TUSCAN SON

A JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY OF
AN ITALIAN-AMERICAN FAMILY ANCESTRY

DINO PARENTI

RESEARCH BY DYLAN GIOVANNI PARENTI

AND *DOTTORESSA* STEFANIA FANGAREZZI

WITH RECIPES AND ILLUSTRATIONS BY PRISCILLA PARENTI

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A JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY
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The author has attempted to identify the text and visual material of others in the compilation of our family history, and apologizes for any oversights or unintentional use of their words or images. Errors and/or omissions will be corrected in subsequent editions provided that notification, along with documentation, is sent to the publisher.

The cover design is derived from the book of births for the parish of Carraia, Italy for the years 1857 through 1871, which included the birth recordings of my great-grandfather Pietro Paolino Parenti on March 23, 1863 and of my great-grandmother Clementina Genovina Michelotti Parenti on April 28, 1867.

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DEDICATION

To my ancestral Tuscan sons and their families.

To the memory of my father and mother,
who gave me life and love.

To my brothers and my sister,
who have shared so many experiences of my life.

To my son and my daughter,
for their love and support,
and for making me such a proud father.

And to my wife, my companion
on my incredible journey of discovery.

DINO PARENTI

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ITALIAN 101:
A LANGUAGE GUIDE TO TUSCAN SON

This guide should be helpful in your pronunciation of the people, places, expressions and events you will encounter on the journey of discovery of the *famiglia* Parenti Italian-American history. *Buon viaggio!*

Letter(s)	Pronunciation	Examples in Tuscan Son
a	*ah* as in father	*arrivederci,* Carraia, *David, famiglia, frazione*
ao	*aw* as in lawyer	Paolino
c	*ch* as in church (before *e,i*)	*cena,* Medici, Cianfanelli, *cimitero,* da Vinci
c	*k* (before *a,o,u,and h*)	*casa,* Carraia*, chiesa, corte, cugina*
ch	*k* (before *e,i*)	Chianti, Chiantigiana*, chiesa,*
ci	*ch* (before *a,o,u*)	Adarcisa, *calcio, ciao, cioccolato,* Narciso
e	*ay* as in day	*me, chiesa, ristorante*
e	*eh* as in bet	*e, bella*, Leone, Mese, Parente, Remo
g	*g* as in gem (before *e,i*)	*viaggio, gelato*, Gemma, Genovina, Biagio
g	*g* as in go (before *a,o,u,and h*)	Ghisa, Ghibelline, Guelf
gh	*g* as in go (before *e,i*)	Borghicciolo
gli	*lli* as in million (before *a,e,o,u*)	*famiglia, foglio, moglie*
gn	*ny* as in canyon	*bagno*
h	is never pronounced	Ghisa, Ghibelline, Borghicciolo
i	*ee* as in machine	*vino, macchina,* Isola, Firenze*,* Michelangelo
o	*o* as in Rome	*contadino*, *pisolino,* Roma, *ospedale,* Leone
r	trilled with tip of tongue	*arrivederci,* Parenti, Carraia, Carrara, *Fiera*
s	*s* as in so	*chiesa,* Mese, *sacrestia*
sc	*sh* as in shell	Priscilla, *piscine*
u	*oo* as in rude	Lucca, *cappuccino*
uo	*w* as in quit	*Duomo, buona, buon*
z	*ts* as in cats	*pizza, palazzo, piazza, grazie*

The letters *j, k, w, x,* and *y* are not part of the Italian alphabet.
The consonants *b, d, f, l, m, n, p, q, t,* and *v* are pronounced in Italian as in English.

All vowels must be distinctly enunciated and never slurred, as is common in English.

Italian nouns ending in *o* are usually masculine (*m.*) and those ending in *a* are usually feminine (*f.*), but there are many exceptions. Nouns ending in *e* may be (*m.*) or (*f.*) Virtually all Italian nouns form their plural by changing the final vowel:

Singular	Plural	Examples
-a (*f.*)	-e	*famiglia, famiglie; oliva, olive; piazza, piazze; porta, porte*
-o (*m.*)	-i	*contadino, contadini; palazzo, palazzi; libro, libri*
-e (*m./f.*)	-i (*m./f.*)	*Parente, Parenti; renditore, renditori; comune, comuni*

Italian words of more than one syllable are usually stressed on the next-to-last syllable, but there are many exceptions. If you get it wrong, Italians will happily correct you.

Don't forget to use your hands while speaking and go easy on the accent.

A FOREWORD AND FOREWARNING

This is my story. But it could be your story.

It's an account of my forty years of wondering and wandering in search for my family's Italian-American ancestry. It began as a personal journal of my experiences and discoveries, but along the way, I realized that it was my family's story, its history. Looking for one long-lost ancestor, my paternal-grandfather, I found generation upon generation of Tuscan sons—my great-grandfathers—and their histories. Unexpectedly, on this march through history, there was self-discovery as well, as I came to better understand my relationship with my father and learn more about myself. Finally, I also came to the realization that with each discovery I was becoming a part of something much bigger than me and the family and history I knew. The richness of these experiences encouraged me to share my story, not just with my family, but with others, in the hope that they, too, might embark on their own journey of discovery, and maybe go digging in their family gardens for their roots.

If you have no interest in your family history—for yourself or your ancestors—then perhaps this book is not for you. And if you are indeed interested, please forgive some of the detailed recording of the Parenti family history. It is important to our story, just as the names and dates of your ancestors will be for your story. The family trees, ancestral timelines, photographs and maps hopefully will make our story more understandable and interesting in bringing our ancestors to life. Read through our history and imagine your family's ancestors and their history. Read the accounts of our travels, trials, travails, and triumphs; and imagine the adventures you could experience, the places your search could take you, and the history you would learn of your people and of your place in your family history.

For me, it was the experience of a lifetime.

I.

WHO AM I, ANYWAY?

It was the mystery of the missing vowel at the end of our family name, the mystery of my missing paternal-grandfather, and the void of anything Italian in our "All-American" Midwestern family that kindled my forty-year quest to uncover and understand my ancestry.

My first recollection of an interest in my Italian ancestry was in 1962. I was a fifteen-year-old boy living in the small Indiana town of Hebron, once called Bethlehem and before that, simply Four Corners. My given name at birth was Dean Parent, born in nearby Valparaiso on January 28, 1947. I was the fourth child born to Elline Grace Wiseman and David Paul Parent, who was born Parenti in Chicago on December 9, 1919. At some time, as a boy, my father would lose the name Parenti, which means "relatives" in Italian, and become a less-ethnic Parent. This would be his name, and his children's family name at their births, for most of the rest of his life.

David and Elline were high school sweethearts in Chesterton, Indiana near the Indiana Dunes on Lake Michigan, and married within a year of their graduation in 1937. Over the next five years, my mother would give birth to my two older brothers Dale, then David, before the birth of their only daughter Diane. World War II would send their father to the European Theater, but upon his return in 1946, our parents resumed their desire for a large family and I became a "baby boomer" in the first month of the following year. My brother Darryl was born eighteen months later, and the seven of us lived in Chesterton until 1950, when we moved thirty miles south to Hebron.

There would be no more children born for another twelve years, until the birth of their last child Drew.

A Sunday visit to Grandma "Koop's" home in the country.
Dave, Darryl, Diane, Bill and Jessie. DeMotte, Indiana. c.1952.

As a boy, I recall the visits to the country home of my father's mother. My grandmother was born Jessie Marie Jones in the Chicago area on February 14, 1901. I only knew her as "Grandma Koop," which was a variation of Wynkoop, the name of her fourth and final husband, William. Bill was a railroad man who met her when she was living in the Chicago area after the deaths, or disappearance, of her two previous husbands. To be kind, she had not been successful in sustaining long-term marriages. But somehow she managed, with the help of her relatives, to get by and to provide for her son David. My father never spoke of his childhood, seemingly as if he did not have one. Maybe this was the reason for the big family for which he was providing.

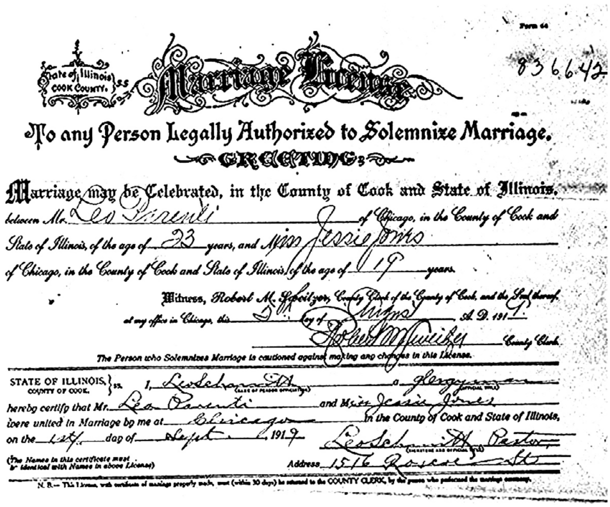
David as a child. Chicago area, c.1921

My recollection of my grandmother is that she always seemed old. Even in her early fifties she was older than her years, and conversation with her was bewildering. I believe she had a very difficult life, a life that I am attempting to uncover as well. On these Sunday afternoon visits, she would occasionally mention her first husband, my father's father (therefore my grandfather), Leonello Giovanni Parenti (as she called him), and endearingly refer to me as her "Little Leonello." One detail of his life that I recall with certainty was the story that he abandoned her and their infant son in Chicago within a few months of their marriage, and that he was never heard from again. In the thirty-eight years that I knew my father, he never discussed this, and he never mentioned his father.

There was one other detail about Leonello that my grandmother revealed; his place of birth in Italy, or at least as she understood it to be. Her lack of understanding of the Italian language and the accent of her immigrant husband would even take me on a 1979 pilgrimage to the Tuscan hilltown of Carrara, for a search of civil records for any hint of Leonello's existence. Nestled in the coastal mountains of northern Tuscany, Carrara is known for its pure white marble, the marble used by Michelangelo in creating his sculpture *David*, the name of my father. In telling the story of her brief marriage to the handsome immigrant from Carrara and the naming of their son, she would say, "David . . . like the statue." This account, and her artistic grandson's imaginings, had me convinced that our family origins were in Carrara. It was four decades before I would discover that the birthplace of my grandfather (and that of generations of Parenti families) was *not Carrara*, *but* the village of *Carraia* in the *comune* of Capannori near the walled-city of Lucca.

The Author's pilgrimage to Carrara, Italy 1979.

My father had only two documents which recorded the existence of his father; "*Leo's*" marriage license and "*Leo's*" son's birth certificate.



Form 44

836642

State of Illinois, Cook County, ss. Marriage License

To any Person Legally Authorized to Solemnize Marriage.

Greeting:

Marriage may be Celebrated, in the County of Cook and State of Illinois, between Mr. Leo Parenti of Chicago, in the County of Cook and State of Illinois, of the age of 23 years, and Miss Jessie Jones of Chicago, in the County of Cook and State of Illinois, of the age of 19 years.

Witness, Robert M. Sweitzer, County Clerk of the County of Cook, and the Seal thereof, at my office in Chicago, this 5th day of Sept A.D. 1919.

Robert M. Sweitzer, County Clerk.

The Person who Solemnizes Marriage is cautioned against making any changes in this License.

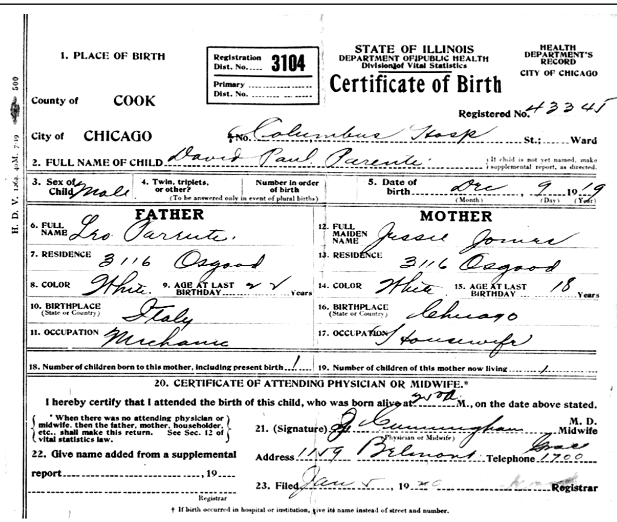
STATE OF ILLINOIS, COUNTY OF COOK, ss. I, Leo Schmidt, a clergyman, hereby certify that Mr. Leo Parenti and Miss Jessie Jones were united in Marriage by me at Chicago in the County of Cook and State of Illinois, on the 6th day of Sept. 1919. Leo Schmidt, Pastor

(The Names in this certificate must be identical with Names in above License)

Address 1516 Roscoe St.

N.B.—This License, with certificate of marriage properly made, must (within 30 days) be returned to the COUNTY CLERK, by the person who performed the marriage ceremony.

Marriage License of Leo Parenti and Jessie Jones, Chicago, Illinois 1919.



H. D. V. 4M. 7-19 500

STATE OF ILLINOIS
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH
Division of Vital Statistics
Certificate of Birth

HEALTH DEPARTMENT'S RECORD
CITY OF CHICAGO

Registration Dist. No. 3104
Primary Dist. No.

Registered No. 43345

1. PLACE OF BIRTH
County of COOK
City of CHICAGO No. Columbus Hosp St.; Ward

2. FULL NAME OF CHILD David Paul Parenti

3. Sex of Child Male
4. Twin, triplets, or other?
Number in order of birth
5. Date of birth Dec 9, 1919

FATHER		MOTHER	
6. FULL NAME	Leo Parenti	12. FULL MAIDEN NAME	Jessie Jones
7. RESIDENCE	3116 Osgood	13. RESIDENCE	3116 Osgood
8. COLOR	White	14. COLOR	White
9. AGE AT LAST BIRTHDAY	22 Years	15. AGE AT LAST BIRTHDAY	18 Years
10. BIRTHPLACE (State or Country)	Italy	16. BIRTHPLACE (State or Country)	Chicago
11. OCCUPATION	Mechanic	17. OCCUPATION	Housewife

18. Number of children born to this mother, including present birth 1
19. Number of children of this mother now living 1

20. CERTIFICATE OF ATTENDING PHYSICIAN OR MIDWIFE.*

I hereby certify that I attended the birth of this child, who was born alive at 3:10 A.M., on the date above stated.

* When there was no attending physician or midwife, then the father, mother, householder, etc., shall make this return. See Sec. 12 of vital statistics law.

21. (Signature) J. Cunningham M. D.

Address 1159 Belmont Telephone Grace 1700

22. Give name added from a supplemental report, 19

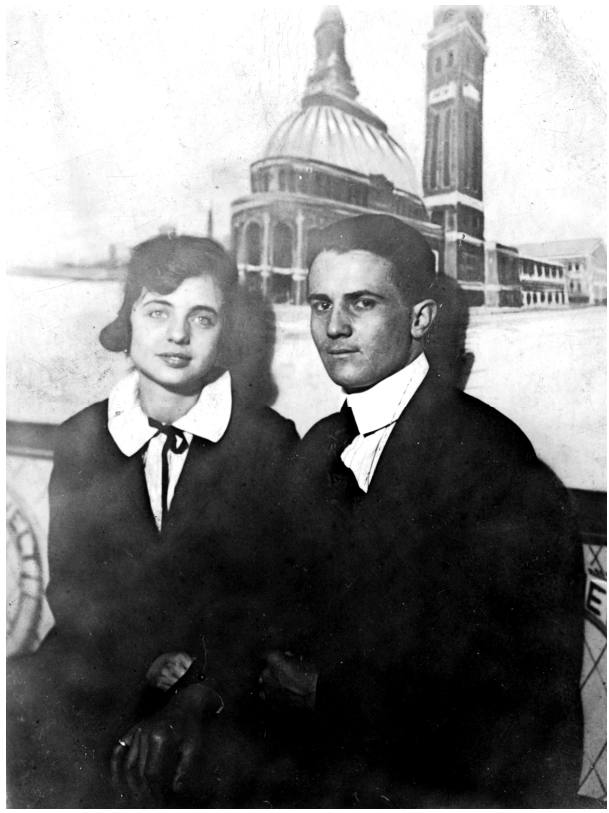
23. Filed Jan 5, 1920 Registrar

† If birth occurred in hospital or institution, give its name instead of street and number.

Birth Certificate of David Paul Parenti, Chicago, Illinois 1919

Only one photograph of the man who my grandmother called Leonello Giovanni Parenti was passed down to our family. He and his young bride are posed on a photographer's set before a painted backdrop, suggesting they are on the deck of a ship on their honeymoon. Their wedding bands are in the camera's eye, but not so clearly as the gaze in the couple's eyes. Hers is of a young, innocent girl who is six months pregnant with child, looking somewhat confused, maybe resolved to whatever her new life holds. Neither of them are smiling. In studying him, I recognize facial characteristics of my father and of my own, but it is in his eyes that the next chapter of his life is revealed . . . a cold, detached stare, in contrast to the soft, dreamy look of his new wife.

Within a few months, he was gone.



Jessie and Leone Parenti, Chicago, Illinois 1919.

With just these two documents, one photograph, and some oral history which my grandmother had shared so many years ago, I would search for my father's father and our family's Italian ancestry.

Baby David Paul Parenti, Chicago 1920.

II.

I AM DINO PARENTI

I wanted to be an Italian. My father was born part-Italian, why not me? My junior high school girlfriend was Italian, named Florence, like the city, and she was Catholic. My mother, though not an Italian, was raised a Catholic. Why did my father prevent her from raising her children the same? We had a large, warm family who shared Sunday dinners, sports, and holidays for many years, but there was nothing ethnic about our family. Our father was the provider and disciplinarian, and mother kept everybody happy, healthy, and together with seemingly endless love and care.

The first effort I made to recognize my heritage—who I *was*, who I thought I *should* be, or who I *wanted* to be—was through a mail-order catalog. I found that I could have twenty wooden pencils imprinted with my name, or any name I wanted, for just a couple of weeks' worth of my allowance. So I sent in the coins and in a few weeks, at age fifteen, I became Dino Parenti . . . at least in "erasable" pencil. It felt right, but it would be another seventeen years for me to legally change my name.

In 1979, I became the first Parenti to do so in a family of Parent children and grandchildren. Over the past twenty-five years, many in the family have reclaimed their heritage by adding that missing vowel, including my father, who upon his death was David Paul Parenti. In spite of the loneliness and emotional suffering he endured, the abandonment by his father and the absence of a father in his life, he died a Parenti on May 30, 1985, as his last will and testament so attests.

As I grew older, my curiosity and my affinity for everything Italian—art and architecture, wine and food, its people, culture and traditions—continued. But my nearly life-long desire to know about my family history was, with each passing year, likely to be unfulfilled if I didn't make a commitment, didn't immerse myself in this search. I could not think of anything more meaningful that I could leave to my son Dylan and daughter Joslyn, to my brothers and sister, and to all of their children and grandchildren in future generations than to know of their ancestry. It would be my gift to my family and my gift to me.

I had worked for forty years, made enough money and had experienced enough success and disappointments in business to decide to make a new life, to travel to Italy, and to search for those who preceded my father. I was also fortunate in that my wife Priscilla, in the first year of our marriage, shared and embraced the decision to sell our home, pack everything away and, with two bags each, go to Tuscany in the fall of 2004 to chase my dreams. A big life change, a new life together. Forsaking the comfort and security of home, we became vagabonds.

In the summer months preceding the trip, I acquainted Dylan with the research objectives and some of the documents and sites available, but in the months to come, he would discover new channels of research through the Internet and provide vital information on any Parenti family members who fled to America in the early 1900's . . . and much, much more. Joslyn graciously offered to watch over our affairs while we were traveling and she adopted our cat Solavino. My wife's parents, Fred and MaryLane, generously cared for our other two cats, Sophie and Sweet Pea. Without the love and support of our family, these dreams would never have been fulfilled.

My wife and I took Italian language classes in the evenings, while our days were filled with marketing the house, selling our belongings, then packing and storing what remained. There were reservations and ticketing to be done for our flights, accommodations, and car rental in Italy; and all sorts of details regarding the sale of the house, insurance issues, *ad nauseam*. Day by day we were getting it done. It was actually going to happen.

We were going to Tuscany!

III.

THE SEARCH

A new life together, three months in Italy, an opportunity to fulfill a life-long quest . . . it sounds so very romantic and we can't believe it's happening. We will experience thousands of wondrous, memorable works of art and architecture, and the spectacular landscape of Italy. We'll live with its people in the cities and in the country for an understanding of its culture and traditions and, oh yes, the food and the wine.

But there is also the research. Those who have pursued their ancestors with almost no knowledge of their origins know it is difficult, frustrating, and sometimes, downright depressing work. Days and days of looking through microfiche with no success. Long hours on the telephone, being put on hold or being transferred from office to office, then having the call dropped. Sometimes you encounter public officials who are rude, unsympathetic, and just don't want to help you. And then, there's the language issue. In the months to come, we would experience all of the indescribable highs and devastating lows in researching our family history.

Upon inspection of my father's birth certificate and my grandparents' marriage license, he was calling himself "Leo Parenti," a Chicago mechanic born in Italy. Some early research through the Ellis Island website revealed that a "Leone Parenti" arrived in New York City in 1914, stating that he was 16 years of age and was from "Carria, Italy." According to "Leo's" stated age of 23 on his marriage license, he would have been seventeen or eighteen at the time of his immigration. There was no Italian town named Carria as it meant

literally, "rotting flesh," in the Italian language. Still, there was enough to pursue. Immigration records are full of misinformation due to errors in the transcribing of immigration clerk entries. It's all a part of doing research, digging a little deeper, speculating what the facts *might* be. Further review of Parenti males who emigrated around that time listed many from "Carrara," but many more from "Carraia" which was unknown to me at the time, and there was a single entry from "Charria." But our Leone was, according to the oral family history, from Carrara, so this is where we would begin our search.

I ordered the microfilms from the Family History Library (an adjunct of the Church of Latter-day Saints) of the births, marriages, and deaths recorded in Carrara during the estimated period of his lifetime. Within a week, I received four tapes from the vaults in the mountains outside of Salt Lake City where the Mormons have millions of rolls of microfilm in their library. They have photocopies of millions and millions of pages of civil and church records of millions and millions of people from all over the world. I'm not sure what they are up to with all of this, but they do provide an indispensable research service.

It was our last week in San Diego before departing, and I spent every available hour studying these films, looking for any entry which would get things started. Reading the entries in these books is difficult. They are hand-written, penned with a quill, featuring elaborate flourishes, smears, water stains, and, by the way, are all in nineteenth-century Italian or Latin. They are beautiful works of calligraphy, precious recordings of history, but the process is tedious. Slowly viewing the pages one by one on a microfilm viewer by turning a crank, constantly adjusting the focus is hideous. With the help and encouragement of staffers and coffee-chugging researchers I came to know, I learned about ship manifests, the Soundex index, U.S. Census and Social Security information bases and more. After countless hours, I was convinced that Leonello was not to be found in Carrara. My son ordered the tapes for Carraia, as they wouldn't arrive before my departure.

My wife and I said good-bye to family and friends in California. We were off to Ohio for more good-byes and a month of touring in the U.S., including a visit to the National Archives Building in Washington, D.C. for a little research.

Our big adventure, and the search, was on!

IV.

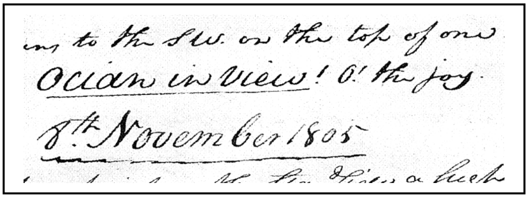
THERE REALLY IS A GOD, AND A LEONE, TOO!

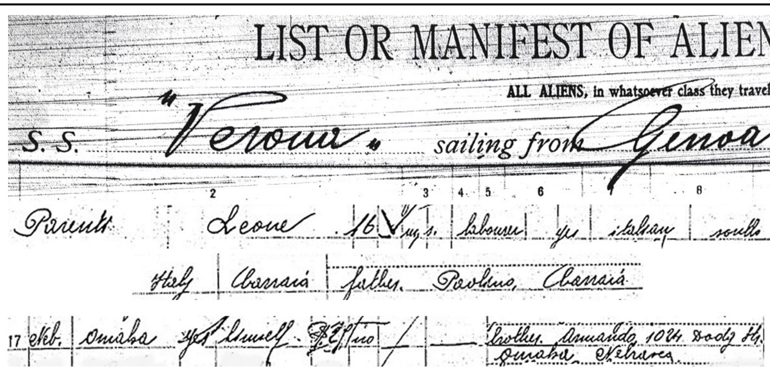
The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) holds the U.S. Constitution, Jefferson's Declaration of Independence and a microfilm copy of the 1914 manifest of the passenger ship S.S. Verona which sailed from Genoa on March 24th and arrived in New York Harbor on April 8th. Upon checking our electronic devices and camera with the security personnel, we were directed to the Genealogical Research Room with its immense wall of filing cabinets and a sea of microfilm-viewing cubicles in an adjoining room. These battle stations are manned by researchers cranking the wheels of the viewers, fumbling and grumbling as they mount the reels of microfilm onto the machines. After a review of the Soundex index (of which Parenti is assigned the alpha-numeric code P653), we were able to search microfilms of ship arrivals into New York Harbor on a particular date, then proceed to the manifest of the Verona, and finally page by page and line by line of the over 2,500 immigrant passengers. The Ellis Island site brought us to this ship's arrival, listing a Leone Parenti of "Carria" coming in 1914 on the Verona. It was our only clue and hope. But after a few hours of staring at the screen, focusing the lens (and our eyeballs) in and out, and cranking the wheels back and forth, it was closing time at the National Archives and cocktail hour for *these* Parentis.

On the following day we returned to the scene, seeing some of the same beleaguered researchers from the day before. There's camaraderie among the legions of researchers who have traveled

considerable distances to be here in Washington D.C.—all with great expectations of traveling even *greater* distances into their family histories. Hours, days and weeks can pass without a trace of an ancestral connection. Groans and sighs, fatigue and bleary eyes are what surrounded us. But we were about to make some joyous noises. We were about to discover our lost ancestor.

