



TIME PRESENT MIRRORS TIME PAST

J. Sacco & Sons Meat Market is celebrating its 65th year in business. The milestone coincides with the grand opening of VB3 Restaurant and Bar. Although the two businesses are diametrically different, their fundamental principles are identical.

The contrast between the two businesses is extreme. While the one-room butcher shop was without frills when it was opened in 1947, VB3 could only have existed in a science fiction magazine. The new restaurant is high tech to the max. The restaurant/bar has 30 large flat screen televisions worked into a funky décor of lights and furniture, coupled with state of the art audio/visual equipment and WIFI service. Late night, when the kitchen is closed, the space transforms into a happening hot spot. By comparison, in 1947 a hot water heater was considered a luxury.

While Sacco's butcher shop was modest even by 1940's standards, VB3 is ahead of its time. Management was not satisfied with creating something common. The owners wanted to be inventive and do things differently, like artists; they wanted to improve on what already was. The improvement that Jimmy and Rose Sacco were seeking when they started their business was in their quality of life. Though the motivations behind each business are different the drive to succeed and the way to do it through hard work are the same. This comes with no surprise for it's in the cultural roots that the businesses are so much alike.

It may be of no coincidence that Jimmy and Rose's granddaughter Alessandra is involved in the opening of VB3. She is married to owner Joe Russo who is partners with his cousin, also named Joe Russo; a third partner is the renowned Chef Michael Colletti. The culture that ties all of them together comes from their roots in the Peterstown section of Elizabeth, NJ. A small traditional Italian American neighborhood where their ancestors have settled.

The culture stresses family values and community. Success is so much easier when people work together. Being selfish never played well in the neighborhood. Trust and respect goes a long way and those traits are in play at VB3 which is open seven days a week. Long hours are the norm, even for Alessandra who stopped working there when she entered the third trimester of her pregnancy.

The two cousins, both named Giuseppe, are tagged Big Joe and Little Joe to avoid confusion. Confusion was normal because, as it was, both Joes were double cousins. Both their fathers, Sam and Jack, were brothers and their mothers, Nella and Rose, were sisters (nee D'anna). If that isn't confusing enough, consider that Michael's paternal grandmother, Maria Mirable married to Gaetano Colletti, is the sister to Nella and Rose's mother Paula Mirable married to Fillippo D'anna. To complete the picture were Sam and Jack's parents who were Joe and Sara Russo. Michael's dad was also a Joe, now deceased, and his mom is Linda. All three clans, originating from Ribera, Sicily, lived in Peterstown on John Street across the street from one another going back three generations.

The Russos and Michael grew up cooking. Michael worked in his father's bagel shop starting at a young age, until he was 16 years old when he joined his cousins and worked in their family business. Both Russo families are partners in Villa Borghese in Fords, NJ. All three cousins were in their teens and working together, a precursor of things to come. After graduating Rutgers both Joes took over their fathers' business and opened a second restaurant in Helmetta, NJ calling it Villa Borghese II.

Michael pursued his own path into a culinary career and established himself as one of the most accomplished chefs today with a string of successful ventures and critical acclaim. He returned to New Jersey from his last venture in Washington, DC and joined forces with his cousins to plan a unique new restaurant. They were joined by another pair of brothers, Ricky and Gary Leff, who own a security company in Fords. They were friends of the Russo's and as partners were responsible for the high tech features in the VB3. The name VB3 is a hipper derivative of the name Villa Borghese III.

VB3 is located in The Monaco, a luxury apartment building on Jersey City's waterfront. The unique atmosphere is rivaled only by the unique cuisine. Michael calls it modern seasonal Italian. He starts with traditional Italian dishes and puts a modern twist to them. Because he uses fresh locally grown ingredients, his menu changes with the season. Only the top grades of meat are used and special orders are no problem for his supplier Sacco's Meat Market.

John Sacco took over his parents business. He and his siblings were skilled with a clever before they learned to write. There is no substitute for learning a skill then growing up in it. John is still low tech. There is nothing automated about his production or prepackaged about his products. All his meat is handpicked and hand cut. One service he did add to the business that his father didn't offer is catering. For John it is more a labor of love than work. He does it so well and he loves doing it. The same can be said for the crew at VB3. 🍷

(left, l-r) Gary Leff, Michael Colletti, (little) Giuseppe Russo, Ricky Leff, and (Big) Giuseppe Russo, owners of VB3 Restaurant and bar located at 475 Washington Boulevard in Jersey City, NJ.



(above) Jim and Rose Sacco with junior butchers John, Joe, Maria and Frank.





Oct 12

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Although great care has been taken to ensure the information contained within is accurate, Around About Peterstown assumes no liability for errors or omissions.

Around About Peterstown welcomes the comments and concerns of its readers put into writing and sent to:

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President's Message



There is no way that I can properly thank all the loyal customers that have patronized my store over the past 65 years. Just thinking about all the people makes me feel so blessed. I do think of all those who have passed also. My customers feel like family. They have been a part of my life sometimes on a daily basis. I've seen generations of the same family come through my door.

The older folks cause me to start thinking about my dad and mom. Customers really loved them and they would remind me to this day just how special they were. I'd like to invite my customers to a get together at the store on Friday, October 26, 2012 from 1pm to 3pm.

I'd like to see my present customers along with those who may have moved away and were once part of my dad's life.

I must also say how proud I am for Ali, her husband Joe, his cousin Joe and Michael for doing a fantastic job in opening VB3. What a great dining experience. I can tell you first hand that I never saw anyone work harder than them.

God bless

John Sacco
John Sacco, President
Sons of Peterstown Sports Club

PRESS RELEASES

Press Releases that benefit the community of Peterstown are offered free of charge. Every effort will be made to accommodate appropriate articles when time and space allows. Send any info in early.

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Letters to the Editor



Hi Tina:

Believe it or not, I got a call from Modesto, CA from someone who graduated from Battin High School. She had a copy of the August 2012 issue of your newspaper and called me to see if her Class of 1947 was having a reunion as well as the class of 1952. I'm sure she graduated with my sister who is living in North Carolina. We were five girls in the Macdonald family from South Street and we all attended Battin High School.

Her name is Fran Lovato Woodworth. She lived on Morris Avenue at Stiles Street. She is hungry for any news of Elizabeth and she called me.

I appreciate you and Joe covering our class's 60th reunion as well as our 50th and 55th. Getting a call from a stranger in California is surprising to say the least.

Best wishes and I love your paper. My sister, who died on December 16, 2011 used to get copies where she lived in Toms River. She always saved them for me. I miss her and the news from Peterstown.

ThanX,
Morag M. Moscato
Pennington, NJ

To the Editor:

I've lived in Cranford more years than I care to recall. Over those years I've had few occasions to go to Elizabeth; but I've heard of Jacobson's many times, and seen their ads in your newspaper.

I finally visited there recently, and it was totally not what I was expecting – which probably adds to the mystique. I met Pat, who has been there perhaps 35 years, and who was very helpful. Two days later my appliance was delivered, and the installation was imperative. Even though it was a long day for them – I wasn't available earlier, they did a thoroughly professional job, and added touches I have received nowhere else.

Bottom line: Jacobson's lived up to its reputation. Will I go there again? Absolutely. Will I recommend them to others? Definitely. Two final comments: One of the installers has worked for Jacobson's many years as well – I think 15 +; speaks highly of how the employees are treated. And, for people who have yet to visit there, do not expect a conventional store. You will not find it. Which, I guess, is half of what makes Jacobson's Jacobson's!

