I think was unusual and made it a very special school, is that a lot of the faculty were men who had served in the war, and they were committed to education and to civics and to knowledge of the world. Then there were films, sixteen millimeter sound documentary films, which were part of the studies of social studies and things like that.

I remember something called the Freedom Train that came through in Poughkeepsie and had aboard original documents from the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. We went down there and we lined up one morning and passed through, and it made a huge impression on me. I was then eight thereabouts. Those are some of the scattered memories.

The farm itself was very small. It soon could not compete in the Industrial Revolution that came along into farming in this part of the state in the late 1940's and '50's, but what I remember from it were the cows being milked by milking machines, and then being, as they called it, stripped out by hand, and the milk stored in a milk cooler, and then in big cans, collected and taken by a Ford pickup truck that was part of the apparatus of the farm to the creamery right here in the village of Red Hook.

Chris Klose: Was that Silver Lake or what was it?

Kevin Klose: I think it was Battenfeld is what the name was, and that I think became later ... There were I think some mergers and it became Silver Lake.

Chris Klose: That's right.

Kevin Klose: Often the farm family next door, the Teeters, they had a milk cooler there, and they were still doing milking for them, and then they, also, became part of the distribution sequence of Silver Lake Dairy. These were bottles of cool milk that were delivered to people's front doorsteps. I remember that.

I, also, remember the widening of Route 199, east and west of the village. It was a very narrow two lane blacktop when I was a child, and because there was traffic now in the post-war, particularly in the 1950's and in the late '40's, people coming out of New York on the weekends, traffic would back up at the Red Hook light east to the village by a mile or more. Would back all the way up. Stop dead to get through the village, because this was the only way they could get through easily, through the center of town.

When the road was widened, it had substantial consequences in the village itself, especially you can see it on the east side, East Market Street, where the lawns were pushed back. There were trees along the street that were cut down, so they could widen it, and that's how the village looks today.

Those are things I remember, and I remember the engineering that went into widening and flattening 199 so it could go from east of the village out easily to the Taconic Parkway, which its terminus was at 199 out there between Pine Plains and Red Hook, and then during that same sequence, a few years later the Taconic was extended up to what became the Mass Pike, or the Mass Pike extend. All that's transportation, but it had an effect on people's lives. I remember that.

Chris Klose: Do you remember ... Tell us about the speed of life in the late 40's or early 50's as you recall it. There weren't that many cars, were there?

Kevin Klose: No. There were not that many cars, and it was basically an orchard. That's what I remember in the springtime. It was filled with pink in every direction, because there were orchards right to the edge of the village of Red Hook, right out here just barely half a mile from the Elmendorph, where we're sitting. That’s what it was.

The school was for me sort of the centerpiece, because my brothers were there, my older siblings were there, and then the younger siblings as well. We were six. It was quite a span.

I played basketball, and that was very fun to do, especially on Friday nights. The classic sort of Friday night lights on a very small basketball court. The court was actually about half the size of a regular basketball court. The first time I ever had to play on full size basketball court, I almost died going up and down the floor. That was part of it.

The other part of the school was that it had an outreach. The big eastern colleges had started to reach out in the post-war era, and they came into

Red Hook Central and began finding children there that gave it a sense of itself I thought, of where graduates could think of going. A few of the classes that graduated before I did, several graduates went to MIT, went to RPI, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, and then our oldest brother, Taylor, was accepted at Harvard, and in his class MIT and Harvard were breakthroughs for the school. Thereafter, two years later, in our brother Woody's class, Phil Rockefeller, one of his classmates and a good friend of our family, went to Yale. Woody went to Cornell, and to me it meant something very special about what the school was doing and who the community was.

I graduated in 1958.

Chris Klose: Tell us about the beginnings of your journalistic career. In a political way, you were, also, the Ditto editor, but I remember the election of I guess it was 1957 for president of the ... Or was it ...?

Kevin Klose: 1956.

Chris Klose: Was it '56 or '57 when you had one black shoe, one white shoe, one white sock, one black sock.

Kevin Klose: Yes. I was actually not much of a politician. I preferred being editor of Ditto, which was I would call it a monthly, somewhat independent of a monthly schedule, but we produced it mostly in the class of '58, all through high school, and Maynard Ham, who is a resident of Red Hook to this day, was our art director and Tivy Smithers, she was then, and Judy Walsh and Ellen Rogers and Jim Harden ... Those are all classmates from the class of '58, and we basically produced this thing, and I really liked to do that.