There on page eight, entry seventeen, was our Leone. Our excitement could not be contained! I felt like shouting, *"O! the joy."*—William Clark's exclamation when he believed he had arrived at the Pacific Ocean after his transcontinental journey with Meriwether Lewis and the Corps of Discovery almost two centuries ago. Those around us in the research room must have thought we had discovered America, not someone who had come here ninety years ago. He was listed as coming from "Charraia," the son of Paolino (my father's middle name was Paul) Parenti and he was five feet seven inches tall, approximately my height and that of my late father. The listed age of sixteen was still questionable, but close enough. His final destination was to join his brother Armando at 1024 Dody Street in Omaha, Nebraska. In that entry, Leone was listed as a laborer. He likely was seeking work with his older brother, maybe on the railroad or farming.





Details from Ship Manifest of S.S. Verona listing Parenti, Leone. April 8, 1914

It was so exciting! It was our first discovery! I was convinced that we had found the immigrant who five years after his arrival in America would become my grandfather. After all of those years of

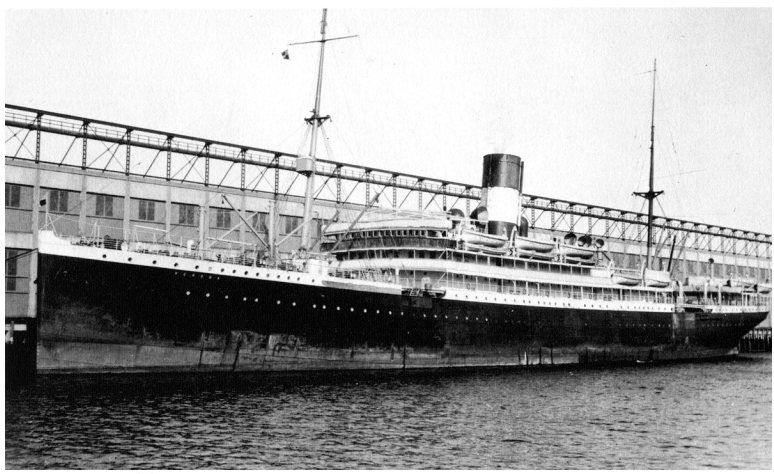
not knowing and of wondering who this man was—when he came here, where he came from, or anything about his ancestors—his story was beginning to come to life. I now had enough of this story to focus the research in Italy, and, fortunately for us, it was in Tuscany, one of the most beautiful and historically rich places in the world. And, not a bad place for a honeymoon!

There in the Genealogy Library of NARA we viewed the Soundex reels, which then led us to the ship manifest reels for April of 1914. What I learned at the Family History Library the week before was applied and was producing results, and it was so satisfying. In the next few hours I would learn that my son was viewing the same manifest in California on his computer, as we were viewing here, across the continent traversed by Lewis and Clark. The research was beginning to be fun and fulfilling.

In the days before and after this discovery by Parenti and Clark (my wife's maiden name), we visited the memorials to this nation's "father," George Washington, and to its most enigmatic "son", the complex, complicated and highly contradictory Thomas Jefferson. We honored those who served and those who died at the new World War II Memorial and stood silently in the rain at the Korean and Vietnam War Memorials. Honoring the other two men who "fathered" this country through its most difficult times, we walked through the peaceful, park-like FDR Memorial with its calming water features, then mounted the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and stood before its commanding sculpture. Looking across the reflecting pool, here at the site of Dr. Martin Luther King's soulful "Free at Last" speech, I wondered what Dr. King and Mr. Lincoln would have thought of race relations in America, forty years after that address, and one hundred forty years after the Emancipation Proclamation. Later in the week we toured the Gettysburg battlefields, even visited the room where Lincoln wrote his marvelously succinct Gettysburg Address, and felt the sadness and futility of this country's Civil War. We made side trips to my two favorite houses in this country, Jefferson's Monticello and Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater. Along the way, we were captivated by the beauty of our country; its forests, rivers, and mountains. Before saying good-bye, we traveled to Chicago, the place where my grandparents married and my father was born. But the answers for us were now in Italy, and we were further motivated in our quest.

I had learned from the Italian Consulate that I could be considered for Italian citizenship if my paternal-grandfather Leone was an Italian citizen at the time of my father's birth in 1919, and that neither my father, nor I had ever renounced our right to Italian citizenship. Having this dual citizenship for me and my family would require securing over thirty documents required by the Italian government for consideration. These documents must be certified by the appropriate vital statistics offices of the county, state, or country that the birth, marriage, divorce, naturalization, or death occurred, and then most of the documents must be translated into Italian for submission to the Italian Consulate. Most of the documents would require a seal, called an *apostille,* which would bring the document count to almost seventy. A monumental task, in addition to the research of our family genealogy. My son would research and secure the documents in the United States. I would do the same in Italy.

We were finally on our way. *Buona Fortuna, Arrivederci,* and *Buon Viaggio!*



S.S. Verona . The ship on which Leone Parenti traveled from Genova to New York in 1914. Photo courtesy of Peabody Essex Museum.

S.S. Verona 8,886 tons, 482' x 58', 2,560 passengers, (60 first class), maiden voyage 1908, top speed 14 knots or 16 mph. The S.S. Verona was sunk by German torpedoes on November 5, 1918 near Punta di Pelaro, south of Reggio di Calabria .

V.

BENVENUTI TOSCANA AND STEFANIA

On August 30th, we arrived in Firenze (Florence) the eternally fascinating city of art and history, the heart of Tuscany, and its incredibly beautiful and diverse countryside. Tuscany is home to a proud, independent people with a rich heritage of traditions and culture from its Etruscan beginnings for almost twenty-nine hundred years. But for now, I just want to learn about *one* Italian who lived here just *one* hundred of those years ago. After a few days of belated honeymooning it was time to go to work. Not a bad place to do research, as I realized that there is no place on Earth that I would rather be.

Our first call would be to the Instituto Genealogico Italiano. Their services were recommended to us in researching our Italian genealogy, as that was the specialization of the Institute. We crossed the Arno River, scene of the devastating floods in the fall of 1966, winding around a few piazzas (*piazze*) and palazzos (*palazzi*) to the street address of Via Torta 14, only to find that they had pulled up roots here a few years ago. Some recommendation! Welcome to Italy and the emotional lows of genealogical research in a foreign land. Perturbed but undaunted, we found the Biblioteca Storico-Araldica Genealogica in the phone directory and decided to visit them. We crossed over the Ponte Vecchio and eventually found their office at Via San Spirito 27. After fifteen painful minutes of trying to present our story and its cast of characters to Antonella and Marzia in our Italian 101 (and their mangled English), we realized that they were not involved in genealogy as we knew it. Secondly, we realized that we were not going to get anywhere in our quest without an Italian

researcher who spoke English. All of these nice folks over here are *Italian* and they all *speak Italian, not English,* as we were told. On the way out the door we asked if they knew anyone who could help us. When the going gets tough, my wife is able to speak, I'm told, perfectly understandable Italian. With that understood, one of the nice ladies picked up the phone and in minutes I was speaking in my perfectly understandable *English*, to *Dottoressa* (Doctor) Stefania Fangarezzi.

Sent to us from above, Stefania is a genealogical researcher with a university degree in language, including English and Latin. Can it get any better? We could only hope for more divine intervention in the days and weeks to come.

We met for coffee the next morning on the terrace of our hotel overlooking the Arno River. She arrived on her silver Piaggio, the ubiquitous Italian scooter. Stefania is a young woman with bright eyes, a warm smile, an infectious laugh, and a real passion for her work. After explaining the situation, and reviewing the few documents we had, she was anxious to get to work, and even offered to drive us in her car the following morning to the Comune di Capannori to view the books at the Ufficio di Stato Civile, near the village of Carraia. Excited by Stefania's enthusiasm and expertise, there was a sense that things were starting to happen.

Civil record-keeping of the births, marriages, and deaths of every family of every *comune* in Italy began officially in the 1860's when the country became unified. Napoleon initiated this as early as 1806 in some areas of Italy, but upon his defeat in 1816 many areas would discontinue civil registration. If Leone Giovanni Parenti was going to be found, it would first be in the birth acts or certificates, called the *Atto di Nascita*. Then we could learn about his ancestry from the family sheets in the *Stato di Famiglia storico* (historical State of the Family).

We said *"ciao"* to Stefania and got several of the same, *"ciao, ciao, ciao,"* in return. We watched her ride away on her motor scooter from our rooftop terrace.

Domani (tomorrow). What will it bring?

We crossed the Arno and made our way past the Piazza della Signoria and on to the Galleria dell'Accademia, where a five hundred-year-old sculpture has recently been cleaned and can now receive visitors, Michelangelo's *David* of 1504.

Pinch me!

VI.

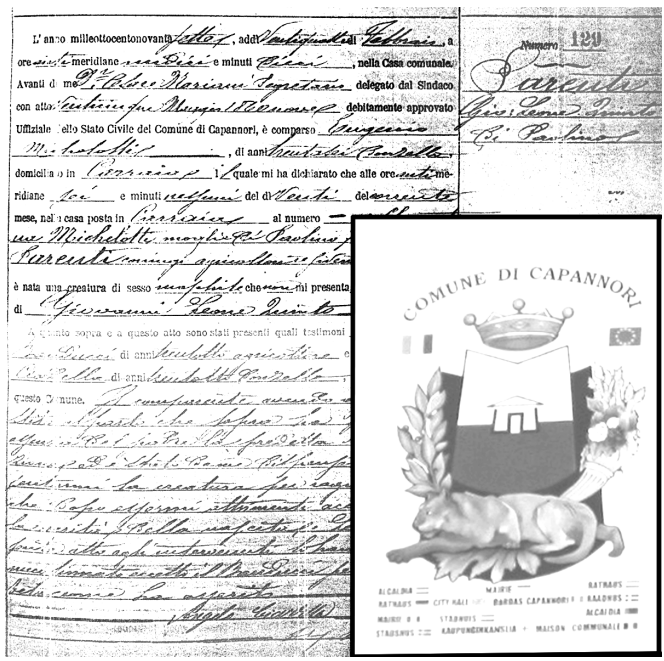
DISCOVERY

The drive from Florence to Capannori, just east of Lucca, is not the Tuscany one sees in the postcards or Hollywood movies. It's very flat, highly trafficked, very industrial and quite polluted. Only as we exited the *autostrada* at Capannori, did we see the old farmhouses, blue skies, the rolling hills of the Garfagnana, and the Alpi Apuane mountains in the distance. It was a warm, sunny day on the Lucchese plain and it was Friday, the *mercato* day (where the once-weekly concept of the Old World open-air market lives on), so the *piazza* around the Ufficio di Stato Civile was alive and excitement was in the air. Our excitement and anticipation was almost too much to bear as we entered the building.

At the counter, Stefania requested the *Atto di Nascita* (the birth recordings) from 1895 to 1897—as that was our best assumption for Leone's date of birth—our only hope for finding him and his ancestors here. Within a few minutes, Roberta Andreotti and Antonio Pucci delivered several books to the counter and then invited us back into their offices. The books are over one hundred years old and are well-worn from being handled over the decades. These registers contain the entries, in chronological order by day, of each birth in the *comune*. As required by civil law, the birth must be registered within a few days of the delivery, usually presented by the father, but sometimes by another family member. The family name and a number are in one column, and the details of the birth are in an adjoining column. The entries for 1895 and 1896 did not include our Leone. Only 1897 remained.

And then it happened! There he was! *Numero* 129 was Parenti, Giovanni Leone Quinto born February 20, 1897! The event was reported to the Stato Civile four days later on the 24th and presented by Leone's uncle Eugenio Michelotti. Leone was the fifth (*quinto*) child of Paolino and Clementina Michelotti Parenti and born at home, casa 207 at Corte Pardini, at six in the morning. Paolino was the son of Giovanni Domenico Parenti and Angela Benetti. Clementina was the daughter of Sebastiano Francesco Michelotti and Domenica Biancalana. Both families are farmers (*contadini*).

In that moment, I had the emotion of realizing that the culmination of my forty-year quest was upon me, and I wished my father could have shared this with me. We had found the man who was lost for eighty-five years in our family's history. In my hands was the knowledge of my grandfather's name, place and date of birth—his beginning. And it was the beginning of a journey through the history of generations of my ancestors. The "Old World" of our family had been discovered.



Birth Certificate of Leone Quinto Parenti, Carraia 1897.
Crest of Comune di Capannori.

VII.

FOGLIO DI FAMIGLIA PARENTI

From the *Atto di Nascita*, we now were able to review the *Stato di Famiglie* and the family *foglio* (sheet) of the Parenti *famiglia* and of the Michelotti *famiglia*. In that these two families have histories here for hundreds of years and there are many branches of each of their family trees, it was helpful to have the grandparents listed. In a short time, two oversized leather-bound books, filled with beautiful calligraphy on time-aged paper, appeared. Handmade in the middle of the nineteenth century, these were the *Foglio di Famiglie* (the sheets of the families) of the Comune di Capannori.

The Parenti sheets, family number 27 in the book, presents the family home as Casa N°.207 via Corte Pardini. We discovered that Leone's father, Paolino, had a grandfather named Giovanni Luigi Ranieri Parenti who married Maria Domenica Pardini on July 1, 1809 and perhaps moved into her family's ancestral home. Luigi would therefore be my great-great-great-grandfather. On these civil records, his son Giovanni Domenico's birth is the first recorded date, July 8, 1822. The book is twenty-four inches in height by thirty inches wide when opened. The ancestors are in descending order chronologically, with the last entry on April 16, 1929, seemingly the end of the story in Carraia. Across the pages, in columns, are the dates and places of the recorded births, marriages, and deaths. Since all births were registered, those columns are complete. But there are few marriage and death recordings. Emigration and World Wars in the first half of the twentieth century have rendered incomplete histories of the Parenti family, and millions of other families of Italian descent.

Giovanni Pietro Paolino Parenti, my great-grandfather, was born on March 23, 1863, the only child born to Giovanni Domenico Parenti and his young wife, Maria Angela Benetti, who was born in the nearby village of Pieve San Paolo. They were married on June 25, 1860.

In contrast, Maria Clementina Genovina Michelotti, my great-grandmother, was born on April 28, 1867, the fourth of eight children born to Sebastiano Francesco Michelotti and his much younger wife, Maria Domenica Pasqua Biancalana. They were married sometime in 1859. Three of their children did not survive childhood.

The dates tell an interesting account of the times and the place. Paolino's father was 39 at the time of his son's birth, his wife was 25. Clementina's father was 51 when his daughter was born, his wife was 29. The old farmers married much younger women, all from the Carraia area. The younger men likely died in battles, emigrated, or had no means of supporting a wife.

Paolino and Clementina were married in Carraia on October 5, 1889. He was 26, she was 22. The witnesses were Pietro Banducci and Angelo Giardella, both 38-year-old *contadini*. The first child of this union was born seven months later with the birth of Aurelio Giorgio on April 22, 1890; followed by the births of Giovanni Lisandro Armando on March 11, 1892; of Maria Isola Zelmira on December 19, 1893; of Giovanni Evaristo Angelo on August 31, 1895; and finally, the birth of Giovanni Leone Quinto on February 20, 1897. The beginnings of all of these lives are registered before us in this magnificent book.

However, there is only one entry of the death of these souls, that of Clementina on May 17, 1897. Staring in disbelief, I realized that this mother of five children (all under the age of seven) died very young. Her newborn son Leone, my grandfather, the father that my father never knew, was not yet three months old. Clementina was just 30 years of age.

The stories that emerge from family research often shed light on previous understandings you may have had about relationships and your family history as you have known it. Would Leone have left his family in Carraia to go to America, then leave his young wife and newborn son in Chicago, if he had a nurturing mother as I did? So much to learn and understand.

There are two entries of marriage that are of interest. First, on October 14, 1899, Paolino married his second wife, Maria Erminia

Sabina Bucchianeri, who was born in Carraia on January 14, 1862. Second, Clementina Michelotti Parenti's daughter, Maria Isola Zelmira, married Pietro Paolo Michelotti, a distant cousin, on June 19, 1922. There were children from those two marriages to trace as well.

Pietro Paolo and Isola Zelmira had a daughter, Giuseppina Tecla, born on March 18, 1923; and a son, Eugenio Remo, born on June 16, 1927. I remembered from our discovery an hour before that Clementina's oldest brother was named Eugenio and that he registered Leone's birth with the authorities over a hundred years ago. Therefore, Remo's great-uncle Eugenio Domenico, presented my grandfather's birth to the world on February 24, 1897.

Paolino and his second wife, Sabina, had three children; a son six months after their marriage, then a daughter three years later. Neither of these children survived childhood. However, a daughter, Maria Angelina Adarcisa Parenti was born on March 30, 1906. She married Narciso Parenti, a distant cousin on April 4, 1929, and that is the final entry on the Parenti family sheet.

The Michelotti sheet, number 124, presents their family home as Casa N°. 9 Via alla Chiesa. Because the two families were joined together on two occasions, their family sheets share some of the same entries.

What became of Leone and his three brothers? And of his father Paolino, and his only sister? Are the children of any of these ancestors still living, and are they in Italy or in America? Where is Casa 207 Corte Pardini, the family home? And what happened to Clementina? Why did she die so young and where can we visit her gravesite?

The Ufficio di Stato Civile was closing at midday. I took a final look at the *Stato di Familgie* and the *Foglio di Famiglia* Parenti and the entries for our family, realizing that I had just found four generations of Parentis this morning. I held this extraordinary book in my hands, wishing everyone in my family could do the same.

It was a morning I will never forget.

Foglio di Famiglia Parenti*

Via Corte Pardini **Casa No. 207**

Luigi Ranieri Parenti
sp. Maria Domenica Pardini

|

Giovanni Domenico Parenti
7/8/1822 – 9/9/1895
sp. Maria Angela Benetti
2/12/1838 – 8/20/1899

|

Pietro Paolino Parenti
3/23/1863-

sp. Clementina Genovina Michelotti
4/28/1867 – 5/17/1897

|

I. Aurelio Giorgio Parenti
4/22/1890 –

II. Lisandro Armando Parenti
3/11/1892 -

III. Isola Zelmira Parenti
12/19/1893 –
sp. Pietro Paolo Sebastiano Michelotti

|

Giuseppina Tecla Michelotti
3/18/1923-
Eugenio Remo Giovanni Michelotti
6/16/1927-

IV. Evaristo Angelo Parenti
8/31/1895 –

V. Leone Quinto Parenti
2/20/1897-

sp. Erminia Sabina Bucchianieri
4/01/1862 –

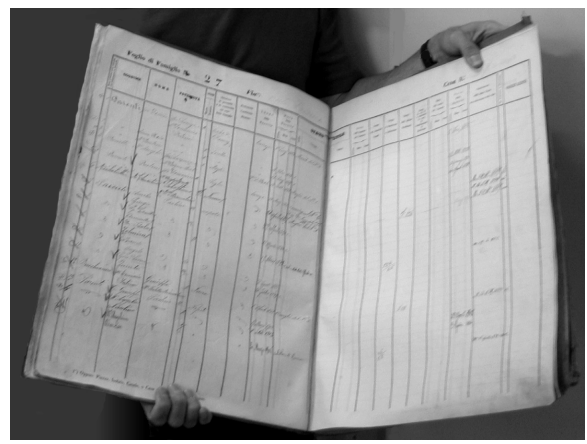
|

I. Giuseppe Paolino Parenti
3/17/1900 – 8/22/1907

II. Angela Nicolina Parenti
11/8/1903 – 1/03/1904

III. Angelina Adarcisa Parenti
3/30/1906 –
sp. Narciso Francesco Parenti

*As recorded in the *Stato di Famiglie* in Capannori. Marriages and deaths have been recorded in the Parenti Family Trees in later chapters of the book.



Foglio di Famiglia Parenti, Capannori, Italy.

VIII.

DIGGING IN THE FAMILY GARDEN

Despite my life-long interest, I had only recently—the previous six months or so—been intensely researching and searching for my heritage. When conducting research of this kind, some of the discoveries come easily, even accidentally. Others come with great difficulty, taking years, or they may never come to light. Some findings are invisible one day, and the next day they are shining bright. It can be frustrating, depressing, and disheartening; then satisfying, exciting and inspiring. To stay the course, it is necessary to have the passion, the purpose, and the persistence to continue: the passion for the process of research in all of its forms; the embracing of the purpose and importance of the goal; and finally, the drive to continue in the face of failure or resistance, the persistence to succeed. And, I should mention, good fortune and a little luck along the way.

Upon embarking on this journey of discovery, leaving our home and garden in California to dig up some roots in Tuscany, I remembered the commitment to family history of my wife's grandmother, Antoinette Arbuckle Turner. "Gum," a term of endearment by her grandchildren, was an avid genealogist. She traced her ancestry, wrote books, and lectured in the schools when she was well into her eighties. Her message, "Be an ancestor, not just a name between two dates," and "Just knowing a relative's name and date is not enough, you must learn all you can about them." She wrote about her ancestors coming to New England in 1630 and, after many generations, about their move to Erie, Pennsylvania, where, in 1900,

her grandmother Hannah Burton declared, "I will go no further." That statement is now an endearing expression of her ancestors.

Upon Antoinette's passing, I prepared a cutting garden in her memory, dedicating it as "Gum's Garden." I miss that wonderful lady and I hope to do her proud.

Gum's Garden. Dedicated to Antoinette Burton Arbuckle Turner.

Our morning in Capannori was truly incredible. But family research requires more than looking at books of civil records and computer monitors. It is essential to gain access to church records, search the cemeteries, walk the streets and fields, meet the people, and learn their customs and traditions—dig into the family roots in its native soil.

The discoveries, the most heartening and disheartening, were just beginning here in Tuscany and in California.

IX.

STONES UNTURNED

Carraia is a *frazione* (small village) situated near the center of the Comune di Capannori in the Provincia di Lucca, a few kilometers east of the city walls of Lucca. There have been inhabitants here, mostly *contadini*, since 799, when it was first settled by Ghisa di Carraia. The family name with the largest presence here over the generations is Parenti, and the cemetery is a lasting testament to that presence. Approaching the deeply-incised and symbolically rich, carved stone walls; and passing through the iron gates of the *cimitero* across the road from the parish *chiesa* (church) of our ancestors, is to step back into another time and into another world. In every direction are marble crypts and gravestones with our family name. Certainly our afternoon will answer many questions from the morning. Surely, we would find most of our ancestors here.

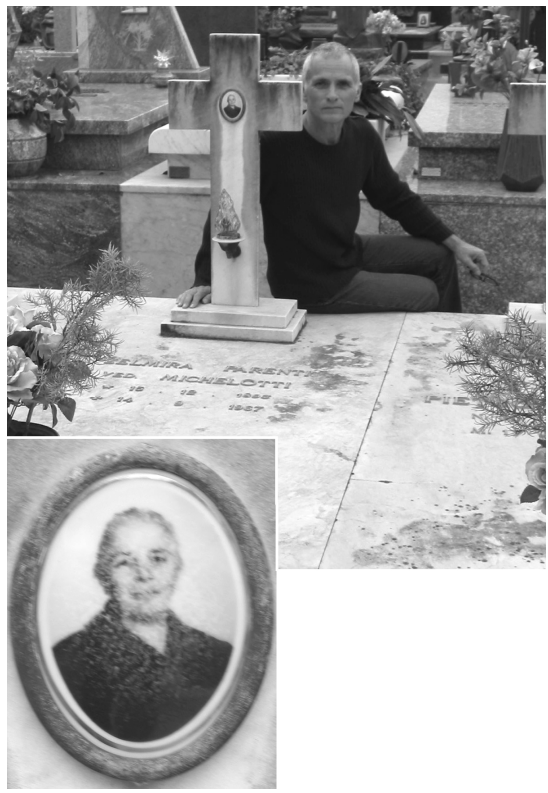
Gates of Carraia Cimitero

Parenti, Parenti, Parenti, Parenti. Row upon row, upon row, upon row of our namesakes, representing several generations of Parentis from the numerous families of this parish. They are memorialized in many, many ways. From the simplest of markers and engraved stones, to above-ground crypts and even a few iron-gated monuments which are the final resting place of entire families. There are pauper's graves along the walls and the most prominent family tombs loom over the *cimitero.* It's a physical documentation of the "haves" and the "have-nots." Like most cemeteries here, the array of marble and granite used to commemorate these souls is impressive and seem to have been selected to individualize each grave. Many of the given names are the same throughout the many families and generations . . . Giovanni, Maria, Pietro, Domenico, Domenica, and Paolino. We examine these names and dates, trying to link them with those from the Parenti Family *Foglio*. Some are tantalizingly close, but in this research, *close* isn't *closure,* and it can lead you astray—as with Carrara and Carraia.

Carraia Cimitero.

After walking the grounds several times, certain that there were more discoveries here, we found just one ancestral gravesite. Maria Isola Zelmira Parenti Michelotti, Leone's sister, is buried next to her husband Pietro Paolo Michelotti. A porcelain photograph of

her is mounted to a cross atop her above-ground tomb. She died on September 4, 1967 at 74 years of age. Studying her portrait, especially her eyes, I was looking for more answers and wondered about her life. I would return another day, as I sensed that there was more to learn at this sacred site.



Grave of Isola Zelmira Parenti Michelotti, Carraia.

In the Michelotti Family *Foglio*, I learned earlier in the day that they had a son, Eugenio Remo Michelotti. We found him listed in the Lucca telephone directory and we thought it was a good time to call him. He could tell us stories about his mother, maybe about his uncles who went to America and maybe about his grandparents Paolino and Clementina . . . but it wasn't to be. He would not allow us to visit, stating that he was too old, an invalid, and could not remember anything. We believed otherwise, as he was just 77, and as I overheard his voice on the phone with Stefania, I was convinced that

he was healthy enough and knew enough to help us, but, sadly, we can do no more. Maybe another day.

We turned our attention to finding the family home at Casa 207 via Corte Pardini. The problem is that these names and numbers are no longer used. Asking at the coffee bar we got no answers, but we were directed to the homes of some of the oldest residents of Carraia. In each case these people sincerely wanted to help, but they could only stare blankly at the photo of my grandfather, and shake their heads slowly, saying that they just could not remember or did not know. After an exhausting day filled with new facts, we decided to end our day of research, convinced that those who were old enough to know our ancestors simply couldn't remember anything which would help us.

