

Salvatore Martoche

There is an old Italian tradition of naming first born children after the baby's paternal grandparents and then the maternal grandparents. Family names proliferated among cousins in large families to the point that it was sometimes comical. For instance, in my family, I have a sister named Theresa; my mother's brother Anthony had a daughter, Theresa, but she was called "Baby Theresa"; my father's sister Anna had a Theresa

Ann, and his brother Angelo had a Mary Theresa. I had two friends with the son of one and the daughter of the other named in honor of their mother, who was a widow and raised them by herself. They claimed she was both a mother and a father to them. Hence, they had a Rosario and Rosaria. A close friend calls his daughter, Monica, but I know that her name is "Dominica" in honor of his mother. He also has a son, Pat, whose name happens to be "Pasquale," in honor of his father. There were Marcos, Marios, Mauros, Cologeros, Lorenzos, Angelos, Dominics, Josephs, Santos, Emilios, Enzos, Marianos, Pieros, Alfios, Dantes, Luigis, Sergios; and the girls were Angelinas, Lucias, Annas, Grazias, Philomenas, Serafinas; and of course, no family was complete without at least one Mary, Maria or Marie, not only naming them after family members but also after the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Our parents could predict from the names of their friends' parents what the names of their friends' children would be. Naming started with the father's mother

and father and then proceeded to the mother's mother and father, often descending to the eldest brother and sister and so on. Some might suspect that one of the reasons they had large families in those days was just so they could get a chance to name a kid with their own name or some name they really, really liked. Sometime around World War II that tradition started to break down,

not only in Italian-American and Sicilian-American households, but in most ethnic households where the tradition had prevailed for generations. People wanted to be assimilated; they wanted to be "American." Their ethnicity created a certain embarrassment and some felt uncomfortable to be "too Italian." Apparently this never bothered Wasps and blue bloods who appear to have a penchant for naming their children a second last name as the child's first name. For instance, Churchill, Wilson, Truman, Donaldson, Forrest, Wells, Dunhill, Chandler, Lincoln or Madison.

Poles and Eastern Europeans similarly started to look beyond their traditional names. There were fewer Stanislauses, Waldos, Cazimiers, Ludwigs or Uldas. The same thing happened to a lesser extent to Germans and Irish. Although their names were more similar to the Anglo-Saxon names of the British founders of this country that many of them still endure to this day and are worn by their children with great pride. Names like Karl, Erwin, Adolph, Ian, Sean and Shamus. Africans and South and Central Americans are the people with the distinctive names today and many name their children with family names. I wonder if those names are suffering the same growing pains as their ethnic predecessors endured as they become acculturated to American society, as they become Americanized.

Anyway, I have to 'fess up', I was one of those people who wanted to be "more American." I am now ashamed and embarrassed to admit that, but it's the truth. I rebuffed the efforts of my mother and my grandparents to teach me Italian reading, writing and speaking. "I want to be an American," I shouted. I remember how I dreaded the first day of class in elementary school when I had to introduce myself to the other students and the mostly non-Italian-American teachers who invariably mispronounced my name. Even many of the Italian-Americans would say Salvatoré instead of Salvatore or Martocci or Martoch instead of Martoche. I am proud to say I never turned my back on the culture and history of Italy, the Roman Empire or its geography, its music, or its joy for life, thank goodness. I remember reading a book on the life of a famous American of Italian extraction, and he was asked at an

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Italian-American function by a female professor of Italian culture, when he became Italian again? I knew exactly what she was saying to him and so did he. I am happy to report it seems many people are rediscovering their cultural roots and their ethnic pride more and more everyday.

It's sad that in days past a lot of Italian-American parents were concerned about their children speaking Italian for fear that it might affect their ability to

speak English in a way that was not different from that of their non-Italian colleagues and friends and cause them problems. Many of these parents did not want their children to have ethnic names, first or last, which could be an impediment to admission into the right schools or finding the right job.

Many years ago, there was a group of Italian-Americans who were not welcomed into fraternities at a local high school. They banded together and formed their own fraternity with a group of Jewish students, which became one of the most popular fraternities at the school. Then there's the story about the young immigrant who was fearful of using his last name when he went out into the job market for fear of prejudice preventing him from getting it. As he was pondering a new name he looked up and he saw a street sign from the window of his flat. "Baynes" became the name he used, and it served him and his family very well. My own father had his name changed when he started elementary school. The story, as it was relayed to me, was that the principal, a guy named Charles Boutet, decided that Carlo Martocchio should be Charles Martoche. I guess I could understand his point of view; he tried to turn my dad into a Frenchman! While the name may have sounded French, my father was 100% Italian-American and proud of it. Another teacher at the same school changed the last name of his brother Angelo from Martocchio to Martocci. Same time, same school. Go figure. Soon, even my grandfather went from Salvatore Martocchio to Salvatore Martoche! Except for Uncle Angelo and his immediate family, everyone in my dad's family including his mother and father became a Martoche.