Sincerely,
E.G. von Fraunhofer
Cranford, NJ

Joe,

Always look forward to picking up the latest issue of Around and About Peterstown at Marino's in Springfield. I read in the Letters to the Editor in the Aug/Sept 2012 issue from Janet Papetti regarding names that sounded very familiar to me. I went to my night table and pulled out my copy of the 1954 Tee Jay Yearbook. There I found the pictures of Charlie Tornatore and Bob Saraco. While I have recognized many of the names in other issues, this is the first time I was able to identify some my classmates. I've been waiting to do that for some time. Thank you Janet.

Sincerely
Paul McGlynn
Mountainside, NJ

Hi Joe,

Been reading some back issues about Kirk Center and Tony Orlando. Have you ever written about Dominick "Tic" Mollozzi? He is now 88 years old, and was an up and coming fighter in the 50's. Although I left Elizabeth in 1952, I really enjoy reading your paper.

Thanks
Doris Stanton Basile
Pleasant Hill, CA

In the December 2008 you published an article about the Papetti family. The Zeppieris of Italy and the Papettis of Elizabeth are connected: In 1875 my great-grandfather, Giuseppe Zeppieri married Maria Domenica Papetti, who was born in 1858. They had two children: Virgilio (born in 1879) who is my grandfather and Cesira.

In 1884 Nicola Papetti (fu Luigi) gave guarantee (in Italian: fideiussione) to Giuseppe Zeppieri when Zeppieri won a tender for transportation of convicts of the town of Veroli. The four page document was found in the public library of Veroli by Piergiorgio Renna, a young free press reporter in Frosinone, a town a few miles from Veroli. Piergiorgio' father was Luciano Renna. He was also a reporter in Frosinone and a good friend of my father.

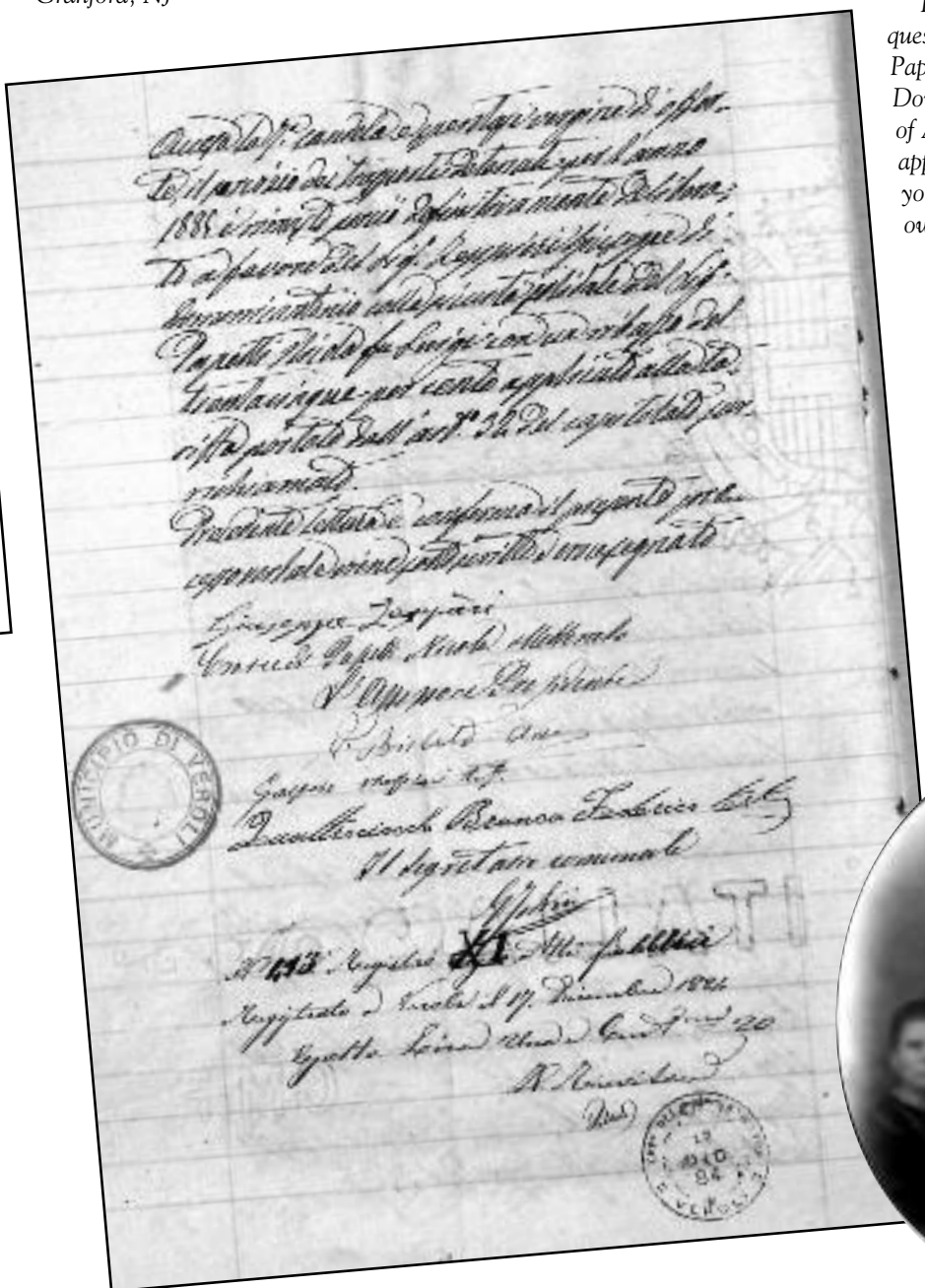
Maria's brother was Nazareno who was the father of Alfred Papetti who migrated in the States in the 1920s. In the summer of 1959 I stayed at Santina's house on Palmer Street for three months. I'm still in contact with Alfred's grandson, who is a great friend of my son Pierfrancesco. Maria died in 1938 and is buried in the Zeppieris family chapel in Veroli, Italy.

The research raised a few questions for me. I wonder if Nicola Papetti was the father of Maria Domenica? And who was the father of Alfred Papetti, born in 1899? I appreciate the photos of the family you published and have one of my own I am trying to identify.

Best regards.
Carlo Zeppieri
Roma, Italy

(left) A page from a transportation document with the signatures of Giuseppe Zeppieri and Nicola Papetti.

(below) A photo of an unidentified couple who Carlo Zeppieri thinks are Antonio and Mary DeStefano.



everybody has one - this is mine - by Joe Renna

Everyone was silent during the boom in the real estate market. Lending institutions were generous in handing out subprime loans to people with little or no capacity to repay them. And why not? There's money to be made with every mortgage sold and then resold.


As is always the case, the businesses did what they are designed to do - make a profit. Wall Street and Banks were vilified for predatory lending even though they were encouraged to accommodate low income borrowers. I agree with the Chairman of The Federal Reserve at the time, Alan Greenspan, who blamed the change in government policies that allowed investment banks to regulate themselves.

All that cash was being poured back into the economy through more reckless spending. The industry became too big to fail. So many people were making so much money that no one wanted to acknowledge the obvious.

The same scenario is being played out in our higher education industry. Guaranteed government loans are being offered excessively to families whose ability to pay them back are marginal at best. The noble cause of government that every American has the “Right to a college education” is somewhat misgiven, much like HUD

As in the housing market, whenever there is free guaranteed money coming from the government people will take advantage of it. In this case the opportunists are our esteemed administrators of higher education. As much as bank CEOs were portrayed as villains in the mortgage crises, college presidents are lauded. I don't see much of a difference.

For schools with academic standards the system benefits the bright and talented students who need the financial assistance. Because they are highly desirable, these students usually benefit from scholarships. There are students that are not good candidates for college and they have muddled the system. Schools more interested in their balance sheet than quality education become “diploma mills”. Their goals have more to do with enrollment numbers than grade scores. Especially when tuition is being guaranteed.