Upon returning to Florence, Stefania took us to our hotel along the Arno River, and we went to the terrace for a glass of wine. We recounted the events of the day—a somewhat disappointing afternoon after an unbelievable morning—but, without a doubt, one of the most memorable days of my life.

I vowed to return to find the ancestral home and final resting place of its inhabitants.

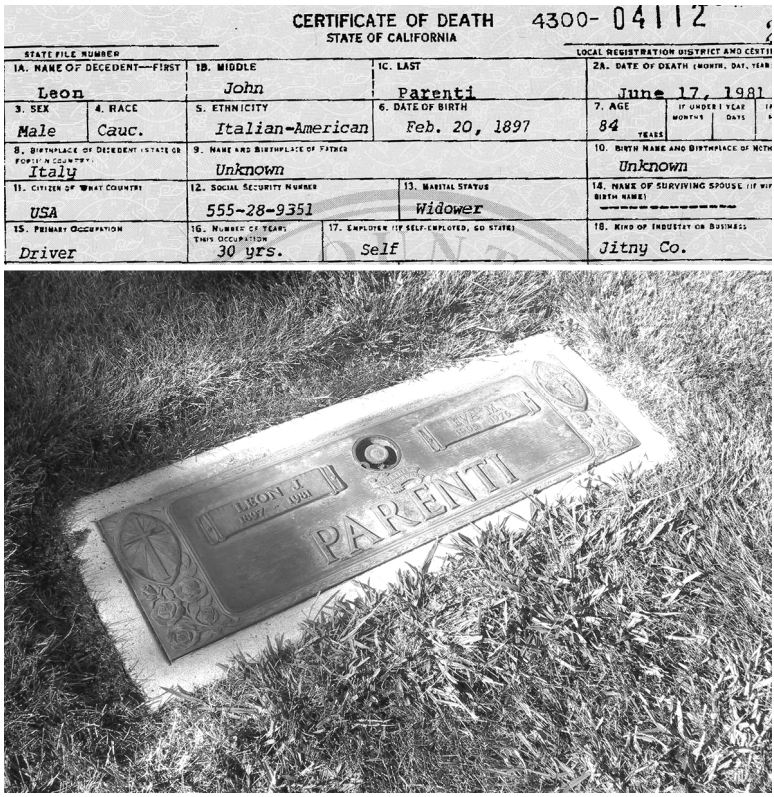
X.

TUSCAN SONS

The search for my grandfather Leone and his brothers in Tuscany showed little promise. There was no evidence that any of them married or died here, so their lives and stories must be in America. The hard economic times and life on the farm in Italy at the beginning of the last century, along with the promise of work and prosperity in the New World, lured these farmers—these Tuscan sons—away from the land that their ancestors had lived on and worked for generations. So one by one, the brothers made the journey by rail to the port of Genoa and, just like Cristoforo Colombo (Christopher Columbus) four hundred years before them, sailed west. He was looking for a route to the Indies, the Parentis were emigrating to America. Millions and millions of Italians passed through the entry ports of New York, Boston, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and others. Finding the documents of four brothers who passed through these ports, in the U.S. Census, Social Security records and the Immigration and Naturalization network would be a very complicated and time-consuming task. But, fortunately, my son had become interested in his ancestry and he has tremendous research skills and Internet know-how. We conversed almost daily, sharing our discoveries and frustrations. Then came the breakthrough!

Just hours after our discovery of Leone's birth act in the Capannori, my son found the notice of his great-grandfather's death in Santa Clara County, California. The certificate revealed that he was born on February 20, 1897 in Italy, and that he died on June 17, 1981 as an "Italian-American." His name upon his death was Leon John

Parenti. He was a widower, living in the town of Milpitas. He died in a medical center in San Jose of pneumonia and was survived by a daughter from his second marriage, to Eva Catenacci of San Francisco. Joyce Parenti Marble was my father's half-sister.



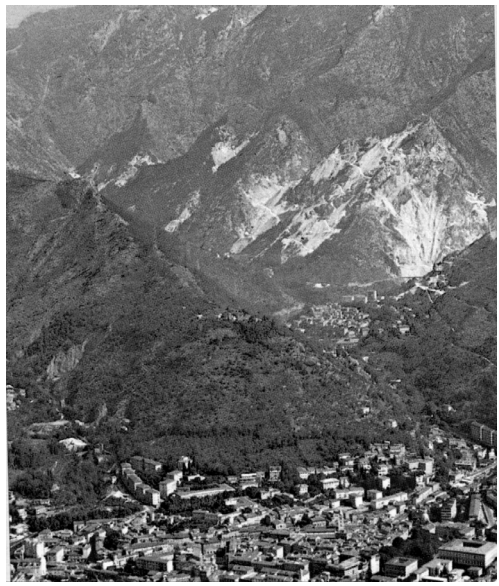
CERTIFICATE OF DEATH 4300- 04112
STATE OF CALIFORNIA

STATE FILE NUMBER			LOCAL REGISTRATION DISTRICT AND CERTI
1A. NAME OF DECEDENT—FIRST: Leon	1B. MIDDLE: John	1C. LAST: Parenti	2A. DATE OF DEATH (MONTH, DAY, YEAR): June 17, 1981
3. SEX: Male / 4. RACE: Cauc.	5. ETHNICITY: Italian-American	6. DATE OF BIRTH: Feb. 20, 1897	7. AGE: 84 YEARS (IF UNDER 1 YEAR: MONTHS / DAYS)
8. BIRTHPLACE OF DECEDENT (STATE OR FOREIGN COUNTRY): Italy	9. NAME AND BIRTHPLACE OF FATHER: Unknown		10. BIRTH NAME AND BIRTHPLACE OF MOTH: Unknown
11. CITIZEN OF WHAT COUNTRY: USA	12. SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER: 555-28-9351	13. MARITAL STATUS: Widower	14. NAME OF SURVIVING SPOUSE (IF WI BIRTH NAME): ----------
15. PRIMARY OCCUPATION: Driver	16. NUMBER OF YEARS THIS OCCUPATION: 30 yrs.	17. EMPLOYER (IF SELF-EMPLOYED, SO STATE): Self	18. KIND OF INDUSTRY OR BUSINESS: Jitny Co.

Grave and Death Certificate of Leon John Parenti.
Cedar Lawn Memorial Park, Fremont, California.

Looking at the year and place of his death, 1981 in California, it took me back to September 1979 when I traveled to Carrara, Italy from my California home looking for "Leonello" Parenti. In my journal entry of September 26, 1979 (my daughter's tenth birthday and almost twenty-five years to the day of this discovery by my son), I wrote, ". . . Carrara. This is the city where dad's father was thought to have lived before coming to America . . . Michelangelo came here to select marble . . . We went to the *biblioteca* (library) but there were no records here . . . We learned nothing about this man but something about this place . . . it was fulfilling to make the pilgrimage and walk

the streets and wonder about this person." I then realized that I had come to Italy looking for him a quarter-century ago, and he was living back home in California.



Carrara,Italy. My father and I made pilgrimages here seeking our ancestry. The mountains of white marble are in the background. From a postcard of 1979.

And then I remembered that in June 1983 my father traveled alone from his San Diego home to Italy on a personal search of his ancestry, and he also made a pilgrimage to that mythical town of Carrara, where he believed his ancestors called home. One of the tragedies of our family story was that my father lived within a few hours of his father for so many years and never knew it. While he was looking for his family overseas, his family was just up the California coast. The thought of this made me sad and it made me angry. That my father did not know this upon his death on May 30, 1985 in San Diego gave me some solace, some relief. He had suffered enough from the abandonment and absence of this man. Not knowing this wicked twist of fate spared him more pain.

My son traveled to San Jose for the certificate of death and then to Cedar Lawn Memorial Park in Fremont where he found the gravesite and e-mailed a photo of the gravestone and a copy of the document to me in Italy. Upon seeing the stone and its inscription, "Parenti Leon John," I thought about the boy who left his homeland, then left his wife and son in Chicago, and in the end left his given name long behind him. My final, and regrettably empty, feeling was of pity that he did not know my father, and that he denied my father of a boyhood with a father.

My father and I were never close. We never really connected, though I am like him in many ways. I respected him, feared him, and remember times when I wanted something more. Looking back, I believe that he was a good provider and the hardest-working person I've ever known. It was as though he was driven to show the world that he could overcome the odds and triumph—just as his namesake David conquered Goliath. I've come to understand his difficulties in being a father, due to the life circumstances he was given and from my own personal experience of being a father. He did his best with what he knew how to do. That was to provide a comfortable and secure home for our mother to nurture six children and give him the family that he never had. Curiously, with the discovery of my grandfather, and the realization that he not only abandoned my father, but also lived a long life without ever connecting with his son, I found some closure in my troublesome relationship with my father.

Father and Me. Hebron, 1953.

But with my grandfather, the question remained. *"Why?"*

XI.

THE SEARCHERS

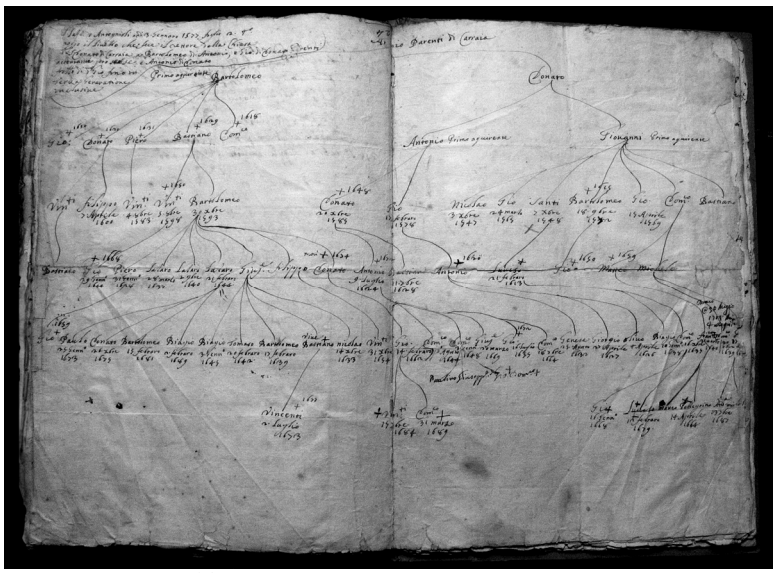
With the discovery of Leone in America, my son Dylan could now focus his efforts on securing the documents required for obtaining Italian citizenship. The most critical document was Leone's Petition for Naturalization. If this filing occurred before his son's birth in 1919, we would be ineligible.

My son would continue his search for Leone's brothers and their surviving families. We felt certain that all four brothers made their way to California and that all of them likely changed their names, making the search more difficult. Most importantly, Dylan was able to contact Joyce Marble, Leone's daughter from his second marriage. Joyce was receptive, and was interested to meet with us when I returned from Italy. She knew her father had a previous marriage. She did not know that she had a half-brother named David.

So my son is traveling around the U.S. and on the Internet gathering documents and information about those who left Carraia. I am in Tuscany looking for those who stayed; hoping to find the graves of Paolino and of Clementina, wanting to know the cause of her death; curious to discover the family home, Casa 207 via Corte Pardini, and to find any surviving ancestors here in Italy to share family stories.

To ensure the correct lineage, Stefania is tracing our family back to the sixteenth century, methodically working through the numerous Parenti clans who have lived in this region for centuries. She is pleased with her work and is diligent in her efforts to produce *Albero Genealogico della Famiglia Parenti* (the Parenti Family Tree).

But she must have access to more church records and we need to scour the cemeteries and return to the streets and fields of Carraia for more answers. We could not have known, or imagined, that the days to come would be so rich in discovering our family history—and so emotional in the experience of re-living it.



Family Tree of Antonio Parenti of Carraia 1577-1713.
Not a direct ancestor, but one of the many clans of Parentis
from Carraia researched by Stefania to determine our family lineage.

XII.

OSPEDALE

On October 21st, autumn has come to Tuscany. The days are cooler and growing shorter. Most days are overcast as it's the rainy season, but it's beautiful here in any season. We are back in Lucca, the magnificent city preserved in time behind its five hundred-year-old walls, *Le Mura*. All around us we see lion (*leone*) sculptures and wonder if they are the inspiration for naming our Leone. With Carraia just minutes away, we count our blessings that I am *Lucchese*, doing this research in one of the most desirable places in Italy.

Three weeks earlier, Stefania learned in her research at the Stato Civile here in the Comune di Lucca, that Clementina Michelotti Parenti died in Santa Maria a Colle, a *frazione* just a few kilometers west of the city walls. The recorded date of her death, May 17, 1897, was the same as recorded in Capannori. No cause of death was listed or place of burial, only where she died three months after giving birth.

One hundred years ago, the twelve-kilometer journey from Carraia to Santa Maria a Colle by horse-drawn wagon over country roads would require half a day. More if the spring rains were heavy in 1897. The trip would take them west past the ramparts of Lucca before crossing the river and turning south onto Via Cimitero, which winds into the village and up the hill, the *colle*. But why was she there? What was there? How did she die and where was she laid to rest? Stefania speculated that she was perhaps on the way to the *ospedale*. Maybe some complications from giving birth to Leone. But why was she not brought home to her home parish for burial? All of her family and history was in Carraia. We would go to Santa Marie a Colle and hope to find some answers.

The *cimitero* in Santa Maria a Colle is across the road from its *chiesa*. Hoping to look at the church records, we find that it is closed and begin to walk through the cemetery, reading each stone, looking for Clementina. After exhausting our search, we approached a caretaker, and my wife inquired, in Italian, if there is another *cimitero* here. *"No,"* is the simple reply we received. Then she asked if there might be an *ospedale* here. He first answered "*no,*" then, upon learning that we were looking for a hospital that was here in 1897, he answered *"si"* and pointed up the road. *"Chiusa,"* he said. "Closed," long ago he added. Then, he raised his arm, spun his hand, and with a gesture to his head, said, *"Insano."* It was an insane asylum.

Stefania knew that there had been a hospital for women here, but she could only speculate why Clementina was brought here, where her life ended. Maybe there was nerve damage from a difficult delivery. Maybe she was suffering from what is known today as post-partum depression. What was the treatment? Why did she die? Maybe there are some answers up the hill.

Minutes later we were looking through a tall iron fence at a formidable building atop the hill. The grounds were overgrown and the building was in serious disrepair. The sanitarium, Ospedale di Fregionaia, was formerly the Monastero dei Canonici Lateranesi di Santa Maria di Fregionaia. In 1775, the monastery became an asylum for the insane and was administered by the Spedale di San Luca. Looking through the brush and into the broken windows, I tried to imagine this setting and the scene inside those walls one hundred years ago and the thoughts and fears of the young mother of five children being brought to a strange place so far from her home. The setting and my thoughts were haunting and eerie, and I wondered what secrets were behind those doors.

We discovered a new medical facility below the old hospital and went looking for some answers. After telling our story a few times to various attendants and nurses we were introduced to an administrator, *Dottoressa* Olga Raya, who might help us. There were no medical records at the hospital any longer, she said. After the building had been vandalized, the records were moved to Lucca for safekeeping. The medical answers were certainly in those books.

Perhaps she was not brought home for burial in Carraia. If not, where was she laid to rest? All of this would have to wait until another day.

XIII.

PAOLINO

Under overcast skies and rain in the forecast, we returned to the *cimitero* in Carraia on October 25th.

Because Clementina died in 1897, we believed that we would not find her gravesite here. It's a small cemetery where old souls and sites are recycled with new ones. I don't know what is done with their remains or the gravestones, only that everything within a *cimitero* is the property of the state and the state decides who goes and who stays. Besides, we are beginning to wonder if she ever came home.

Paolino remarried and had three more children in Carraia. His daughter by Clementina, Isola Zelmira Michelotti, was buried here. No records could be found of him emigrating to America, or even to visit his sons. He must be here.

We walked the rows of the gravesites in the oldest section, slowly pausing at each gravesite. Most of the stones reflected lives that began or ended in the earliest part of the last century. Some sites had no stones, only wood or iron crosses without markings. Many stones were stacked in the corners against the old walls. And some of the still-standing stones were broken, or so badly weathered, that they were difficult to read upon first viewing, if not indecipherable altogether.

As I walked to the back, I noticed such a stone, one that I had not remembered from our earlier visit. It was a simple slab, about twenty inches in width, about thirty inches in height and only about an inch in thickness. It had a rusted iron candleholder mounted near the top of the stone, but it was crooked, so that a glass lantern and candle could no longer be mounted. It was sunken into the ground

and had shifted over the years so it was no longer perpendicular. Some of the inscription seemed to be below ground-level. There were weeds, broken marble pieces and debris around the stone, further suggesting that the site had not been visited for a very long time. Studying the inscription, I could see the letters "LINO" and the word "*MARZO*."

Grave of Pietro Paolino Parenti.

Knowing that Paolino was born on March 23rd, I excitedly moved closer, and upon seeing "ENTI" and the date of 1863, I called out to Priscilla who was exploring nearby. In the damp soil, I began excavating by hand, then, finding a rusted kitchen knife buried below the surface, I removed enough soil to reveal more of the story. As the

marble surface was worn almost smooth by the elements, but there was dirt on the surface, so we poured water over the face of the stone. The inscription appeared.

PARENTI PAOLINO
NATO IL 23 MARZO
1863
MORTO IL 30 GENNAIO
1940
LA MOGLIE E FIGLI
P.

His birth, his death, and his wife and children survive.

It was my great-grandfather's grave! The dates were those in the civil and church records, with one exception. He actually died on that same date in 1941, not 1940. Maybe someone from America sent money for the engraving. Maybe the stone wasn't placed for years after his death because of the war. Maybe we will never know the answer. Behind his grave was a recently-dug site that had been prepared with a lined vault for a new soul. It would be a short time before Paolino's remains would be removed and the stone discarded, making room for new souls in the small *cimitero*. A recycling of souls. I wondered if I could save this humble memorial from its fate of being relegated to the pile of gravestones in the back corner. Perhaps because it was not readable, and no one seemed to care about this stone, it too may be recycled by the state for a less noble purpose.

Pietro Paolino Parenti with *cimitero* in the background, Carraia c.1940.

We had found Paolino the patriarch. It was a simple, modest gravestone, and there were no Parenti children beside him. There was a plot next to his that had no stone. Maybe that was his second wife's

grave? Probably not. His daughter Zelmira was buried in the newer section, beside her husband, at rest in a very fine marble tomb. Paolino was alone back there in the corner of the cemetery. All alone.

Gravestone of Pietro Paolino Parenti.

XIV.

CASA 207 VIA CORTE PARDINO

The morning brought us the discovery of Paolino's final resting site. Perhaps there would be more that we would learn about him, but it would not be at the *cimitero*.

We drove up the road, past the church, and turned left into Corte Parenti, as it seemed to be an appropriate place to begin. We had visited here the month before with Vera Parenti, not a direct relative, who was probably ninety years old and could remember nothing about our family. No one was to be seen, so we drove further up the road to another court of old stone farmhouses. Seeing a woman outside doing her laundry, my wife greeted her, "*Buon giorno, scusi, una domanda, per piacere.*" That's "Good morning, excuse me, a question, please." Or something like that. She engaged the energetic and very excitable woman in our story and asked if she knew where Corte Pardini might be. She seemed to know something, but in her eagerness to help, she was speaking so fast and furious that Priscilla couldn't keep up with her and begged her, "*Piano, piano,*" meaning "slowly, slowly," and reminded her, "*Non parlo Italiano*." But any time my wife says "*non parlo Italiano*" they know she *must* speak the language. Their response seems to say, "You're here, you just spoke in Italian, and anyway, *everybody* speaks Italian." She pointed and gestured across the road, then broke into a gallop, waving for us to follow. Was she taking us to Corte Pardini? She was so entertaining and so excited, we almost didn't care, as we were having such a good time. She led us to the village mechanic just up the road who, we guessed, must know more than she. He made some phone calls, then sent us to the other end of the village, where they believed Corte

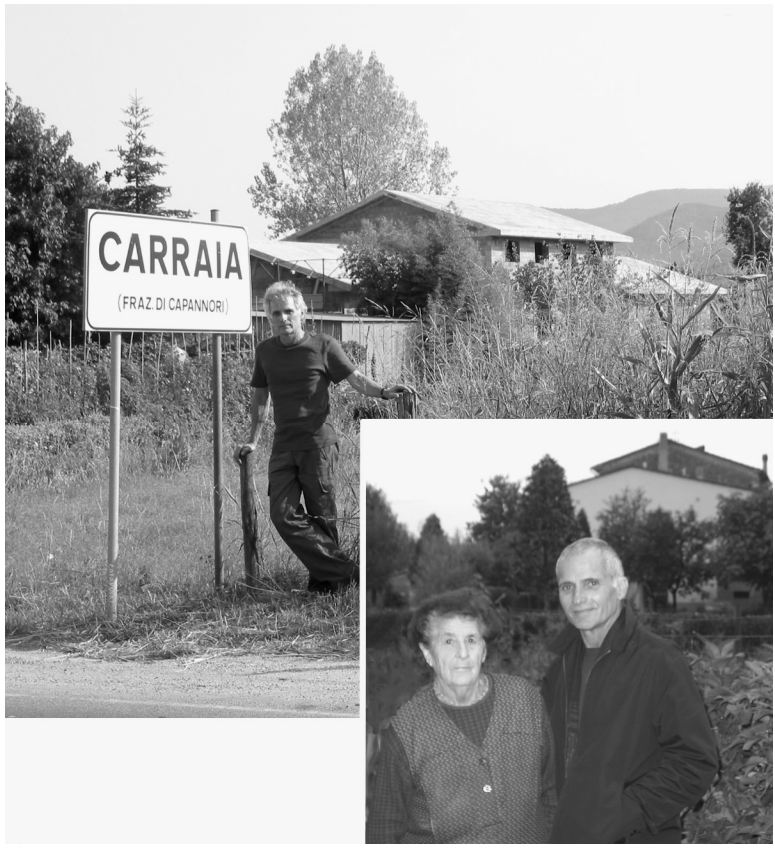
Pardino, not *Pardini*, existed. Remembering the whole Carrara, Charria, Carria, and Carraia experience, and that Leonello would become known to us as Leone, Leo, then Leon, I thought, *why not*?

We drove westward on Via di Carraia (which means "the way of the cart"), past the coffee bar and toward the edge of the village—which is demarcated by the sign "Carraia Fraz. (*frazione*) di Capannori." On the north side of the road is a small shrine, a *cappella,* with a *Madonnina* behind its iron gates. It's a small, road-side chapel for the village inhabitants who are the furthest from the church, so that they might visit the Virgin Mary for prayer without walking to the *chiesa*, a distance of about two kilometers. We made a right turn off of Via di Carraia just before the shrine, past a large *casa colonica*, a traditional Italian farmhouse, which is being restored. On either side of the narrow road were courtyards with superbly restored homes, which in another era were farmhouses with stables and barns.

Italian villages are very still in the early afternoon hours. It's the *pisolino* (the Italian siesta) and *il pranzo* (the mid-day meal), when the family gets together for a meal of several courses, conversation and a nap. The doors and the shutters over the windows close out the rest of the world, its people, and its troubles. We had been to this court on our previous visit but could find no one to help us.

Today we saw a woman in the courtyard on the east side and we repeated our story, also showing the old photo of Leone and the family tree. She seemed to know some of the names, maybe the place, but we weren't certain what she was telling us. She, too, was very excited and wanted to help. When things were about as confused as they could be, the lady called out across the path toward the houses in the courtyard to the west. We saw a shuttered window open and a small, elderly woman looking to see what was going on. She was told to come over and talk to the *stranieri* (foreigners) who were asking all of these questions. In a few minutes, we met Fedora Bucchianeri Giovacchini.

Fedora is in her eighties and is very much alive. As we would learn, she has lived in that *corte* her entire life, was born in that house across the path, and knew something about the Parenti family. Pointing to a property over the fence and across a small field, she enthusiastically and repeatedly told us that we are looking at Corte *Pardino* (not *Pardini*, as we thought) and that Paolino Parenti lived there when Fedora was a little girl.



The Author in Carraia, Italy 2004.

Fedora and the Author with Corte Pardino in the background across the neighboring field.

After the discovery of my great-grandfather's grave in the morning, and now certain that we were looking at the family home, we were emotionally finished for the day. We asked if we could return later in the week with our translator and she graciously accepted.

As we were leaving, I studied the *corte,* which is two houses, and the surrounding fields. The three-story house on the left is abandoned, but its rock walls and tile roof are in restorable condition. The windows have been boarded for many years and the grounds are overgrown. There is an attached haybarn and stable with the characteristic terracotta vents. This handsome building was the home of another Parenti family. The house on the right is the one which I

saw across the field, and that Fedora told me was Paolino's home and the birthplace of my grandfather. It is a narrower three-story house, whose elevation matches the larger house on the left, but it has a smooth masonry finish over its native-rock walls. We gathered that the ancestral home left the family when it was sold, probably after the death of Paolino's daughter Zelmira in 1967, his only child from his first marriage to remain in Carraia. The purchaser restored the house and later sold it to its present occupant. Hopefully, I would learn more about the two houses and the lives of the two Parenti families in the days to come.

Corte Pardino as seen from Via di Carraia. The building in the foreground was formerly the haybarn and stable which adjoined the three-story house which was our ancestral home for many generations. The other three-story house, along with its haybarn and stable in the background, belonged to another Parenti family.

I looked at the windows and imagined the history, the lives and the stories behind the shutters. I stared at the front door and I imagined all of the people I've become so familiar with—like family—passing through that doorway. Coming and, in the end, going.