On West Market Street were the offices of the Red Hook Advertiser, which was the weekly paper. I used to go by there and talk to Ralph ... I will think of his last name, but he was the editor, and the Nortons were basically the owners, Allison and Don Norton were the proprietors, I would call it, of the Red Hook Advertiser.

We, also, paid a great deal of attention to the Poughkeepsie Journal, because it covered sports, and it covered the Red Hook basketball team, which in 1956 did extraordinarily well and went to major tournaments in this part of the state, and was a great winning basketball team, so we paid a lot of attention to that.

I was aware of newspapers, and our grandfather on our mother's side, had been a newspaper editor in St. Louis, so we had all these stories about the life as a newspaper ... I was sort of drawn to it.

To me, newspapers are crucial to the way a civil society functions.

Chris Klose: We don't have a newspaper here. The Red Hook Advertiser went out of business after a hundred and sixty-seven years of basically continuous Red Hook newspapers about five or six years ago, six years ago now, 2009.

Kevin Klose: Just stopped it.

Chris Klose: What do we do?

Kevin Klose: Well, it's very hard to get it back, if you're talking about print on paper. That's a big operation, and when you think about the complexities of it ... I had a very good friend many years later, who ran a similar paper in Hartford County, Maryland, and it was subject to the vagaries of the economy in a very particular way, and his ups and downs finally led him to just close the paper, because he had to hire people and then lay them off and so forth.

I don't think there was that kind of turmoil, economic turmoil here, but once it stops and the presses stop and the newsprint doesn't come down here anymore to print the paper on, and you go to digital, the notion of community gets a little bit more ephemeral I might think. It can be much wider than you could distribute the paper, and you can get individual participation almost instantaneously, as we know, from all the means of social media today, so you can actually find a kind of following or a community group, but I think that a newspaper, to my mind, the actual physical fact of a newspaper that people can read, and share, and know that each other's doing it together, I think that's very important.

In these small communities, it is true that many of these smaller papers have, in fact, survived, because the communities have their own unique character. It's like a mosaic. If you look at the mosaic, almost every little piece of a mosaic has some significant something that's similar to the one next to it, but it's unique in itself, and that's how we are. We're a nation of communities, and I think that newspapers, whether they be dailies, or weeklies, or bi-monthlies, or whatever, bring people together in a very special way.

It's a loss to me, and I hope it can get made up somehow.

Chris Klose: What is it about Red Hook that you feel this day ... Though you've been all over the world, what is about Red Hook that is special to you?

Kevin Klose: It's a wonderful question. I think that Red Hook has a real history. The history is being rediscovered in new ways, and its sense of its place in the community of communities I think is becoming much more specific than perhaps it had been.

I left here basically at the age of eighteen, and I came back ... I went to college. I was in the Navy, and then I worked at the Poughkeepsie Journal for a few years, and then I was in Washington for virtually pretty much the rest of my life from my late twenties on at the Washington Post and so forth.

The actual daily life of the village was not part of my life, but as a community and a people I knew and had grown up with, and their parents and their siblings and their offspring, I feel at home here in a very particular way. I think Red Hook is a unique place, not just in my own thinking, but as it is. It has meant something in the world. It has meant something that people can recognize, and there are other parts of the world that are named after it, like Red Hook, Brooklyn.

Chris Klose: On a Friday night at the gym, and we're now the middle school, but which was ... It debuted in 1939, the school that would have as much capacity as the future would ever need, nine hundred and thirty-seven seats, according to the dedication ceremony. It was rather more like the gladiatorial exhibit or not. Give us a sense and feel of the jammed bleachers and the noise and the lights, and then afterwards [inaudible 00:17:11].

Kevin Klose: Yes. As you know, it was not only a gym, a basketball gym, it was the athletic floor during the week for PT, for physical training. But on Friday nights when there were home games in the wintertime, basketball games, it was to die for. It was all by itself. With an energy and a reverb going on that was extraordinary, and I'm sure it's true in every school in America that has basketball through the mid-winter.

It would just start filling up around five thirty or so, and by the time ... Then there was a JV game, a junior varsity game. There were wonderful cheerleaders in both the JV and the varsity games that came later, and these schools competed quite hard against each other, Pine Plains, Rhinebeck, and so forth and so on. We can name them all.

