

The OSS and Italian Partisans in World War II

Excerpts from an article written by Peter Tompkins



Italian partisans marching after helping Allied troops capture village.

The contribution of Italian anti-Fascist partisans to the campaign in Italy in World War II has long been neglected. These patriots kept as many as seven German divisions out of the line. They also obtained the surrender of two full German divisions, which led directly to the collapse of the German forces in and around Genoa, Turin, and Milan.

These actions pinned down the German armies and led to their complete destruction. Throughout northern Italy, partisan brigades in the mountains and clandestine action groups in the cities liberated every major city before the arrival of combat units of Fifteenth Army Group.

The partisans' success was largely attributable to the arms and supplies parachuted to them by the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) and the OSS and to the brilliance of the intelligence networks developed by members of the Resistance in constant touch with Fifteenth Army Group headquarters via secret radios.

Intercepted German signals and the Ultra deciphering at Bletchley Park in England went far toward assuring final victory, but little credit has been given to the vast amount of detailed intelligence collected and rapidly transmitted by individual partisan spies in Italy. Strategically, Ultra may have saved the day, but tactically its information was far slower in getting to where it was needed in the field than agent signals.

During the crucial battles of Anzio in January and February 1944, for example, Ultra signals warning of Hitler's plans and of Field Marshal Albert Kesselring's attacks would arrive regularly at Allied headquarters in Caserta as many as three days after the attacks had already taken place. On the other hand, extremely accurate information gathered by the partisans, often directly from Kesselring's own headquarters, was sent via a secret OSS radio in Rome, on the air as many as five times a day, to be received simultaneously in Caserta and on the beachhead in time to repel these attacks.

After Rome's liberation, as Kesselring retreated to his mountain defenses straddling the Apennines from Carrara on the Tyrrhenian to Rimini on the Adriatic, a barrier known as the Gothic Line, intelligence became a priority for Field Marshal Sir Harold Alexander, who was intent on launching an attack against these defenses. Gen. Mark Clark, whose Fifth Army would have the job of cracking Kesselring's mountain strongholds, exhorted partisans operating further north to increase their activities.

To organize such operations, the OSS infiltrated individual Italian partisan agents by submarine behind the German lines, landing them along the Adriatic coast at the mouth of the Po River. One agent, 20-

year-old Mino Farneti, set up a secret radio in the foothills of the Apennines, just south of his native city of Ravenna. From there, he organized parachute drops of weapons to pinpoints in the mountains, enabling growing groups of partisans to attack the Germans behind their lines and in Ravenna and other lowland towns.

As Alexander prepared to launch his major attack in September of 1944, his G-2 thirsted for intelligence details of the Gothic Line. One of Farneti's colleagues, who had already managed to protect and smuggle back across the fighting lines five

Allied general officers captured by the Germans, obtained a key piece of information. Reconnoitering behind the Gothic Line, his men intercepted and shot a German major traveling by sidecar; the major's briefcase contained a complete set of plans for the eastern half of the Gothic Line defenses. To get the plans for the Allies, another agent took them to Milan, where they were forwarded by courier to Allen Dulles, head of the OSS in Switzerland.

Meanwhile, another young OSS agent, Ennio Tassinari, was informed that partisans in Lucca, close to the Tyrrhenian, had obtained a complementary set of plans for the western half of the Gothic Line. He personally smuggled a copy of the plans in the soles of his shoes to the OSS in Siena, and from there the plans were rushed to General Clark's G-2. The plans showed that the weakest spot in Kesselring's defenses was at Il Giogo Pass, at the juncture of his Tenth and Fourteenth Armies. Clark therefore shifted the main attack of his II Corps eastward to the area indicated by the partisan intelligence. If Clark were to break through to the foot of the mountains, he would be in position to trap and destroy Kesselring's forces by cutting the flatland Route 9 from Bologna to Milan.

On 17 September, II Corps broke through the Gothic Line, causing the whole German line to fall back. Clark then brought forward his 88th Infantry Division, considered the best American division in Italy, and Allied

commanders became confident that the Fifth Army would soon sweep into the Po Valley, where Gen. Sir Oliver Leese's Eighth Army attacking along the Adriatic could roll back the whole German Tenth Army past Bologna.

By dawn on 21 September, the US 350th and 351st Regiments were advancing up narrow mountain trails

through intermittent rain and fog to attack Monte Battaglia, the last remaining obstacle. Ahead of them, behind the German lines, the 36th Garibaldi Brigade, armed by several OSS drops, had become a disciplined group of 1,200 men commanded by an Italian artillery lieutenant codenamed Bob, renowned for his courage, astuteness, and the red shorts he always wore into battle. As a result of the partisans' daring and courage in the area immediately behind the Germans' main Apennines battleline, German units were unable to move freely without danger. Kesselring's intelligence officer reported that the partisans killed 5,000 Germans and wounded from 25,000 to 30,000 between June and August.

Bob was determined to attack the Germans on Monte Battaglia, the most sensitive area, where Kesselring's 4th Parachute Division was all that blocked the Fifth Army. On the night of 25 September, 400 partisans reached Monte Battaglia just as the Germans were beginning to fortify it. They killed an unspecified number of Germans; the rest fled down the mountain. To clear the way to Monte Battaglia for the Americans, the partisans then saw that they first had to remove the Germans from neighboring Monte Carnevale. The partisans came under heavy mortar and machinegun fire from retreating Ger-

Italian partisans greet the Allied troops as they enter a Florence suburb south of the Arno



mans and from American artillery protecting its advancing troops, unaware that partisans had already liberated Battaglia. Pressed along the crest of Carnevale, the Germans, caught between two fires, realized their predicament and broke. Kesselring failed in his efforts to retake Monte Battaglia, and Clark could now push down the Santerno Valley.

Luigi Vestri, an Italian Air Force engineer, accompanied by his girlfriend and a radio operator, had been accepted by a renowned Communist partisan leader, Vincenzo Moscatelli, commander of all the Garibaldi Brigades in the north. Together they had organized a vast intelligence service. They also developed a foolproof system for receiving drops without losing a single weapon; they directed battery-operated car headlights at the sky, visible only from above.

Two of Moscatelli's brigades set off for Milan, but they encountered strongly armored German forces trying to retreat to the border. By the afternoon of 25 April, they had managed to defeat these German forces, but they still were far from Milan just as Mussolini, outraged at being abandoned by the Germans, secretly headed for escape across the Swiss frontier.

Playing his last card, Mussolini attached himself, along with his girlfriend, Claretta Petacci, to a strong German convoy of 30 SS trucks protected by armored cars heading for the Brenner Pass. Trapped by a Moscatelli

roadblock near the lakeside town of Dongo, Mussolini was discovered and executed with his girlfriend on unanimous orders from the partisan high command.

On 28 April, after neutralizing several thousand Germans, Moscatelli reached Milan at the head of 2,000 well-armed troops, riding in captured trucks and protected by captured tanks and armored cars. The partisan leader, who was to become the first minister of defense in liberated Italy, paraded into the city to be welcomed by the partisan high command.

That same morning, Piacenza, the last German-held big city in the area just south of the Po, was taken over by its partisans. On 29 April, the entire 6,000-man German 232nd Division was captured, including its commanding general and his staff. Allied forces entered Milan on 29 April, the day Hitler killed himself in his Berlin bunker.

On 2 May, at noon, hostilities officially ceased in Italy, with Alexander declaring that almost a million Germans had surrendered with all their equipment and accessories. That same day in Berlin, the garrison laid down its arms and the German capital passed to the Red Army.

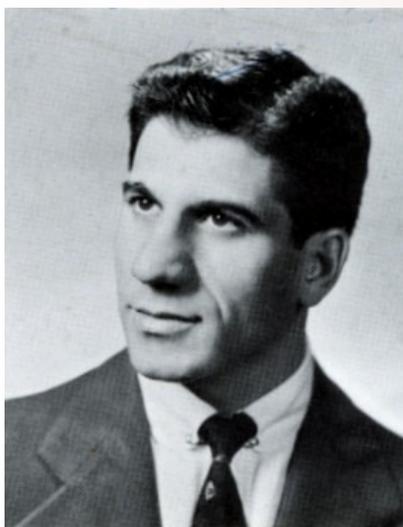
Two days later, General von Senger und Etterlin, after fighting from Sicily to Bologna, arrived at Gen. Clark's headquarters to sign the unconditional surrender. By 4 May the battle for Italy was over.

Peter Tompkins served in the OSS and spent five months behind German lines in Italy. He is the author of two books on OSS activities in Italy.

Total article can be viewed at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/>



Partisans parading after the taking of Milan



Michael F. Licata

St John Chrysostom once said "Those who instruct many unto justice will shine like stars for all eternity".

These individuals whom we respect are kind to us and generous with their friendship. They inspire us to emulate them. For me that person was Michael Licata.

Mike, born on May 16, 1926 at 37 Efner Street to Sicilian immigrants who came to America from the towns of Licata and Caccamo. The family later relocated to 40 Busti Avenue. Mike attended PS # 2 and McKinley High School. In 1944, while in high school, the United States Army drafted and trained Mike to be a tail gunner on a B-29. However much to Mike's chagrin the war ended before he had an opportunity to go overseas and apply his acquired skills, yet his parents were delighted.

Returning home from the service, he finished high school, received his diploma and taking advantage of the G.I. Bill attended Buffalo State College. During college, Mike cut clams at the stand next to Andy's Café on the Lower Terrace. At that time I was 9 years old and lived in the building that housed Andy's. That's where I met Mike. I was immediately taken in by his infectious smile and warm personality. He was liked and respected not only by the neighborhood kids but also by the Damon Runyon characters, who each night, inhabited Andy's at the corner of Lower Terrace and West Genesee Street..

On summer evenings, my friends and I played baseball until the street lights turned on signaling it was time to go home. On the way, we would pass the clam stand and pester Mike for a handful of oyster crackers. With a laugh he never refused our request. Mike talked

with us and humored us with stories and anecdotes.

In 1951 Mike graduated from BSC, earning a degree in Industrial Arts. After graduation he worked as a substitute teacher in the Buffalo Public School system and took the exam for the Buffalo Fire Department. He was appointed to the Fire Department 1953.

In 1955 a teaching position opened at Bishop Timon High School. Mel Palano, a friend of Mike's, and the physical education and legendary coach at Timon, recommended Mike for the position. He was hired to teach Mechanical Drawing, and later he also taught religion and physical education.