Just as the mortgage crisis had a rippling effect throughout the entire economy so will a collapse of the student loan system. No doubt a new bailout will be needed to help our universities because they too are too big to fail. But those who stuffed their pockets would be long gone to take the blame. 



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I was once offered a


mortgage from a

supermarket cashier.



John T. "Jack" Sinnott, a lifelong resident of Elizabeth, N.J. passed away on Wednesday, Sept. 19, 2012 at the age of 58. Jack was a great friend and neighbor to those in the Peterstown neighborhood. Jack was quiet but wore a big smile. Sinnott was the type of guy who gave without asking, listened without lecturing and was amused instead of angered. Amongst friend who were in disagreement, Jack was natural and disarming in his philosophy - Life was too short to have tpetty things upset you.

Jack retired as a recycling foreman after working for 25 years for the city of Elizabeth Department of Public Works. He spent his free time after retirement enjoying visits his family, playing golf and eating Oreo cookies while watching western movies.

He was pre-deceased by his wife Maryann (Saboski) Sinnott and left behind his son Jonathan Sinnott and his wife, Elizabeth. Jack had a large extended family and even larger circle of friends. He is remembered fondly. 



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The studio, now known as Danceology Studios, remains in the same location as the former, 158 Washington Avenue, Elizabeth, NJ. 



(above, l-r) Rosabla Comas, Kirsten Valero-Malanga, Jacaqueline Esteves, Kimberly Dashiell, and Donna Marshal Kelly.



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AWARDS HIGHLIGHT
OCTOBER MEETING OF
THE ELIZABETH UNICO

Submitted by Salvatore Coppa

During the June 2012 meeting, the Elizabeth Chapter of UNICO, The Italian Service Organization, awarded seven J.Di Giovanni scholarships to deserving high school seniors who are attending college this fall. Also, one student was awarded the Arlene Fatigati Scholarship to pursue a career in Education.

In addition, the Elizabeth Chapter donated monetary gifts to St. Anthony’s RC Church, Occupational Center, The ARC of Union County, The Center for Hope Hospice, The Cooley’s Anemia Fund, and the Achilles Foundation which purchases wheelchairs for returning Veterans who have suffered the loss of limbs.

The Elizabeth Chapter of UNICO inducted Joe Renna as its newest member and looks forward to working with him in our continuing efforts to serve our Community. 



(above, r-l) UNICO Chapter President Courtney Villani administered the oath of allegiance to Joe Renna before a large contingent of membership present at its August monthly meeting.

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THE PATRICK SCHOOL OPENS NEW DOORS



(above, l-r) Assistant Principal Chris Chavannes and Head master Joe Picaro.

A new private school has risen within the city of Elizabeth. The Patrick School is independent and non-denominational, serving grades 7 through 12. The school, located at 547 Morris Avenue opened in September 2012. The building, formerly housing the Social Security Administration, is a block from Kean University. It is approximately 12,000 square feet with newly constructed classrooms, school offices, computer labs and multi-purpose space.

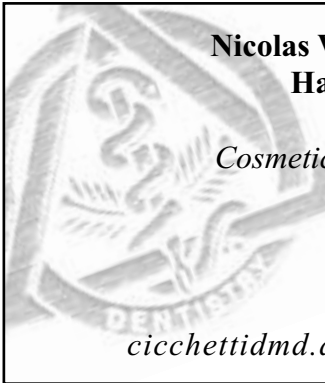
Joe Picaro serves as the Headmaster, Lee Turkowski as the Principal, Chris Chavannes as the Assistant Principal and Rich Biddulph as the Director of Admissions. The Patrick School currently educates approximately 150 students and creates a small, close-knit learning community to support each student's intellectual growth and holistic development.

The Patrick School is registered with the NJ Department of Education and accredited by the Middle States Association.

Anyone interest in more details about the school can call at 908-353-5220 or visit thier website at www.thepatrickschool.org. Applications for enrollment for 2012-13 school year are currently being accepted and a limited number of spots for transfer students are still available. The school will be holding an Open House and Information Night geared specifically for prospective students on November 2nd at 7pm. 📅

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“LOVIN THE LANES”

When we hear the name Frank Iazzetta 'SLIP KID", we from The Burg think back to the days when the boy from John Street grew into a man, and took the love of Baseball and Softball to heart. Now his son and namesake Frank Iazzetta III, shares the love and same gifted arm as his father in the sport of bowling.

Frankie, 15, started bowling as a freshman for St. Patricks High School and quickly made the varsity team, while achieving Principal's Honor Roll honors. His first league, Saturday Morning Juniors, Iazzetta anchored for his team, and finished with a Championship Title after a strike out finish and the first place trophy. He averaged a 200, in his first year in the sport.

Frank has shown rapid and steady improvement on the lanes, leading in five state categories on the Summer Monday Night Singles League and bringing home a Championship Plaque. Frank's mom, Diane, sits and watches him hours on end as the lefty throws a curve that seems to come naturally.

Frank says he has a goal of one day becoming a professional bowler. He wants his love for the lanes to carry through to a career in bowling. Frank's arsenal is a collection of balls all engraved with the same name, Slip Kid II, a tribute to his Dad, who passed away. His dad is his idol and inspiration and his memory is always in



(above) Slip Kid II, Frank Iazetta

Frank's heart.

Frank is playing in a Saturday Winter League and in his first week he rolled eleven strikes in a row, finishing with a 279, part of a 685 Series. He will be presented with an Eleven In a Row Crystal Trophy by the Bowlers Commission for his effort. Frank plans to continue his Bowling in the new Patrick School in his Sophomore year as Captain of the team. 🏹



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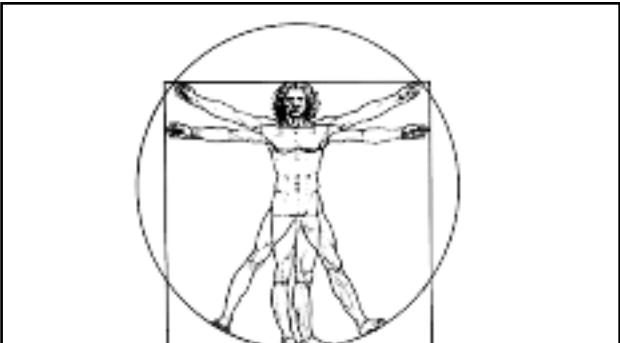


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VAL AND AGNES IMBRIACO CELEBRATE 65TH



Mr. and Mrs. Val Imbriaco of Linden, NJ recently celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary. Childhood sweethearts, they were married July 27th, 1947 in St. Anthony's Church in Elizabeth, NJ.

Mrs. Imbriaco, the former Agnes Cusumano, was employed as a secretary and retired in 1989. During World War II, she played saxophone in bands for war bond rallies. Mr. Imbriaco, a veteran of World War II served in Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Italy. He retired as City Clerk of Linden after 35 years of service in 2007. He now volunteers on several city committees.

The Imbriacos renewed their vows as Father Carroll Norwicki officiated at the ceremony. The Imbriacos are members of charitable and civic organizations. They have three married sons, Val Anthony and Mary Ann of Medford; James and Arleen of Lebanon; and Gregory and Geri of Linden; who hosted the dinner party at the Gran Centurion with entertainment by OJ Chuck Leonard. They have five wonderful grandchildren. 🐾

MEMORIES OF PETERSTOWN

By Carmella Spino Helminski

My parents, Josie and Al Spino had a fruit and vegetable store on the corner of Third Avenue and Niles Street, in front of which we sold my father's homemade Italian lemon ice. It was quite a favorite in the Peterstown section of Elizabeth. My sister, Fran, brothers Dan and Al and I squeezed the fresh lemons and chopped the ice for the ice-making machine. We'd buy blocks of ice from the Ice House on Fourth Avenue.