Stefania and I returned a few days later, and we were invited into Fedora's kitchen, where we were joined by her husband of over fifty years. Stefania has a pleasant way with people, engages them in conversation easily, and asks a lot of questions. Fedora dresses like a typical Tuscan housewife of her age; layers upon layers of socks, shirts, sweaters, aprons, pinafores, and housedresses; with house slippers in the warm weather, heavy black leather shoes or boots in autumn and winter, and rubber boots in the wet season. She certainly

Corte Pardino as seen from the fields behind. The two buildings on the right belonged to another Parenti family. The stable and haybarn seen in the foreground and the adjoining three-story building was their property. The three-story house of Paolino Parenti and its adjoining haybarn and stable are attached.

wears scarves in different ways and combinations, but I had not seen her outside of the *corte*. Her husband is a big, healthy-looking fellow who retired twenty years ago, after thirty years of making Vespa motor scooters over in nearby Pontedera. Fedora has expressive eyes that sparkle and, like most Italian women, is animated in her speaking and gestures. And the once-little girl who remembers Paolino, is not quite four and half feet tall.

Fedora remembers going across the field to borrow pieces of rope, buckets, and brooms. Neighborly things. But more than that, Erminia Bucchianeri, Paolino's second wife, was her aunt and she called her *Zia* Sabina. Fedora did not know about Paolino's first wife or family, but did have a story which will now become part of the family lore.

As a young man, the tall, strong *contadino* had illegally shot some birds that he was selling at the *mercato* in Lucca in order to have some money for his family. The *carabineri* (police) discovered this and gave chase. The athletic Paolino eluded them, the legend goes, by leaping over a wall of over two and a half meters (over eight feet)! Fedora loves this story today, as much as she did probably seventy years ago—tells it with a measure of pride and amusement.

He also had a nickname, "*Pardino*," meaning the head of the house at Corte Pardino.

It was getting late. We left the kitchen and walked outside to view the house across the field. As Stefania continued conversing with them, I walked out to the road and paused to look in on the Virgin Mary in the *cappella*. Then I continued walking west on the road toward Corte Pardino, looking at the old farmhouse and the fields and mountains to the south outside its front door. At the intersecting road beside the property, I turned and walked to where I had a view of the side and rear of the farmhouses. I thought about the livestock in the stables and the hay in the barn . . . and about all of those people over so many generations—my people. Walking back to join Stefania, I paused to see the Madonna and once more say thank you.

Mille grazie.

Madonnina and *Cappella* on Via di Carraia.

XV.

SS. DONATO E BIAGIO

Earlier that day, October 29th, under heavy skies, I had driven to Capannori to meet Stefania at San Donato e San Biagio, the parish church, across from the cemetery. The parish priest, Polycarpe Ngendakumana, had graciously granted us access to the church records. The young Father from Rwanda is representative of the new face of the clergy in Italy and speaks Italian perfectly. We had arranged to meet at 9 a.m., and at 9:01 the rains came and would continue until the minute our research was finished six hours later. I had heard stories before leaving America that researchers had crossed the ocean and traveled to the parish of their ancestors, only to be grudgingly granted ten minutes by the parish priest to view the hundreds of years of books (in Italian and Latin, by the way). We had been granted unlimited time and access. The Parenti family had been blessed. A month earlier, the Church was especially helpful when Stefania made special arrangements with Don Vittorio Martini, the priest of Pieve San Paolo, where the family baptisms occurred, who brought parish records to the Archivio Vescovile di Lucca. Monsignor Giuseppe Ghilarducci graciously permitted the transfer of these records to the seat of the Bishop's archive in Lucca.

San Donato e San Biagio has been on this site since sometime around 800 A.D. When it was built, the small *chiesa* was on a quiet country path with its walled *cimitero* a few steps across the road. Today, the road nearly touches the walls of the church, and worse, it is the entrance and exit to the toll station of the *autostrada* with cars and trucks rumbling by at all hours. Yet, within the walls of the

cimitero, and even more so within the *chiesa*, one is transported to another time and state of mind and the outside world is forgotten.

SS. Donato e Biagio, the parish church of the Parentis of Carraia.

The Catholic Church, by Papal proclamation, has required parishes to keep records of baptisms, marriages, deaths, confirmations, and a census record of each family in the parish since 1545. It was the Council of Trent that required that the parish keep these five books, the *Liber Quinque*. These are especially valuable in family research, as the civil records were not instituted until 1866. Stefania was determined to trace the Parenti lineage back to the early sixteenth century, the time of Columbus.

The priest escorted us to the *sacrestia* (sacristy or vestry), where the incense, wine, and vestments are kept. It is also where the historical records of generations upon generations of the families of

this parish have been safeguarded for hundreds of years. These are kept in an old wooden cabinet with two tall doors secured by a single lock. As the priest turned the old key and the creaky doors were opened, it occurred to me that this old cabinet and simple lock were the only measure of conservation and security against fire, water, vandalism, varmints, and the march of time. In her travels across Italy, Stefania has discovered church records for sale at antiquarian fairs, purchased them, and returned them to the rightful parish. Water-stained from leaking church roofs; worn and weathered from being handled for centuries; and sadly, all of them have been separated from the place where one would search for their ancestors someday. I felt blessed that our little parish had its records intact, and hoped that one day these treasures would be preserved. Without conservation, I don't believe they'll be here a hundred years from this day.

For the next six hours we reviewed these magnificent registers, books of handmade paper, bound in leather or decorative paper, in various sizes, of which no two are alike. These are the *Stato delle Anime* (State of the Souls); the records kept by the parish priest to ensure that the Sacraments were correctly administered, to provide a census of the parish, and to collect taxes required by the state from its parishioners. The pages are filled with entries in Italian and Latin, written in beautiful calligraphy using feathered quills and later, metal nibs. The individual penmanship of the calligrapher can be challenging to decipher. Flourishes and swaths, line variation and smears, letters disguised as other letters—like *s* disguised as *f*—add to the experience. And then, once you are able to easily read the style of a particular registrar, it's then time for him to "pass the pen" to a successor (and his scripted style) and the challenge is renewed for the modern-day researcher.

It was cold and damp as we hovered over the small table in the dimly-lit *sacrestia* with its black and white marble floor of alternating squares. Through the small window we watched the grey skies and gentle rain throughout the day. Inside, we pored over the church records, and confirmed the entries of the civil records. The Parenti family is *Famiglia 116* in this parish. In addition to finding the birth, marriage, and death acts, we discovered that Leone's three brothers had gone abroad (*all'estero*) and that Armando had died abroad in December of 1927. Also, in the *Stato delle Anime,* we found two curious entries. The letters *llo* had been added to the name Leone,

and in an earlier recording, the name Genovina was written above a partially-erased entry for Clementina. Genovina Parenti was the name stated on the death act as well. I had learned that their next-door neighbor at Corte Pardino was also named Clementina Parenti, so this may have been the reason for changing the name. All of these entries

The *Stato della Anime* books and the old cabinet in the Sacrestia of SS. Donato e Biagio. Carraia.

were added to the original family document sometime before 1930.

Taking a break, I walked across the road to the *cimitero*, in the drizzling rain, to visit Paolino. Returning, I walked around the interior of the little church, sat in the pews, studied its art, and stood at the

altar. I imagined the weddings and funeral services of my ancestors over the centuries. Looking at the pews, I imagined them kneeling at Mass. The experience today is so very rich, so filled with imagery and imaginings.

The parish records of SS. Donato e Biagio yielded ancestors far beyond those of the civil records in Capannori. We knew from those records that my great-grandfather Paolino was the son of Domenico, and that his grandfather was Luigi Ranieri Parenti. Luigi was my great-great-great-grandfather, or more simply stated, my great (x3) grandfather. With these parish records, Stefania was able to trace our ancestors back to the mid-sixteenth century, to the beginning of the Church's requirement of record-keeping in all parishes, as stipulated by the Council of Trent in 1545.

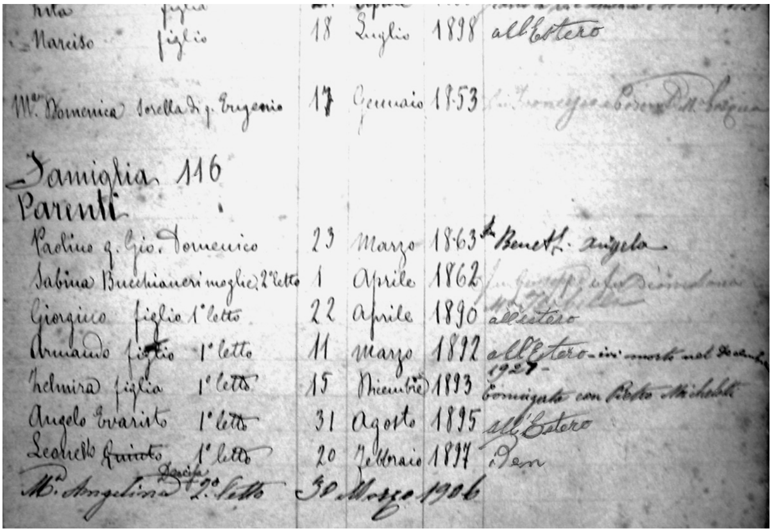
Luigi's father was Andrea, who was the son of Renieri, who was the son of Francesco Parenti and his wife Domenica Michelotti, the same family name as my great-grandmother Clementina. Francesco was my great (x6) grandfather and he was the son of Domenico Parenti and Zabetta Parenti, a cousin from another clan. Domenico's father was also named Domenico and he was the son of Vincenti Parenti. Finally, the last entry in these parish records is of Paolo Parenti, Vincenti's father, who lived in Carraia before 1550. Paolo Parenti was my great (x10) grandfather!*

Paolo Parenti
|
Vincenti Parenti
|
Domenico Parenti
|
Domenico Parenti
|
Francesco Parenti
|
Renieri Parenti
|
Andrea Parenti
|
Luigi Parenti

*Dates of these ancestors are found in the Parenti Family Trees.

It was incredible, but I wanted something more.

As Stefania reviewed the last of the registers, and as I began to return these precious books into their cabinet, I made a request of her that would lead us on to the journey of our next discovery.



Narciso	figlio	18	Luglio	1898	all'Estero
M.a Domenica	sorella di q. Eugenio	17	Gennaio	1853	[illegible]
Famiglia 116					
Parenti					
Paolino q. Gio. Domenico		23	Marzo	1863	[illegible] angela
Sabina Bucchianeri	moglie 2° letto	1	Aprile	1862	[illegible]
Giorgino	figlio 1° letto	22	Aprile	1890	all'estero
Armando	figlio 1° letto	11	Marzo	1892	all'Estero [illegible] 1927
Elmira	figlia 1° letto	15	Dicembre	1893	Coniugata con [illegible]
Angelo Evaristo	1° letto	31	Agosto	1895	all'Estero
Leonello	1° letto	20	Febbraio	1897	iden
M.a Angelina	2° letto	30	Maggio	1906	

Famiglia 116 Parenti from the *Stato della Anime,* SS. Donato e Biagio. c.1890-1927. The three older Parenti brothers are recorded as *all'estero* (abroad) with Leone*llo* listed as *idem* (the same). A later entry by the parish priest, Alberto Borelli states that Armando died abroad in December of 1927.

XVI.

MOTHER, MOTHERS, AND MOTHERHOOD

There in the *sacrestia*, I expressed to Stefania my deep desire to learn about Clementina's last days, and to find her final resting place. She perceived that this was very important to me and asked why Clementina means so much to me.

Stefania had found Clementina's death act in Lucca and her birth and marriage acts (along with the birth acts of her children) in Capannori. As a genealogist, she had been very successful in this research and was quite satisfied. Her passion is research, putting together all of the pieces, all of the civil and church records of the *famiglia* Parenti, into a family tree with roots and branches going back to the 18th, 17th, and now, with these recordings, the 16th century. The hundreds and hundreds of entries we have reviewed have her very excited about getting back to her office and moving ahead, or in this case, *back* in time.

But Stefania recognized my desire to make this connection to my great-grandmother and telephoned, at my request, the official in Lucca that was to help us with the medical records of Clementina. She made contact, provided the information stated on the death act, and then requested the cause of death and the place of burial. He responded by telling her that he must search the books and told Stefania to make a return call in thirty minutes.

In the meantime, we finished reviewing the final register in the vestry, then returned it to the old wooden cabinet and closed and locked its doors. We are so grateful to the priest for his generosity, and to those who came before him in preserving these books mostly intact, if not archivally. The experience of holding these books and

seeing the recordings of the lives of generations of my ancestors in this parish was extraordinary.

It was time to return the call to the official who was searching for Clementina's records. The official was swift, absolute, and rather indelicate in his delivery of his findings. Clementina Parenti did indeed die at the mental hospital, but because of the nature of her illness, he was not allowed, under Italian privacy laws, to provide us any details about the illness or her treatment. That the patient was my relative (my *parente*); that it would be helpful in understanding our family history; and that she died over a hundred years ago, did not matter. *"No!"* in Italian, meant "No!" I could petition the state and perhaps be persuasive in gaining access to her records. End of conversation.

When the powers of persuasion fail in getting the answers you seek in family research, one's passion is tested and the level of commitment to the purpose is called into question. To prevail you must be persistent, annoying, aggravating, and have a "don't go away until you get what you want" kind of persistence.

I pleaded with Stefania to call him back, to tell him that we understand, but would he please be so kind as to tell us where her body was taken for burial. She re-dialed and re-phrased the question to the aggravated attendant. Upon Clementina's death, he told her, she was taken to the Cimitero Urbano di Lucca. That's all he can, or *will*, tell us. End of conversation. *Click*.

A copy of the Lucca telephone directory had been with me since our first week in Tuscany almost two months ago, in spite of its size and weight. Lifting it from my bag surprised Stefania and it brought a smile to her face. Within moments she had someone from the office at the urban cemetery of Lucca, Cimitero di S.Anna, on the line. Stefania provided the name and year of death and we waited while the register for 1897 is searched. Then came the discouraging, inconclusive answer.

Clementina Michelotti Parenti was indeed brought to the *cimitero* from the asylum and was likely buried in the open field with simple numbered gravestones—the field for those without families, for indigents and paupers. Certainly by now these gravesites no longer existed and the remains of these souls were placed together somewhere, saying that there was no gravesite to visit. He was very busy preparing for the All Saints' Holiday visitations over the

weekend, suggesting that my visit be at a later date. *Much* later, it seemed.

Disheartened, I am told that there is no gravesite, no place to give respect to my great-grandmother; that there would be no discovery, as I had experienced earlier in the week of my great-grandfather's site in Carraia, or that my son had experienced when he found the gravesite of his great-grandfather, half-a-world away in California, a few weeks before.

I received the message with disappointment, but vowed to visit the cemetery in the morning, our last day in Lucca, before returning to Firenze. For closure, I needed to see the place and visualize her presence in this setting, just as I did at Santa Maria a Colle, where Clementina's life ended.

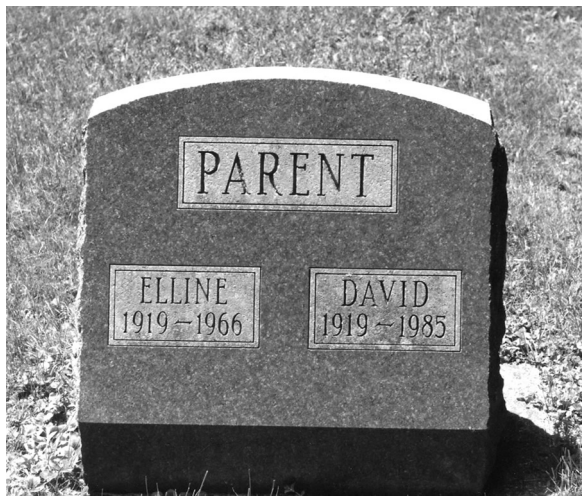
Why did she mean so much to me? Perhaps because my mother died young. She was just 46 years old. She had raised me, my three brothers and my sister beyond our childhood years, leaving a six-year-old son to the care of his father and his older siblings. Her illness was prolonged and painful. She struggled to hide her suffering, but eventually her small body with the big heart succumbed to a debilitating disease. I came home from college when I learned that she was moved to the hospital and was in critical condition. I was at her side, holding her frail hands moments before she took her final breath. She died on May 5, 1966, and, after a Catholic service, was buried in Chesterton, Indiana, where her life began and where she began raising her children. I visited her gravesite in 1985 when I brought my father's remains to sprinkle on her grave. His name is inscribed on the stone beside hers. I returned with Priscilla fifteen years later to show her their final resting place.

Mother and Me. Chesterton, Indiana 1947.

She was a loving, caring, nurturing mother and an energetic, tireless provider for her children. She was, and will always be, the most important person in my life and I cannot imagine my childhood without her. I was blessed to have my life in her care and guidance.

My children have been doubly-blessed—by two loving, caring, and nurturing women—by their natural mother, Barbara Prentiss, and by their step-mother, Beverly Yaeger, who have been so significant in the lives of Dylan and Joslyn Elline.

I wish that my father and that *his* father had guardian angels in their childhoods; as my brothers, my sister, my children, and I did. Maybe that is why Clementina means so much to me.



Grave of David and Elline Parent.
Chesterton Cemetery. Reinterred August 2010
to the Parent Family Memorial.

XVII.

CLEMENTINA

The next morning, Saturday, October 30th, was the beginning of the weekend before All Saints' Day. The rains subsided, the sky was a radiant blue, and the surrounding hills were a luscious green from the week of rainfall. Olive groves glistened in the foothills, chestnut woods and tall stands of elegant pines and cypress rose in the distance. Autumn had come to northern Tuscany and the oaks and poplars were giving us a brilliant show of warm hues and falling leaves. The Lucca cemetery is just outside the walls of the old city, coincidentally and conveniently near our lodgings, so we were able to walk around the northern perimeter on this beautiful morning.

At the base of these mighty walls are large expanses of grass, a perfect contrast to the two and a half miles of brick rising over thirty feet above these fields of green. Atop the walls is a double avenue of trees planted two hundred years ago. I thought about my ancestors coming to the *mercato* here to buy and sell their farm's produce—and to sell those birds that Paolino shot. The walls, the trees, the rooftops, the bell-towers, and churches have not changed since their trips here by horse and wagon. Take away the cars, TV antennas, and signs and it's easy to imagine the setting over a hundred years ago.

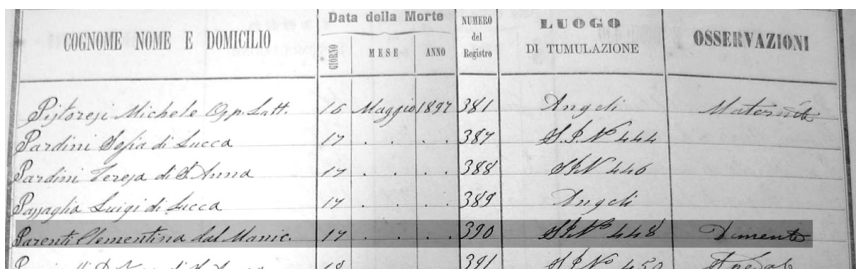
Along the way, we passed an interesting mix of Italian people and traditions, old and young; those with arm-loads of flowers going to the *cimitero* preparing for All Saints' Day and those in costumes and masks celebrating the relatively recent holiday, Halloween. It's all part of the ongoing changes in Italian culture.


Gates of the Cimitero di S. Anna. Lucca, Italy.

We first saw the tall walls of the Cimitero di Santa Anna, a chapel beyond, then the entrance with its arrestingly macabre arch of wrought-iron skeletons over its gates. In the context of the day, nothing could have been more appropriate.

We walked to an office on the right, just inside the gates of this awesome site, and were greeted by a pleasant man, who nodded and smiled, awaiting our question. Beginning our questioning, as we do when we do not have a translator, "*Parla Inglese*?", we are relieved that the attendant speaks our language perfectly. Even though we had a translated note from Stefania outlining our mission, it is so much more personal and reassuring this way. He read the details and I asked if we could view the register. First hesitating, and then nodding that we could, he gestured for us to follow him around the corner and into the archives of the cemetery.

From the files he removed the large green and black book for burials spanning the years 1897-1910. The pages of these registers were in perfect condition and the calligraphy of the registrar made it



COGNOME NOME E DOMICILIO	Data della Morte GIORNO	MESE	ANNO	NUMERO del Registro	LUOGO DI TUMULAZIONE	OSSERVAZIONI
Pistoresi Michele Capp. Latt.	16	Maggio	1897	381	Angeli	Mentecatto
Pardini Sofia di Lucca	17	. .	.	387	[illegible]	
Pardini Teresa di S. Anna	17	. .	.	388	[illegible]	
Pasquale Luigi di Lucca	17	. .	.	389	Angeli	
Parenti Clementina dal Manic.	17	. .	.	390	[illegible]	Demente
[illegible]	16			391	[illegible]	

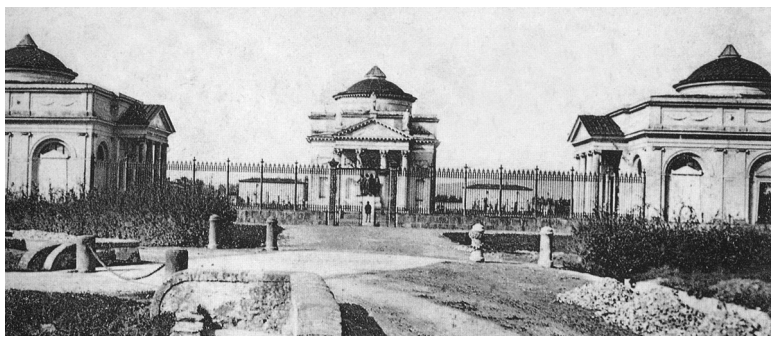
Parenti, Clementina dal Manic 17 Maggio 1897 390 plot 448 Demente

easy to decipher and translate the entries. Upon studying entry number 390, we realized that Clementina was indeed interred here in the *cimitero* on the 17th of May in 1897 in one of the fields in plot number 448. She was listed as "Parenti Clementina dal Manic." that is, from the *manicomio*, or asylum. The last column stated the cause of death, *demente* (demented). This was not the medical record which

would detail the cause of death and the treatment for her illness. But it was more than I thought I would see today.

Why wasn't she brought home? Was there some hideous social stigma associated with her illness? Had her behavior become uncontrollable and caused embarrassment or a threat to her family? Why was she not buried in the *cimitero* across the road from the *chiesa* where she was married?

There were no answers to these questions there on entry number 390. Showing this book to me and allowing me to hold the book is not permitted, but he understood and sympathized with the reason for our pilgrimage. He did not know the location of plot 448 only that the common fields were in the right-rear corner of the grounds. He did not have a map of the large cemetery, only telling us in parting to look for some old markers back there.



Cimitero di S. Anna at the time of Clementina's burial. Lucca, c.1897.

It was now mid-morning, the fabled Tuscan sun was beginning to warm the air. The grounds of the cemetery were filled with families and loved ones bringing flowers to the gravesites. We passed large mausoleums and temples, as well as more modest memorials, before arriving at two fields behind them. Mostly these sites are scattered with simple terracotta stones, many of them the same size and shape. Some of them are missing or replaced with larger marble gravestones interspersed among them. The terracotta stones are very austere, yet classic in their form. Timeless. Standing like sentries in the field of grass about two feet in height, one foot in width and two inches in thickness. They are pointed at the top, like a little house, with an inset square cross and a recessed square area below, where the plot numbers were painted over a century ago. Some are still readable and the moss and lichen make a nice contrast

to the color of the stone. Some are sunken, some are tilted, some are missing numbers, and many are missing altogether.

We walked slowly through the furthest field, not certain of the numbering sequence. Even though we were told that there would be no gravesite, we carefully searched for where it would have been. Suddenly, Priscilla called out to me from the adjacent field, *"448."* Delicately side-stepping the gravesites, I arrived at the stone, where she asked me to read the numbers, as the first *4* was heavily spotted with lichen, though the second *4* and the number *8* were perfectly readable. Confirming the numbering sequence of the adjacent stones, and seeing the similarity of the two number *4*'s, we knew we had found what we had been searching for. We had discovered Clementina's gravesite!


Grave of Clementina Genovina Michelotti Parenti

The joy of discovery was intense, but moments later I felt weak, drained, and sad. I stood in melancholy silence for several minutes over her grave. The questions still lingered, but at that moment it was sadness that overwhelmed me. Clementina Michelotti Parenti, the mother of five young children, dead at age 30 years. Staring at the little stone, I thought about this plot of earth, the very place that I am standing, where she was put unceremoniously into the ground a hundred years ago. And I realized that she was probably all alone that day in that field. No family. All alone.

Walking back toward the walls of Lucca from the *cimitero*, a rainbow appeared, cascading from the heavens and the distant clouds over the hills. It was magnificent, and it seemed as though it was a message sent from above by my great-grandmother—a truly magical moment which will always be with me.

XVIII.

THE BELLAVISTA AND THE *FAMIGLIA* BECUCCI

Our research in Lucca, Carraia, and in Capannori, was more bountiful and enriching than I ever imagined. But it was time to focus on our other search, finding a farmhouse to rent. We would be returning to California in just one month and needed a place to call home, here in Tuscany, upon our return in the spring.

In the past two months, we had experienced many regions and their cities, villages, and their wondrous countrysides. It was all so beautiful, and rich in history, art, and architecture. With each discovery of a new place, we felt that we had found *the* perfect place, supplanting the *previous* perfect place of a few days before, but now it was time to get serious.

Priscilla and I realized that we needed the city life, with its museums, shopping, and activity. But we also knew that the country life and its small villages and farms, a slower way of life, was why we wanted to return. It was a farmhouse whose front door opened into the city, and its back door into the country, that we must find.

We found the town of Impruneta through Stefania, who lives in a nearby village. From here we would search the surrounding countryside for our farmhouse. Just minutes to Firenze out the front door, and to the Chianti region of vines and olives out the back door. We moved into the Albergo Bellavista on the Piazza Buondelmonti in the heart of the village of Impruneta. The Bellavista has a splendid view of the Basilica di Santa Maria, the Romanesque clock tower, 13th century *campanile*, and of the activity of the village in the square below.

Impruneta, from "*in pineta,*" meaning "within the pines," is reached by winding roads to a hilltop setting with remarkable views. The serenity of the wine country of the Chianti region is to the south, and the frenzy of Firenze is to the north. Finally, the perfect place. But we could not have known when we checked into the Bellavista, that we would not only find our farmhouse, but also new friendships with two Tuscan families.