The same year I transferred from Canisius H.S. to Bishop Timon. Both Mike and I were starting the school year at a new school, he as a teacher and me as a student. On the first day of school we drove together in his green Pontiac. After we traveled a few miles making small talk, Mike turned to me and said " Joe when we are in school, remember you have to call me Mr. Licata." From that point I always did and we never let on that we personally knew each other.

Arriving at school I settled into my new surroundings and discovered that mechanical drawing was on my class schedule with Mr. Licata as instructor. Students scrambled to their respective classroom and anticipated the arrival of the instructor. The door of the classroom opened and Mr. Licata entered, placed his briefcase on the desk and without a word slowly rolled up his sleeves of the pristine white shirt he was wearing. He introduced himself to the class, described the course and proceeded to talk for a few minutes. He was an imposing figure, impeccably dressed, dark complexion and strong handsome features. He looked more like a middleweight contender than a teacher. At that moment I sensed that my fellow students did not think it wise to test his authority.

He told the class the he was also a firefighter, adjusting his schedule to the night shift so that he would be free to teach at Timon during the day. There were times when Mike would come to class straight from a fire and still look as sharp as a tack.

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Within a few weeks Mike had won the hearts and respect of his students. Everyone liked him and his teaching method. He taught us more than just mechanical drawing, he taught us life skills. His lessons were often interjected with discussions on current events, politics, sports or anything that interested his students. We felt comfortable in talking about anything with Mr. Licata.

After graduation I bid goodbye to South Buffalo and nestled back into the lower West Side beginning my journey to adulthood. On this journey, I now realize, the road was paved by the love and guidance of my parents and by a few other special people, including Mike Licata.

Mike, a lifelong resident of the Westside, worked at the firehouse on Jersey Street and Plymouth Avenue. Often, while driving up Jersey Street, I hoped to see Mike camped on the bench in front of the fire house. When I did see him he would pop off the bench, come over to the car and we would talk. Sometimes he would invite my children to come in the firehouse to see the trucks.

Mike continued to teach at Timon for twenty-seven years while working with the Fire Department. He reached the rank of lieutenant opting not to achieve a higher level because it would interfere with his teaching at Timon.

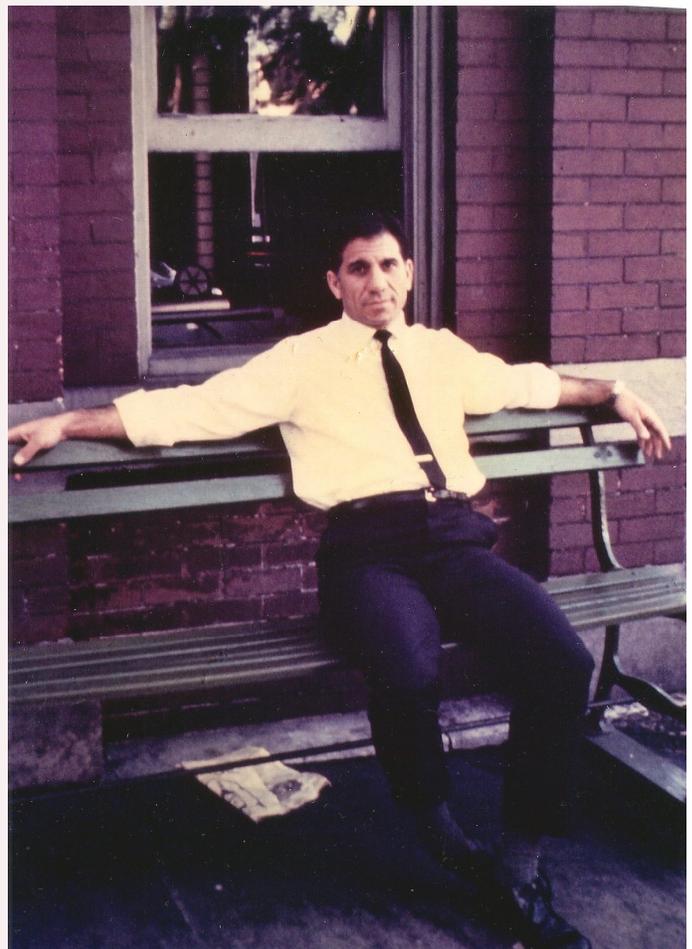
Mike married Theresa Barry from County Cork, Ireland. They raised nine children in a house on Lafayette Ave. The house was a double that Mike had renovated to also accommodate his mother and father. That was Mike!

After I moved from the West Side to North Buffalo I seldom saw Mike. Then one summer day, circa 1980 my wife and I took our four children to Crystal Beach. We walked along the beach and while passing a row of beach houses, I noticed a man waving at us. I thought nothing of it. On our return walk the man again waved. So I approached the house. To my surprise it was Mike. He insisted we join him for lunch. So we spent the afternoon enjoying Mike's company at his self-built beach house. We reminisced about many things. It was then that he told he had been diagnosed with leukemia. The disease had restricted his work but it was not going to beat him. His positive attitude and his cheerfulness impressed me, yet I was crushed. We said our goodbyes and I wished him well. Walking away I thought about Mike and what an inspiration he was to his students. He made a difference in

our lives. I wish I had told him that. He died not long after in 1982, he was 56 years old.

(Excerpt from Bishop Timon Alumni Newsletter September 1982)

Mike's life touched the lives of thousands of young men who attended Bishop Timon High School. His influence will never be measured because it is beyond measurement. Perhaps the greatest contribution was the example of his life. Mike was a good person and this goodness radiated in this whole life. He was an outstanding example of a Christian educator. He was "strong in faith" and this was very obvious to his students. He was a great example to all of them, all of the time and especially in his struggle with cancer. In recognition of his work with the Franciscans at Timon he was made an affiliate or honorary member of the order. On October 4th, 1979 he received the Franciscan Habit.



Lt. Michael Licata at the Jersey Street Fire House



Every July when I was growing up, my mother would retell the story of how our grandmother and several older aunts would make the trip from South Buffalo to downtown, to St. Anthony's Church. There they would sit in the pew that Mother Cabrini sat in when she visited Western New York in the late 1800s. My mother would explain how these petite, elderly women would slide back and forth in the pew trying to merge their energy with that of Mother Cabrini's as they petitioned her to intercede on their behalf. This is the image that inspired the writing of my play, "Mother Cabrini's Mission to America."

There are not many young people today who realize that Francesca Cabrini, a small, sickly Italian woman from the Lombardy Region is our first American saint. To find out about Mother Cabrini, I didn't refer to the *Miniature Stories of the Saint*. I read six biographies, two, written sixty-five years apart by members of her Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart. I also searched numerous web pages, articles, collections and cross-references. Those of us who are actively participating in this production feel that the spirit of Mother Cabrini thinks this is a good time in our history to remember her

life and her work.

Like every good reader and book sale adventurer, I was led to Christ the King Seminary's annual book sale where I was drawn to Pietro Di Donato's *Immigrant Saint*. After reading this beautifully written and impressive account of Mother Cabrini's life, I spent two years reading, researching, interviewing and writing a two hour version of the play.

I asked my main drama resource and talented sister, Jackie Albarella, to read the play and give me a critique. Jackie is an experienced actress, television personality and owner of her own media company. Like me, she felt there was something special in Mother Cabrini's story. We were convinced that the play should be produced and that Mother Cabrini's message should reach as many as possible. We spent another year collaborating and editing the script. At this point, I gave Jackie a brief description of how I envisioned the set, and she designed a unique, spiritually-centric set and included many multi-media effects.

Portraying Mother Cabrini is a challenge for any actress, but Jackie is able to merge the contrast of Mother Cabrini's diminutive size with the greatness of her deeds. St. Francis Xavier Cabrini helped Italian families and orphans world-wide but remained steadfastly attached only to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. To truly portray a real mystic even for a one hour performance is a daunting task, one that Jackie enthusiastically embraced and continues to perfect. Audience members familiar with Mother Cabrini's life, have remarked that Jackie brings our Saint alive. She brings our Saint's presence out of the worn novena books, back to her days in Buffalo.

Mother Cabrini has touched us both. At every performance we feel the pride of our heritage and the struggle of our forefathers. We are awed by the number of people who share with us the devotion they have for Mother Cabrini. They share stories of miracles and prayers answered. They show us treasured relics and those well-worn novena books that were used every day during the lunch hour when secretaries and students

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made their way to St. Anthony's for the Mother Cabrini novena. We are honored to be in their presence bringing her life and message to the world.

Although she wasn't in Buffalo for a long time, the play is framed around that trip. Mother Cabrini came here at the invitation of Father Gebelli. She came to ask the poor Italians for money to support her orphans and work. Father Gebelli hoped she or her sisters would stay and help run the Italian-American school on the West Side that at one time served over 300 children. She came to the small St. Anthony's Church because the pastors of the larger churches and the cathedrals, especially in New York City, would not let her collect money for poor Italians.

The play speaks of the Italian immigrants who were often treated like indentured servants sent from Ellis Island to wherever strong Italian laborers were needed. It was interesting to learn through the records and writings of Mother Cabrini that many Italians went to Denver to work in the mines. It was so dangerous that their children were left orphans, so Mother Cabrini built orphanages there. Other Italians worked in the oppressive heat of the Louisiana plantations, and some settled in California and as far as Washington. Mother Cabrini traveled to all of them to build schools, orphanages, churches, and hospitals.

She is not only known as Patroness of All Immigrants here in the United States, but her work also spread to nine countries on three continents. There is a version of the play set in England where her sisters set up schools and helped with the wartime effort. It also deals with the devotion to her in the Italian area called Bedford where a huge post-war migration from southern Italy took place. Housing was needed and poor starving southern Italian farmers went to Bedford to work in the brick factories. Many of their wives became domestics or worked in the local candy factory.

In the United States, Mother Cabrini almost continuously traveled to Eastern cities where there were large concentrations of Italian immigrants. On one trip, she spent three days in Cincinnati, three in Pittsburg, and three in Buffalo. She also visited Niagara Falls where she

admired the "omnipotence of God."

We think everyone should know that the first American Saint, the patroness of our country, was an Italian woman who served her people and anyone who needed help. Her life is a tribute to all of us. She came to America, like our grandparents and great-grandparents with very little and with little support from existing institutions, she built schools, orphanages, hospitals and churches. She traveled coast to coast ministering to Italian workers and their families. She makes us proud to be faith-filled Italian-Americans, part of the family of immigrants who built this nation and made it strong.

Mother Cabrini's Mission to America is available for large or small groups. It can also be adapted for fundraisers. My sister Jackie and I invite you to spend some time learning about and visiting with one of the most important Italian-American saints, our Patroness, Mother Cabrini.

For information write JKEA@JUNO.COM or call 716-656-5043.