No one would be turned away for not having enough money to pay. Mom knew they could be trusted to pay when they could.

We sold the fruits and vegetables in the store and also in the City Market on First Avenue on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. On Wednesdays and Fridays the Market was held on Front Street. I remember Moe Levy's Shoe Store there and watching the Staten Island Ferry at the Pier.

In the summer, we would sit on the back of our truck and ride through the streets of town selling our produce. Watermelons were a big favorite. Dad would "plug" the melons with a small sample for the customer to taste before buying.

Ours was a special corner. Across the street from our store was Mary and Joe Occhipinti's grocery store. Every Halloween Mary would decorate a giant pumpkin in the window with pepper ears, lettuce hair and red pepper lips.

Mr. Costanza was next door with his sign and lettering business.

Diagonally across the street was Sal's Tavern. It was a favorite "cooling off spot" for the Italian band that marched down Third Avenue during the Saint Rocco's Feast. On the other corner was Charlie Arnone's butcher shop, complete with sawdust on the floor. A block away, on Palmer Street, was Mr. and Mrs. Parinello's Italian deli. They made the best olive salad.

The Dugan's truck would park on our corner, selling all kinds of baked goods. It was always a treat, just like seeing the Good Humor truck today. Joe, the Hot Dog Man would wheel his wagon along Third Avenue and park in front to the butcher shop selling hot dogs and soda.

Mr. Lebow would go door-to-door with his huge valise filled with housedresses, towels, curtains, etc. A virtual Target on wheels. I remember the knife and scissors-sharpening man, riding through the streets, ringing the bell on the tricycle he rode with the sharpening wheel in the front. Everything came right to our door was within walking distance.

Family lived nearby. Within a few blocks were aunts, uncles, cousins and our grandmother. Friends were always nearby for walking to Christopher Columbus School #15 one block away on Spencer Street or playing games of



hide and seek, stickball, jacks, marbles or hopscotch played with a used heel we would get from the shoemaker on Third Avenue.

Growing up in Peterstown holds many fond memories, many centered around St. Anthony's Church, where we were Christened, made our First Holy Communion, were Confirmed and married.

Special times were spent in the parish hall after catechism class where we would dance to the music on the jukebox. We even put on a talent show, not unlike a Mickey Rooney/Judy Garland movie. My sister, Fran and our friend, Sheila wore authentic "flapper" dresses, borrowed from Sheila's aunt and danced the Charleston. Dan and Al played in St. Anthony's Drum and Bugle Corps., which was directed by my mother's cousin, Tony DiFluri. Those were unforgettable bygone days. 🐾

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LA FAMIGLIA D'ANTONIA FAMILY REUNION

Submitted by Toni Peduto

On September 16th, 2012 over 100 people gathered to honor Antonia Basile and her children with a picnic at Nomehegan Park in Cranford, New Jersey to honor the family values and traditions passed down thru generations.

Born in Italy, Antonia Basile, travelled from Italy, to the United States in 1910, at the age of 17. Once here, she married Sylvester D'Alessandro and settled at 810 Third Avenue, Elizabeth, New Jersey.

Antonia had nine children, Raphaela De Maio, Pasquale D'Alessandro, John D'Alessandro, Gaetano D'Alessandro, Sylvia Spirito, Anthony Guiliano, Anna DeMaio, Vincent Guiliano and Maria LaMorte. All of her children married and remained in Peterstown to raise their families, leaving 38 grandchildren, 73 great grandchildren, and yet another generation of great-great grandchildren.

Many of the descendants of Antonia Basile never had the opportunity to know her. Her life was cut short at the age of 51, due to heart disease. Tales of Antonia have been handed down to her grandchildren and each of them yearned to know the grandmother they never knew. They may not have had any memories of knowing her, but they did have what was handed down to them through her own children – the true meaning of unconditional love and treasured family traditions.

Everyone lived within walking distance of each other, attended church and school together. All of the grandchildren were raised in a close, loving relationship. Vincent Guiliano, with his nine children lived on South Seventh Street, Tony Guiliano's family with seven children, along with the LaMorte family, lived on Fourth Avenue, Sylvia's family of four lived on Third Avenue, the DeMaio's and D'Alessandro's all in one small neighborhood. Sunday mornings, after church, everyone would visit with each other. This tradition was still being carried out with visits by Janet Guiliano to Sylvia Spirito every Sunday after St. Anthony's 9 am Mass until 2011 when Sylvia passed away.

It was at that time that everyone agreed that it was time to revive an old tradition of gathering for a picnic once a year. The second generation of La Famiglia, all born and raised in Elizabeth, and now living throughout Union County and spread as far as California came together with plans to spend quality time with the people they were raised with and love.

One of the most precious family traditions was the annual Labor Day Picnic held each year at Nomehegan Park in Cranford, New Jersey. This event started around 1960 and continued through 1985. All of Antonia's children, the first generation of La Famiglia d'Antonia, would gather their families early in the morning for a day of fun. Breakfast was served by 8:00 AM. If you could believe, with no modern advantages, they would make bacon and eggs, and have fresh coffee going all day. The day would include plenty of eating, sack races and

softball.

Although the menu was somewhat changed to make things simpler this year (Antonia's children were a tough act to follow and live up to) the traditional softball game, sack races and egg toss were played and brought back such wonderful memories! Watching the faces and fun the subsequent generations had was such a joy!

Antonia D'Alessandro, daughter of Pasquale, travelled the farthest, coming from California, along with family that came from Arizona, Nevada and Virginia.

Everyone felt that Antonia and her children who've passed were looking down from heaven, smiling knowing that they left something so wonderful behind. 🍷



(above) Antonia with daughters Raphaela and Syliva.



(above) Vincent Guiliano - 1982.



(above) Gaetano (Gimps)
D'Alessandro.



(above, seated, l-r) Ben Musto, Amy Samsel, Giana Peduto, Kevin Samsel.(standing, l-r) Thomas Guiliano, Guy Guiliano Margaret (Mudgie) Konicewicz at a family picnic held on September 16, 2012.

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(above) Chef Michael Colletti used his Peterstown roots to developed a menu using old Italian classics and making them into this modern cuisine at VB3 Restaurant and Bar in Jersey City.



(above) VB3 has a relaxed atmosphere for dinner and a serious nightlife afterwards.

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CHEF COLLETTI RETURNS TO HIS CULINARY ROOTS

Chef Michael Colletti began his culinary journey at a young age growing up in the Peterstown section of Elizabeth, NJ watching his grandparents and father, who migrated from Sicily, preparing the family recipes with home grown ingredients. Delicacies, such as figs, cardoons and persimmons. He remembers, "I was always in the kitchen with my grandmother or my father, or in the garden with my grandfather. You know it's funny, we ate back then the way people are eating now, farm to table. Whatever my grandfather was growing, or whatever was in season, that's what we ate. At Easter, my grandfather would be in the basement butchering a goat to breakdown for Easter dinner. I always had a love for food and culture and of course, eating," he laughs.

Michael's first culinary job was into the family business. His father owned a bagel shop and he studied bagel-making at his father's side, also doubling as a short order cook. He then learned more about the hospitality business at his cousin's pizzeria, Villa Borghese. The discovery of his natural palate and affinity for cooking led him to attend the Culinary Education Center in Asbury Park, NJ. He started his professional culinary career at Aqua in Bound Brook where the restaurant received 4 stars from the Star Ledger. From Aqua, Colletti then moved on to work with New York restaurant icon Sirio Maccioni of the world renowned Le Cirque. It was there that he met Celebrity Chef Spike Mendelsohn. They worked side by side and when Spike decided to move on to a new restaurant being opened by Drew Nieporent and Michael Bao, Mai House, also in NYC, he took chef Colletti with him.