One of life's lessons is that we should never become too old or set in our ways not to adapt and change. Recently, my son Christopher taught me a great lesson. When he was born I had to decide whether I would name him after my father, as my father had named me after



Charles Martoche

his father. My dad told the story of going into his father's shoe repair store and suggesting that he might want to name his first born Richard, telling the old man that it was a favorite name of his. But he knew as soon as my grandfather threw a heavy metal shoe form in his direction and uttered an expletive, that idea would not fly. Thus, I became Salvatore despite the fact that I was born on Columbus Day. I always thought the name picked me and that I should be Christopher. Therefore, I always told my dad when my first-born came he would not be Charles, he would be Christopher, the name I felt should have been mine. My father, always kind and understanding, said that was just fine. As long as the baby was healthy, it didn't matter what I called him. But I know now that might not have been exactly the whole truth. My father died just a month before my son Christopher came into this world and I faced a huge dilemma. I spoke to my wife over and over again and she was very supportive. Although she loved my father she would leave it to me. As time has passed I learned that my mother too may have been somewhat disappointed in my choice.

Fast forward to the birth of my first grandson. My wife and I had a visit one night from my son and his beautiful wife, the former Kathleen Duffy, to announce that if the baby was a boy, the baby's name would be Salvatore Daniel in honor of both grandfathers. I looked

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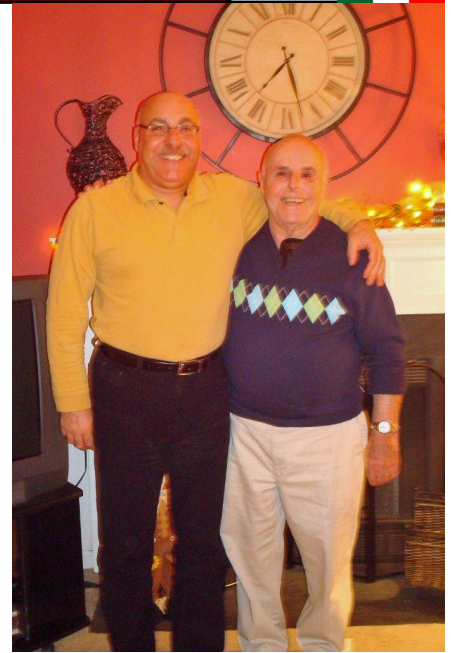
at Katie and Chris and my eyes welled up. I was so proud they would even consider doing this as I suggested they didn't have to. I said, It was a tough name for a child to grow up with. I knew from experience.

My son Christopher said, "That's all right, Dad, he's going to be tough kid." I countered and said, "Yes, but the name is so very ethnic," to which Katie responded, "Well that's where you are wrong, Dad. It use to be ethnic, now it's exotic." It gave my wife and me a good chuckle. I learned first hand that the love and respect being afforded to me at that moment was very special and I was, and remain grateful that they chose to name this wonderful, beautiful child in my honor and in honor of Katie's father, Dan Duffy.

Lesson number two came recently when a new baby entered our lives. Christopher and Katie had a second son. I lobbied hard for the name which was kicked around for months by my son and daughter-in-law, Charles Christopher. I thought it would be neat for Christopher Charles to have a son named Charles Christopher and, of course, it would bring great smiles to my father and mother in heaven. But these young adults are always full of surprises and unique twists and turns. In the end, Chris and Katie decided to do a wonderful thing. They named the baby Charles Dennis, after Christopher's Godfather and

favorite "non-blood uncle." Dennis has been a family friend for nearly 50 years and, the truth is, on many occasions when I was off tending to my career and my ambitions, he included Christopher along with his two sons on many excursions and adventures. It made perfect sense since one of Dennis' sons, John, is the father of two beautiful girls and the other, Greg-

ory, is single. It was a wonderful thing to do. It made Dennis and his family very happy and once again I was taught another valuable lesson. My son and my daughter-in-law taught me about blending old and new traditions, culture and customs, to keep faith with the past, to honor the present, and to prepare for the future.



Salvatore Martoche III & dad,
Salvatore Martoche Jr.



Salvatore Daniel, Christopher, Salvatore and Charles Dennis Martoche