Now in my 70s, I find myself reminiscing more and more. In my mind I often travel back to Massachusetts Street and relive those days at the Massachusetts playground.

It was that glorious summer of 1953. School was out and the playground was in. I was living on Massachusetts Street and fortunate to be within a stones throw from the beloved Massachusetts playground. In those days playgrounds existed in every neighborhood in the city and were staffed by city employees. The city was divided by ethnic neighborhoods, and the flavor of the playground revolved around that ethnicity. Needless to say ours was Italian and it was our home away from home.

Epifanio Saia was the playground attendant. He was a well respected teacher at Lafayette High School who worked the summer season at Massachusetts. Outside of a few minor incidents, he was in control of the grounds, if you misbehaved or caused trouble you found yourself suspended for a day or two. This usually did the trick and the culprits stayed in line the rest of the season.

It's early in the morning, the sun is shining, its going to be a glorious day. I hop out of bed, gulp down a fast breakfast of Italian toast and a cup containing half coffee and half milk. I grab my well oiled Rawling baseball glove and headed down Massachusetts Street to the playground. In the near distance I could see the crowd starting to assemble. I spotted Sammy Asarese and Joe Burgio coming from Winter Street and joined them for the walk to the park. Sammy carried his baseball bat over his shoulder. It was the only bat that we had to play with. It was handed down to Sammy from his older brother Tovie. Unfortunately it was previously cracked and had to be secured with black electrical tape.

Approaching the entrance of the playground we bumped into Vinny Scime and Buddy Ruggerio and together we scooted to the far end of the playground where we made our own diamond. It was near Richard Tezel's house and away from the other diamond that was used by the older players. Tezel's yard had a fence with a gaping hole in it. Richard, hearing the morning activity getting under way, came out through the hole to join the crowd. He wouldn't miss a day. He was a sports jock who

enjoyed verbalizing every play in every game played. He made the most simple plays sound exciting. He later in life actually worked radio as a stat man and spotter on radio sports programs.

Soon the remainder of the playground gang showed up. They were Jimmy Caputi, Joe Iraci, Sam "Underdale" Lipomi, Sam Genco. We were ready to play. We had two baseballs, one fairly new and the other covered with black tape. I don't think that we could have gotten through the summer playing baseball without that roll of black tape.

We played endless days on this makeshift diamond until we were old enough to graduate to the big diamond. There the competition escalated as the guys from the playground at school 77 came to play. They were led by Sal Maggiore, noted for coming up periodically with a new ball or bat. The remainder of the bunch consisted of Joe Pepperone, Joe Foglio, Jimmy Cirrito, Len Pepe, Ben Licata, the Ganci brothers, John and Don, and Jimmy "Red Sox fan" Randazzo.

The big diamond had a short right field fence, that was no match for the left-hand hitting Randazzo or later arrival Mark "gaberden pants" Tiftickjian who continually attacked the fence with hard shots to right field. We right-handed hitters were out of luck as leftfield went forever.

A foul ball down the right field line had the opportunity to end up in the swimming pool. When that happened one of the players had to climb the fence and retrieve the ball. Except for Sal Maggiore who had a fear of water. Too bad because after playing ball on those hot July-August days we would all go [except Sal] swimming in the pool.

The pool was the domain of the Ganci brothers who swam and dove like fish. They were the first to master the "Carl Huber" arch dive. Sorry, you had to see it, too hard to explain. At night we went to the pool to gawk at Red Mosier, the Ester Williams of the neighborhood. Our reactions were similar to those of the boys in Federico Fellini's Amacord.

Later on when they put in the basketball court, we

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basically played 12 months a year. The guys who lived close brought the shovels if we had snow. West Side basketball legends Joe Merlo, Don King, and Charlie Tedesco often played here.

I was at the playground everyday except Saturday and Sunday. Those days I shined shoes with my uncle George Ranallo at the landmark Felix's shoe shine stand at Niagara and Ferry Street. The money was nice but I would rather be at the Massachusetts playground.

On Sundays, the playground hosted an illegal crap game. "Gazuookas" from all over the west side came to shoot dice. Guys dressed to the hilt with Stetson hats, spade shoes, Charlie Baker suits. It was a sight, especially when the cops pulled in, and all the "suits" headed for the holes in the fences to get away. Away from what? All the cops wanted were the loot left behind in the pot. Dozens of raids! Zero arrests.

In the early 40s everyone in my neighborhood, either took accordion or guitar lessons.

My teacher was Joe Colby who played with the Buffalo Philharmonic. When he came to the house for my lesson, you had better be there ready to learn. I tried to skip one day and he tracked me down in the playground and drove his car right into the baseball field, picked me up and took me home for my lesson. Here's what I learned, don't mess with Colby on lesson day. I still have the Gibson he sold my parents. I'm told it increased in value 10-15 fold. To bad my guitar playing didn't improve as well.

I'll never forget the story Sam Maggiore tells about his father, a quiet, non-smiling man who, at supper time always came to the playground to fetch Sam.

One day, when his father arrived Sam had just hit a home run. He said, through the corner of his eye, he saw his father witness the feat. As he and Sam walked past the swimming pool, Sam asked his father if he saw the homer? He didn't respond. Just then, a female friend of Sam's approached to say, "hello". It was fourteen-year old (going on twenty) Marie Notaro, now Marie Caccamise who could have been Jane Russell's movie stand-in. She

not only got Sam's father's attention but made him smile. It was obvious mister Maggiore was impressed more with Maria than his son's homer. Fifty-five years later Maria is still impressively beautiful.

Lucy Andolina, who lived next door to Sal Bottaro on Winter Street, married Jimmy O'Connell. They now live in Florida adjacent to Charlie and Patti Tasca's winter home.

Early in our teens we were bullied by two 16-year olds: Larry Shields and Austin Morelli both of whom grew to their full height: 5' 3" at best. Larry Shields married Tom Miceli's sister and is a butcher at Johnny's Meat Market on Hertel.

We played a lot of touch-football in which the Gancis excelled. Maggiore often played quarterback. Sam was judicious at play calling as he wanted everyone to get a chance at the ball. But after the play was called and the huddle broken I'd whisper to Sam where I'd be and Sam would throw the ball to me thus ignoring the play.

A day didn't pass without seeing our mascots, the Pieri brothers, John, now a first tier criminal defense lawyer, and Steve, a Buffalo building inspector, who, in his formative years was a student of Sam Maggiore's school-teacher-wife, Sue.

I recently spoke to Sue. She said she had many vivid memories of the Massachusetts Street playground and pool. She remembers her mother standing by the pool fence and watching as Sue, at age six or seven along with her sister, Rachel, stood in line with other children who were practicing swimming strokes. Sue said she will always be thankful for Buffalo's public swimming pools where she spent many happy days ... before she met Sam. (ONLY KIDDING!)

By 1955 the Butler Mitchell club took over the management of the Massachusetts building and playground. My friends and I grew older and acquired new habits. We had out grown the playground and began the journey to adulthood. But needless to say, those days spent at the playground were one of the happiest times of our lives.

Larry LaDuca

At the risk of losing my honorary membership in Per Niente, I thought the PN readers might enjoy seeing their beloved West Side from the point of view of an Italian American raised east of Bailey Avenue. Growing up in East Lovejoy my early knowledge of Per Nienteville came from my mother, whose brother Mike had married Rose, a kindly woman who was typically described as “a real westsider.” I assumed this was better than being a make believe westsider and let it go. But with time I learned there was more to it. Once my uncle left Shiller Street for points west he sacrificed many things, above all our sauce.

Rose had many fine qualities—she dressed nicely, was said to like good furniture and to both tolerate and monitor my uncle’s gambling, but we were told in hushed tones that she put sugar in her sauce and didn’t use pork. Blood may be thicker than water, but putting sugar in sauce defied belief. Why not candy bars my father would scoff. Luckily no one brought up the Arab influence on Sicilian cooking with its inventive use of oranges, dates and raisins. Some other eating habits earned grudging respect—“They love their caroons” I was told and their “pasta con sarde at the St. Joseph’s table,” whatever that was.

As a musician my father counted among his best friends many Italians clustered along Buffalo’s western frontier. My parents were especially close to the talented alto player Tony Todaro and his wife “Honey,” she who first introduced me to the term “minners,” as in “What a pair of minners on that one.” From these westsiders my father learned many things, like how to navigate the odd diagonal orientation of the streets on the west side, which he attributed to the stubborn pride of their Sicilian heritage. He also claimed to have learned Sicilian, or at least the key to their language. As he explained to me, it required no more than the substitution of a “du” sound wherever an “i” appeared in our Santa Crocese version of standard Italian. And he would demonstrate—“You say ‘cappedu’ for ‘cappello.’” This technique combined with a generous sprinkling of “minchias” allowed you to pass. A good sentence would be, “Minchia che bedu cappedu.” I toyed with “che bedu cudu” for “bel culo” but it didn’t seem right, so I went with “Minchia che minners.”

My first real, underage job in Buffalo was as a city lifeguard at that great bathtub on Massachusetts Avenue, the late lamented Mass pool. And the first real westsider I got to know on my own was the pool manager, Mike Foglia, who worked at the steel plant and would arrive at the pool on his way home to make sure we guardians of the brats were present and accounted for, offering coffee with some “skeets” (Crown Royal) to get our lifeguarding skills up and running on a chilly Buffalo morning. Mass Avenue was indeed a tight if occasionally unruly neighborhood. But Mike knew everyone and if we arrived to find a garbage can or two floating in the pool he would set off on a house to house fact finding mission and always return with a perpetrator squirming at the end of his grip. When Mike wasn’t around we just went upstairs to the lady who ran the sewing lessons, an individual who made Mike seem like Gandhi.

The neighborhood kids spent most of the summer in the street, the playground, running in and out of the pool and any available house, often in their bathing suits, most of their utterances punctuated with “Yeah fungool,” a phrase that made me feel right at home. Since the pool had been constructed before the invention of the filtration pump, it was drained and refilled once a week, and thereafter received regular treatments of piss and chlorine that steadily turned the water a darker and more lethal shade of green. I knew that Sicily was an island and came to understand that these kids carried some genetic disposition to spend hours in that green liquid attacking one another underwater as their ancestors had done squid. So after I had saved a few from drowning, or strangulation at the hands of a beloved “cuz,” or death from third degree chlorine burns, I was accepted into the tribe. My memory of the rite of passage is marked by a day when I seriously twisted my ankle playing pickup basketball in the playground. I hobbled over to Mike’s and Mrs. Foglia heroically dumped a pot of almost cooked pasta, filled the pot with ice and made me soak my puffed ankle. I was deeply touched to see a stray rigatoni stuck to the rim of the pot. Say what you will about real westsiders—these people had heart.