During Chef Colletti's tenure as Chef de Cuisine at Mai House, the restaurant was awarded two stars by Frank Bruni of The New York Times and named among the Top 10 Best Restaurants in New York City by The New York Times. He spent more than two years at Mai House; during which Colletti traveled throughout Vietnam for several months to study the local food and culture and was chosen to guest chef at the 5-Star Renaissance Hotel in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

After their years in New York, Mendelsohn asked Colletti to join him in Washington D.C. at the Sunnyside Group. There he would play a vital role in the conceptualization of Chef Mendelsohn's restaurant, Good Stuff Eatery, located in Capitol Hill, where he was an integral part of the conceptualization, decor and menu building. During this time Spike gained national acclaim with his being on TV's Top Chef. With the national success of Good Stuff Eatery, Chef Colletti was invited to

participate in Food Network's 2009 Food & Wine Festival's "Rachel Ray Burger Bash," in both Miami and New York, where he earned back-to-back victories for his creation of the "Colletti Smokehouse Burger. Food Network then invited Chef Mendelsohn and Chef Colletti to compete in an episode of Iron Chef America, where they would "Battle Prosciutto" versus Chef Michael Symon. The episode aired in March 2010.

Chef Colletti was then given responsibility for opening and overseeing operations at the second Spike Mendelsohn venture, We, The Pizza, also in Capitol Hill. It became an instant sensation and within three months of opening was voted one of the "Top 50 Best Pizzerias in America" by USA TODAY.

First Lady Michelle Obama, a frequent visitor and supporter of both restaurants, requested Chef Colletti participate in preparing several White House luncheons serving the President and staff members. Through this affiliation, he became part of the "Lets Move!" campaign created by Mrs. Obama to combat childhood obesity. In addition, while living in Washington, D.C., Chef Colletti was proud to be involved with Horton's Kids Foundation and D.C. Central Kitchen. As a result of his supportive efforts, Chef Colletti was asked to attend the 2011 Capitol Food Fight, in which he was awarded second place by celebrity chefs Anthony Bourdain, Eric Ripert, Tom Colicchio and José Andrés.

After three successful years in Washington, D.C., he decided to move back to his home state of New Jersey to pursue his own restaurant vision with his cousins. The resulting collaboration is VB3 Restaurant and Bar located in Jersey City in The Monaco, a luxury apartment building on Jersey City's waterfront. Carrying on the important garden to table tradition of his family, the restaurant features Chef Colletti's creative, Modern Seasonal Italian Cuisine, based on family recipes using locally-sourced ingredients. "From the moment I decided to do this it was a blast," he said excitedly. "My own concepts, my own menu, falling back on my roots and my heritage. Taking the old Italian classics and making them into this modern cuisine, using French techniques." He continued. "I was thrilled to be back in NJ. It's my home. Friends and family are here. My roots."

About the VB3 Restaurant & Bar direction and concept Chef Colletti explains, "We spent a lot of time figuring out the concept," he continued, "what the area needed. We decided on serious food with serious nightlife. VB3 has 80 seats in the dining room and 30 at the bar. Our philosophy is; 'Come for the Food...Stay for the Party.' It's a very relaxed atmosphere, not stuffy at all, but with incredible food coming out of the kitchen. Most patrons are quite surprised, but that's a good thing. The menu is seasonal and focused on local, fresh farm to table ingredients. It (the menu) speaks for my cooking style. At the same time it has to be accessible to the main stream dining public. We're flanked by two hotels, so while I'm doing fresh, exciting interpretations of classic dishes, it's still recognizable to what we all know as comfort food."

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Recipes

Submitted by Chef Michael Colletti, VB3 Restaurant and Bar, Jersey City, NJ

Roasted Jersey Cod with Baccala-Potato Puree, House Cured Olives and Salmoriglio Sauce

INGREDIENTS:

1 1/2 lbs. fresh cod filet, 2" thick
2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
1/2 pound salt cod (soaked in cold water for 24 hours, changing the water several times)
1 small head garlic
1 cup heavy cream
1/2 cup diced yukon gold potato
1 bay leaf
4 sprigs fresh thyme
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
4 fresh parsley sprigs
House Cured Olives:
2 quart mason jar
2 cups raw castelvetrano olives
1 quart water
2 cups kosher salt
4 garlic cloves
or
1 cup pitted cured castelvetrano olives
Salmoriglio Sauce:
1 large clove garlic, peeled
4 Tbsp. fresh thyme leaves
3 Tbsp. Italian parsley leaves
Juice of 1 to 2 lemons
1/2 tsp. kosher salt, or more to taste
Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
3/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil

PREPARATION:

1. Preheat oven to 400°. Wrap garlic in foil and bake for 35 minutes. Cool garlic, cut top off its head, and use a knife to squeeze meat from peel.
2. In a heavy saucepan, cook garlic, cream, salt cod, potatoes, bay leaf, 1 thyme sprig, and salt and pepper to taste over low heat until potatoes are almost done about 10-15 minutes. Strain sauce into medium saucepan, discard thyme, and reserve vegetables and fish. Over moderate heat, reduce sauce by half, remove from heat, add vegetables, flake fish into sauce, add 1 tablespoon of olive oil, then puree in blender until smooth.
3. Strain puree through a fine mesh strainer.
4. Wash the olives thoroughly. With the heel of a knife crack the olives in half and place them in a clean mason jar, add the garlic cloves, meanwhile whisk together the water and salt until incorporated. Pour the brine over the olives and seal with the cap. Let stand in a cool dry place for one week. Will hold for several months, refrigerate after opening.
5. For the salmoriglio sauce coarsely chop together the garlic, thyme, and parsley, whisk in a bowl with the remaining ingredients season with salt and pepper.
6. Season remaining 1 1/2 pounds cod with salt and pepper. Heat 1 tablespoon olive oil in a heavy skillet over high heat. Brown fish on one side, add remaining thyme sprigs, then roast in oven for 10 minutes or until firm. Meanwhile, reheat puree over a low flame. To serve, spoon puree on bottom of 4 plates and place roasted cod filets on top. Spoon over a couple olives and some of the sauce, garnish with some sprigs of fresh parsley. 🍴

Skate Milanese with Arugula Marinated Tomatoes, Grilled Red Onions and Roasted Lemon Vinaigrette

I grew up eating veal cutlet Milanese, my Nonna would make it for us every Sunday for dinner, I wanted to come up with something different, I love the sweet flavor and texture of skate and it goes great with a peppery arugula and tomatoes. I grill the lemons and onions to add a little smokier flavor. Italians usually don't pair fish and cheese but us Sicilians love it so why not, its up to you.