The Bellavista has been in the Becucci family for almost one

Basilica di Santa Maria, Campanile, and Clocktower on the Piazza Buondelmonti as seen from the rooftop terrace of the Bellavista in Impruneta, Italy.

hundred years. Giuseppe Becucci's grandfather operated the *albergo* and *ristorante* (hotel and restaurant) in its beginnings, and today Giuseppe and his wife Roberta, along with their two sons, Matteo and Tommaso, and daughter Martina are hosts to travelers from all corners of the world. To us, the *"Vagabondi"* from California, they were much more, they were like family. When we needed to check out of the Bellavista from time to time in our travels to other areas, we sent them postcards and then returned for another stay at their *albergo*. I hope that we can always return to a place like the Bellavista and people like the *famiglia* Becucci.

Wine label and table card from the Ristorante Bellavista, Impruneta.

SCHIACCIATA CON L' UVA DI ROBERTA
(ROBERTA'S FOCACCIA BREAD WITH GRAPES)

The *Albergo Bellavista* was our second home when our travels took us to Florence, near the charming village of Impruneta. We would spend a week or long weekend with the warm and welcoming Becucci family in their hotel and restaurant on the Piazza Buondelmonti. The inn would be a constant buzz of activity with guests and fellow world travelers, as well as the comings and goings of the Becucci family; their sons and daughter and their inquisitive grandchild, along with many friends just dropping by.

Beppe and Roberta ran the show as one big extended-family, fussing over every guest's need and every detail with interest and great care. Espresso and wine were plentiful and always offered and family photos and stories shared.

The kitchen of the *ristorante* was in full view from the lobby. There were always pots simmering on the big stove and embers glowing in the enormous wood-fired oven. Many delicious meals came out of that kitchen. In the summer, meals were enjoyed on the rooftop terrace overlooking the *piazza* under the twinkling stars. In the chilly winter months, meals were served in the dining room *trattoria* style.

Roberta made a special bread for the family that we were lucky enough to share. It was a slightly sweet, rosemary-infused focaccia-type bread made with local Sangiovese grapes. That golden bread fresh from the oven was irresistible on a cool fall afternoon with a steaming cup of espresso or glass of wine. All of it served with love.

6 Tbs olive oil
1 sprig fresh rosemary
¾ lb Sangiovese or Red Flame grapes
1 cup warm water (110 degrees)
1 tsp sugar (to activate yeast)
1 cake fresh yeast or 1 pkg. active dry yeast
3 ½ cups flour
pinch of salt
¾ cup sugar
olive oil for top
sugar for top

Infuse olive oil with rosemary by lightly frying together. Let cool, then discard rosemary. Set oil aside.

Dissolve yeast in warm water with 1 tsp sugar. Let stand 5-10 minutes until foamy.

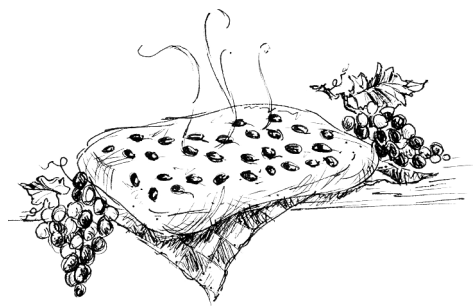
Combine flavored oil, sugar and salt in a large mixing bowl. Add the dissolved yeast mixture, stirring until ingredients are blended. Gradually add the flour and mix until dough begins to hold together.

Knead dough on floured board until smooth and elastic.

Place ball of dough into an oiled medium-size bowl, turning once to coat both sides with oil. Cover with a towel and let rise in a warm, draft-free place until double in size (about 2 hours).

Punch down the risen dough and divide into two portions. Roll or pat the dough into one large or two medium-size rectangles on an oiled baking sheet. Brush tops with a little olive oil and gently press grapes into surface of dough. Sprinkle the top very lightly with sugar. Cover with plastic wrap and let rise again until almost double in size (about 30 minutes to 1 hour).

Bake in pre-heated 350 degree oven 25 minutes until light golden brown.



Recipe and illustrations by Priscilla Parenti.

Archaeological discoveries provide evidence of a place of worship here dating back to the Etruscans in the 6th century B.C. . . . a mere 2,600 years ago. In the Middle Ages, the village of Impruneta and the Basilica di S. Maria became very important to nearby Firenze for two reasons, one secular and one very sacred.

For centuries, artisans here had been making terracotta products by mixing the native clay with water, then firing various molded forms, providing high quality pottery, bricks, and tiles—products needed for the growing populous of the Renaissance city of Firenze and for the construction of its buildings, palaces, and many churches. That industry and art continues to this day.

The Basilica di S. Maria was built in the 11th century upon the site of a preceding Roman parish church and housed a venerated "sacred and miraculous effigy" of the Madonna, the Virgin of Impruneta, which was believed to be a protectress against floods, plagues, drought, and war. Occasionally, the painting was moved to Firenze in elaborate processions through the countryside— in 1593 to combat the Black Death. Century after century, thousands of pilgrims converged upon the Basilica to praise the Virgin, filling the broad *piazza,* which is named for the Buondelmonti family, who ruled these wooded hills during the Medieval period until their defeat in 1135. A considerable patrimony developed over the centuries (because of the Virgin's fund-raising powers?) which allowed for the old sanctuary to be enlarged and restructured many times. The Medieval clocktower, 13th century belltower, and 17th century porticoes have mostly survived the ages and rages of war, but sadly, the 11th century Basilica was mistakenly bombed (I pray) by the Allies in 1944. It was reconstructed in the Renaissance style and re-consecrated in 1950.

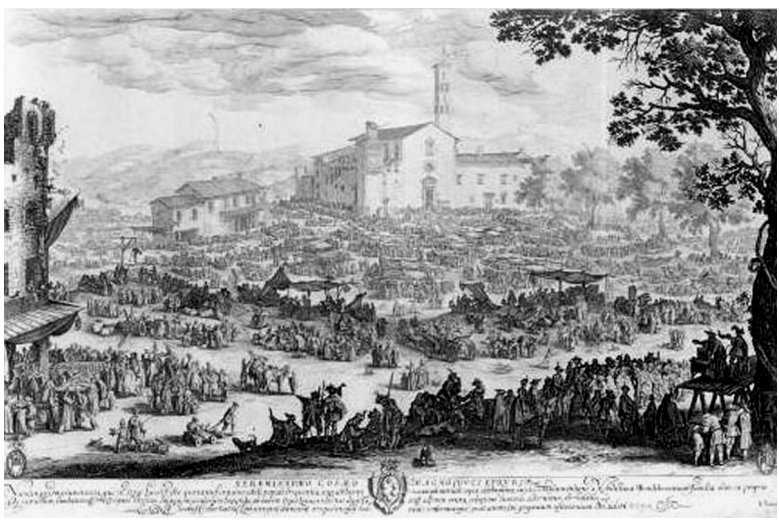
Impruneta, Piazza Buondelmonti, and the Basilica di Santa Maria. Photo *Comune di Impruneta*

The pine-covered hills surrounding the village of Impruneta have been witness to this rich history of the Basilica on the Piazza Buondelmonti over the centuries, and today, pilgrims, like us, are still beckoned to this beautiful setting.

XIX.

FIERA

The *Fiera di San Luca* (the Feast of St Luke— Impruneta's patron saint) has been observed on the 18th of October for centuries. It celebrates the return of the herdsmen and their flocks from the nearby hillside pastures, with a week-long festival which brings the villagers together and maintains the rich local tradition.



The Fair at Impruneta by Jacques Callot, engraving 1620. There are more than 1,620 people and animals depicted in this scene of the *Fiera* on the Piazza Buondelmonti.

There is a finely detailed engraving of the *Fiera* done by Jacques Callot in 1620 which depicts the fair's activities there in the Piazza Buondelmonti with the Basilica di Santa Maria, consecrated in

1060, in the background. Tents and wagons with farm produce and merchant wares, horses, livestock, and hundreds of people of all ages dressed in their early seventeenth-century fashion, fill the broad *piazza*.

Almost four centuries later, the scene is readily recognized and the activities have not changed. The wagons, tents, and fashions are twenty-first century but the tradition has been preserved. The *piazza* and the surrounding streets are a marketplace of food, clothing, housewares, pets, and terracotta pots of all shapes and sizes. Just outside of town in the nearby fields, you find horses, cattle, goats, donkeys, rabbits, ducks, pigeons, and chickens. Along the roads are stalls with fire-pits roasting wild boar, whole chickens, and chestnuts; and more stalls with thousands of baskets of olives, beans, and a dazzling array of fresh fruits and vegetables. An amusement park for the children and colorful candy vendors fill the *piazza* behind the church. Horse and donkey races between the four *contrade* (districts) of the town are wild, exhilarating spectacles through the streets of town with the locals cheering their rider on.

From our room and rooftop terrace of the Bellavista, we awoke each morning to the vendors setting up their tents in the *piazza* and putting out their goods and wares, just as their ancestors had done for centuries before them. The ancient clock tower marked the time and the majestic bell tower of the Basilica di Santa Maria rang out to the villagers just as it had in that 1620 scene. We really felt like we were a part of the history and the tradition of this town and its people.

We felt at home.

XX.

POGGIO ALLA SALA AND THE *FAMIGLIA* CIANFANELLI

Upon learning that we were looking for a place to call home in the following spring, Roberta remembered that a long-time friend of their family may have a farmhouse to let in the countryside in the Chianti region. She arranged for us to meet at the Bellavista and, over a glass of *limoncello*, maybe get to know one another.

The dream was to come to Tuscany and buy a restored *casa colonica*. The *reality* was that these traditional farmhouses were selling for millions of Euros in a hyper-inflated market. *Sticker shock!* Coming from San Diego, we never imagined that we would encounter prices more ridiculous than those in Southern California. And, the exchange rate of the U.S. dollar to the Euro was continuing to slide, from $1.22 (when we departed) to $1.35 just four months later. Considering all of this—along with a war going on, an embarrassing U.S. Presidential election, and terrorists planning to change a thing or two—we decided that maybe this isn't a time for dreaming. Besides, we just now determined where we wanted to immerse ourselves in Italian life next spring, and we were leaving in thirty days. Hopefully, we would find a dream *to rent!*

Roberto Cianfanelli grew up in Impruneta and has known Giuseppe Becucci since childhood. He was a professional soccer player as a young man until an injury ended his promising career. *Calcio* (soccer) is pretty much the most important thing in an Italian male's life, from what I've seen. It's said that the only time Italy comes together as one country is during the World Cup, that's once every four years, despite its Unification in the 1860's. Roberto went

on to success in the shoe business, exporting to the U.S. and other countries. He not only speaks English, but he knows American ways and, like me, is interested in history, design, and gardening. We connect immediately and Priscilla thinks we are two peas-in-a-pod. Now, what about that farmhouse?

Poggio alla Sala, is a *podere* (farm) of olives and grapes on a hilltop along the old road, the Chiantigiana, winding south of Firenze through the Chianti region and on to Siena. The roadbed which fronts the property has been part of the history of this region since the third century before the birth of Christ. The view in all directions is a rolling patchwork quilt of grapevines, olive groves, pine forests, and cypress trees lining the narrow roads to villas, churches, castles, and tile-roofed farmhouses. It's incredible in so many ways.

It was sometime in the 1960's when Italy recognized that it was losing its history, one farmhouse at a time. Mostly in ruin, the handsome, stone houses had collapsed, were knocked down, pilfered for materials, or poorly restored. Built of native stones, locally-fired brick and tile, and of timbers from the surrounding woodlands, these *casa colonica* were abandoned, thousands of them, in the first half of the twentieth century.

Italian farmers, like the Parenti family, could no longer bear the economic hardship of the first half of the twentieth century, and moved to the cities or emigrated to other countries. They abandoned the farm and the family home of many, many generations. The distinctive character of these homes and their histories are told in the facades. Perhaps beginning with a room at the side of the farmhouse, then another, and then over the years additional levels added, generation by generation as the family grew.

To preserve these treasures, strict building codes were adopted, preventing building any additional structures or increasing the footprint of the remaining structures on the farms. Also, materials consistent with the originals must be used. A half-century later, the results are remarkable—and so are the prices. First the Swiss, then the Germans, Americans, and in particular, the English bought these farmhouses over the years and there are not many remaining to be restored in this area of Tuscany.

The Cianfanellis, Roberto and Giuliana, began restoring Poggio alla Sala in 1982. Upon completion of their beautiful *villa* ten years later, the old house had a new life, and became the family home for daughters Lucrezia, Giuditta, and son David. Then work began on

the conversion of the farm buildings into smaller detached farmhouses. The smallest was the fertilizer barn, but the old *contadini* would not recognize it today. It's gorgeous, good for our visiting friends and family, but we needed more room for three months of living here. Next door was our dream come true. We were led into a three-level stone building which was the stable, feeding stalls and the haybarn in another lifetime. It has marvelous, rustic beamed-and-tiled ceilings, terracotta floors and stuccoed white walls with exposed-brick framed windows and doors. Each room has majestic, panoramic views of the hills, the sunrises, sunsets, and a sky-full of stars. There is a fireplace (*caminetto*), patio (*aia*), and a pool (*piscine*) for the hot summer months. And we can have chickens out back!

"Casa Parenti" at Poggio alla Sala. Strada in Chianti, Italy.

The Cianfanellis and Parentis discussed, over *espresso*, our mutual concern that neither of us knew the other, and that it was a long time to be so close if it wasn't just right. Our conversation then drifted into family and life experiences, and by the minute it was feeling better and better.

We were traveling the next day to Lucca for ten days of family research and Roberto suggested we return and stay for a week to give it a try. We liked that idea.

After our remarkably rewarding week of research, we settled into Poggio alla Sala and the country life, with a couple of day trips into Firenze. We picked olives, tasted the wine of our *podere*, traveled to nearby hilltowns, and we visited the city of the Medici, Michelangelo and Brunelleschi which was just thirty minutes from our door. It was everything we wanted and more.

Priscilla and I also felt we were becoming comfortable with the pulse of life here and with the differences in customs and attitudes. We had a place to call home and we would have our own kitchen . . . the missing ingredient in our daily life here. Strolling about the farm, we discovered an organic vegetable garden out by the chicken coop, which would be planted in the spring, and flower beds around the farmhouses which would be blooming upon our return in April.

There are hundreds of olive trees on the *podere*, in four varieties, giving the oil a distinctive taste. The trunks are twisted and gnarled; the old branches are awkward and not very graceful; and the leaves are a dusty green with silvery undersides which glisten when the wind gusts through the trees on these hills. The olives, when ready for picking in early November, are an array of hues—various shades of green and reddish-brown to almost black. Perched atop a ladder which has been wiggled between the lower branches and leaned precariously against an upper pendulous branch, the pickers drop the hand-stripped olives onto the nets spread below. Any leaves which remain attached are removed—as the chlorophyl corrupts the taste of the oil—before loading the olives into baskets and storing them in a dry place to prevent mold. The harvest is then taken to the same *frantoio* (olive mill) which has served these farmers for centuries, where the fruit of their trees and labor are crushed by giant millstones. The first pressing yields the extra virgin oil, and the luscious green oil is ceremoniously "toasted" (drizzled, actually) by family, workers and friends onto *bruschetta*, the toasted unsalted Tuscan bread which is topped with garlic, tomato, onion and basil. After such a long, tempremental

growing season and so much work, it's a time for celebration.

Throughout the *podere*, there are monuments to the heart-breaking and unpredictable realities of olive growing. Hundreds of large stumps remain as memorials to the devastating freeze, thaw, and re-freeze in early 1985 which killed millions of Tuscany's olive trees. Those which did not die, but required beheading to a stump, didn't generate viable off-shoots from their roots for many years, and the slow-growing, newly-planted trees didn't yield sufficient oil for more than a decade. The planting patterns of the old trees and their relationship to the grapevines of the *podere* reveal the changes in farming practices here. In some areas the vines are planted between two olive trees which are approximately ten feet apart, with the tree trunks and branches giving support to a tangle of vines. In an area which was planted later, there are alternating rows of trees and vines. Finally, and this is what is done today, there are areas where the trees are planted in regimented groves and the vines are planted in a *vigna* (vineyard), in long rows of well-ordered posts and cables running up and down the hillsides. Prior to mechanization, just a half century ago, the olives, grapes, and grains were cultivated on man-made, rock-walled earthen terraces built upon the sides of the hills, tended by the *contadino*, an ox, and a plow, just as it had been done for centuries by their ancestors.

The growing of grapes to produce a notable Chianti vintage is even more susceptible to heartbreak and disappointment after an arduous season of great expectations. 2001 was the best year since 1997, which is believed to be the very best in the last thirty years or so. 2002 was fair, but 2003 was very good. The 2004 vintage was fair (which had been picked in September before our arrival) and it is thought that 2005 will be very good . . . we'll see. Roberto believes that the old adage has some truth, "the odd years are best." A combination of weather factors, *whether* and *when* those acts of nature occur in the growth cycle makes it all so chancey—too wet, too dry, too cool. Even though the Sangiovese grape has been grown in this soil and climate for centuries, and the standards for producing Chianti were created by Baron Ricasoli back in the 1860's, each year, each vintage, is a give-and-take drama between the Wine God and Mother Nature.

It's a hard life, but it's a beautiful and satisfying life here on the *podere* of Poggio alla Sala of the Cianfanelli family.

POLLO DI GIULIANA
(CHICKEN GIULIANA)

Meals at the Cianfanelli's of Poggio alla Sala are always something special. Giuliana Cianfanelli is one of those very talented cooks that effortlessly puts food together. She prepares meals simply and beautifully using only the freshest and very best ingredients. Produce comes from the well-tended organic garden on the farm as well as fresh eggs from "the girls"—there is nothing as good as those fresh eggs! The fragrant green olive oil is pressed from olives grown on the farm, and the meals are accompanied by the endless liters of Chianti from the surrounding vines.

Giuliana makes the rounds in the village specialty shops to gather her other ingredients; that good unsalted Italian bread, meats, fresh pastas and cheeses. Meals are served family-style, either in the farmhouse dining room or outside on the kitchen patio with the table set with her lovely linens and Italian pottery. We would sit for hours under an arbor of grapevines taking in the hilly Chianti views and inhaling the herbaceous scents of lavender, sage and lemon blossoms.

Knowing how crazy I was about the tomatoes in Italy (nothing truly compares), she prepared a menu in my honor with nothing but tomato-based dishes. I was in heaven! Giuliana invited me into her home on that warm summer afternoon and in the coolness of her large farmhouse kitchen with vases filled with freshly cut wildflowers and windows flung open wide for the breezes we made "*Pollo di Giuliana.*" The most enjoyable part of preparing this dish was the time spent together sharing and comparing, enjoying each other's company and speaking in Italian, of course!

This is a tasty and quick dish that has now become one of our favorites.

4 boneless skinless chicken breasts, pounded ½" thick
¼ cup tomato paste (like Amore Double Concentrated)
1 Tbs chopped fresh oregano (or 1 tsp dried)
chopped fresh Italian parsley
salt and pepper
2 Tbs olive oil
4 slices Ementhaler Swiss
¼ cup chicken broth

Mix tomato paste and chicken broth in a small bowl, set aside.

Salt and pepper chicken. Heat 1 Tbs olive oil in skillet until shimmering. Sear chicken in batches over medium heat 3 minutes per side until lightly golden. Pour tomato mixture into pan with chicken. Reduce heat to low, turn chicken to coat. There will be very little sauce. Cover pan and simmer, turning occasionally for about 12 minutes. Add the oregano and 1Tbs olive oil. Stir into sauce, turning chicken. If necessary you can add a small splash more chicken broth. Cover and simmer 5 minutes more.

Lay a slice of cheese on top of each breast, turn off heat and cover pan again for a minute or so, allowing the cheese to melt slightly. Serve each breast with a spoonful of sauce and garnish with fresh parsley.

I have substituted many other types of cheese with equally tasty results.

Recipe and illustrations by Priscilla Parenti.

A week in Umbria had been planned in advance, so we packed up and motored to the region bordering Tuscany to the east. Our rental car chugged mightily up steep, winding grades and, as we descended, we learned a new Italian word, *freni* (brakes)—from a flashing warning light on the dashboard. After an inspection and a litre of brake fluid, we were back on our way to an isolated retreat in the mountains northeast of Lake Trasimeno. Our stone house was perched on a frosty hilltop with a spectacular view of a medieval castle in the valley below. A special feature of the house was that it came equipped with a cuddly cat named Baci (Kisses) who helped Priscilla with her knitting and translation of Italian cookbooks; while I spread out by the fireplace, gathered my journals, notes, and thoughts and began to write this story. We were discouraged from taking walks on the mountain, as it was hunting season and gunfire was all around us. Hunters, in their camouflaged-best, were shooting at pretty much anything that moved. Retreating from our retreat, we made a pilgrimage to Assisi where we watched the nuns of Santa Chiara—dressed in their traditional habits—picking olives, just as they have done for centuries, rustling in the trees atop tall ladders. We made day-trips down the long bumpy road from our hideaway and each day experienced the incredible beauty of western Umbria, exploring its hilltowns and countryside.


Our Umbrian mountain retreat.

We returned to our farmhouse in Tuscany, "Casa Parenti," for the last two weeks of our big adventure. The olives we picked had been to the press, and a bottle of oil was awaiting our return. The days were shorter and the nights much cooler, but our fireplace and our Chianti wine would keep us warm. Autumn, and our unbelievable experience in Italy, was coming to an end.

XXI.

REMO

Having researched all of the civil and church records available here, Stefania was engaged in documenting our direct family line. She had successfully traced our clan back through the generations of Parenti births, baptisms, marriages, and deaths back to Paolo Parenti who lived in Carraia, back in the early sixteenth century. The family tree was a tangle of branches of Parenti marrying Parenti, Michelotti, Biancalana and Bucchianeri offspring. Most were born in or near Carraia, baptized at Pieve San Paolo, and married at SS. Donato e Biago.

Five hundred years of my family history had been documented here. It was truly remarkable. The records from the civil offices in Capannori and Lucca, and the parish records of Carraia and Pieve San Paolo told the story generation by generation. Stefania would continue her research with the hope of finding the Parenti family crest and maybe some family history, perhaps predating the sixteenth century.

So much of the history of those ancestors who left here early in the last century is unknown. My son discovered Leone's records and knew that he had a daughter, Joyce, by his second marriage. I learned from the church records that his oldest brother Armando died abroad in 1927, but knew nothing more about the other two brothers or their families. Leone's only sister, Zelmira, stayed in Italy where she married, had two children, and died in Lucca in 1967. We knew nothing of her daughter Tecla, but her son Eugenio Remo Michelotti was still living here near Carraia.

Remo represents the last thread of our lineage still living in Italy. He was 40 when his mother Zelmira passed away. Certainly he would have stories about his uncles, maybe photographs, as he was 14 when his grandfather Paolino died in 1941. Surely he would remember him and have recollections of Corte Pardino. Surely he would know about his grandmother Clementina's illness and death.

Eugenio Remo Michelotti had denied us an interview two months earlier for reasons which we did not understand. I was determined to get to him before we left the country. Roberto Cianfanelli was interested in my story and interested in helping. He arrived at Remo's doorstep and pleaded through a speaker phone at the gate, but could not get an audience. Then he called on numerous occasions, trying to persuade this man that his cousin's son only wanted to meet him and learn about the family. Remo repeatedly told Roberto to call back later, that he wasn't well enough or available. Finally Roberto, working through Remo's daughter Silvia, was able to arrange the meeting just a few days before our departure from Tuscany.

I prepared a list of questions which I would ask in English, and then have Roberto translate for him to answer. They were the questions which only he could answer. I prepared a gift for him, a framed print of his parents' marriage record from the parish archives, along with prints of their birth acts, something which I thought would be meaningful to their son, my father's cousin.

On the morning of our meeting with Remo, Priscilla and I drove from our country home south of Firenze toward the village south of Lucca where he resided. I felt anxious, nervous, but relieved that we were at last meeting. It was a grey day with rain threatening, so we allowed more time than was usually necessary to make the ninety-minute journey. We stopped for our version of *il pranzo* before our scheduled connection with Roberto at the parking lot of the *cimitero* in Carraia prior to traveling together for our late afternoon interview with Remo. Then the phone rang. It was Roberto. Remo could not—or *would* not—see us that day.

I was devastated. My skepticism about the meeting actually happening had been swept aside by the anticipation and excitement of what he was going to share with us. Roberto felt my pain and disappointment and said that he would make another call on my behalf. But our time was counting down and I knew that it wasn't going to happen before our departure.

What could I do? I had come so close to completing this chapter of our family history in Tuscany, only to have the book closed for reasons which I could not understand. Priscilla understood what I was experiencing and would do whatever I felt I needed to do. After a few minutes of quiet, introspective thought, I made a decision.

We would continue on the road to Lucca, find the village, and find his home. We would present the gifts and, even though Roberto would not be with us, we would introduce ourselves, hoping to make a favorable impression for an interview another day. It was raining now, the skies were growing darker, but Priscilla agreed to the mission. We stopped to see Fedora and the Parenti farmhouse at Corte Pardino, then continued west on Via di Carraia past the remarkable aqueduct en route to Remo's home.

Acquedotto. The aqueduct, designed by Lorenzo Nottolini, was built between 1823 and 1832, and carried water to the city of Lucca. Shown are 18 of its 459 arches.

We found the address and paused to call Roberto to tell him of our plan and our whereabouts. He was surprised, but thought it was good to make contact, to show our commitment by traveling three hours in miserable weather to bring him a present and to wish him and his daughter well.

With offering in hand, I approached the gate and pressed my finger firmly on the doorbell. A dog began barking and moments later a young lady came out the front door and approached the gate. Silvia is the thirty-four-year-old daughter of Remo, who is seventy-seven. She is the same age as my daughter, understands very little English but enough of our Italian to understand who we are. The gate is solid up to shoulder height, then bars to above head-level and Silvia spoke to us through the bars. She seemed suspicious as we showed her our family tree and I explained to her that I am her second-cousin, that

my grandfather and her grandmother were brother and sister. I passed the gift through the bars, wondering why she would not open the gate and accept us into their home. She thanked us and said that maybe next spring, "*when it's warmer*", her father will meet with me. As we exchanged conversation and documents through the bars (and feeling as though we're visiting a prisoner), I caught a glimpse of a man peering through a curtain. It was Remo, and when he saw that I had seen him, he promptly disappeared.