Joe Alto

I recently heard the song "Here's to Life" (lyrics by Phyllis Molinary and music by Artie Butler) for the first time. I was awe struck by it.

Shirley Horn, Barbra Streisand, and Lanie Kazan among others have recorded this marvelous piece. Its

haunting words: the flying of time, a yesterday with no yes in it, love, hellos, sad goodbyes, warm memories for cold days, etc. best describe the late Joe Alto, my compare, who placed his bets and chased his dreams without regrets.

Who was Joe Alto? What did he do? And where? Only a few really knew him. He came and left quickly, inhaled by a wind that danced in the night and took him from us. I was with him, when as a freezing teenage will o' the wisp he boarded a train to California, in search of warmth and who knows what?

I knew his late sister, Bunny, and I know his sister Prudie Ciminelli, her husband, Armand, and their children. And I know Joe Alto loved my immigrant mother's homemade bread as much as he loved her and I loved his parents, the homespun Americans Ethel, and Joe Senior. Though Junior loved life, Sicilian culture, Italian movies, and the New York Yankees like many of us; still, he was different. He did different things and did them all differently. He gambled with life as he did with death.

Our friendship began when we were kids in the hot summer of 1945. We were shining shoes for coins in front of Shear's Buffalo. We later delivered newspapers. In High School he chose Sports. I chose music and the Arts. In addition to being athletic and savvy in sports, he also was a great dancer. I played the music to his much applauded "rubber legs" dance routine.

We were busboys at the Chez Ami. He quit when I was fired. I later became the Chez Ami orchestra leader and Joe became Buffalo's King of the Mambo. He performed Latin dances at the Chez for admiring socialites; many of whom he taught the Art of Dance at his Hertel Avenue studio.

In the early 1960s, he was to host what may have been the first sports radio talk show anywhere. But the Buffalo station where his star would rise was sold and a different format instituted. Unemployed but undaunted he became a track announcer at Hamburg Raceway and Batavia Downs.

He graduated to Monticello in the Catskills and then to Florida. In Los Alamitos Raceway and Hollywood Park, his voice and words made him a California icon. I was there. In 1988, Joe, Lee, his wife, and their daughters, Jolene and my Godchild, Rene, Californians all, came to the Actors Studio in Hollywood to see No One Is Us, a play I wrote about Urban Renewal's impact on lower West Side Buffalo families. The Altos loved it. Joe knew the characters. Twenty-years earlier he shared their experience when the home in which he grew up was demolished.

In recent months he often dined with me and another old friend, Angelo Tona, a retired New York City Judge. After playing tennis, Joe, and a bottle of wine were at the door. His contagious laughter sparkled while reflecting on his days as a boxer and how after ten fights he had to quit because he hurt his hand: the referee kept stepping on it.

He also told warm, loving stories about our mutual dear friend, Joe Cavalleri, about Prudie, Armand, his daughters, their husbands, his two-girls-and-a boy triplet grandchildren whom he adored and how proud he was of young Ryan whom he loved to watch play baseball and how much he missed seeing that. A friendship that began on a hot summer day in 1945 and would span sixty-five years ended on a cold, rainy day in the spring of 2011. Goodbye, Joe Alto. We will never forget you, old pal.



Carol Portale

The DMA (Direct Marketing Association) Nonprofit Federation announced the selection of Carol Portale as their 2011 Max Hart Nonprofit Achievement Award recipient.

Jane Massey, COO of Carol's organization March of Dimes, described Carol in her nomination submission: "Carol serves an inspiration to her staff and peers at the March of Dimes. She is dedicated to the mission of our organization — making sure all babies have the best possible chance for healthy birth! The mission is personal to her — and she gives 150% to drive the work to accomplish the work of the organization. Through her leadership — millions of volunteers and donors know better the mission of the March of Dimes, the way in which they can get involved, and donate to life saving research and community based programs. Babies are born healthier due to work of Carol Portale ... and Moms have a better chance for a healthy pregnancy."

Carol and I have been married over forty-two years. Our biggest accomplishments in this marriage are our children. The success we've had as a couple has been extremely gratifying and this prestigious award that Carol has received has made us all very proud of what she has done in her career.

Our first date was a Jack Jones concert at Kleinhans Music Hall, but it was our second date that sealed the deal.

We started the evening with a dinner at the Peter Stuyvesent restaurant with our friend Leo DiGuileo. It was Lobster Fra Diavolo as I recall. Next it was on to the Royal Arms to catch the late show by Jimmy Smith, the jazz organist, and then to top off the evening at midnight it was on to the Turf Club for clams and corn on the cob. She had no chance....

We love you honey!!!!

Carl



The Portale family

Carol, son-in-law Chris Coco, daughter, Christina, son, Giancarlo, Carl



The Hill, in St. Louis was formerly known as 'Dago Hill' and was the home of many Italian-American immigrants, including Yogi Berra, Joe Garagiola, and several members of the U.S. soccer team that beat England in the 1950 World Cup.

The Hill was the quintessential Italian American community of St. Louis, but it was far from typical. It differed from many in at least one major respect: it wasn't a slum. It's a neighborhood with houses, yards and lots of room for kids to play in. In some ways it had and has more in common with suburban neighborhoods in towns all across America than with, say, the Italian sections of the Bronx or Brooklyn or South Philadelphia.

There were several reasons for the strong sense of order on the Hill. One was the concept of La Famiglia, of which the father was the unchallenged head but the mother was the center. Each played a distinct role in keeping the children in line. The mother declared the rules, the father enforced them. "No matter who it was who was mad at me," Berra said, "Mom or Pop or both of them, it was always Pop who hit me. Mom would never do it, she would just tell him and he would take care of it." Nothing else illustrates the differences in attitudes towards child rearing over the last seventy-odd years than Yogi's calm acceptance of his father's easy use of the hands in maintaining discipline. Several times in his memoirs and in inter-

views he would mention that his father hit him when he was a boy, he'd always mention it casually, in passing, and with no trace of anger or resentment. "If it was something that Mom thought she could explain to us, and fix up that way, she would try it. Not Pop, though, he never talked; he was all action. All the other fathers were the same way. There wasn't any juvenile delinquents on the Hill.

Outside authority such as police were rarely needed, largely because mothers and fathers, backed by the unquestionable force of the Catholic Church, held the hormonally charged young men in check. "No trouble was so big," Joe Garagiola would recall in his autobiography, "that Father Palumbo couldn't straighten it out. You were taught early that Saturday is take-a-bath-day, get-to-Church-for-Confession, and help-mama-fill-out-the-weekly-envelope-to-drop-in-the-basket-at-mass-on-Sunday."

Another reason for the relatively low crime rate was, as Yogi would recall years later, "There wasn't much of anything to steal." And if there had been, there were no cars for them to make their getaways in. "Even our parents didn't have cars."



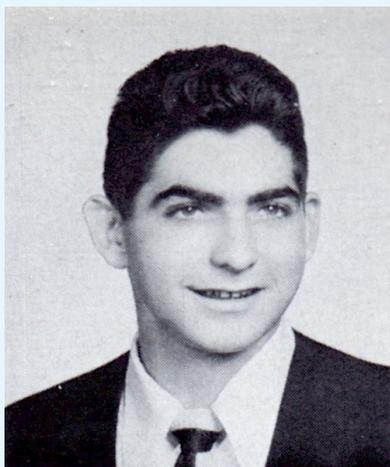
Yogi Berra and Joe Garagiola

by: Angelo Coniglio

On Wednesday nights, a group of *Per Niente* members meet at the local eatery-of-the-week and exchange jokes and stories. I'm relatively new to this group, but it didn't take me long to realize that these are (or were) some serious *jocks*. They all seem to have played numerous sports, whether in the schoolyards of grammar school, the courts and diamonds of high school, "at the Butler", or in Muni or other leagues. They never tire of spitting out stats from sixty years ago, or telling you how they faked an All-High guard out of his socks, back in '59, to sink a jump shot to win the big game.

As one whose highest achievement in sports was once *avoiding* being picked last for a sandlot baseball game (the guy who was picked last was a new immigrant and didn't know what 'baseball' meant), I do a lot of listening when the subject turns to the sports expertise of the guys.

In high school, at Lafayette, my athletic prowess was limited to '*Acka-Lacka-Ching*', and other cheers I helped perform as a cheerleader. But greatness was not far away, as I was lucky enough to get to cheer for some outstanding Italian-American players. One of these was Joe Merlo.



Joe Merlo, from Buffalo Public School #52, took his "athlete of the year" award for basketball, softball and track to Lafayette High School, where he built a foundation for achievement in multiple sports. Voted All-High in basketball his senior year, he was the Yale Cup scoring champion, averaging 28 points, and set a high school scoring record for points in a single game with 54. While he played only one year on the football team, earning an All-City honorable mention, it was in baseball that Merlo savored notes of accomplishment.

On the diamond he was an All-High shortstop his junior and senior years, batted .571 and .410 respectively, hit a 375-foot home run over the wall at Offermann Stadium, and was drafted and signed by the New York Giants in 1953. Among those in training camp with him in 1954 was Willie Mays.

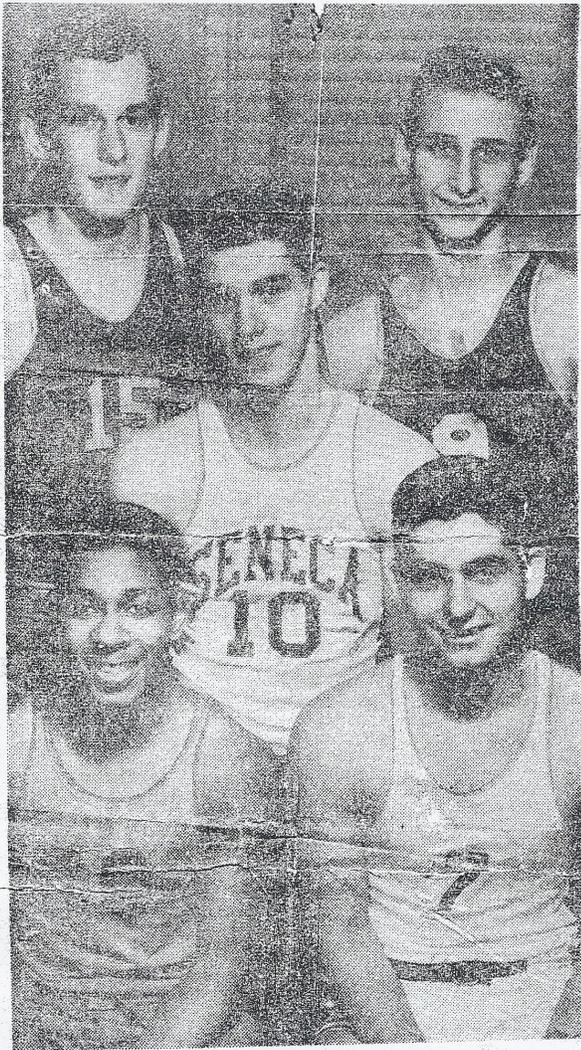
Merlo played four years on the basketball team at Buffalo State College and was named an All-American and All-Western New York as a junior and senior. He was State's MVP for four years and recognized as the outstanding athlete as a senior. The first 1,000-point scorer in Buffalo State College basketball history made a school record 30 straight free throws as a junior and totaled 1,322 points for his career.