INGREDIENTS:

1 1/2 pounds skate wing fillets
1 1/2 cups all purpose flour
3 eggs
1 1/2 cups plain unseasoned bread crumbs
Kosher salt and ground black pepper
1 piece parmesan cheese for shaving, optional
1/4 cup unsalted butter
1/2 cup and 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
2 tablespoons sherry vinegar
2 tablespoons basil, chopped
8 ounces baby arugula leaves
16 grape tomatoes, halved
1 small red onion, sliced into rounds
2 lemons, halved

PREPARATION:

1. Season the skate wings liberally with salt and pepper. Set up three shallow bowls, put the flour in one, crack the eggs in the other and whisk them until they are blended and place the breadcrumbs in the other. Dredge the fish first through the flour, shaking off the excess and then the eggs let the excess drip off. Lastly, pass the fish through the breadcrumbs, pressing it lightly. Let stand for 10 min.
2. Heat the butter and a 1/4 cup of the oil in a large sauté pan over medium heat, when hot add the fish in batches about 3 minutes on each side until nice and golden brown. Remove to paper towels and season with salt and pepper.
3. Meanwhile heat up a grill or grill pan until smoking hot brush the onions and lemons with oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper and grill for 3 minutes on each side or until nicely charred, set aside and cool. Squeeze the lemons through a sieve to ensure no pits.
4. In a bowl, toss the arugula, tomatoes, basil, grilled onions, sherry vinegar, 2 tablespoons of oil, and the lemon juice. Season with salt and pepper and toss to combine.
5. Divide the fish among warmed dinner plates and top with the salad and shave some parmesan cheese over the top. 🍴

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(above) Roasted Jersey Cod



(above) Skate Milanese

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VAMONOS A LA PLAYA (LET’S GO TO THE BEACH!)

Excerpt from “No Monkey Business in This House” by John Urrutia

To me, a visit to a beach—any beach—evokes memories incorporating music from the thirties and forties and a shore ambiance complete with waves crashing gently on its appointed sand accompanied by a wafting breeze cooling pleasantly warm air. I luxuriate in a bath of comforting thoughts from other places and other times.

The beach was an important aspect of our young lives. The atmosphere and general ambience of beaches hasn’t changed much since those days. The only things that have changed are the bathing suit styles, the current popular expressions, jokes, and songs—all the superficialities that we were obsessed with for a while and were soon replaced by newer obsessions.

The familial cohesion transcended all, and the flirtations, both social and sexual, encouraged a pleasant camaraderie. It was a neighborhood on a blanket that was ours. This was our fortress that protected us from the world and people foreign to us. We considered the essence of the family Puerto Rican, but we didn’t look like the other few that lived in Elizabeth in those days.

I didn’t realize it then, but my mother’s family was primarily Italian and Spanish with a touch of Taíno Indian, the so-called indigents of San Juan. San Juan was the original name of the island whose principal city was called Puerto Rico (Rich Port).

As often happens, it had taken just one generation in a new land for the Pelliccia to become assimilated into the island culture. They had been through several such iterations in their migrations from Tuscany, Italy, to Corsica, France, to Adjuntas, Puerto Rico, and finally to Elizabeth, New Jersey. The sojourn in Corsica and Puerto Rico for my maternal ancestors lasted only two generations in each locale. The Pelliccia had been in Tuscany since the sixteenth century that we can historically verify.

At the beach we were a “closet” minority group; unless asked, we would never volunteer that we were Puerto Rican. We were embarrassed that we had come from “inferior” people. Living in the primarily Italian section of Elizabeth called Peterstown (I guess a reference to St Peter’s Church, which served the community), we thought of ourselves as a minority group at home as well as at the beach, although we were as much Italian as most in Peterstown.

We didn’t, however, let our sensitivity about our ancestry affect our spirit and enjoyment at the beach. The beach, like other social venues, bubbled with a high and mighty, happy spirit. Unimportant decisions assumed priority. “Let’s go in the water.” “Let’s play catch.” “Think I’ll read for a while.” “Is there anything to eat?” “I’m hungry...let’s eat!” Mama would warn, “No nada muy lejo!” (Don’t swim too far [out]!)

“No,” we would superficially acquiesce not realizing that it really registered sub-consciously. Papa would grunt, “Uh,” and utter his displeasure as if it were his responsibility to view our concurrence with suspicion.

South Beach on Staten Island had its own style and seemed to be frozen in a state that probably reflected the architecture of the previous century. The boardwalk, perhaps a hundred yards long, was built at beach level, so there was no “under the boardwalk” where the “older” young people could gain some privacy to cavort and introduce themselves to the world of romance, love, and sex as they would be able to do under boardwalks built in later days.

The business stands along the boardwalk were mostly wood-frame constructed and covered in weather-beaten plank sheathing. Jaeger’s Bath House was the most prominent structure. Here you could get a locker and change from street clothes into bathing attire. You could also rent a bathing suit—with Jaeger’s name displayed on it, I suppose to discourage thievery. In addition, there were towels, beach umbrellas, and chairs for rent, all monogrammed. You could also take a shower and wash the salt water and hopefully some of the sun burn from your body.

Jack and Nelson worked at Jaeger’s as attendants. It was only



(above, top row, l-r) Early days at South Beach: Jenny, Bill Gratacos, Dolores, Mila, Amy (half face), Alice Gratacos, Mama. (bottom row, l-r) Jose Gratacos, Lidia holding Johnny, Papa.

Papa who changed there, and we never rented anything. The kids and most adults wore their suits under their clothing to the beach, and at the end of the day would either remain uncomfortable or “sneak change” behind or under a blanket and suffer the discomfort of salt water and burning until they got home.

A typical beach day started early in the morning with a singing announcement from Mama, “Levantaten ninos que el sol se levanta y anuncia la hora del dia splendor, y vamos a la playa!” (Arise, children, as does the sun to announce a splendid day, and we’re going to the beach!). That news would result in the children repeating the song—no, clamoring the song—along with various related sing-song phrases: “We’re going to the beach. Hi ho and cheery oh, we’re going to the beach!”

“Mama, you’re the greatest mama of them all.”

“Never mind, just get ready or we won’t be going anywhere.”

There would be the usual confusion as the kids would look for their clothing and toss things back and forth,

“Here, these are your pants, throw me mine.”

“Hey, help me look for my socks.”

Mama would be packing lunches by now: cheese sandwiches, soda, water, crackers, cookies, candy bars, fruit, and whatever else was at hand. Everything would be carefully packed in cloth market bags, and later even in an insulated ice box (cooler). Also included were beach blankets (actually our bedding), towels, bathing suits, and extra clothing.

The buses were usually crowded, and some of us kids would have to stand. The windows would be open for lack of air conditioning, and we would pretend to be cooled by the hot, sultry breezes that wafted through as the bus accelerated between stops. The bus would make its way down Elizabeth Avenue, cut in and wind its way to First Street. The bus trip would terminate at a parking lot across from the pier, sort of catty-corner from the ferry ticket office and waiting room.

The ferry pier was a slot defined by creosoted, heavy poles that, although loosely tied together, seemed to sway in the undulating water in unison as rhythmic and coordinated as a group of chorus girls. It was from these poles that Bill Gratacos would perch and dive or jump into the contaminated waters of the Arthur Kill and swim in the company of rats and various amphibians or aquatic creatures. His moniker, “Blackie,” could be seen crudely painted on surrounding storage tanks and toward the top of dilapidated brick buildings. It provided Bill with a certain notoriety to have his name displayed in the neighborhood that we all considered an extension of our normal neighborhood boundaries. If Bill happened to be there, he would wave an acknowledgement to us, and we knew that he might meet us later at the beach.

Next to the ferry area stood the “magnificent” recreation



(above, l-r) Nelson, Dolores, Amy, and Jack. “We’ll figure it out as we go along. Others have gone before us and others will follow. We will live our lives as we will. Heart within and love o’erhead.”

pier. Always colored dark green, no doubt the same paint used to paint all the park benches in the several Elizabeth city parks. Warinanco Park was the uptown park and Montano Park was the local park in the Peterstown section where we lived. The pier stood along the waterline to allow boarding onto the several excursion boats via short gangways. The pier had two levels that were linked by a wide stairway at one end. Park benches (green, of course) provided refuge for local visitors intent on capturing whatever warm evening breezes might be available.