When I was kid [Tivley 00:18:20] had its own high school, and I'm part of the team distinguished in Red Hook basketball history for having lost to Tivley on a Tuesday afternoon. Yes.

Chris Klose: [Inaudible 00:18:31]

Kevin Klose: Tivley High school, perhaps it had nineteen students in it and they just whipped us.

Chris Klose: [Inaudible 00:18:41]

Kevin Klose: The basketball team's fortunes ran high, but in years prior fell quite low at that particular point, but we had a great time. We were sophomores and juniors and seniors doing stuff together, and competing together, and, also, doing teamwork together. It was kind of fun. It was always very tense, because competitive sports in front of a crowd, yeah, that can jangle the nerves right all the way out.

Chris Klose: What about the ... Tell us about the cheerleaders.

Kevin Klose: The cheerleaders were fabulous, because everybody's cheerleaders at a basketball game, and the Red Hook cheerleaders were noted for their beauty and their ability to coordinate their cheers and do it together. I think it was a squad of eight or ten. I'm not the person to really ask about it. Perhaps there are cheerleaders from that time that you would care to interview, who would have much clearer memories than I.

Chris Klose: We will [inaudible 00:19:49] segue to the [inaudible 00:19:54] exhibit or those nights in June to what happened after the game [crosstalk 00:20:01].

Kevin Klose: After the game. The bleachers were often ... They were on rollers, and they would roll back to the opposite wall. The floor was cleared. There was a stage across from the bleachers with curtains on it, and there was a Wurlitzer, literally a mighty Wurlitzer record machine that you would put in five cents and you get a 78. The Wurlitzer was rolled out. The lights went down, and students, the former team who now had one thought showered and got themselves duded up, and Friday night dance went forward. It was always dark and romantic, odd, and always interesting.

Chris Klose: All right. Good job. I want to get to Red Hook ... Red Hook celebrated its bicentennial three years ago, and it was founded on the strength of agriculture. We remained an agricultural based economy visually, not

financially certainly, but tell us about what it was like ... I want to specifically have your memories of the people and haying for Fraleigh.

Kevin Klose: Sure.

Chris Klose: Tell us about that. What it felt like, it looked like with the heat.

Kevin Klose: I think from about the age of fourteen on, I basically worked in the summertime either at the neighboring farm on and off for the Teeters or most particularly for Irving Fraleigh at the Fraleigh farm that actually had a common boundary with our farm, with Echo Valley Farm.

I'd be out there at seven thirty or eight in the morning during haying season, whenever first cutting is in say late June, and spend the entire day in these fields with a man named Dewey Decker, who lived nearby, who was a farmer who did custom baling for a lot of the farms. He had a tractor that I think had had ... It could have done well on a race course, because he would put that thing in its highest gear and just charge through the fields, and the bales were just flying out of that baler.

It was in the days before what are now kickers to kick the bale into a trailing wagon, so everything was done by hand. You walked along the wagon, along the wind rows of bales. Picked them up and threw them up to somebody who was loading them up.

As a little boy, I remember actually open hay ... It was not baled. It was just loose hay. It was mown, stacked in wind rows, and then men, often with horse drawn wagons, walking through the fields with increasingly long handled pitchforks to be able to pitch it up higher and higher as the load raised up, and so the baling was about the same thing.

Then taking it to the barns at Irvings, and then there were elevators to run the bales up into the hay mow above, and that was hot work.

Chris Klose: What was the worst job?

Kevin Klose: The worst job was being at the end of all that trying to stack the things, and the other worse job was to work inside the silo as they were making silage, and blowing it up a blower tube and then down ... These are the round silos that I don't think people use anymore. With a pitchfork inside as the mound of ground up corn showered down on you. You're pushing it around, forking it around to make sure it stays flat and level, and they don't miss any spaces and so forth. That was a bit of a trial, but at a dollar an hour when you're fifteen, that's pretty good wages.

Chris Klose: What was the last load of the day like?

Kevin Klose: Relief. The wonderful thing was that at the end of the week, every week on Fridays, I would go and stand at the back doorstep of Irving Fraleigh's father, and he would come out and he would ask me what I'd been doing for the week, and I would say I'd worked X number of hours, and it just happened that every week as he was paying me for whatever work, whatever hours, he never argued with any of that, because he often spent time in his Chevy pickup truck parked on the side of a hay field to make sure everybody was working hard, including his son. He was terrific. Paid real attention to what was going on. But when it was time to get paid, it seemed to me like every Friday night he wound up counting out pennies to me to make up the last dollar. It was like a ritual.