We can do no more. We were locked out, but had delivered our gift and a message of our good intentions. We just don't understand.

Our interview and the answers would have to wait. It was the end of autumn and we must hope for better things in the spring.

XXII.

ARRIVEDERCI

It was time to go home to our family and friends. Our Tuscan odyssey had come to an end, and it was time to say *arrivederci* to our new friends, who had become family to us. We had dinner with Stefania and her husband Marco, and she brought us the documentation of the splendid work she had done for our family. The Becucci Family at the *Bellavista* made us our final *cappuccini* and sent us off with hugs and kisses on every cheek. Roberto and Giuliana stopped by our newly-christened farmhouse, "Casa Parenti," and wished us *buon viaggio*. It was everything that we could hope for—extraordinary, loving and caring people with which to share our lives, and the excitement and blessed feeling that they will be here upon our return.

We would be traveling back to California, our home in America. By remarkable coincidence, it was the same place that my grandfather and his brothers called home after leaving Tuscany nearly a century ago. I was anxious to share our discoveries with the family I knew, and with the new family members I was about to meet. As we were roasting chestnuts and having our last meal in our farmhouse, Dylan was sharing Thanksgiving dinner with my recently-discovered half-aunt Joyce. I imagined my father, her half-brother, sitting at that table of Thanksgiving and the conversation and emotional outpouring of such a meeting.

Priscilla and I packed our bags for yet another journey. The *"Vagabondi"* were going home for the winter and returning in the spring.

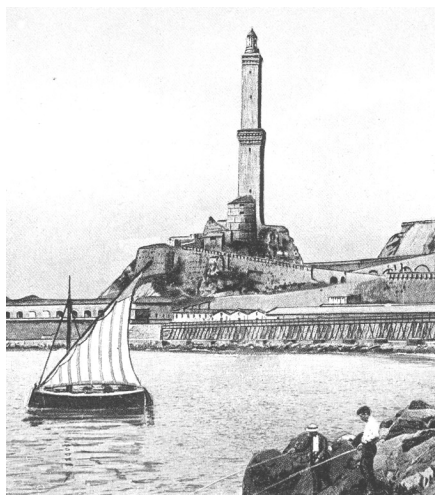
Stazione Ferroviaria, the train station in Lucca, Italy built in 1847. The Parenti brothers of Carraia boarded the train at this station for their trip to the port of Genova when they emigrated to America. From an old postcard, c.1914.

Steamship Terminals, Port of Genova. From an old postcard, c.1914.

XXIII.

GO WEST, YOUNG MEN, GO WEST

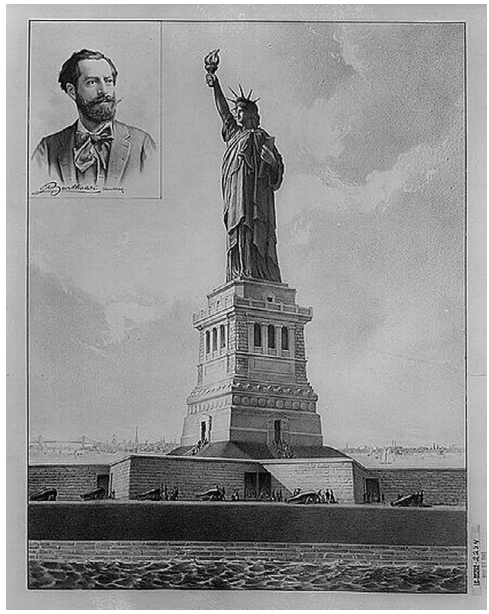
Our travel time from Tuscany to America was a flight of about twelve hours. A century ago, for the Parenti brothers of Carraia, it was a voyage of about twelve *days* from Genova (Genoa) to Ellis Island. As each of them grew to manhood, they said *arrivederci* to their family, walked away from the farmhouse, took the west-bound train from the Lucca station to the coast, and boarded a passenger ship at the port of Genova. They sailed out of the harbor and passed La Lanterna (the colossal light-house built in 1543) and watched the shoreline of their homeland disappear forever—as they would never return.



La Lanterna, the lighthouse. Genova harbor.

They crossed the mighty ocean and, with just a few lira in their pockets and carrying a small bag containing all of their worldly possessions, they came to America. As third-class passengers (otherwise known as "steerage"), they traveled near the bottom of the ship, and in turbulent seas they were probably seasick in their bunks for much of the crossing. Sailing into

New York Harbor and viewing Lady Liberty holding her lamp on high must have been uplifting for these "tired, poor, huddled masses" on board their ship after their "tempest-tossed" voyage. Upon arriving at the piers in the harbor, they disembarked and were transported by ferry to Ellis Island where they were probed, prodded and poked as they underwent legal and medical inspections. The Examination Hall looked more like the stockyards of Chicago and Omaha—holding-pens and chutes—where the immigrants were herded from pen to pen. After two weeks of being tossed about at sea and so much uncertainty of what was awaiting them, the scene and the inspections must have been bewildering and terrifying. The halls were loud and echoed with



Liberty Enlightening the World.. New York Harbor. Auguste Bartholdi.1886. Collections of Library of Congress

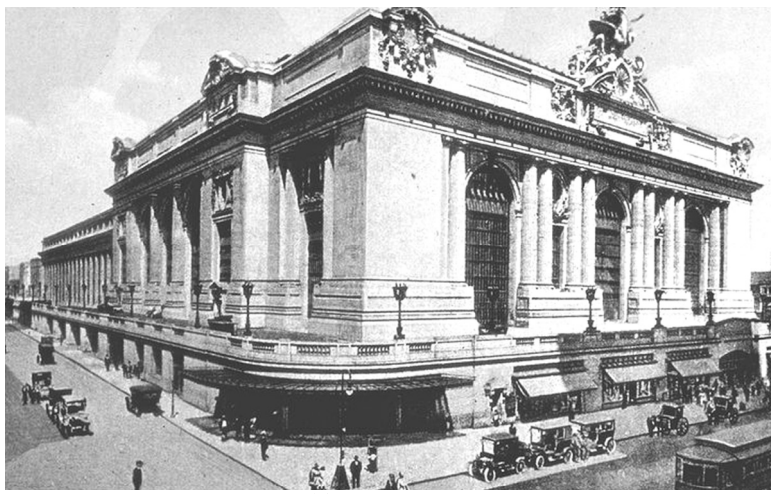
Ellis Island, New York Harbor. Collections of Library of Congress.

Ellis Island Examination Hall. Collections of Library of Congress.

Immigrants on an Atlantic liner. Collections of Library of Congress.

many languages; the examinations were impersonal and out in the open; and the questioning was thorough and tough—and not necessarily in the immigrant's native tongue. Legal inspectors cross-examined the immigrants to confirm that the answers to the twenty-nine questions they had provided on the ship's manifest were truthful. After all of this, if they failed, they could be refused entry and returned for the long disheartening voyage back to Italy. But each of the Parenti brothers were successful, which allowed them to proceed to the Registry Hall, and then to board the ferry which took them from Ellis Island to New York City, where they disembarked.

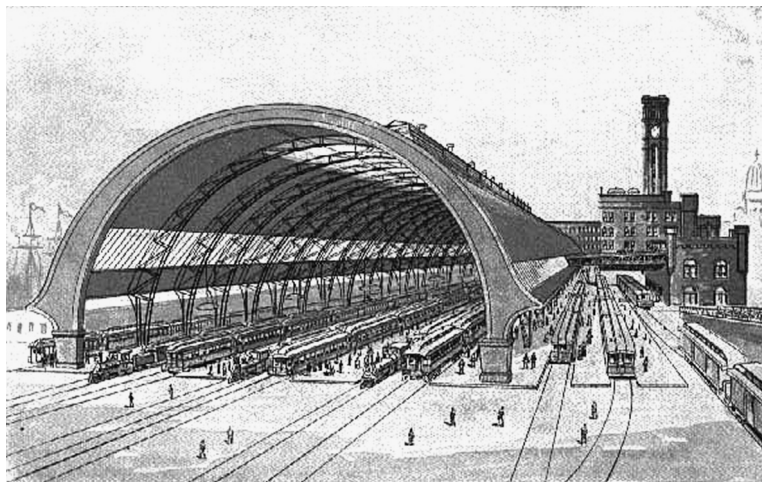
On April 9, 1914, Leone cleared Immigration and ferried to New York City, where he spent his first day and took his first steps on American soil. For the teenage boy from a farm in Italy it must have been quite an experience. The largest town he had ever seen, except for his brief layover in Genova, was probably Firenze, which was just a couple of hours by train from the station in Lucca. New York (with its disproportionate immigrant population) had over two



Grand Central Terminal, New York City, 1914.

million residents in Manhattan alone. Maybe Leone knew someone from his little village of Carraia who was living here in Little Italy and he had a place to stay that night, or maybe he kept moving. In any case, he made his way to the new Grand Central Terminal (which was completed just the year before) and bought a ticket to Chicago on the New York Central line. Heading west, the route took him across northern Indiana and through Porter County—a place which is very

important in our family history, as you'll learn as our story unfolds—before turning northbound as the railroad line swept around the south



Grand Central Station, Chicago. State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

shore of Lake Michigan and headed into Chicago's magnificent old Grand Central Station. There, Leone bought a ticket to Omaha to join his three brothers, who were perhaps awaiting their little brother when the train pulled into Union Station. He would live in the Midwest for five years, returning to Chicago but, like his brothers, made his way west to California where they all settled.

Postcard of Union Station in Omaha. Traveling from Chicago, this is where Leone and his brothers arrived after their long journey which began at the train station in Lucca, Italy. Image courtesy of Omaha Public Library Collections

On the flight home from Chicago, I thought about my emigration to California in 1973 with my children, Dylan and Joslyn, and their mother in a 1968 VW Microbus. We were escaping the cold, harsh Midwestern winters and following my father and younger brothers who had settled in San Diego a year or so earlier. I was looking for a new beginning and I was captivated by the beauty and geographic diversity of the state. So much of what Priscilla and I had just seen throughout Tuscany reminded us of home; the trees, plants, flowers, vineyards, hills, mountains, and coastline. As we flew over the farms of the Midwest, the Mississippi River, the Great Plains, the Rockies, the Colorado River, its Grand Canyon, and the Desert Southwest toward our Pacific Coast home, we experienced the full majesty of the American landscape.

Within a few years, my two older brothers and my sister migrated to San Diego with their children. All of the Parent family and their Midwestern roots—just like the Parenti brothers and their Tuscan roots—had been transplanted to the Golden State. New lives and new opportunities in a new land . . . California.

By 1914, the year my grandfather Leone Parenti emigrated to America, hundreds of thousands of Italians had come to California. Mostly they were men, and mostly they were farmers who were escaping their poverty-stricken country. Many of those *contadini* who made it to California were from northcentral Italy, like the Parenti brothers from Carraia in the Comune di Capannori. But many of these farmers sought other work with higher pay and the dream that maybe they could make enough money to return to their native land, find a wife in their village, and return to America. These "birds of passage" would seek work as construction laborers, miners, and railroad workers—hard work, but more promising than being farmers in their new land.

From immigration records, my son learned about the Parenti brothers. Armando was the first to come. In February 1912, he traveled with Prezioso Biancalana, 17, and Antonio Belluomini, 50, both from Carraia. Armando was 19 and his listed destination was Chicago. Evaristo, just 17, followed his brother in October of that year, listing Omaha, Nebraska and Armando's "residence" as his final destination. That address seemed to read 1024 Dody Street—a street which never existed in Omaha. It was actually 1024 *Dodge* Street (just seven blocks north of the Union Pacific Station) and it was a misreading of the clerk's penmanship (the letters *ge* were mistaken for

the letter *y*). The City Directory of Omaha from that period revealed that 1024 Dodge Street was the Cantoni and Bertacini Saloon at the Hotel Roma, which was a boarding house for Italian immigrants. One can only imagine what these young single guys did there when they weren't working on the railroad *"all the live-long day."* The following year, 1913, Aurelio Giorgio would list the same destination, as did Leone in 1914 when all four brothers had emigrated. Both Leone and Evaristo were 17 when they left home. Every Italian male, when he reached 18, was eligible for military conscription. World War I had begun in Europe and Italy would join the Allies in 1915, the year Leone would be eligible. Armando had found work on the railroad in Omaha, so the brothers soon joined him there.

Postcard of Omaha, "Bird's Eye View" looking east toward the river. The Hotel Roma and the Cantoni & Bertacini Saloon at 1024 Dodge Street are in the middle distance, just to the left of the cupola of the Post Office clocktower at 16th and Dodge Street. c.1914.

Image courtesy of Omaha Public Library Collections.

Omaha, which means "against the current," was in Indian Territory until 1803 when Thomas Jefferson completed the Louisiana Purchase. The following year, Meriwether Lewis, William Clark and the Corps of Discovery entered the Missouri River and in late July 1804 had their first tribal council on a bluff near present-day Omaha. Their journal noted that the territory would be good for trading and a fortification outpost. The city of Omaha was founded fifty years later in 1854.

Detail from a map of Omaha, Nebraska from the late 19th century. The llustration depicts the downtown blocks and Union Pacific Depot. 1024 Dodge Street is just off the corner of 10th and Dodge Street (near the letter G). It was the location of the Hotel Roma and the Cantoni & Bertacini Saloon (the address of the Parenti brothers in Omaha).

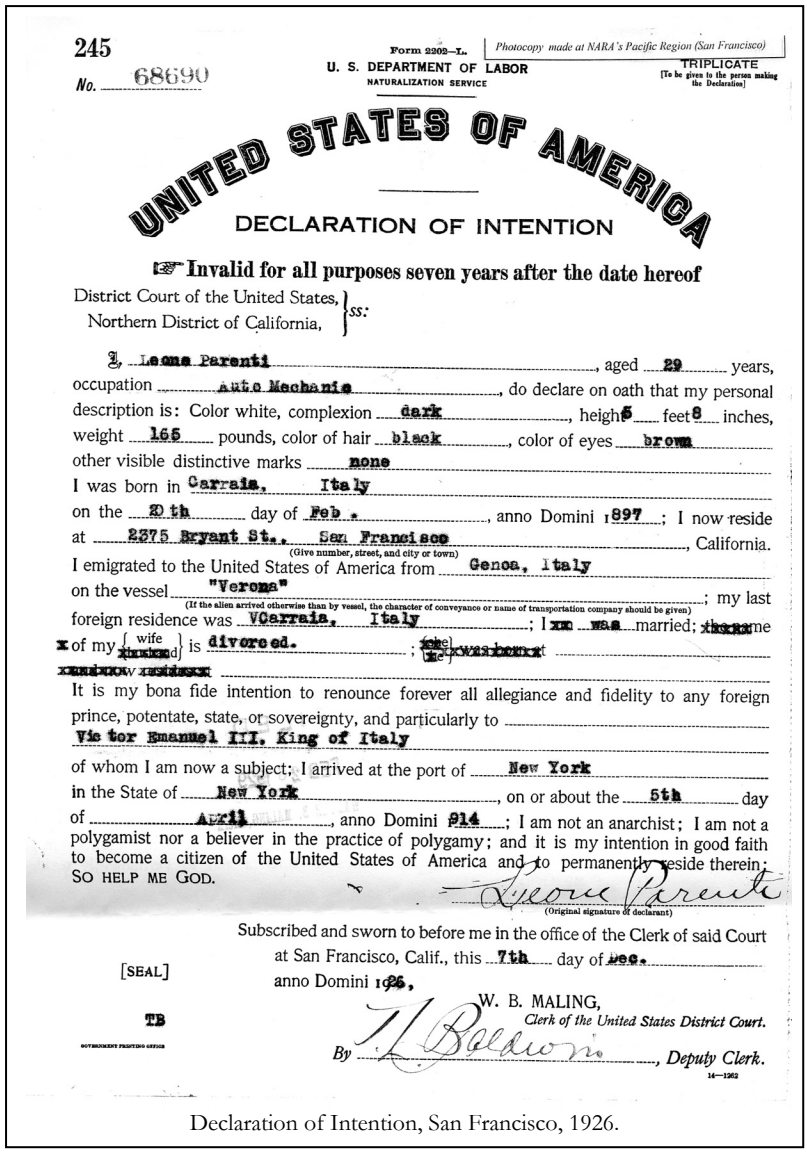
Image courtesy of Omaha Public Library Collections.

Passage of the Pacific Railroad Act in 1862 provided for the construction of a transcontinental railroad from an unspecified point on the Missouri River to a western terminus in California. During his campaign for the Presidency, Lincoln visited Council Bluffs, Iowa and ordered the purchase of a plot of land where the rail line would eventually cross the river. On November 17, 1863, Lincoln announced that Omaha would be the eastern terminus of the new railroad with ground-breaking ceremonies on December 2, 1863. Just five-and-a-half heroic years and 1,776 miles later, the final spike was driven at Promontory, Utah on May 10, 1869.

The Golden Spike, Transcontinental Railroad. Collections of Library of Congress

Omaha became a Mecca for thousands of immigrants seeking work on the railroads, in the packing houses and with businesses supplying the demand for goods out west and back east. The Parenti brothers were in the last wave of these immigrants and Omaha was just a way station before going to Chicago for work on the rail lines feeding into the Midwest hub.

For the youngest of the Parenti brothers in Chicago, Leone, that meant marriage and fathering a child, my father David, in 1919. But within months, he abandoned his wife and son and headed west for a new life in California.



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No. 68690

Form 2202—L.

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
NATURALIZATION SERVICE

Photocopy made at NARA's Pacific Region (San Francisco)

TRIPLICATE
[To be given to the person making the Declaration]

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

DECLARATION OF INTENTION

☞ **Invalid for all purposes seven years after the date hereof**

District Court of the United States,
Northern District of California, } ss:

I, Leone Parenti, aged 29 years, occupation Auto Mechanic, do declare on oath that my personal description is: Color white, complexion dark, height 5 feet 8 inches, weight 165 pounds, color of hair black, color of eyes brown, other visible distinctive marks none

I was born in Carraia, Italy

on the 20 th day of Feb., anno Domini 1897; I now reside at 2375 Bryant St., San Francisco (Give number, street, and city or town), California.

I emigrated to the United States of America from Genoa, Italy on the vessel "Verona" (If the alien arrived otherwise than by vessel, the character of conveyance or name of transportation company should be given); my last foreign residence was VCarraia, Italy; I ~~am~~ was married; ~~the name~~ of my {wife / husband} is divorced.; {he / she} ~~was born at~~

It is my bona fide intention to renounce forever all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty, and particularly to Victor Emanuel III, King of Italy

of whom I am now a subject; I arrived at the port of New York in the State of New York, on or about the 5th day of April, anno Domini 914; I am not an anarchist; I am not a polygamist nor a believer in the practice of polygamy; and it is my intention in good faith to become a citizen of the United States of America and to permanently reside therein; SO HELP ME GOD.

Leone Parenti
(Original signature of declarant)

Subscribed and sworn to before me in the office of the Clerk of said Court at San Francisco, Calif., this 7th day of Dec., anno Domini 1926,

[SEAL]

W. B. MALING,
Clerk of the United States District Court.

By T. L. Baldwin, *Deputy Clerk.*

TB

GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

14—1262

Declaration of Intention, San Francisco, 1926.

XXIV.

OH BROTHERS, WHERE ART THOU?

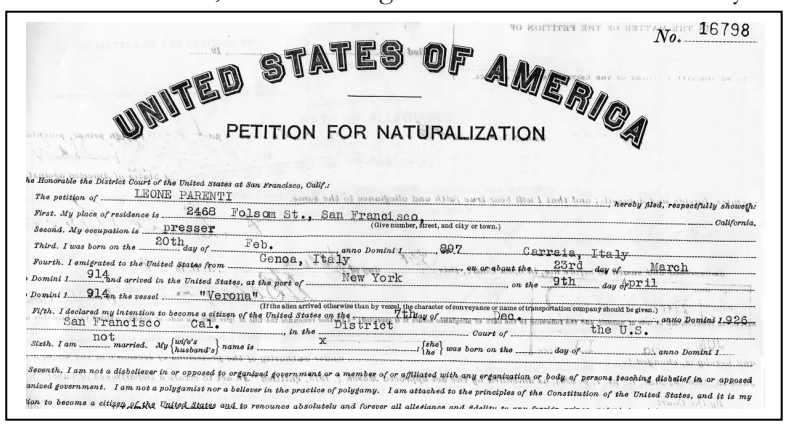
There were no more answers in Italy and there were few leads back in California. Through his research of the 1920 U.S. Census, Dylan discovered Leo and Jessie living with their infant son David at 3116 Osgood (now Kenmore) Avenue in Chicago. The Census taker had come to call on January 7, 1920 recording Leo as a machinist and Jessie as a housewife. Whether he was at Columbus Hospital at 2:50 a.m. on December 9, 1919 for the birth of his son is not known.

From my son's research, the U.S. Census of 1920 shows no record of the other Parenti brothers in Omaha, Chicago, or anywhere else. Leone had abandoned his new family that year, by Jessie's account, and his whereabouts and those of his three siblings in America are unknown until December 7, 1926. Leone, in his Declaration of Intention to renounce his allegiance to King Victor Emanuel III of Italy, states that he is a 29-year-old mechanic living at 2375 Bryant Street in San Francisco. He declares that he was married, but is now divorced. Jessie claimed that he disappeared, never to be heard from again. Were there divorce proceedings, was the marriage annulled, or was there really no divorce at all? If so, why declare a marriage that had not legally ended? Answers we may never know.

Two years and three months later, upon filing his Petition for Naturalization on February 26, 1929, Leone lists his address as 2468 Folsom Street in San Francisco and lists his profession as "presser," whatever that may have been. Some kind of press operator perhaps. He certainly wasn't pressing grapes or olives as he may have done as a boy. His brother Evaristo is one of the witnesses at this event and is

already a U.S. citizen living at the same Bryant Street address and his occupation is listed as "milkman." Ironically, my father and his four oldest sons (I'm the third) were also milkmen in their early years.

On June 3, 1929, Leone swears an oath of allegiance to the United States of America, renouncing his fidelity to the King of Italy, Victor Emanuel III, and becoming a U.S. citizen. It was fifteen years



No. 16798

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

PETITION FOR NATURALIZATION

The Honorable the District Court of the United States at San Francisco, Calif.:

The petition of LEONE PARENTI hereby filed, respectfully showeth:

First. My place of residence is 2468 Folsom St., San Francisco, California. (Give number, street, and city or town.)

Second. My occupation is presser

Third. I was born on the 20th day of Feb. anno Domini 1897 Carraia, Italy

Fourth. I emigrated to the United States from Genoa, Italy, on or about the 23rd day of March Domini 1914 and arrived in the United States, at the port of New York, on the 9th day of April Domini 1914 on the vessel "Verona"

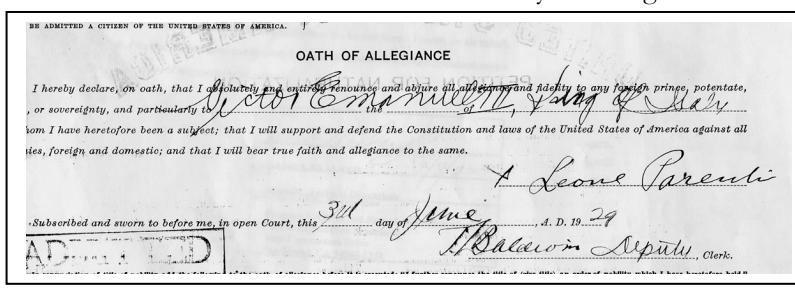
(If the alien arrived otherwise than by vessel, the character of conveyance or name of transportation company should be given.)

Fifth. I declared my intention to become a citizen of the United States on the 7th day of Jan. 1926, anno Domini 1926, in the San Francisco Cal. District Court of the U.S.

Sixth. I am not married. My {wife's / husband's} name is x {she / he} was born on the day of , anno Domini

Seventh. I am not a disbeliever in or opposed to organized government or a member of or affiliated with any organization or body of persons teaching disbelief in or opposed to organized government. I am not a polygamist nor a believer in the practice of polygamy. I am attached to the principles of the Constitution of the United States, and it is my intention to become a citizen of the United States and to renounce absolutely and forever all allegiance and fidelity to

after he left his father, his sister, and home in Carraia and traveled alone across the ocean; made his way across half the American continent to be reunited with his brothers; married an American girl and fathered a son; and then crossed the rest of the continent and chose a new name for himself. He was now 32 years of age.



BE ADMITTED A CITIZEN OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, , or sovereignty, and particularly to Victor Emanuel III, King of the of Italy whom I have heretofore been a subject; that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all ies, foreign and domestic; and that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same.

A. Leone Parenti

Subscribed and sworn to before me, in open Court, this 3rd day of June, A. D. 19 29

ADMITTED

J. Baldwin Deputy Clerk.

The Church records in Carraia revealed that Armando had "died abroad" in December 1927. The precise date and place was not known to the parish priest who made the entry, and perhaps his father Paolino and his sister Zelmira, his remaining family in Carraia, did not know either. They must have been deeply saddened with the loss of their son and brother when they learned of his death. Brother Aurelio Giorgio had joined Leone and Evaristo in California. They had taken the Transcontinental Railroad to the end of the line and were making new lives in America.

XXV.

BACK HOME AGAIN IN INDIANA: DAVID & ELLINE

The history and the ancestors of my paternal-grandfather Leone was coming to light, but that of my paternal-grandmother Jessie Jones was still unknown. We knew her parents' names and supposed birthplaces from her death certificate (information provided by my father in 1979) but little more. Ironically, we'd discovered a dozen generations of Parentis in Italy, but we didn't know even two generations of the Joneses in America. So Dylan went digging.

The 1930 U.S. Census revealed that Jessie Parent and her 10-year-old son David were in Hammond, Indiana living with an aunt named Jessie Mayer. It is the first recording of the name "Parent"—the Anglicized version of the Italian family name Parenti. Dylan concluded that Jessie Mayer was the half-sister of our Jessie's mother, Mabel Cecil Berow, or perhaps of her father, Charles James Jones.