After college Merlo played semi-professional softball for the Buffalo Hot Shots and enjoyed a 31-year career as a basketball and baseball coach, teacher and administrator at North Tonawanda High School. He remained active as an official in baseball, a basketball scorekeeper and an instructor at high school and college basketball clinics.

Merlo was inducted as a charter member of both the Lafayette High School and the Buffalo State College Sports halls of fame and was inducted into the Western New York Baseball and Western New York Softball halls of fame.

In 2009, Merlo was inducted to the Greater Buffalo Hall of Fame, where his biography states, "*Few athletes, let alone fine wines, have had smoother finishes than Joe Merlo.*"



Evening News All-High Basketball Team

These five players today were named to The Buffalo Evening News All-High basketball team. They are, left to right, back row, Bob Farrell, Riverside; Bruce Haller, Seneca, and Henry Nowak, Riverside; seated, Chuck Daniels, Hutchinson, and Joe Merlo, Lafayette.

St. Andrews	23	27	73	Totals	24	15	63
Nichols	17	20	17	19	73		
	32	24	16	11	63		

MERLO SCORES 75 POINTS IN 2 GAMES

Special to The Buffalo Evening News
CLEVELAND, Feb. 1.—The Glowmeters, an outstanding amateur basketball team from Buffalo, defeated the Olympia A. C. team in two games here over the week-end. The Glowmeters won Saturday night, 71-60, and downed the Olympia squad, 87-85, in overtime Sunday night.

Joe Merlo, former All-High star at Buffalo's Lafayette High School, counted a two-game total of 75 points for the Glowmeters. He had 28 points Saturday and 47 Sunday. Ralph Franchini netted 20 points and 21 for a two-game total of 41 for the Buffalonians. Lou Chickos' two

★ THIS AND THAT — The fact that the Yale Cup high school basketball teams will play 11 instead of the usual 13 games this season brings up this question: "Will Joe Merlo's individual season record of 359 points ever be broken?"

★ Merlo, star of the 1953 Lafayette team, averaged 27.6 points in 13 games last season. With the schools now playing two games less because of the closing of Hutchinson and Fosdick-Masten, a player would have to average 32.7 points in 11 games to break Merlo's mark.



CAGE TROPHY PRESENTED—Mai Eiken (left), coach of the University of Buffalo cage team, presents the Williams-Sarsnett Memorial Trophy to Joe Merlo (center), captain of the Barton All-Stars, who defeated the Emersonians in the final of the annual basketball tourney last night at the Michigan Y. At right is John Moore, Emersonians' captain.



MERLO SIGNS WITH GIANTS—Joe Merlo Jr., left, hard-hitting Lafayette High School shortstop, has signed a baseball contract with the New York Giants. The 18-year-old star, who batted .410 this season and .571 last year, inspects the contract with his father, Joseph Sr. Young Merlo, signed by Giant scout Steve Toth, will be assigned to one of the New York

C-E Photo

My most vivid memories of living on Buffalo's East Side from 1942-1960 (the year of it's demolition), are filled with a mixed bag of ethnic people. Grandparents, parents and some young children who were my age spoke with accents very different from the Italian which my father, Serafino Paolini, my mother, Giulia Paolini (third cousins) and their siblings spoke. Later on in life I learned that our neighborhood was very different from the West Side. We had paisani: the D'Andrea's, Joe and Lina, who lived on the West Side and whom we visited on the corner of Rhode Island and Prospect. Their son would become my Godfather and Lina, my Godmother. *Per Niente* readers know the son as Bernard D'Andrea, artist, painter and contributor to *Per Niente* magazine.

Memories of some of the East Side families and stand-outs within them come to mind often. Rocco Santoro and I were inseparable friends. His brother Mario founded Santoro Signs in a low ceilinged woodshed in their back yard on Eagle Street. Eventually the whole family worked in the business and today it's reputation is still respected. The Aloisio name is stamped in concrete slabs all over WNY: some dating back to the early 1920s. Attilio Aloisio, an uncle, was one of the financial leaders within the circle of Italians making homes and businesses on the familiar streets: Eagle, Swan, Jefferson, South Division, North Division, Pine, Cedar, Hickory, Chicago, Carroll, Pratt. He was able to make



Italian-American boys at Swan and Chicago Streets

loans and he did. There was a large group of us who had come from a small village commune in Aquila, Abbruzzi: San Pio Delle Camere. They came to Buffalo at the turn of the 20th century, mostly settling in what we know as The Lower East Side. Many lived there until 1960, when the City of Buffalo enforced a project inappropriately named "Urban Renewal." Using the force and principles of Eminent Domain, they evicted to the last. Included was my father's original self-service supermarket, "Paolini Brother's & Sons at the corner of Eagle and Hickory as well as the original Bocce Club Pizzeria (a former horse barn/garage), which was attached to the rear side of the store. Malvina Sacco was the founder that spawned six "Bocce Pizzerias" in her lifetime, by franchise, to her sons and brother, Dino. The store was take-out only and was rented from Mr. Lazzari, the owner of the Bocce Club. Prior to Mrs. Sacco renting, Lazzari would occasionally bake a sheet pizza and walk it out into Hickory St. where we all played our street games: Releavio, Nip, Kingers (wild chestnut game) Beef-Trust and "It" were most often played. We constantly nagged Lazzari to make pizza. Eventually it became the

best wish come true when the Sacco's moved in. Rudy Sacco, her oldest son, although presently recovering from a stroke, still operates the Bocce's Pizzeria on Clinton St. and Monroe.

Without delving into family history there are many who have left their mark on Western New York and beyond. Tobbio Martino, a Cornell

(Continued on page 17)

grad taught horticulture, hosted a weekly radio show on WBEN and ran a very large nursery in Lancaster. Joe Mosey became a national magazine distributor, collection agency magnate and Real Estate investor by nothing more than hard work. The Sorrentino family not only ran Marco and Duffy's Tavern in the shadow of Chef's Restaurant, but Vince (Jim) Sorrentino rose to lead the Democrat Party as it's Chairman for several years, while still practicing Law. Carl Spavento was a radio news announcer on AM and FM radio for almost 5 decades. The Attea family is so large and successful that only their name be mentioned; the same goes for the Joseph and Moran families. Jim Horne, one of the best basketball players in UB history started in Welcome Hall and School #6 playground. Msgr. Pulling, the pastor of St. Columba's Church during the mid-forties was famous for his height, 6'3", but more so for his cousin, Johnnie from Phillip Morris of "Call for Phillip Mooorriis" fame. He was about 5' tall and visited Msgr. Pulling often. Roxie Gian, a builder and developer of strip plazas and his large family made their start from the East Side as did Dan Amigone, world famous funeral director. His first "Parlor" was on Eagle St., near St. Columba's Church. In the early 20s his mother begged my father to have

young Dan apprentice for him at the Pierce Arrow Company, but after a few weeks of blacksmith work, Dan left for the undertaking career he so desired. He told that story till his last days. The Battistoni family, known for cured Italian sausage making fame as "Bison Products", was located within the neighborhood for nearly four decades. They wholesaled their products to grocery and meat stores locally (except to those who made their own i.e. Paolini Bros.) and now are doing it nationally, re-branded as "Battistoni".

This was a true melting pot. Lebanese, Hasidic Jews, Irish, German, African Americans and Italians some of whom were not yet naturalized citizens. Our house was separated by 30" side-yards. We always knew what was cooking next door when the windows were open. It could be kibbeh, matzah ball soup, spaghetti sauce or a pork roast. "Have a taste," is what you heard as a hand reached through the open window. That explains the "Old Neighborhood." By the mid '50s, many Italians moved to the East Delavan area and South Buffalo; the Jews and Lebanese moved to North Buffalo and Amherst.



Naples Delicatessen at Spring Street and Myrtle Avenue



Walking on Myrtle Avenue



The Modica Family— from Burgio, Sicily to Myrtle Avenue
Background: Rosario Modica, Anna Cordaro, Josephine Cordaro, Carmelo Modica
Children: Mariantonia and Biaggia Modica
The Modica brothers married the Cordaro sisters



The Sedia family
From Naples and Abruzze to North Division and Jefferson Avenue



The Sedita Family

Frank ,Vincent, Theresa, Frances, Mary, Crocifissa, Josephine

Children: Rose and Joseph

Frank would become the first Italian - American mayor of Buffalo

Joseph would become a NY State Supreme Court Justice.

The Giambra Family
From Serradifalco,
Sicily to Efner Street.

Frank, Francesco,
Prospera and
Salvatore.





Sam Arena

Pork Braciola

Braciola is the Italian word for roulade or rolled meat. Traditionally this was made with thin round steak stuffed with anything that pleased the cook. In Italian cookery the meat was usually with a combination of bread crumbs with salami, capicola or sausage and the traditional hard boiled egg. I choose pork instead of beef because generally pork has more flavor and is always tender.

INGREDIENTS

Italian bread crumbs (Progresso)

Italian bread crumbs (Progresso)

1/4 lb.. salami

1/4 lb. capicola

1 medium onion

3/4 lb. Italian sausage (not in casing)

1 quart of home made tomato sauce or marinara sauce



Sweat the onion over low heat until they are soft and translucent.

Sauté the sausage a little. Do not cook thoroughly. It will be cooked more in the sauce later. Chop the salami and capicola coarse. Combine all the ingredients and some of the bread crumbs in a food processor. Pulsate the ingredients gently, only until they are mixed. Add salt and pepper to taste and set aside.