Chris Klose: What did he sound like?

Kevin Klose: Wonderful, very high pitched voice, and very grandfatherly to me. He always had a straw hat on, even when he came out to see me. He had suspenders, and often had a tie on his chambray shirt. He was very proper and wonderful, and I worked for Irving, his son, a lot, and I liked it very much. I have very fond memories of that.

Chris Klose: If you were to walk around Red Hook twenty years or thirty years now, what would you see and how would you feel?

Kevin Klose: I think it would be pretty much as it is. Most of what I see here are certainly the center of the town and the center of the village. It looks to me very similar to what I remember as a child, although I do remember the Red Hook Hotel, which was on the corner as something quite unusual. I don't know all there is to know about how the township has continued to grow, but I do think there's a fair amount of open space and space that's under cultivation. It seems to me that it still has a very pastoral feel to it, although the pace of life is much more intense, and, of course, the vehicular traffic is phenomenally higher in terms of volume than it was when I was a child.

We had one car and one pickup truck for a family of six kids, and parents who often worked in New York City, so that's almost unheard of now to have a family of eight with one car and a farm pickup, and a tractor, a crank tractor we had. All that's changed, and it bears its impact I think on these communities because of that, but we're used to it. It's part of life, and maybe it will get smaller as people learn how to travel more easily with advanced technology that we don't see yet.

What is wonderful to me about Red Hook is that it's very close to New York City, while being distant. It's in the northeast corridor. It's easy to get to and it's easy to get from here to New York City and up and down the Hudson Valley, which is quite an extraordinary place. As the arts and culture continue to advance, and as people look for alternatives to the intensity of urban life, I think a community like Red Hook has a very special place in its future.

Chris Klose: What about the ... You thought a lot about communication in your business and democracy, the sense of community. How do we maintain that sense of community here? People love to go to Rhinebeck, but they love to live in Red Hook.

Kevin Klose: Again, I think that a community with its own identity is unique. It's special to how humans behave, and they feel identities with places like these, and they want the identity generally to be preserved and to prosper in the sense of how they think about their futures for themselves and their families, and maybe people who pass through and have transient lives. I've lived in many different parts of the world in different cities, but I've always felt that this was a very congenial place to be, and, of course, with family and friends from years by, it's very special.

To me, because I've spent my life almost entirely in news one way and another, I think that the presence of fact based reporting, fact based journalism that informs people about the actual parts of the lives that are beyond the front door or the back door is crucial to how the society can manage its own issues.

It's not an accident that the first amendment to the US Constitution is the one that says Congress shall make no law abridging freedom of press, freedom of assembly, freedom of religion. That’s not some other number. It's the first, and they understood very clearly from the very beginning, since they were struggling to get free of the domination of a domineering impacted essentially in their view despotic governance from the king of England. They knew that freedom of speech was essential to what they could do for themselves.

When Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence and made it that humans had inalienable rights of life, liberty and the first version was pursuit of property, and it was not that they didn't feel correct about that. They thought there was something less in that formulation than there should be, and they changed it, and Jefferson changed it to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. In the late eighteenth century in this country, in these descendants of the fairly recent enlightenment, they

thought that happiness meant community and serving the community. That that's where happiness stem from, and gave people a feeling of that, and that's what they were talking about.

Chris Klose: This is kind of a … Not a curve ball, but if you were to describe Red Hook, what color would you paint it? What color is Red Hook?

Kevin Klose: In my mind, it remains in that sense pink, because of the springtime. That's in my head. Years ago, I flew from Poughkeepsie, the Dutchess County Airport in a small plane with the then congressman, a man named Joseph Resnick. We flew down to Washington on a May morning, and then we flew back that afternoon. I wrote a story for the Poughkeepsie Journal, where I was working, about a day in the life.

Both down and back at several thousand feet above the Hudson River, almost all the way to the outskirts of New York City, it was entirely pink. Orchard, after orchard, after orchard was in bloom, and it was the same when we came back that afternoon. It's true around here still to this day. That to me is how it sits in my mind and my imagination. I love the feel of it.

Chris Klose: That's the sense that I think a lot of people have. They share this. We've interviewed quite a few people, and they all say they've lived all over the world, but when they come over the bridge, most people say it's the most beautiful place they've ever been. Do you share that view?