Dylan then found Jessie and the Jones family in the 1910 U.S. Census. The census-taker had come to call at 1822 Belmont Avenue in Chicago, Illinois on the 8th of May and recorded: Charles, 33; Mabel, 29; Lorna B., 12; and Jessie M., 9. Charles and Mabel were married in Chicago on May 4th, 1896.

Next, we learned that my great-grandfather Jones registered in the 1918 draft for World War I, stating that he was born on October 9, 1875, making him 43 years old at the time of the registration, not consistent with the projected age of 41 from the 1910 Census. He was a foreman at the Lake Shore Depot and was of medium height and build. Curiously, he listed his nearest relative as Jessie Mayer, the half-sister in the 1930 Census, not his wife Mabel or his daughters. We

believed that he died within the next two years, as the 1920 Census indicates that Mabel was a "widow", but later learned he remarried before 1930, to a Norwegian woman named Hannah, and was still living in Chicago in 1943. From the 1860–80 Census records, we know he was born in Syracuse, New York; was the son of Charles James Jones of Syracuse and Mary Eddy Jones of Cuyahoga County, Ohio; and was the grandson of George and Caroline Jones, who were born in England and emigrated in 1850. No death records of the Jones males; George, Charles and his son Charles have been found. Mabel also remarried, in the 1930's to Arthur Miller.

David Parenti and his grandmother, Mabel Berow Jones. Chicago, 1920.

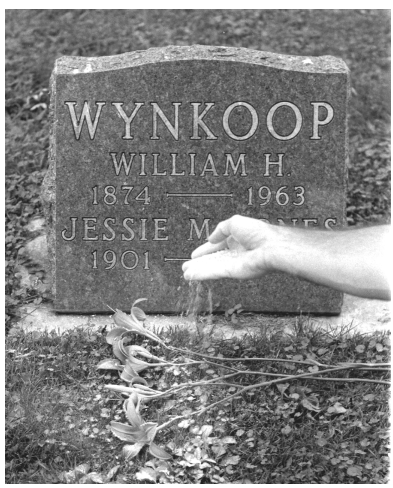
Mabel Jones Miller with her daughters, Jessie and Lorna. Late 1930's.

Mabel Cecil Berow was born in Milwaukee on February 4, 1879 to David Lewis Berow and his wife Lily Orsula Martin. David was born in 1854 in Canada and died in Chicago on October 21, 1881 at age 28 of tuberculosis. His parents were Joseph and Susan LeBiron from Cornwall, Stormont, Ontario along the St. Lawrence River and they were of French origin. Lily was born in New York in 1856. Her mother, Betsey Martin, was born in 1813 and her father, Peter Martin, was born in 1810. Betsey was born in Upper Canada, Peter in Lower Canada. They were farmers in New York across the river from the Berow family. The Martins were of Scottish origin.

My grandmother's sister, Lorna B. Jones, had a tragic life. She suffered from mental illness; was deceived and abandoned by her

husband Joe Morrison; had a child which was still-born; and was responsible for crippling her mother in an auto accident. She died in an institution near Westville, Indiana in 1975. A family photograph survives which shows the two sisters and their mother together in a park, taken sometime in the late 1930's. Mabel Berow Jones Miller died on May 4, 1950 and is buried in Chesterton Cemetery beside her daughters.

My father's destiny and destination, like his father's, was linked to the railroads. Chesterton and the neighboring village of Porter over the years had developed into a railway center between Chicago and Michigan City. His mother is believed to have married twice in the early 1930's, to fellows with the last names of Rich and McDonald, respectively, though no record of either marriage has been found. Jessie's oral history of her marriages was trivialized with her sing-song jingle, "First one left me, / Second one died. / Third one left me, / Fourth one died." It was her fourth, final, and only lasting marriage, to William Henry Wynkoop, a railroad man, sometime in the mid-1930's, that likely brought my father to Chesterton in his teenage years. My parent's marriage application on March 22, 1938 has Jessie Wynkoop granting consent. By October 1, 1942 she and Bill were living at 400 Hobart Street in Gary, Indiana according to her Social Security application.



Grave of William and Jessie Wynkoop. Chesterton Cemetery.

Bill Wynkoop, our "Grandpa Koop," was a conductor for one of the lines running through Westchester Township in Porter County. It's not known how or when they met. It's possible that Jessie and her son David were in the area when her third husband ran away, or when the second one died. She once remarked that "this" husband (Rich, or maybe it was McDonald?) was buried "somewhere around here" while visiting Chesterton Cemetery sometime after Bill's death on March 23, 1963. He died in DeMotte, Indiana, about forty miles south of Chesterton, at their house in the country, at age 88. The

name Wynkoop, translated from the Dutch language, means "wine cooper," or "wine barrel maker." By 1950, he and Jessie had moved to DeMotte, an area settled by many Dutch families. I have memories of our visits to their little house at the end of a winding lane, and of the visits to their two-seater outhouse—one hole being smaller so that the little people wouldn't fall in. Grandpa Koop had a garden tractor, which he called "the doodlebug," for cultivating his asparagus crop. I remember him wearing his conductor's cap, sitting beside the radio, and listening to the baseball games of his beloved White Sox.

My father referred to Bill Wynkoop as the only father that he ever had, even sending a photograph in his Army uniform from Germany with the inscription, "Loads of love and luck to my Mom and Dad."


Private David Parent, U.S.Army. c.1945.

Grandma Wynkoop lived her final years in San Diego, California where my father had brought her to be near him. She died on August 17, 1979 at the age of 78. The records of her birth, three of her marriages and divorces have eluded all research efforts.

The circumstances which brought my father from Hammond in Lake County, Indiana to the bordering Porter County sometime during this period are speculative. We only know that he graduated from Chesterton High School in 1937 along with his sweetheart, Elline Grace Wiseman.

Elline, known as "Patty," was born on October 19, 1919 in Porter County, the first child born to John Benjamin Wieseman and his wife Etta Maria Radelia Carter, who married on February 17, 1918, three days after being granted a marriage license on Valentine's Day.

There are various spellings of their family name; Wiesemann, Wieseman, Wiseman and a few typographical misspellings as well. Through the Census records of 1910 and of 1870, Dylan discovered that my grandfather Ben was the son of John Peter Wiesemann who

was born in LaPorte County, Indiana on November 18, 1867 and died on August 16, 1952. He was the son of Johann Peter Wiesemann, who was born in Prussia in 1833, and of his wife Rebecca Catherine Strausbaugh, who was born in Pennsylvania in 1843. Johann's parents were Adrian Wiesemann and his wife Marguerite Grossman, farmers from Dahl, Olpe, Westphalia, Prussia. Elizabeth Rosenburg Wiesemann, my great-grandmother, was born on September 5, 1874 in Michigan City, Indiana. She was the daughter of Peter Rosenbach and Magdalena Wings. The Jacob Rosenbach family emigrated from Grenderich, Rheinland, Prussia; the Peter Wings family emigrated from Grefrath, Rheinland, Prussia. Both families arrived in May 1852 and settled in LaPorte County. Lizzie lived to be 102 years and 11 months young. She died in Valparaiso on August 8, 1977. A photograph taken in August of 1963 of her sitting with my grandfather, my mother, my oldest brother Dale and his oldest son, captures five generations of our Indiana family on film. My grandfather was one of nine children born to Elizabeth and John. He was born in Michigan City on April 7, 1897, and died in Klamath Falls, Oregon on March 20, 1989. Ben had two brothers, named Ernest and Leonard; and six sisters, named Phyliss, Helen, Catherine, Margaret, Eleanor, and Mary.

Five Generations. Elline Wiseman Parent, Jeffrey Parent, Dale Parent, Elizabeth Wiesemann, and Ben Wieseman. Chesterton, Indiana,

Etta was born on April 6, 1898, the daughter of Judson and Johanna Svensdotter Carter. Both parents died before her fifth birthday, and was adopted by the Nils Samuelson family. Her sister Clara was adopted by the Carl Nelson family, who lived on a bordering farm. The two sisters were born in Chicago, as was their older sister, Eliza Lida. The Carters also had two sons who died soon after their births. Judson was the youngest son of Rufus and Eliza

Grave of J. Ben and Etta Maria Wieseman.
Chesterton Cemetery.

Allen Carter of Scarborough, Cumberland, Maine. Judson Newell Carter was born in July of 1868, and died in Chicago on September 9, 1900 of typhoid fever at the age of 32. My great-grandmother, Johanna Maria Svensdotter, was born in Barkeryd, Jonkoping, Sweden on January 11, 1870 and died on January 15, 1903. My grandmother Etta died in Valparaiso, Indiana after celebrating her 50th wedding anniversary while visiting her family in Porter County on May 23, 1968. She was 70 years old. Her gravesite is very near her daughter's in the Chesterton Cemetery beside Coffee Creek.

Ben and Etta had four sons after the birth of their only daughter; Benjamin, James, Roger, and Leroy. Uncle Benny (known as "Sonny") and brothers Jimmy ("Pee Wee"), Roger ("Weezer"), and LeRoy Russell ("Mikey") moved with their parents out to Portland, Oregon sometime around 1942. The City Directory of Portland from 1943-44 lists Etta as a housewife and John B. as a pipefitter employed by the Kaiser Company. Henry J. Kaiser had established three shipbuilding works along the Columbia River here for the production of U.S. Liberty Ships and recruited tens of thousands of workers from back East, including my grandfather Ben.


Etta, Mikey, and Ben with Bachelor.
Vanport, Oregon, c.1943.

Portland experienced a severe housing shortage because of this, so Kaiser built thousands of housing units in the marshy Columbia Slough, creating the nation's largest public-housing project. Vanport, named for Vancouver and Portland, housed over 40,000 residents by the fall of 1943. A photo taken by Weezer shows Ben, Etta, Mikey and their dog Bachelor sitting on the steps of their apartment, number 6822 at 10519 Force Avenue. A poster on their front door declares "Serving Our Country" and the two gold stars below indicate that Sonny and Pee Wee are in the service at this time. When the war ended in 1945—and after 750 Liberty Ships had been built—there was no more work here. So they moved to southern Oregon, where the drier climate was better suited for my grandmother's asthma condition. If they were still living in Vanport on Memorial Day of 1948, they would have seen their apartment and worldly possessions wash away in the famous Vanport Flood.

Grandpa Wieseman, along with Uncles Jimmy and Roger, were plumbers by trade. Jimmy also had a motor-court motel and an A&W root beer stand in Lakeview at which I was a "soda jerk" and short-order cook one summer as a teen. We knew Benny best, as he lived near us. He was a delivery man, a grocery store operator, and, for a short time, owned a movie theatre in our town. Uncle Mikey was born with Down Syndrome, and lived with his parents and his brothers throughout his lifetime.

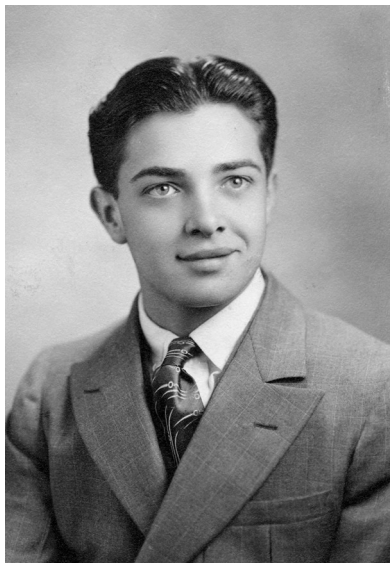
My mother did not seem to be very close with her family, for reasons unknown. Like my father, she never spoke of her childhood. Not a word. Because of the distance between them, she would rarely see her parents and brothers. I never witnessed any warmth between my mother and her family when they did get together every few years in Oregon or Indiana—usually in Chesterton, where grandpa's mother, many of his siblings, and his eldest-son Benny resided. My mother seldom visited her aunts, uncles, or her grandmother, though they lived near us.

Chesterton, in northern Porter County, is just a few miles south of the Indiana Dunes State Park, a magnificent lakeshore with drifting-sand hills on the south shore of Lake Michigan. It's truly an incredibly beautiful and unexpected apparition in the Hoosier State landscape, with views of distant Chicago across the lake. The park was dedicated in 1923, and my grandfather served as a park ranger there before leaving Indiana for Vanport to build those Liberty Ships.

Ben, Etta, and baby Elline.
Porter County, Indiana. c.1920.

Elline as a child, c.1922

Roger, Jimmy, Benny, and Elline Wiseman. Chellburg Farm, Porter County, c.1934.

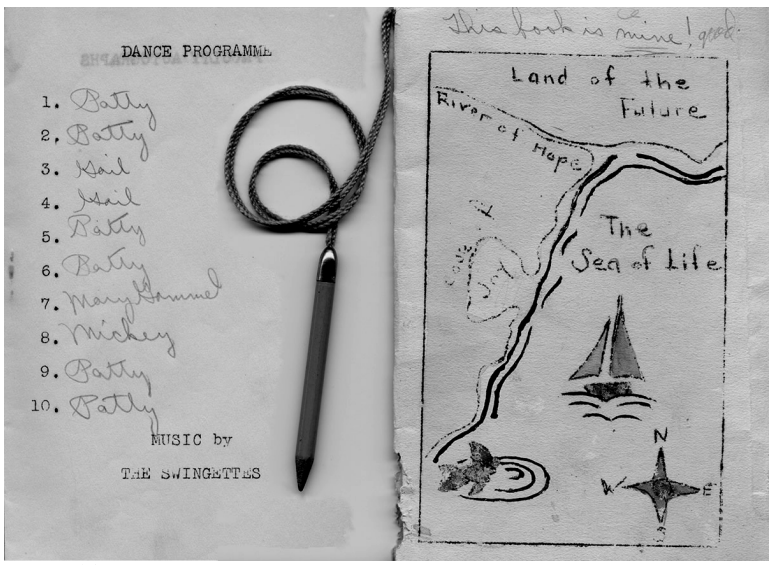


David Paul Parent

Elline Grace Wiseman

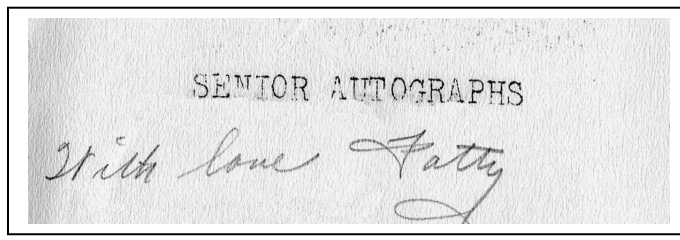
Chesterton High School Class of 1937.

The paths of the Wieseman and Parenti/Wynkoop families brought my parents together in Chesterton. They met and fell madly in love. The dance card from their senior dance "The Cruise" at Barker Hall in Michigan City is a record of their togetherness. They



"The Cruise" Junior-Senior Dance, Chesterton High School, 1937.

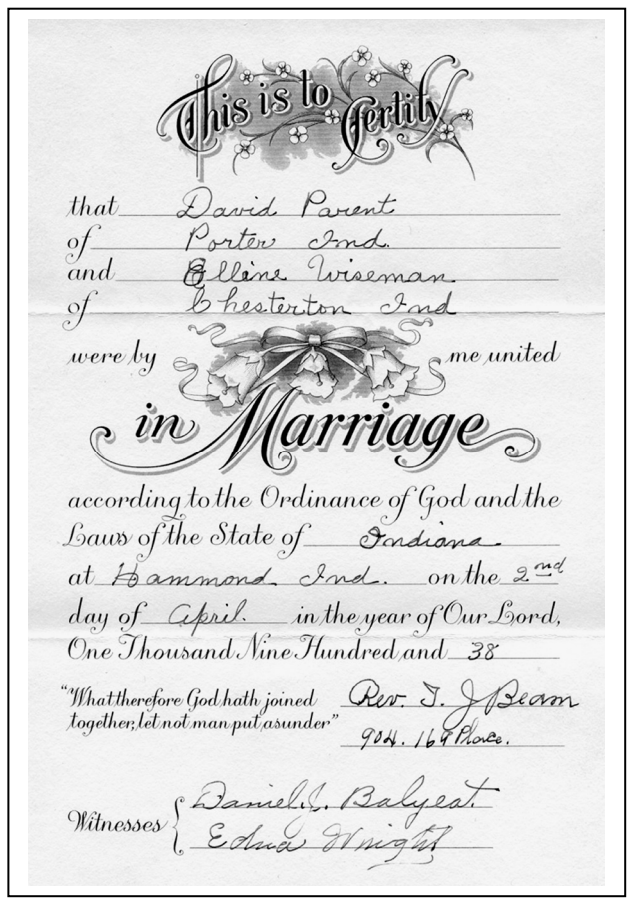
danced to the "Swingettes" (they were partners for six of the ten dances) and she signed his memory book, "With love, Patty."


SENIOR AUTOGRAPHS

With love Patty

David and Elline on the "The Honeymoon Express." Riverview, Chicago, 1937, and the "Easy Payment" book.

Just six months after graduating from high school, they became engaged, but they had already made their commitment to be together. The photograph taken at the Riverview Amusement Park in Chicago on July 8, 1937, just weeks after their graduation, shows them posing on "The Honeymoon Express," and a priceless little blue payment book from Simon Brothers Jewel Shop chronicles the rest. On November 18th, my father bought an engagement ring for $50 with $3 down on "easy payments." By March 18, 1938, he had paid it down to $33, at which time he selected a $7.50 wedding ring prior to their applying for a license in Porter County on March 22nd. They married in nearby Hammond on April 2, 1938. By making payments each month of between one and two dollars, he was finally paid-in-full on September 14, 1939, eighteen months after their wedding day.



This is to Certify

that David Parent
of Porter Ind.
and Alline Wiseman
of Chesterton Ind
were by me united
in Marriage
according to the Ordinance of God and the
Laws of the State of Indiana
at Hammond Ind. on the 2nd
day of April in the year of Our Lord,
One Thousand Nine Hundred and 38

"What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" Rev. J. J. Beam
904. 169 Place.

Witnesses { Daniel J. Balyeat
Edna Wright

Four months following their marriage, on July 28, 1938, their first child, Dale Lee, was born in a house near Tremont, a small village near Chesterton. My mother was waitressing at a roadside café and filling station at the time, and my father was having difficulty finding steady work. He now had three mouths to feed, and the Great Depression era was lingering.

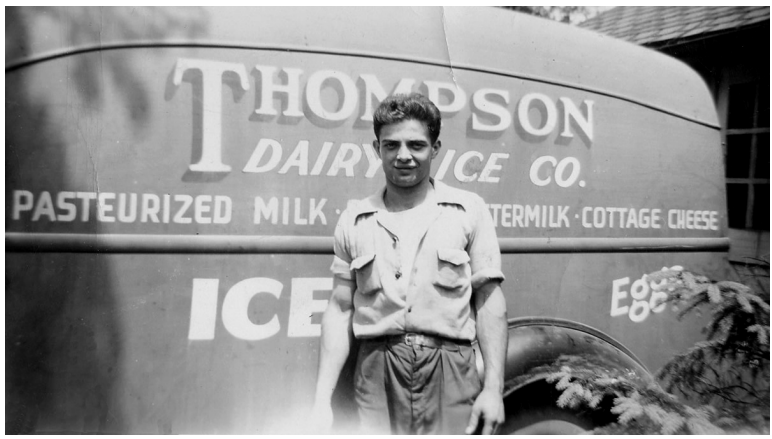
Elline the waitress at the roadside café. c.1938.

He found work in Chicago, washing windows, at the Morrison Hotel on the southeast corner of Madison and Clark. It had 2,500 guest rooms and at 46 stories, claimed the title of "World's Tallest Hotel." The view of Lake Michigan from those windows must have been spectacular.


Mother and baby Dale, Chicago 1939.

During this time, my parents and their son lived at 3715 N. Sheffield Avenue, which was just six blocks from the apartment house where my father was brought home from the hospital twenty years before. Their apartment was just off the corner where it crosses Waveland Avenue. Opposite that corner is Wrigley Field and its "friendly confines," then sporting its newly-erected scoreboard high above the centerfield bleachers. My father would catch the late innings of the Chicago Cubs baseball games after work, walking through the gates after the ticket-takers had left their posts.

On April 24, 1940, my mother gave birth to their second son, David Paul Parent, Jr. at Michael Reese Hospital in Chicago. Within a



David the milkman, Chesterton, c.1941.

year or so, my father got a job as a milkman back in Chesterton at the Thompson Dairy. The family moved from Chicago to an apartment above a grocery store in Porter, then to an apartment above the old dairy building on Calumet Road. Then, within a few months, they would move again, just down the street to what would be the first Parent family house.

Family home, 514 Calumet Road, Chesterton, 1941-1950.

The two-story white house at 514 Calumet Road in Chesterton would be home for the next ten years. Their only daughter, Diane Kay, was born on October 7, 1942, at Porter Memorial Hospital in Valparaiso, where the rest of my parents' three children would be born. But those children would not begin coming into the world for another four and a half years.

America was at war. With the bombing of Pearl Harbor, on December 7, 1941, and the declaration of war the next day against the Empire of Japan, the world had changed forever. As Franklin Delano Roosevelt said in his "Day of Infamy" speech, "The people of the United States have already formed their opinions and well understand the implications of the very life and safety of our nation." Then, three days later, on December 11, Germany and Italy both declared war upon the United States, and Congress responded in kind, declaring war on the Axis Powers.

My father, leaving a wife and three young children, joined the U.S. Army to defend the very life of his nation and his family. After training at Camp Croft in South Carolina, he was sent to the European theater. In addition to the anguish of leaving his family, he was also going to war against the country of his father's birth, and that of generations of ancestors before him. But it was his duty to his country and to his family to serve. His young bride would care for the children alone there in the house on Calumet Road while he was abroad.

It was the worst of times.

XXVI.

ALL' ESTERO

When Stefania and I discovered the Parenti family records in the *sacrestia* of the *chiesa* in Carraia, we learned for the first time that all four brothers were *all'estero* (abroad). A later entry by the parish priest, Father Alberto Borelli, revealed that Armando died *all'estero* in December of 1927, but there was no place or cause of death recorded. Dylan had found Leone's Petition for Naturalization (dated February of the same year), placing him in San Francisco along with his brother Evaristo, before becoming a U.S. citizen on June 3, 1929. We had no knowledge of Giorgio other than he, too, was "abroad."

It had been fifteen years since Leone's arrival into New York Harbor, passing Lady Liberty on April 9, 1914, and disembarking at Ellis Island. He could not read the inscription at the base of the statue (by the sculptor Auguste Bartholdi, a son of Italy) but he must have felt welcomed by the Lady in the Harbor. "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore, send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me: I lift my lamp beside the golden door."

From the "golden door" to the Golden State, Leone had crossed the continent and was an American citizen at last. On March 15, 1931, he married Eva Marie Catenacci and on November 19, 1933, Joyce Audrey Parenti, their only child, was born. The Parenti family was one of thousands of Italian-American families living in the central California coastal area during the time prior to World War II.

Italy's declaration of war against France on June 10, 1940, when Mussolini's army followed Hitler's troops into Paris, aroused anti-Italian sentiment in America and angered FDR to proclaim, "The

hand that held the dagger has struck it into the back of its neighbor." Suspicion of the loyalty of the more than five million residents of Italian ancestry living in the United States was also aroused. With the declaration of war against Italy on December 11, 1941, the light from Liberty's torch lamp grew dim for these Italian-Americans, leaving a very dark place in American history.

Knowledge of Japanese-Americans being subjected to eviction, evacuation and internment during the war years is commonplace. What is *not* common knowledge is the eviction, evacuation, internment and restrictions placed on Italian resident aliens living in the United States beginning in February of 1942, within weeks of the declaration of war.

It's something of a secret story, known as "*Una Storia Segreta,"* largely untold and unrecognized by the U.S. government until 1999 with the passage of House bill 2442, the Wartime Violation of Italian-American Civil Liberties Act.

Even though over one million Italian-Americans would serve the United States during World War II performing exemplary service, and thousands had sacrificed their lives in the war to defeat the Axis Powers, Italian resident aliens were classified as "enemy-aliens." *"From sea to shining sea"*—from New York City (which had the largest population of Italian-Americans) to the central California coast, where the Parenti brothers had made their new home.

These "enemy-aliens" were required to be fingerprinted, photographed, registered with the federal law authorities and carry a pink enemy alien passbook when they were outside their homes. They were ordered to stay close to home, to not go out after dark, and encouraged to not speak Italian in public. Whether they were Italian-American citizens or immigrant resident aliens; the indignity, fear, and dishonor brought upon their ancestry and families would cause many to Anglicize their names, stop speaking Italian, and discontinue Old World traditions in order to demonstrate how "American" they were. All of this would leave a lasting effect on their Italian culture in the New World.

On the West Coast, over ten thousand were evicted from their homes in coastal and military zones, and barred from entering over 80 areas. Tens of thousands of Italian resident aliens there were subjected to curfews which confined them to their homes between 8 p.m. and 6 a.m., and travel restrictions prohibited them from traveling more than fifty miles from home. Fishermen were prohibited from

going out to sea and many had their boats impounded. Giuseppe DiMaggio, the father of "Joltin' Joe the Yankee Clipper" was one of these fishermen whose boat was seized just as his son was enlisting in the U.S. Army. Hundreds of resident aliens were arrested, thousands more were interred in military camps. Hundreds of thousands of resident aliens and Italian-American citizens experienced various restrictions of their personal freedoms and the shame brought upon them, while tens of thousands of their sons were U.S. servicemen fighting against the Axis Powers.

They had escaped the poverty and oppression of Italy, crossed an ocean and a continent to "breathe free," but in 1942 they were branded as "enemy-aliens" in their new country. It would be a half century for the United States to officially recognize the injustices to those people of Italian descent in their new homeland during that time.