THE MEAT

I choose pork butt or shoulder, it's expensive but has more flavor and will be tender after braising in the sauce. If you're not handy with a knife tell the butcher what you want and they will usually do it for you. What you want are slices of pork about 1/4 inch thick and about 6 inches long and 4 inches wide. This will make small individual braciolas rather than the large roll Grandma made. Lay the pork on a cutting board fat side down and pound thin. Put a small amount of the stuffing on the flattened slice of pork and roll it. Use tooth picks or tie the roulades to keep them closed. Brown the pork rolls on all sides and place them in tomato sauce and simmer for about 45 minutes or until the pork rolls are tender.

THE SAUCE

It's best to use home made sauce although a simple sauce of canned plum tomatoes with sautéed onions and garlic will do nicely. The sauce will take on the flavor of the pork and the stuffing and be delicious. Cook your favorite pasta and ENJOY !!

THAT'S IT.... KEEP IT SIMPLE with Sam



Email Sal Maggiore: Smaggiore@roadrunner.com

Maggiore's In Bagheria

SAL MAGGIORE

While waiting for a haircut at Mike Mendola's Parkway Beauty Salon. I saw a beautiful ad for Tomaso's, a San Diego area restaurant. (I later learned there are three of them out West) I asked Carl Caccamise who lives in San Diego if he knew of Tomaso's. He said he did and added ironically that Tomaso's last name was the same as mine. I asked Carl would he learn more about Tomaso, his roots, etc. and he did.

He said Tomaso Maggiore's mother and sister lived in Bagheria, Sicily, a suburb of Palermo where my parents were born. Carl had visited the area and stayed at a resort in Santa Flavia. Wow, since the name Tomaso was also strong in my family tree, I was sure there was a connection.

2002 was a special year for my wife and I. We reached several milestones including a household move, our fortieth wedding anniversary, ages of 65 and 60, our son's wedding, and the joyous birth of our granddaughter, Anna. To commemorate these occasions, our children presented us with airplane tickets and a week's hotel reservation in Rome for the following March.

Since this would be our first trip across the pond, we decided to extend our journey to include Florence, Venice and Sicily. We contacted Tomaso who was as excited as we. He gave us his mother's address and phone number. After visiting Rome, Florence and Venice we flew to Palermo. At the airport my wife rented a car from Budget (prior reservations had been made online in the USA). When the agent saw our name he laughed. Next door was Maggiore Car Rentals. Our hotel, Hotel Zagarella in Solanto, Santa Flavia near Bagheria was great thanks to the Caccamises.

Excited and anticipating a warm welcome I

phoned Senora Maggiore. For years we've heard how Sicilian's treat visiting Americans as relatives, serving them elaborate meals with strong protests against departures.

What could we do in exchange for such a possible welcome? We arranged for the Maggiores to meet us at the hotel. Mrs. Maggiore arrived with her daughter, grandchild and son-in-law. None spoke English, but my antiquated Sicilian was fine. We met in the lobby and enjoyed a bottle of wine. The thought of same names never arose. Mrs. Maggiore first name was Rosa as was my mother's. That too was never addressed. This nice lady was solely concerned about her son, Tomaso, whom I hadn't met. With no hint of a smile she asked, how's my son? Evidently, she was furious that Tomaso hadn't visited and wasn't with us. That's all we got, repeatedly. We said our good byes and we left.

The next day while walking on the main street my wife and I came upon two very young and beautiful meter maids. After polite greetings, I noticed a name tag revealed one to be Rosa Maggiore. Again with my mother's name! This blew my mind. Is this a relative? She wasn't impressed and went on her way but later did help with a parking ticket.

Disappointed, we later went to City Hall to seek birth records of my parents. I not only found them, it seemed everyone in that town was a Maggiore and the men were all Salvatore. In Bagheria, Salvatore and Maggiore are as common as John Smith. We have since learned of Maggiores across the United States. Our son, John, received a Facebook message from a John Maggiore in Australia but no connection to us has been made. In closing, arrivederci to all the Maggiores and Smiths of the world. Just think; we may be related.



Tony Canastraro giving Sonny Caruana a lesson



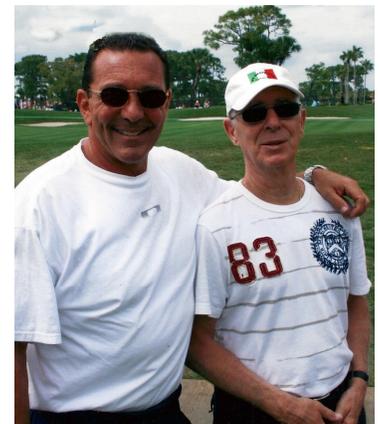
Peter Spallino can't seem to take his hands off of Sal Schiavone



Jack Gullo has more hair than Jerry Armstrong

The game of golf is really tuff
 Most often you wind up in the ruff
 If you have a good game your off the cuff
 If not you wind up on your duff
 This game is hard, not fluff
 Many leave the course in a huff
 If you master the game you have the right stuff
 In this game you just can't bluff
 Your game can easily blow up into a puff
 Well I think I've said enough

Charlie Mendola



Mike Capozzi and Joe Di Leo at the Honda Classic



Pete Gambino, Phil Garafaro, Tom Woodside and guest Getting set to tee-off



Len Pepe, tournament chairman runs the show



Dr. Bob Gianada admiring his long drive

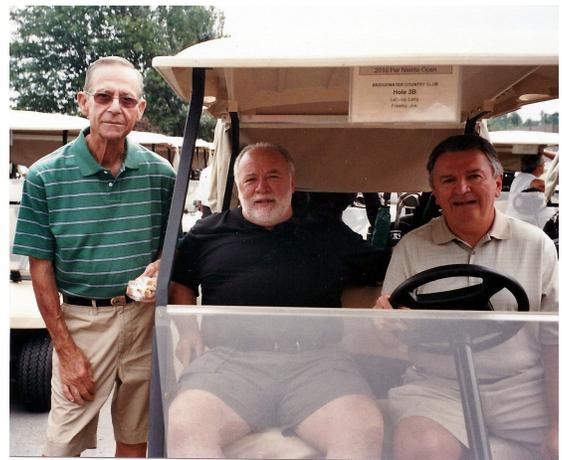


Frank Lotempio and Dick Portale celebrating a good round of golf!



Sam Arnone hitting an unusually good iron shot.

Pat Palmeri;
Joe Frawley
and Larry
LaDuca ready
to hit the
links



John Pieri, Bob Smaldone, Sam Maggiore and Pete Tasca
The Fearsome Foursome



Joe Mineo and Joe Dagonese always a twosome

What: Annual Per Niente Golf Outing

When: Friday July 22, 2011

Where: Links at Ivy Ridge
12221 Main St (Rte 5)
Akron NY 14001

Time: 1:30 Shotgun Start (all start and finish at same time)

Events: Calloway Tournament
Closest to the pin on all Par 3s
A, B, C Skin Games

Cost: \$110 Includes: Golf, cart, 12 oz. Steak Dinner, Beer, Pop and Prizes

Payment due Len Pepe
by July 12 to: 26 Greenhaven Ter
Tonawanda NY 14150
716-693-6848



Sponsor a Hole

Type #1: \$45.00 donation or \$40.00 worth of merchandise/ gift certificate for prizes. A sign with your name will be placed at one of the tee boxes.

or

Type #2: For \$50.00, a golf hole flag with the Per Niente logo on it will be placed on the green. The flag will also have your name on it as the sponsor.

In the ensuing years your sponsorship cost will be reduced to \$30.00 and your flag will be used again. You will have the option of holding the flag for the year but you must surrender it for the 2012 event.

* *Revenue generated from golf outing supports the Annual Per Niente Christmas Fund*



**“Sera Sotto Le Stelle”
“Evening Under the Stars”**



Saturday July 23, 2011

DiTondo's Ristorante

370 Seneca Street

Buffalo, NY

Casual Dress

Socializing begins at 6:00

Dinner at 7:15



Hors d'œuvres

Stuffed Eggplant

Roast Beef/Roast Pork

Barbecue Chicken

Vegetables/Mashed Potatoes

Salad

Coffee/Dessert

includes

Open Bar

Music

by

Joey Giambra's Orchestra

\$45 per person

RSVP and send your check by July 11

to either co-chairperson

Make checks payable to Vincent Scime



Susan Maggiore
133 Bedford Ave
Buffalo NY 14216
716-875-5311

Let us know
if you like to
reserve a
table for your
group

Peter Tasca
229 Virgil Ave
Buffalo NY 14216
716-875-3469





Sara waiting for penny goodies

One morning in June 1923 Mr. Frank rang the doorbell at 423 Seventh Street to announce that the Insana Family mail would no longer be delivered by him since he was preparing to move to Pasadena, California. Then, as he sipped the "caffé nero," my Mom had poured for him he continued on with his farewell message.

He expressed how deeply he was going to miss the cheerful greetings, as well as the sounds and aromas emitting throughout this Italian Westside community of Buffalo, New York

After eating his last bite of mom's giugliuliena (sesame seed) cookies he went on to tell about his great pleasure when hearing Enrico Caruso's renditions of Italian operas and also the popular "O Sole Mio" bel- lowing from phonographs at homes in the neighbor- hood. He added that he was able to distinguish the alto to soprano voices that accompanied piano, guitar, man- dolin or accordion instruments.

Mr. Frank commented about his delight when hearing the laughter of children playing various games: baseball, jacks, hide and seek, hopscotch, jumping rope, roller skating, and other outside activities. While he talked we could hear a young girl's voice chanting "one-two-three alairy, four-five-six-etc." in time with bouncing a ball.

Many homes had grape-vines in their backyards or side-yards. Mr. Frank said he would never forget the scent of the grapes being pressed into wine, nor of the aroma of home-grown sun-dried tomatoes turning into tomato paste. He said he could distinguish what was being cooked whether it was sugo, brodo, pesto, carne, or pasticiotti.

Mr. Frank expressed gratitude to my Mom for her freshly baked breads and pastries that he had relished so often. He boasted that despite being Irish he could pronounce sfogliatelle, sfinge, biscotti and almost all of the main course Italian specialties.

"I will miss you very much," I interjected reflect-

ing on our frequent good morning exchanges and of penny-goodies he gave me during my summer vacation from PS # 1 grammar school. Would anyone else be presenting me with these penny sticks of Black Jack, Teaberry, and Spearmint gum or the penny licorice bits, suckers, and button candies stuck to white paper strips? I felt so sad about his departure as we hugged and bade our farewells.

Several weeks after Mr. Frank's family was set- tled, he began sending us two-cent stamped postcards giving us insight about his new surroundings. He sent photo postcards of the flower-decorated floats from the annual New Year's Day Rose Bowl Parade in Pasa- dena. He invited us to visit and especially to view this spectacular event.