Kevin Klose: I can say that we've spent a number of … Debra and I, my wife, Debra, and I and our children have spent time at the farm. We have seen in unique ways the Hudson River light, which I think is astonishing. It's just different, and that's a huge part of our sense of peaceableness I think, and the proximity to the great river itself. Just to come over the bridge, for example, as you say, or come up on the railroad from New York City, or anywhere in the south, or come down from the north, alongside that river. It's astonishing. I think we feel very fortunate to be so close to that, and that it gives us a sense of peaceableness and a kind of majesty of the Hudson River Valley, which is quite particular.

Chris Klose: I agree.

Speaker 3: I have a couple questions [crosstalk 00:34:37]. You mentioned Fraleigh farm. Is it important that people remember him? I mean you remember him, obviously.

Kevin Klose: Yeah.

Speaker 3: [Inaudible 00:34:54]. What about people my age or so?

Kevin Klose: As a community moves on, some personalities persist in almost a presence in people's minds and in their thinking. I think for a certain number of people, probably a diminishing number, the Fraleigh family, that particular ... And there are a number of related families by that name, but Irving and his father, and I think they were of a particular kind of person, who were independent, fun to be around, and creative in running their farms, and were part of a community that had a conversation, that had its own language, and he was very much part of that I would say.

Chris Klose: Give me an example of his language.

Kevin Klose: I can't tell you specifically, but he had wonderful stories about going to livestock auctions, and how he had the wool pulled over the eyes of his competitors, fellow bidders, or not bidders, whether he made out in an auction or not, and he was very honest and upfront about that, and entertained us with these delightful stories.

I don't think I've ever been to a cattle auction as a participant. I've been to some of them as an observer, but to actually participate, and maybe you don't know what you're getting. He always seemed to come out on top somehow, and I loved him for that.

Speaker 3: Chris, [inaudible 00:36:40] what we have in the article.

Chris Klose: Yeah.

Speaker 3: We have a hundred and fifty years of that in the archive?

Chris Klose: Yeah. It's about [inaudible 00:36:48] of 1817 to the Red Hook Advertiser of 2009.

Speaker 3: You might be [inaudible 00:36:55] to answer this question. I mean Mike has agreed, but I'm wondering if you can describe ... We have all these newspapers that you've described. They're preserved here.

Kevin Klose: Yes.

Speaker 3: I think of that, and it's like a treasure trove, almost a magical, mystical quality kind of thing. If you agree, can you tell Chris that we still have these newspapers as an archive?

Kevin Klose: Yes. What's actually very interesting to me, Christopher often, especially in the past year or so, we've traded back and forth by the internet, by email. He sends me excerpts from the Advertiser from fifteen, twenty, fifty, sixty, seventy years ago, and we go back and forth about that. It's really interesting. It becomes part of the living memory. If you can call memory a living thing, that's what it is. It's the lively reality of a time that doesn't exist anymore, and the Advertiser is a phenomenal resource for looking at a community's continuity and history, and I think the Advertiser has that power in it for people who want to understand what our past has been.

Speaker 3: Can you just in a sentence actually just say that these old newspapers are archived, so we have it.

Kevin Klose: Sure. Yes. And the fact that there is an excellent archive that people can find their way to and find information from is enormously important to the sense of the community itself. I think it's a great resource, priceless really.

Chris Klose: You wouldn't have had the pleasure of saying that.

Kevin Klose: Yes. The Red Hook Advertiser is a priceless resource. Its archived pages are a lively history of a lively community.

Speaker 3: [Inaudible 00:38:57]

Chris Klose: We have the [inaudible 00:39:01] from I think it's ... No, it's earlier. We have the 1817 I thought. Okay. 1857.

Speaker 4: 1858.

Chris Klose: [Crosstalk 00:39:13]

Speaker 3: Could you say 1859?

Chris Klose: [Crosstalk 00:39:17] '57.

Kevin Klose: But the specificity of what the Advertiser reported is quite remarkable. Just recently my brother, Christopher, and I, we exchanged back and forth about an aircraft accident that happened where the plane crashed into the Red Hook Golf Club, and the newspaper reported that event, and by the next week, which was the next time it published, they had exactly the names of all the people who had tried to rescue the pilot, all the people of law enforcement and of the fire company who had turned out

and had seen the accident itself. They had everything in specific detail. I was told that names make news, and, boy, that was proof of it.

Speaker 3: [Inaudible 00:40:29]