A bus ride to the ferry at Elizabethport, a ferry ride (including entertainment by a violinist, guitarist, or an organ grinder complete with monkey), and one (or two) more buses took us to from the ferry landing to South Beach, Staten Island. Laden with the canvas shopping bags Mama had filled with sandwiches, fruit, cookies, and other treats, our grandparents managed to keep tabs of five, six, or more kids. Actually, the older kids, Amy and Dolores, helped with the younger kids.

It was South Beach that provided family outings at least one day a week during the summer. It was there that Amy and Dolores met Jack and Nelson (two brothers dating two sisters). Papa (my grandfather) would rent a locker at Jaeger’s and would change into his bathing suit and later would shower and dress for the trip home.

I loved the water and would spend hours enjoying the almost-clean waters of the New York Greater Bay, swimming with whoever felt like going, sometimes Jack or Nelson who were very capable swimmers. Invariably I would endure a painful sunburn at the beginning of each season. It wasn’t until someone would notice how red I had gotten that I would finally cover up. I continued this somewhat masochistic ritual until I was a young adult.

The beach outings usually occurred on weekends when Papa was off from work. During the week there were other activities which were memorably special.

It’s the summer of 1930. Jenny is the only one smiling. She is with her family and is holding her first (and only) son, Bill. It’s a sunny day, and she is comforted. Perhaps she senses that she should enjoy what she can because she doesn’t know (or maybe she does) how much—or how little—time she has. Mama holds Jenny’s daughter Alice. They are all a little intimidated by John Urrutia’s new folding Kodak. 📷

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SANCTUARY AT SOUTH FIFTH STREET

Excerpt from “No Monkey Business in This House” by John Urrutia

Francisco and Maria Pelliccia were our grandparents. We ten cousins found sanctuary at their home in the Peterstown section of Elizabeth, New Jersey. It was our safe haven and refuge ... our holy place. When we entered 326 South Fifth Street and climbed the stairs to the second-floor, left-side apartment, we passed into a fortress where nothing and no one could hurt us.

At first we identified it as the first Pelliccia family social gathering place. In retrospect it was really as safely guarded a citadel as was our beloved St. Patrick’s Church located two miles across town. Both places were distantly apart from the problems and dangers of this new world in which we found ourselves as the first generation.

At both sanctuaries we were watched over by God and his appointed assistants, Mama and Papa Pelliccia. Three of their daughters had been born in Puerto Rico and were married to men who had also immigrated to the United States. These unions had taken place in the 1920s, and the resulting ten cousins were born in that same period.

The first of the pairings was Hortense and Bernardo Vazquez. They had five children: Bernard Jr., Telephoro, Claude, Mercedes, and Wilhelm.

The next branch was the Gratacos: Jenny and Jose and their children Alice, William, Mary, and Francis.

The third group was comprised of just three: Lidia (Mary) and Juan Urrutia and me, John Jr.

It was here that children would go for day care as I did while my parents worked. Others spent time there due to family problems, as with the Vazquez, or due to death in the family, as with the Gratacos. The home served whatever need was required by any and all—a secure escape from whatever travails of life were encountered.

Fragmentations of well-meaning but ill-conceived plans were salvaged here. Need for financial help, food, shelter, and clothing were addressed here. Limited resources were shared: the few dollars in Papa’s snap purse, the food that was available on the stove or in the pantry, improvised bedding, clothing that someone had outgrown or was tattered and in need of repair.

The keepers of this sanctuary were Mama and Papa and their three daughters, Amy, Dolores, and Mila.

The primary recipients were Horte and Bernard Vazquez and their children Bernard Jr., Telesphoro, Claude, Mercedes, and Wilhelm; Jenny (until her death), Pepe, and their children Alice, William, Mary and Francis; John and Lidia Urrutia and their son John Urrutia Jr. As time went by, Amy’s and Dolores’s boyfriends were frequent guests, Jack and Nelson, respectively.

The apartment was the upstairs left of four apartments. It was laid out as what was then, and is still called, a “railroad apartment”; that is, a series of rooms laid out in a row, so you have to go through each room to get to the next. The kitchen was the rearmost room. A stairway led up from the rear entrance. The bathroom was located off the kitchen rear wall. From the kitchen you could find your way sequentially to four virtually identical rooms. The first room was Mama and Papa’s room. The next room served as a den and contained Papa’s radio, a few chairs, and a couch that also served as a bed. Finally there came another bedroom and then a living room. From the front-most room there was another stairway leading to the front door. Beyond this room was a sun porch.

It was at 326 South Fifth Street that the first activities took place for us cousins and the preceding generation. It was from there that Amy and Dolores became young women and went off to work and met their men. But even before that, we grew though our formative years under the care of Mama and the financial security, such as it was, and discipline of Papa.

There was no central heat. It was what was called “a cold-water flat.” There was no telephone or refrigeration, and TV

was not yet available. We did have a radio, via which Papa kept track of the news. We had a window ice box that kept some perishable food cold or frozen during the colder parts of the year. Eventually we had an indoor, insulated ice box and had ice delivered (or we would go out and buy it and carry it back in a burlap bag).

Around the corner from us was an Italian grocery store. On certain days, when Mama was troubled, she would send me to the store with two pennies to get her two cigarettes. We never realized that something was really bothering her as she sat there and held a lit cigarette between her thumb and forefinger and puffed on her fag. She never inhaled; she simply took the smoke into her mouth and, just as quickly as it entered her mouth, she blew it back out. We all kind of laughed at her antics with the cigarette. She would smile at us and purse her lips at us as her eyes sparkled and her problems dissipated with the smoke.

Songs from the 1930s recall the front porch at 326 South Fifth Street where we older children joined the young adults in singing the popular songs of the day. The young adults thought of the opposite-gendered friends and romance, sex, and such ideals, practical and ethereal. Those were the carefree pre-war days. Pre-dark games such as kick the can, dodge ball, and spud, occupied the kids until darkness invited the gathering on the front stoop for group singing of the latest hits, joke telling, and other meaningless nonsense.

I remember the activities there mostly because activities existed or because there were other children growing up there. I enjoyed the time with my grandparents because I had my aunts and cousins there and, although I was shy and retiring, I could learn from them. I could also laugh and play with them. It was such a wonderful time.

Mila was closest to my age, so she was my friend. Dolores was an older friend. Amy was the oldest, so she was the leader. She was Mama’s lieutenant, and like Mama she was compassionate but in control. They were my substitute siblings, my aunts, my family. We were very often joined by cousins (mentioned above) from aunts who lived in their own apartments. In those pre-enlightened days there were very few “only child” families. I belonged to that minority.

Mama mostly supervised and directed the kids’ activities. She cooked, took care of us, cleaned us, and did whatever else was needed. An important part of her day was to prepare supper for Papa. Very often, rice and beans were the fare, cooked with tomato, oil, onions, and garlic. I guess it was her Mediterranean/Puerto Rican–style cooking. Sometimes the dish included chicken or meat. I don’t think Papa cared for red meat. He was often critical when she included it in the meal. He did like bacon and chicken.

Dinner was a structured ritual as were other gatherings, particularly when Papa was home. Not structured in the formal sense, but structured informally to meet the requirements of the several generations that shared the gathering. Basically, the younger children would carry on bickering, giggling, and poking each other, fighting over a portion of food or a particular piece of chicken or meat, making faces and trying to make the others laugh—hopefully uncontrollably out loud and as disruptively as possible.

The trick was to do it so that Papa would not notice and respond with his anger. So, the perpetrator would wait until Papa was looking the other way, perhaps at what he thought was a previous prankster. Another opportunity would be when he was talking with Mama or having a serious discussion with one of the older girls. Anyone who felt he or she was out of Papa’s field of vision would carry on with the nonsense. As the young diners satisfied their hunger, they became more daring.