Mr. Frank's invitation to view the parade never came to fruition for the Insana Family. However, fifty years later when my family name was Lepeirs, we moved to Granada Hills, not too far from Pasadena.

After viewing the parade on January 1, 1974 and then on television every New Year's day since then, I am always reminded of that charming mailman who presented me with penny gifts when I was seven years old. Now that I am 94, I marvel at the changes that have taken place since then. Recently, when I related this story to my great-grand-daughter, she was amazed that television was not in existence, found it unbelievable that a penny could buy gum or candy, and even that there ever were two-cent postcards.

I wonder what will be the reaction when she retells this story to her great-grandchildren. Will there still be the Rose Bowl Parade on New Year's Day? Will pennies and stamps continue to exist? Will the song "Pennies from Heaven" be played, and will "A penny for your thoughts" be verbalized?

Sara Lepeirs started writing as a young girl. At age nine, she received a prize from the Buffalo Courier Express for one of her stories in the children's section. Sara also started a newsletter in 1931 for Grover Cleveland High school called "Campus Topics."

What did Washington say when he crossed the Delaware?



What did Columbus say upon discovering the New World?



Another grand winner. Topic of many compliments. Guys down here in Sarasota just loved this latest edition. Fascinating subject matters. Touches hearts !!!!!
The photo on the back cover. Brought tears to my eyes. This is what I somewhat looked like when I went there years ago 1932–1934!!!!

Giuseppie you are the man, Intelligente con cuore grande.
Tanto grazie.

Giuseppi Amico
Sarasota FL

Thank you for sharing with us your wonderful magazine “Per Niente.” We have read them cover to cover in the last two days. We found the articles and photos very heartwarming and they evoked many memories of our heritage. Enclosed find check for membership and donation to the Christmas Fund.

Al and Janine Nicolaio
Williamsville NY

Great magazine! It brings back many happy memories of our heritage. Keep up the good work.

Phil Di Re
Buffalo NY

Thank you for my first copies of *Per Niente*. They are very interesting and remind me of growing up on the West Side

Kathy Luzio Kolbe
Lancaster NY

Bravo, ..Un altro editizione fantastico di Per Niente.
ciao,

Mark Goldman
Buffalo NY

Your last issue of the Per Niente was outstanding, keep up the not the good work but the great work.

Mel Palano
Lancaster NY

To Per Niente publisher, Joe Di Leo, thank you for continuing to publish my penny thoughts.

Sara Insana Lapeirs
Grenada Hills, CA.

Hi,

Thanks for inserting my mother's picture in the last issue of *Per Niente*. At 94 years of age, she was excited to take part in a scene for the forthcoming movie, *Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*.

Keep up the good work!

Donald Tomaselli
Phoenix, AZ



Message from the President



Dr. Frank Giacobbe

About a year ago, my wife Renata and I launched the idea to establish an Italian Cultural Center in order to promote the Italian language and culture in W.N.Y. We met with several friends, who embraced the idea, held a few meetings and we applied to the State of N.Y. as "Non for profit organization". This status was recognized and the idea became a reality.

Founding members: Frank and Renata Giacobbe, Umberto Albanese, Sebastiano Andreana, Maria Aquino, Donato Curcio, Ferdinando Cimato, Andrew Giacobbe, Mario Giacobbe, Andrea Guiati, Paola Kersch, Peter Lojacono, Cosimo Mautone, Johanna Mucciarelli, Roberto Pili, Philip Tarantino.

Officers for one year:

F.Giacobbe (president), J.Mucciarelli (v.president), S.Andreana(secretary), M.Aquino(treasurer).

Board members: F.Cimato, A.Giacobbe, Lucia Caracci Ederer (It.vice consul), P.Tarantino.

Mission: To preserve and promote the Italian language via: a) Instructions, b) Italian television program (R.A.I.), c) Informal conversations. A laptop will be available for research, as well as a small library of Italian books, magazines, videos, D.V.D.s C.D.s. Soon, membership will open and with that revenue we will be able to have a place in North Buffalo.

Visit us at www.ccibuffalo.org and become a friend on Facebook

Email: info@ccibuffalo.org

Frank Giacobbe



Black and Green Saloon - Busti Avenue and Carolina Street



Jiggy Gelia and Gil Silva: a musical moment



Francesco Scamacca, always on his porch at 46 Busti Ave
1965



Giuseppe Licata on guard in front of Andy's on
the Lower Terrace. His grandchildren called him
"Kit Carson" because he carried an unlicensed
pistol.



Vincenzo and Giuseppe Sciandra
Pittston, Pa.



Primo Rinaldo, Joe Sciandra, Elmwood and West Chippewa



© The Joseph M. Cascio Collection

Above: Frontier Importing at 401 Niagara Street

Below: Religious procession up Seventh Street from St. Anthony's Church



© The Joseph M. Cascio Collection

Monday,
June 22, 1959

BUFFALO

Father of 4 Realizes a Dream—He's a U. S. Citizen
Born in U. S., He Grew Up in Italy, Then Returned



MR. ROMBOLA WITH DOMENICA, 12; GREGORIO, 8; SABATINO, 11 AND PASQUALE, 5

A man who was born in this country and then taken to Italy as a child became a citizen of the U. S. today, along with his four children, all born in Italy.

Dominic Rombola, 41, of 140 Vanderbilt St., is a laborer at the Ford stamping plant. He and his four children were among 220 persons naturalized by Federal Judge Harold P. Burke in U. S. District Court.

The group of new citizens was the largest in a year.

Mr. Rombola was born in Pittston, Pa., of

parents who immigrated from Italy. They returned to Italy when he was 4.

Mr. Rombola served in the Italian Army in World War II and operated a farm in Calabria, on the southern coast of Italy, until 1951, when he came back to the U. S.

"Everything is better here," he said today. "I wanted to live in this country."

Mr. Rombola came to Buffalo "because there is lots of work here" and made arrangements for his wife Laura and children to follow. They were not able to come

until 1955. Mr. Rombola visited his family once during his four-year absence from them.

Their four children, all pupils at St. Francis of Assisi School, are Domenica, 12; Sabatino, 10; Gregorio, 8; and Pasquale, 5. They speak English and Italian fluently.

Mrs. Rombola, who works in the laundry at Mercy Hospital, must wait another year to fulfill her five-year residence in this country to become a citizen. The children became citizens through their father's citizenship.

Ed. Note: Dominic Rombola passed away on April 15, 2011 at age 93.

By Tim Tielman

In 1959, an employee of the Buffalo Planning Department stuck his head out of a 9th floor window of the department's City Hall offices and snapped several photographs from West to North. The subject was the northern section of the Waterfront Urban Renewal Area, literally in the morning shadow of the 28 story City Hall. Most Buffalonians knew the area as the Italian Colony, or Little Italy. The pictures show a mix of manufactories, houses and apartment buildings, and neighborhood stores and restaurants. The buildings are mostly brick, the streets canopied by towering American Elms.

This neighborhood had to go. The city had designated it five years earlier as one of two areas subject to "Total Clearance." Every house, apartment house, residential hotel, warehouse, factory, social club, restaurant, butcher, baker, and cigar maker was to be destroyed. In all, across the 292 acre district, 915 buildings. The clearance would displace 1250 families, over 3,750 people, by official estimate. Those figures were probably low. The Italian Colony, the residential core of the WURA, was the 65 acres defined by Niagara, Virginia, Court and Fourth streets. In this area, by official records, 1003 residential units, 121 commercial units, a hotel, and three rooming houses were to be destroyed. Even the neighborhood school, built only 30 years before, was to go.

The federal government was offering cities 75% reimbursement for the cost of acquisition and demolition in Urban Renewal areas. New York State offered to throw in 12.5% of the costs. The cities themselves could define the Urban Renewal areas; the areas would have to contain a substantial number of "vacant and blighted" structures, but it was again left to the cities to define what constituted blight. The warehouses and factory lofts within the broad sweep of the waterfront between Washington and Virginia Streets were mostly not fireproof, and thus designated as blighted. Further, many examples of houses and apartment buildings could be found in the same area that were blighted in the eyes of city inspectors.

This piece seeks to demonstrate that the Italian Colony in 1959, taken by itself, was not generally "vacant and blighted," was not considered such by its inhabitants and casual observers, and, far from being a threat to the future prosperity of the city constituted a type of neighborhood

necessary to the continued vitality and wealth of any city. Finally, it seeks to demonstrate that, rather than promoting business creation and retention, subjecting the Italian Colony to Urban Renewal eliminated many "Mom and Pop" small businesses, particularly the corner store, and prevented the creation of new ones.

This phenomenon as it pertains to the Lower West Side has been touched upon by authors whose focus was in other areas. Neil Kraus examined the impact of Urban Renewal on the Lower East Side of Buffalo, which experienced "total clearance" 10 years before the Lower West Side. In *Race, Neighborhoods, and Community Power: Buffalo Politics, 1934-1997*, he found the Ellicott Urban Renewal Area displaced over 2,200 families, but, "also displaced were roughly 250 businesses, almost all of which were small, neighborhood-oriented businesses, such as restaurants, laundromats, grocery stores, taverns, and the like... Residential disruption, therefore, was only one dimension of the effects of redevelopment." Mark Goldman devotes a chapter of *City on the Lake* to the Waterfront Urban Renewal project and related plans for a cross-town expressway in the Virginia Street corridor.

Eliminating the Italian Colony

In 1954, the City of Buffalo Common Council first took legislative action to begin defining the Waterfront Urban Renewal Area. In 1959, it applied to the federal government for funding to acquire and demolish a now-defined 242 acre tract of land that included the Italian Colony. In 1964, the city's application for federal funding was approved. In July of that year, the city published a glossy booklet, "Planning for You," that sought to explain the need for Urban Renewal. The 1966 Polk Directory of the city, enumerated in the late summer and early fall of 1965, for the first time shows a number of residential vacancies. Demolition was by fits and starts at first, because of the slowness of property acquisition, but by 1968 demolition was in full swing, and by the end of 1969 only a few now vacant commercial buildings were left to be demolished.

Through draconian laws governing condemnation,



The old Italian Colony in 1959, part of the City of Buffalo's Waterfront Urban Renewal Area (WURA). View is toward north-west, with Niagara Street on the right. School 73 is on Seventh Street, lower left. A mixed-use neighborhood with dozens of small businesses, manufactories, and hundreds of houses and apartments. Over 3,000 people lived there, by official estimate.



The same area in November 1969. Few buildings remain. School 73 would be the last to go, replaced by parking lot. In upper left, piers of crosstown expressway can be seen just south of Virginia Street. Community protest blocked completion of expressway, but spur extended to Niagara Street, creating permanent barrier in neighborhood.