The activity seemed to build up until someone would simply

ignore all subterfuge and burst out loud with an angry comment over another’s transgression. Perhaps several of the group would burst out in an uncontrollable laughter over any tomfoolery, at which point Papa would send the more obvious guilty parties from the table into another room to await and ponder a later hearing, sentencing, and punishment. He might punctuate his remarks by pointing to his two-inch-wide leather belt, or he might unbuckle it and wave the soft end in the air.

The ultimate admonition was to remove his belt from his pants, fold it over, and wave it above his head, shouting, “Sin verguensas!” (Shameless ones!). Continuing in Spanish, he would imply all kinds of punishment and retribution that awaited the guilty parties later that night.

The same kind of scenario took place as Papa tried to listen to the evening news broadcast. The same subtle beginnings would develop into an unacceptable interrupting diversion. The same threat and promised punishment would be issued, and the kids would gather in another room to discuss what wrath and violence was sure to come.

First, they would argue about whose fault it was: “You started it!”

“I did not! You did!”

“What do you think he will do?” a younger one would ask a more experienced older one.

“I don’t know. You guys should not have acted up so much. You know how mad he gets. He’s liable to do anything.”

“Will Mama be able to help us, so he doesn’t hurt us too much?”

“I don’t know. He’s pretty mad!”

The speculation would go on and on. In quiet, hushed tones, they would try to conjure up explanations for why they had acted the way they did. They would review everyone’s actions to find rationality in their behavior. Finally the older girls (young aunts) would offer some hope. “We’ll talk to Mama and see if she can explain it to Papa. We’ll tell her that you feel really bad and that you’ll behave in the future. I don’t know if it will work, but we’ll try it.”

Later Mama would come in and talk to the group. “Your grandfather was very angry, but I explained to him that you had all helped me with the housework during the day. You were all very tired, and you just got carried away with your foolishness as young people do. He told me, ‘If they’re so tired, have them go to bed now, and go right to sleep. If I hear so much as one sound, I will be in there, and they’ll be no more talking—only action.’”

Protests seemed to collide with each other.

“Why do we all have to be punished? They were the ones that did it!”

“No, we all did it. It was just us that got caught.”

“I’ll get even with you tomorrow!”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah!”

“Yeah?” This time with both hands jerkily raised for emphasis

“Yeah!” This time the expression was accompanied with a wagging finger and a threatening backhand.

“Quiet!” Mama would order adamantly. “You got off pretty easy this time. You were all acting like malcreados [brats]! Just go to bed and speak softly for a while, but don’t make any noise because I won’t be able to help you anymore.”

“Si, Mama. Echanos bendicion [Give us your blessing],” one of the older girls would ask.

“Dios te bediga todos [God bless you all],” Mama would answer, making the sign of the cross toward the group.

All is well. We are in God’s hand for the night, and Mama and Papa are in the next room. 🐒

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THE CHICKEN IN THE BAG

Excerpt from “No Monkey Business in This House” by John Urrutia

A twenty-minute walk from South Fifth Street was a weekly market. Some of us would go with Mama to select fresh vegetables and sometimes clothing from the vendors that lined the sidewalks with their merchandise.

The market encompassed several blocks in each direction to form a square. We started at Elizabeth Avenue and Seventh Street and would walk once around. Mama liked to examine many stands. She would look, feel, and smell many items, and buy only the best buys for acceptable quality.

The most memorable process was Mama shopping, selecting a chicken and getting it ready for the pot.

We would go into a live chicken store. Most often we would select and take home a live chicken. She would put the chicken in a paper bag with a hole in the bottom through which the condemned hen could breathe during her final trip. Mama would kill the bird, and the girls would feather, draw the innards, and thoroughly clean it. Certain innard parts were set aside for soup, such as the heart, liver, and something called the gizzard. These were saved along with selected exterior parts such as the neck, legs, and feet.

Mama’s favorite way of killing was to hold the chicken by the head and whip it around to break its neck. It seemed to die instantly, and she would immediately cut its throat and drain the blood. The girls would then take it to the kitchen sink for final dressing. Dunking it in hot water would make it easy to de-feather. If there were little feathers left, they would burn them off over a range burner.

Sometimes Mama would have the store man do the killing and cleaning. He would weigh the chicken she chose and take it in the back to process it or put it in a paper bag.

Whichever way she chose, she would assign us to follow the man wherever he would take the chicken to watch that he didn’t substitute an underweight, sickly, or an otherwise inferior bird. She would signal us with pursed lips, wide open eyes, and a backward tilt of her head to follow the man with the bird. Before we left the shop, she would question us to make sure we had paid attention.

Sometimes she would buy us Italian ices served in small, thin paper cups. We would ceremoniously eat or lick the ice and suck on the paper cup to get whatever ice had been absorbed by it.

Across the street from the market on Elizabeth Avenue was a “five and ten cent” store. Before shopping in the market, Mama would love to walk through the store and examine many of the items for sale. She would lift things, examine and feel them closely; then she would mostly return them to the bins. Occasionally she would buy something—a spool of thread, some sewing or crocheting needles ... usually things that she couldn’t buy at the market.

The trips to the market were, as were the trips to the beach and Warinanco Park and the fishing boat, main events in our childhood; they were adventures. Something different usually happened on each trip. We might find a coin lying in the street, see some neighbors, or meet someone we knew working at the market. Sometimes there were special sales to get rid of inventory, and Mama might wind up buying some socks, underwear, shirts, or blouses ... something to find joy and conversation over when we returned home. If some of the kids had not gone with us, we would tell them what we had done, what had happened, and what we’d bought.



(above, front row, l-r) Freddy, Jeff, and Ellen Urrutia with Mama and Papa, who are so pleased and amazed to be with their great-grandchildren at Atlantic City, New Jersey.

FINAL ALARM RINGS FOR JOE BARRACO

When Carl Corsentino of Corsentino’s Funeral Home reflected upon his most memorable services during his fifty years in business the funeral of Joe Barraco came to mind. Barraco was a life-long firefighter who passed away on June 7, 2012. His funeral drew firefighters from around the state who formed a cortege stretching for miles as it made its way from the funeral home located in the Peterstown section of his home town of Elizabeth, NJ to his ocean side community 30 miles away.

Firefighters are brave by definition and revered and respected by the people they serve. The tribute that fellow firefighters gave Barraco speaks to how special a person he was among his peers.

Barraco retired from the Elizabeth Fire Department after a remarkable 36 years of service. He moved to Lavallette and continued to serve his new community as a member of their volunteer fire company. His unending dedication to being a first responder never waned. He continued training and keeping up on the latest technologies even in the late stages of his career. He was committed to sharing his knowledge and experience with the new recruits.

It was in his teaching that Barraco was able to affect so many lives. He was a mentor to a new crop of prospects. He gave direction and inspiration. In a career like firefighting it can be a life changing experience.

His funeral was attended by past students and brother



(above) Joe Battaco with his youngest grandchild Joe.

firefighters, some going back to his rookie year in 1961 to those just starting in 2012. Barraco worked behind the scenes in many causes to benefit firefighters and their families. He never sought recognition but appreciation was evident in his wake.

Joe Barraco was 75 when he passed away. he is survived by his wife of 50 years Connie, nee Concetta Tavormina, and daughters Kay Ceceri and her husband Michael, and Annette Cox and her husband Robert, also by his sons Santo, and wife Maryann, and Salvatore and his wife Lisa. He had nine grandchildren. He is also mourned by his brother, Bob and his wife Cheri.

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