West side of Busti Avenue between Wilkeson and Georgia Streets, 1959. Note many brick houses, neatly trimmed hedges, and general high level of maintenance in this section of Italian Colony.

there was little that citizens could do to stop a given urban renewal project once a city decided upon it. A former city planner said "It was easy for the city to go in and say, "Here's \$3,000. Take it and shut up."

There was a lot of grumbling in the Colony, even anger, as the city began condemning properties and demolishing them, but a sense that resistance was futile. There were few tools at hand.

There was no civic disobedience, mass protests, or organized resistance to the project. A litigation group, The Waterfront Steering Committee, Inc., was established to petition for higher levels of reimbursement from the city. An article by Courier Express reporter Joe Ritz in the summer of 1966, which ran under the headline "Renewal Can Also Cause Scars," detailed housing conditions and the arbitrary offers the city made for supposedly blighted properties it had assessed for much more. Ritz found "gardens and fruit trees in back yard plots," while "the interiors of many homes are well

kept and comfortably furnished."

By 1970, into his third term as Buffalo mayor, Frank Sedita's old neighborhood was scraped clean. Here was cleared land, right downtown, ready for development. Yet not a single developer stepped forward. Sedita had just presided over the destruction of over 1,200 units of housing, and the displacement of thousands of people of all incomes levels. And now, "the city was stuck with the acreage." The just established New York State Urban Development Corporation stepped in in and arranged a deal wherein two private developers would build over 700 new apartments in developments known as Pine Harbor and Shoreline, designed by the eminent Paul Rudolph designed in his signature Brutalist style and meant to evoke an Italian hill town. In return for the public subsidies involved, the apartments would be rent controlled. They were completed shortly before Sedita left of-

office in 1973. Few residents of the Italian Colony actually moved into the new apartments. They had found housing elsewhere in between the demolition of their homes and the completion of the new project.

Disrupted as their lives may have been, Urban Renewal, in a literal sense, did not kill people. It did kill the small family owned businesses that were in the neighborhood. Not a single commercial enterprise was permitted to locate in the new development. Forty years after completion, the area around the developments is as urbanistically sterile as the day they were built.

Of the 89 small businesses in the Italian Colony conclusively documented at the announcement of the project in 1959, only two bakeries and a meat market survived to reopen elsewhere, a much worse rate than elsewhere.

Even larger incorporated businesses had a hard time surviving the disruption; among the survivors were some which left the City of Buffalo for the suburbs, exacerbating problems urban renewal was meant, in part, to address. One, Buffalo Wire Works, had over 100 employees. It was on Lower Terrace, directly behind City Hall and across Genesee Street from Andy's Café, a neighborhood landmark. The site remains vacant over 40 years after demolition.

Joey Giambra, 77, and Joe DiLeo, 71, remember the neighborhood well. DiLeo and his extended family lived above one of the most famous restaurants that ever existed in Buffalo, Andy's Café, at the corner of Lower Terrace and Genesee Streets behind City Hall. The stout four-story Second Empire style apartment building was a stone's throw from both Buffalo City Court and City Hall, dominated from the 1950s to the early 1970s by Frank Sedita, the city's first Italian mayor. Andy's was a political



Lower Terrace and Genesee Street looking southwest from City Hall, 1959. The extended Di Leo family lived on the upper three floors of Mansard-roofed structure at southwest corner of Lower Terrace and Genesee. The ground floor was occupied by Andy's Café, operated by Joe Di Leo's uncle. Joe's father, Frank, moved his family from a top floor railroad flat a few blocks away to a more commodious house on Busti Avenue in 1956, Buffalo Wire Works, with over 100 employees, is just across Genesee street to the north.

hangout par excellence. Three floors of cold water railroad flats rose above the restaurant. A hallway ran down the middle of each floor, with rooms on either side. A bathroom was on one end of the hallway, and each room had a door or doors connecting it to adjacent rooms. In this way a room or suite of rooms could be configured to fit the needs or budget of the occupants. Rooms were heated with small coal stoves. DiLeo's family lived on the top floor in a range of rooms on one side of the hall, and his uncle, aunt, and his four cousins lived across the hall. His grandparents lived on the third floor, and another cousin lived in a small two room flat on the same floor. Yet another aunt, uncle and set of cousins lived on the second floor. That was convenient, because they owned and operated the restaurant below.

"At one time and another the family helped Andy's survive during and after the depression," recalled DiLeo. "My father and uncle were bartenders. My sister and cousin were lunch hour waitresses. My mother, aunt and grandmother prepped food early in the morning. We all pitched in." While not as plush as the Kennedy Compound at Hyannisport, it was every bit as lively.

Joe's immediate family moved a couple blocks way, to a second floor apartment at 51 Busti Avenue, in 1956. The house had central heating and hot running water, and Joe finally had a bedroom of his own. Fresh bread was to be had right next door at Maria's Bakery.

DiLeo enumerated the attractions of the years above Andy's: family, the hundreds of nearby downtown stores and department stores, the public and parochial schools within a short walk, and the food stores on seemingly every corner. Lomeo's delicatessen, Joe Battaglia's butcher shop, Mr. Catanzaro's fish market, Mister Paolo the shoemaker, and Palermo's chicken market. Hucksters also plied the neighborhood. "You could do your shopping in Italian or English; most of the merchants were bilingual," said DiLeo.

Not that the new DiLeo home on Busti was without its conveniences: Besides Maria's Bakery next door, Merlino's cheese was in front, Nick Ellia's grocery store across the street, and on the corner, Mr. Strozzi's drug store. This pattern of deli, drugstore, bakery, butcher, repeated every few blocks in a densely populated, pre-automobile

neighborhood would be familiar to, and expected by, urban geographers.

The 1959 Polk Directory for the City of Buffalo lists 539 delicatessens (selling cheese, cold cuts, perhaps prepared sandwiches, and packaged goods), 739 grocery stores, 165 meat markets, and also 165 baked goods stores. The City of Buffalo had almost 533,000 people in the 1960 census. Not including smaller categories like fish markets, poultry stores, and specialty food stores, this works out to one food store per 342 people, or one per 112 households (Buffalo in 1960 had just over 3 people per household). Household size in the heavily Catholic, pre-pill Italian Colony was probably larger, meaning fewer households were necessary to support a given type of store.

Commodities like bread, coffee, milk, and meats are daily necessities and people will not venture far for them. A population of 100 families within walking distance would support a "Mom and Pop" grocery store. Taverns, hardware stores, restaurants, cafes, and drugstores all had their threshold populations. Each entrepreneur learned to adapt to the peculiarities of his or her block, down to the level of individual tastes and habits. The merchants became repositories of local lore, and trusted keepers of keys.

Joe Giambra, who lived as a teenager on Busti Avenue between Carolina and Virginia, vividly recalls the Black and Green saloon at Busti and Carolina. Run by Sam Martorana, it served foods of "southern Italy and Sicily: tripe, roasted lamb heads, fava and ceci beans, pasta, clams, crabs," said Giambra. The Black and Green closed in early 1950s after Sam shot and killed a young man who threatened his life. Martorana was exonerated of any wrongdoing. He went on to open the Rose-Mar with his wife, Rose, on Niagara Street. After that was demolished in Urban Renewal, Martorana became a city employee until retirement.

Giambra's home was near a cluster of neighborhood stores on Trenton Avenue near Carolina Street, and he rattled them off when asked: Chimera's Hardware, Snowy's Cleaners, Giangreco's Meats, Varco's butcher shop, Baudo's grocery. Mr. Gaetano Mule's store across the street from the Black and Green was a favorite. "Mule

also had a small four pony merry-go-round that he would cart around the neighborhood,” recalled Giambra. “He charged pennies for a ride.” A few feet from Mule’s was Traina’s Fish Market, and next to that, Bracco’s delicatessen. At Virginia and Busti was Massaro’s (“a store like the present day Guercio’s on Grant Street”) and Johnny’s Meats.

The Lower West Side was a complex ecosystem. It must be observed, however, that places deemed the “nostrils of hell” in Buffalo and urban America were by definition densely occupied by the poor, many of whom were immigrants or migrants. A low-rent area teeming with street life within walking distance of a factory, waterfront, train yard, or entry-level clerical or retail job would have many attractions for a recent arrival with few resources. More so if the area had people of shared ethnicity, class, and worldview.

Unbuild It and They will Come

Urban renewal clearances were built primarily on uninformed distaste for the neighborhoods that looked to the decision-making classes as shabby, junky, falling-down. Secondly, and often as post hoc justification for the clearances, was the belief—faith—that new buildings would come in the place of old. When this became demonstrably false, programs were set up to arrange for something to be built there (such as the New York State Urban Development Corporation in 1969).

Not only did Urban Renewal fail to renew urbanity, it was hostile to traditional urbanism and often consciously so. The result was the counter productive destruction of an “urban ecosystem” that dispersed populations and caused the local extinction of small businesses and prevented their reestablishment through zoning laws that either forbade commercial enterprises in a residential neighborhood or mandated expensive and expansive suburban-style parking. So thorough was the expungement of the Italian Colony and the prevention of the establishment of new businesses, that the collection of buildings that emerged have failed to be adopted in local hearts, minds, and parlance as a specific place at all. Residents are consigned to living in a state of placelessness.

The physical structuring of a neighborhood greatly influences social behavior. Where population densities are high, related families can live near each other. Where streets are narrow and stoops, doors, and windows are close to the sidewalks, people are easily seen and neighboring is encouraged. Where stores, taverns, and social clubs are scattered throughout the neighborhood, places for spontaneous encounter are more readily available. Inner-city neighborhoods are geared to distinctive inner-city lifestyles. In most inner-city public housing projects, however, such may not be the case. In public housing it is more difficult for related families to live near one another, open spaces are large and impersonal and less conducive to large concentrations of people and their spontaneous encounter. Street life is discouraged and, indeed, may even be impossible to achieve. Feelings of “community” and of “belonging” may disappear in favor of social isolationism—a condition perfect for the breeding of total social indifference.

Cataclysm

The clearance of the Italian Colony was counterproductive. It displaced thousands of people, eliminated businesses, thwarted the creation of new businesses, reduced land values in bordering areas, and cataclysmically destabilized a much larger section of the city. A small part of the story of Urban Renewal in Buffalo is being illuminated here. Much more can be written about the impact on individuals, businesses, and the ability of cities to renew themselves; the political nature of much of the decision making, etc. A counter-factual history could even be written, supposing what would have happened had the neighborhood been left alone.



From the Joe Cascio Collection by Joe Rizzo