Mussolini become dictator in 1922 and in the beginning did good things for Italy; promoting public works and bringing ethnic pride to Italians, but so much of this was an illusion, what Luigi Barzini, in his classic account of Mussolini in *The Italians* described as "the limitations of showmanship." Behind the scenery of modernization, much of Italy was still living in primitive conditions and squalor. There was little will in its people for this war, little support of their country's alliance with Germany, and there was little might in his military. As Gay Talese in *Unto the Sons* wrote, "unfortunately for *Il Duce,* he could not turn Italians into Germans." By 1943, most of Mussolini's supporters had turned against the new "Caesar" and his dictatorship was near collapse. This gave rise to the secret reestablishment of opposing political parties and the rallying of partisan forces in the form of the Resistance. The King of Italy had him arrested on July 26th, and six weeks later, Italy surrendered to the Allies on September 8th. The Nazis seized Rome two days later on September 10th. Only because Hitler rescued him, was Mussolini able to establish a Fascist puppet-regime in northern Italy for a brief period. But on April 28, 1945, *Il Duce* was captured as he was seeking refuge in Switzerland. Partisans found him in the back of a German truck wearing a Nazi officer's coat and helmet as he was fleeing his native Italy. He was executed the next day and within hours, Hitler committed suicide in Berlin. The Third Reich had fallen. Germany surrendered and VE-Day was declared on May 8, 1945. Three months later, atomic bombs were dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima

bringing about the surrender of Japan and the declaration of VJ-Day on September 2, 1945.

The war was over; the troops came home. Private First Class David Parent, #35909445, had served from September 30, 1944 until his honorable discharge on January 16, 1946. He had been "abroad" (*all'estero*) in Austria, Germany, and France. He was coming home to his family, to his work, and to the American way of life.

PFC David Parent, U.S. Army, 1945.

XXVII.

COMING HOME

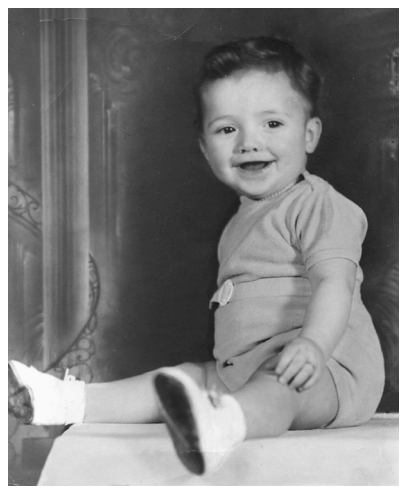
Elline had been raising their three young children alone during those long months of separation—months of emotional and financial hardship. She, like millions of women of her generation, was truly heroic in providing for the care and well-being of David's two sons, Dale and David Jr., and his daughter Diane. There are two favorite family photographs from that time. One was taken by the local newspaper which shows my mother chopping a huge stump with an axe because she thought it was too dangerous for children at play. The other captures her sitting in the family living room with the three kids beside the Christmas tree and cardboard fireplace, anxiously waiting for Santa to come sliding down the imaginary chimney, and for their father to come marching home.

Our axe-wielding Mother. Chesterton, c.1945.

Wartime Christmas. Mother, Diane, Dave, and Dale. Chesterton, 1944.

When he returned to his family in Chesterton, he resumed work at the dairy, becoming the manager, and he resumed fathering as well. It didn't take long.

I was born on the 28th of January in 1947, and was a much pampered baby, at least for eighteen months anyway, until my brother Darryl Craig came into the world. My very first memory was the trauma of being away from my mother during her time at the hospital for his birth—embedded recollections of the farmhouse where we went to stay with a relative, of crying on the front porch on a hot summer day, of being passed around by my



Portrait of the Author as a spoiled baby.

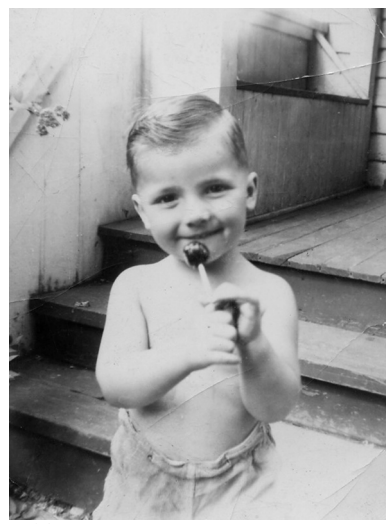
siblings, and not being very happy about it all.

Our house on Calumet Road, with its big backyard always full of neighborhood kids, was a home filled with so many wonderful memories. And probably the two most memorable days were

Diane learning to walk again. 1944

Coming home. 1946

homecomings—the day that father returned home from the war, and the day my sister Diane came home after successful treatment of spinal meningitis. These memories are preserved with a photo of Diane learning to walk again on the sidewalk in front of the house, and by a photo taken in the backyard showing a proud father reunited with his family shortly after his return. That house today looks pretty much the same as it did when I was standing on the front steps in 1949 licking a lollypop after my first haircut.



The Author's first haircut. 1949.

My father was ambitious, and there were all of those mouths to feed—five of them, actually, between the ages of 2 and 12. He was ready to have his own business.

When we moved from Chesterton to Hebron in October of 1950, my father purchased the Hebron Dairy and the house in front of the trucking operation at 127 North Main Street. It was the first frame building in Hebron, built in 1849 and served as an inn —The Stagecoach Inn—for road-weary travelers and sportsmen who came to hunt and fish the game-rich area known as the Kankakee, just south of town. It was also a way station for stagecoach travelers

Hebron City Limits. Mother and Darryl. 1952.

between Detroit and St. Louis. With the coming of the railroad in 1863, it continued that tradition. It was a two-story, white clapboard structure, with many rooms on the second story, which became our bedrooms. There was a huge pine tree in front of the house which each year was wrapped in Christmas lights. A photograph of my mother and brother Darryl at the city limits sign claims 700 residents in Hebron, but I seriously doubt that number. Our first telephone number was simply *8*, and the calls were patched through a switchboard by an operator in a house next to the volunteer fire station. It was a small Indiana town, surrounded by farms and was straight out of the movie *Hoosiers*. Substitute *Hebron* for the fictitious

town *Hickory* and you'll get an understanding of our lives there in the 1950's.

Hebron, in Boone Township, was opened for settlement in 1832 by a treaty between the U.S. government and the Pottawattomi Indians. I don't know the particulars of *that* settlement, but it was likely a "we're *taking* it, so you *leave* it" kind of arrangement. The first white settler was Judge Jesse Johnson, who arrived with his family in the spring of 1835. The Bethlehem Church of Associated Reform Presbyterian (now there's a church seeking a flock) changed their name from Bethlehem to Hebron sometime after 1838, so the town followed suit and became known by the same name. There must have been a good biblical explanation.

I remember my first day of school, our first television set, milk trucks in the backyard, Chicago Cubs baseball, and lots of Indiana high school basketball. It was the post-war era of endless possibilities and prosperity. It was the 50's—*Ozzie and Harriet*, TV westerns, *American Bandstand*, *The Mickey Mouse Club*, hoola-hoops, and Elvis Presley getting teenagers "all shook up." During summer vacation we played baseball or went fishing with our bamboo poles, barbed hooks, red and white bobber and a coffee can full of night crawlers, to the ponds outside of town. My father was also the town's ice cream man. Our garage had two freezers full of ice cream bars, popsicles, big tubs of several flavors of ice cream and we made thick chocolate milkshakes on the holidays. So we always had lots of kids around. On the hottest summer days, when we weren't playing baseball, mother would load up the Plymouth station wagon and drive us to the Indiana Dunes for "fun-in-the-sun" on the beach at Lake Michigan. In the winter, we ice-skated on the ponds, shoveled

Our 50's family.
Dave, Dean, Darryl, Diane and Dale.

mountains of snow, and celebrated Christmas in a big family way. The keys were in the cars on the street, and I don't think we had a key for the house doors, even when we went on family vacations. I don't remember many bad things happening in our little town.

Running a dairy-products delivery business in the Midwest in those days was hard work and fraught with difficulties. In the heat of summer, the challenge was to keep the milk cool, the ice from melting, and the compressors running. In the harsh winter months, the challenge was to keep the milk from freezing, to get the trucks started in the early morning hours, and to deliver the milk (like the mail), through ice and wind-driven snow. Today, milk is delivered in lightweight, leak-proof plasticized cartons and carried in lightweight plastic bins. In the 50's, milk was packaged in wax-coated paper cartons, which leaked, or was bottled in thick glass bottles with a paper sealing cap with a disk that identified the dairy and the bottle's contents. These were transported in heavy wooden crates with wire bottoms and dividers which made for messy and back-breaking work. Milk leaked, bottles shattered, compressors and trucks broke down.

Dean and Darryl in the dairy lot. 1951.

The Author as a young milkman. Hebron, 1951.

My father was tireless and worked twelve-hour days, six days a week. He kept the old trucks and equipment running and steadily added more routes, newer trucks, and enlarged his distribution area.

For recreation, he always had some kind of boat. In the early days, there were small wooden boats with outboard motors that were kept tied up under the bridge over the Kankakee River south of town. Over the years the boats became progressively larger and they were docked at various harbors on Lake Michigan.

Because my father worked so much and spent time with his family, I don't remember him having any friends or hobbies. His only personal time from work and the mayhem of all those kids was reading the newspaper, working crossword puzzles, and writing poems.

My father's business was very successful, and in the fall of 1954, we moved to a newer house over at 143 W. Sigler Street. By 1960, the three oldest children graduated from high school and left home for college at Purdue University, making room in the house for our baby brother Drew, who was born that summer on June 9th. This would be our family home until 1966, when our mother passed away, and we moved from Hebron.

Family home, 1954-66. 143 W. Sigler, Hebron.

The five older siblings all attended and graduated from the brick schoolhouse where grades 1 through 12 were taught. We knew the same kids, had many of the same teachers, and pretty much were taught the same classes, in which we received a good basic education in the 3 *r's*. Our history lessons, I later learned, were a bit suspect. Much of what was in those books can best be described as, *"It ain't necessarily so."* One teacher in particular, Mrs. Eldridge, was especially influential in my interest in learning. She was intelligent,

Our 60's family.
Darryl, baby Drew, Mother, and Dean. 1960.

respectful, and insistent, without being intimidating.

Sports were a big part of our family, school, and small-town lives. The Hebron Hawks played teams from neighboring small towns year after year in the tiniest and loudest of gyms. It's called "Hoosier Hysteria." The bus rides on the way back home from a Friday night basketball game were special, because you got to make-out in the back of the school bus. My brothers were basketball players, but I was better at kissing.

I loved running on the country roads and had success as a middle-distance runner. It was a more peaceful, mostly solitary athletic endeavor with much lower expectations and pressures in a basketball-crazed town. My moment of individual athletic glory was winning the half-mile run at a sixteen-team invitational meet, missing the breaking of a twenty-eight-year-old meet record by just one-tenth of a second, but setting a new school record. As I was being presented a "gold" medal with satin ribbon, I looked up into the stands where my mother was sitting. She was waving and smiling and was so proud of me. I bounded up the bleachers and gave it to her, and she gave me a big hug. A year later, almost to the day, I thought about that precious moment as I placed that medal in her hand and said good-bye just before her casket was closed.

Our mother's perpetual care and father's disciplinarian ways kept us all in line and properly socialized. They were good parents to us, leading by example, and were good citizens in the community, participating in many civic organizations—the P.T.A., Lion's Club, and the Boy Scouts. Looking back, I believe we grew up in a

wonderful time, in a secure, sheltered environment, and thought that life would always be that way. It was the best of times.

But other events at that time were not so idyllic. I remember the invasion of Hungary by the Soviet Union, and meeting a teenage refugee of that country who had escaped and somehow ended up in our small town. I remember crawling under our school desks as a drill to shelter us from bombs dropped on our Midwestern town; reading blueprints in *Popular Mechanics* for building a fallout shelter; Khrushchev telling us that "we will bury you" in Communism; and Blacks in the South refusing to give up their seats on the bus, challenging the supremacy of White culture. Like everyone old enough to remember, I know where I was when I learned of President Kennedy's assassination, and for me, my insulated and naïve world changed forever, and like so many others of my generation, a measure of innocence and youth was lost that day in '63.

I grew up in the *"Happy Days"* of *"Mayberry RFD"* but now the times of Bob Dylan (my son's namesake) were most certainly *"a-changin'."* It was the time of the Beatles and the 'Stones, of a changing social consciousness, and of experimentation and self-examination . . . and it wasn't all about peace and love. Our country's involvement in Vietnam was escalating and so were the protests. There was also a military draft, whether you believed in that war or not, and I felt as though I was being sucked into a political, moral, and military abyss which was *"Apocalypse Now."* Parental fiat was called into question, blind obedience was challenged by disobedience, and disinterest was supplanted by concern and a call to action. It was a time of questioning and one helluva time to grow up—and grow up fast. When I left our little town and went off to college, I stepped into that brave new world, and contrary to the adage, "If you can remember anything about the 60's you weren't really there," I do remember those times and I really was there. Those were years and experiences which defined my generation and the next phase of my life.

I've traveled extensively, lived in the big city, and experienced a fair amount of living in my years. But I believe, at heart, at my center, I'm a small-town guy with solid values instilled in me by my parents, and by my life with my brothers and sister in those three family homes during the best of times.

My mother's passing on May 5, 1966 marked a day of passage for me. It was the beginning of my adult life.

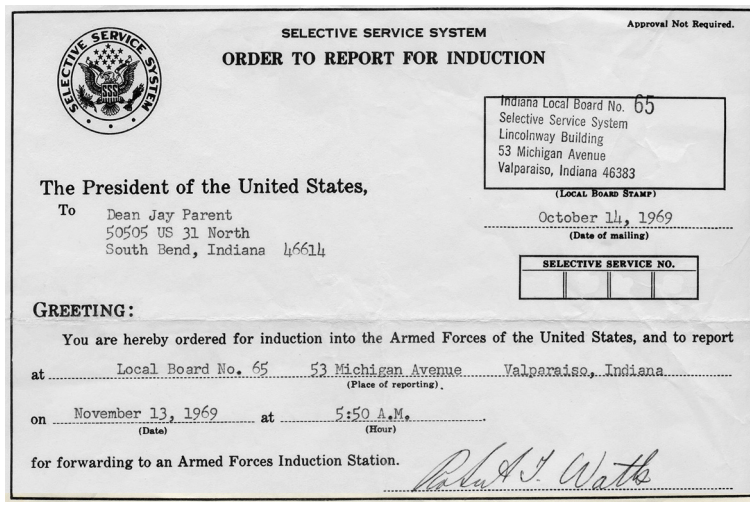
My first calling . . .

The news of damage in the city is grave. The beautiful churches have suffered terribly, with losses of incomparable masterpieces of frescoes, paintings, and sculpture. The foundations of the Duomo are weakened and the pavement is buckling, Giotto's campanile is in danger. The Ponte Vecchio may still collapse . . . Piazza Santa Croce is devastated . . . The church cannot be entered, but there are soldiers inside pushing at the mud with shovels and wooden scrapers The oil lines on the walls and doors of the church show all too plainly what must have gone on inside. This is one of the finest and largest of the churches of Florence, dating from 1294, and . . . along the walls of the aisles within the church are ranged the handsome marble tombs of the most famous of the sons of Florence; Michelangelo, Galileo, Machiavelli . . .

Kathrine Kressmann Taylor,
A Diary of Florence in Flood

Piazza Santa Croce, Florence
November 1966

. . . and my other calling.



SELECTIVE SERVICE SYSTEM

Approval Not Required.

ORDER TO REPORT FOR INDUCTION

Indiana Local Board No. 65
Selective Service System
Lincolnway Building
53 Michigan Avenue
Valparaiso, Indiana 46383
(LOCAL BOARD STAMP)

The President of the United States,

To Dean Jay Parent
50505 US 31 North
South Bend, Indiana 46614

October 14, 1969
(Date of mailing)

SELECTIVE SERVICE NO.

GREETING:

You are hereby ordered for induction into the Armed Forces of the United States, and to report at Local Board No. 65 53 Michigan Avenue Valparaiso, Indiana (Place of reporting), on November 13, 1969 (Date) at 5:50 A.M. (Hour) for forwarding to an Armed Forces Induction Station.

Richard J. Wathe

Greeting: You are hereby ordered for induction into the Armed Forces . . . a very personal calling from Mr. Nixon.

XXVIII.

THE WAR AT HOME

It was at this time that my relationship with my father became especially difficult. After my mother's death, we now had to deal with each other directly, man-to-man, face-to-face. My political and social views were unacceptable to this proud veteran and father who was trying his best to assume the role of parenting a son who was artistic, bearded, and opposed to the war. I was of the generation that he did not understand and he could only see me as a hippie, though I was a good student and always worked to pay my own way. A catastrophic event which occurred in Florence, Italy on November 4, 1966, would precipitate a tragic confrontation with my father which would affect our relationship for the rest of our time together.

The flooding of the Arno River and the resulting devastation to the historic architecture and artworks was also devastating to this young student majoring in art history, with a particular interest in the art of the Renaissance. My art professor at Indiana University, the eminent Harold Zisla, made me aware that there was a contingent of concerned U.S. students (who came to be known as "The Mud Angels") that was responding to the catastrophe. It was a calling for me to go to Firenze to work on the recovery of its lost treasures, to do something meaningful, and to learn while I was doing some good.

But there was another calling. I faced the prospect of being classified 1-A, which meant, "available immediately for military service." I could be drafted into a war which I did not believe to be in our country's best interest, and serving this cause was morally abhorrent to me. I was faced with four options:

One, I could be inducted and serve against my will and beliefs. Two, I could appeal my classification through the various legal, medical, and religious processes afforded by the draft board. Three, I could refuse to report for duty upon receiving the notice letter (which opened with the salutation, "Greeting") and be picked up by a couple of soldiers a few days later and go directly to jail. And finally, I could leave the U.S. and make a new life in another country with no assurance that I could ever return a free man.

I was a nineteen-year-old small-town boy who was just beginning to experience and explore a world beyond my childhood. I didn't know what to do.

On a cold November evening, the war hit home. The generation gap was at arm's length. To my father there was but one honorable choice, no other options were acceptable or would be discussed. I was to serve my country, just as he had in World War II. This is what he was ordering me to do. When he learned of my interest in going to Italy to work in the relief and restoration effort he exploded in anger. With great rage and clenched fists, he was within inches and moments of pummeling his son.

I was caught off guard and defiantly blurted out,

"Don't you hit me!"

He backed away, but delivered the knockout blow,

"If you go, you will never be welcomed back into this family!"

It was more than I could process. I had lost my mother just six months before, my father wanted to beat the crap out of me, and now I was threatened that I would lose my entire family forever if I went to Italy. All that I had to do was be a good soldier, do some killing (or be killed) in Southeast Asia for a cause that I didn't believe in, and everything would be just fine between my father and me.

I chose to stay and stand by my commitment. Over the course of the next several years, the war continued to escalate, and the country (and the relationship with my father) became further divided under Nixon with the "silent majority" at war with "those hippie protestors." Meanwhile, I exercised every appeal opportunity while continuing to attend college full-time and work two part-time jobs. Several days a week I arose at 4 a.m., loaded the milk truck, and did my rounds of deliveries. Later, on those mornings, I unloaded the truck and hurried off to my afternoon and evening classes. Some evenings I worked alone in a beer store until closing and did my classwork when things were slow. They were long days, but I had to

maintain my class load to prevent being drafted, to further the appeal process, and to delay the day when difficult decisions may have to be made. I also had to work.

In 1968, I married Barbara Prentiss in South Bend, Indiana and we soon had a family to care for with the birth of Dylan and then, eighteen months later, the birth of Joslyn Elline. I was drafted just three weeks after her birth, but was able to get the induction date postponed, my case file re-opened for review, and, much later, a re-classification. We moved to Michigan, and later to Ohio, where I worked as an industrial designer to support my family. I was taken under the wing of Neill S. Brown Jr., who employed me at American Motors, and later at the Chrysler Corporation. As the war became more unpopular and the build-up of troops peaked, the draft board became more lenient toward married men with dependents, and probably in my case, those who had expressed moral conscientious objection to the war. On January 28, 1973—the very date of my 26th birthday—the U.S. abolished the draft. Ironically, that was the last day I was eligible for involuntary conscription. Six months later we moved west to California, saying good-bye to Indiana and our Midwestern home and history. Personally it was time for a change, and the country and the war were *"a-changin'"*—Watergate, Nixon's resignation, the fall of Saigon.

I respect those who served, either because of their own beliefs or for other reasons. I respect those who gave their lives and those who are still living with the physical and emotional scars of that conflict. I believed I was doing the right thing then, and I believe it today. I regret that it caused such a rift in our country, one that has never mended, and I regret that it caused such a rift with my father that never mended.

I respected my father and I was proud that he served in World War II. But I could not honor or obey his directives for living my life. Regrettably, over the last nineteen years of his life, I don't believe that I loved him as a son would hope to love his father. But I have come to better understand him and I know that he was trying his best, by the only means he knew. I have also come to know that his son, like him in so many ways, was wrong to not be more understanding and more forgiving. Two months after our fateful confrontation, my father extended an olive branch, a poem which he wrote for me on my twentieth birthday. The last two stanzas read,

And tho Mom has gone to find her peace, eternal rest,
Your father hopes and prays that he
May now be closer and aid in your quest
To find a sheltered port on life's stormy sea.

Just allow old Dad a chance to fill the need,
Allow him patience and time a-plenty,
Then the days we face will be brighter, indeed
In the coming year, while you are twenty.

Much love, Dad

Days before he died in the Veterans' Hospital, his body racked with cancer and with morphine coursing his veins, my father expressed his sorrow to me that he allowed his beliefs to alienate him from his son and confessed that "his President" had lied to him. He was truly sorry and so was I.

As I write this, I realize that this conversation at his deathbed, was only the second occasion in our life together that I can remember being alone with my father and having a personal discussion. The only other was the night nineteen years before when we drove home together from the hospital where my mother died. The one thing I remember him saying during that thirty-minute drive still haunts me.

"I don't know what you think of me, but I did love your mother very much," he said as he drove around the last curve in the road just a few miles from home. I didn't understand it that night, and I don't understand it today, forty years later.

As for my father, as it was for his son, the death of my mother changed his life forever. I believe that his thirty years with her were the best years of his life. Eight months following her death, he married a fine woman named Ann Raptis and adopted her son Doug, but the relationship was difficult and ended in divorce after ten years. He began to struggle with his identity and confidence; made bad decisions in financial matters and in his relationships with women. It was sad to see this once-proud and ambitious man become financially broke and broken in spirit.

He had made it on his own without a father, without a brother or an uncle as a lighthouse. He died having lost his compass, who I believe was my mother, the girl he fell in love with back home in Indiana.

XXIX.

SISTER JOYCE AND THE LOST FAMILY

With my son's discovery of Leone's death certificate, it was also revealed that my father had a half-sister, one he never knew. Dylan had contacted her and shared Thanksgiving dinner with her while Priscilla and I were still in Tuscany.

Shortly after our return to California, I made telephone contact with Joyce Parenti Marble, and after a series of calls and e-mails we began to learn about each other. Joyce Audrey was born on November 19, 1933 to Leo and Eva Catenacci Parenti. In naming my father, Leone followed the Italian tradition of naming his son for his father: David after the Michelangelo sculpture, and Paul for Paolino. He did not follow the custom of naming his daughter after the mother he never knew.

Leon, Joyce, and Eva Parenti.
California, c.1939.

Joyce shared many photographs of her childhood and many of her parents and of her aunt and uncles. It was incredible. Faces for many of the names of the people we found in the church and civil records in Capannori. Finally, I was looking at photographs of these ancestors. Though no longer among the living, they had come to life.

Our family had but one photograph of our grandfather, taken in 1919 when he was twenty-two. Now we were looking at him twenty years later, with his wife and young daughter in a park on a family outing, wearing their Sunday best. There were several photographs of him in a backyard in the early '60s proudly posing with his grand-children, and there were many pictures of family gatherings. I wondered what my father would have thought of these photographs. There were snapshots of him with his brothers Giorgio and Evaristo, who lived nearby in California, and there were pictures from 1966 when his sister Zelmira visited him in Chicago. She had come to the U.S. along with her daughter Tecla and her two grandsons, Fosco and Pier Luigi, who stayed in the United States after Zelmira returned to Lucca. There were other people in the pictures that Joyce could not identify, but hopefully in time, I would learn who these people were and where the photos were taken. But, for now, what we had was so meaningful. Even more than the images of Leone, I was probably more interested and intrigued by those of a man standing alone in two photographs. Joyce did not know the man, but I knew him well. One of the images shows a strong, determined, yet lonely man standing in a courtyard. The other shows the same man, but much older, standing near the roadway in front of the *chiesa* in Carraia

Jesse, Dickie, Jean, and Jackie Marble with grandfather Leon Parenti. California, c.1963.

with the *cimitero* in the background. I had stood on that place just weeks before and knew it, and I knew the man. It was Paolino, the family patriarch.

Prior to the end of the nineteenth century, most families in the United States would not have had a visual record of what their ancestors looked like. In poverty-stricken Italy, it was fortunate to have two images like those of Paolino, which were taken between 1920 and 1940. They were probably taken by Zelmira or by her well-to-do husband, who had remained in Carraia and had the resources to own a camera. The men are simply dressed, reflecting their country backgrounds, and they all look very Italian. The women are only seen in traditional housedresses and they, too, look very Italian. These are my ancestors.

All of the photos are faded black and white prints—with one exception. Just one photograph of Leone was in color. In some of the black and white photos I could see resemblances to my father in his facial characteristics, and in others, how he stood or sat, and even how he looked in a hat. But in this photo, I saw the man who I had studied in that photo taken almost sixty years earlier. The man with the fixed, penetrating eyes who held some secrets . . . who knew some things he did not share.

Pietro Paolino Parenti.
Carraia, Italy, c.1930.

Leon John Parenti.
California, c.1980.

It was my son's determination, and a chance naming of a granddaughter, that brought Joyce and our family together. Dylan found her phone number and left her a message explaining that he was the great-grandson of her father, and that we were interested in meeting her. When he did not receive a return call, I reminded him of my experience in Italy of not connecting with my father's cousin Remo and his daughter Silvia. Not only could Joyce be suspicious of our good intentions, but, as we were to learn, she had no idea that she had a half-brother from her father's first marriage. It would be over two weeks before Joyce was able to return Dylan's initial call. The delay in responding became clear and understandable when Dylan learned that Joyce had recently lost her husband, Richard Marble, after fifty years of marriage, and she was just beginning to get on with her new life.

Joyce Parenti and Richard Marble. California, c. 1955.

Joyce was curious, although still understandably apprehensive of these strangers claiming to be long-lost family. She did have knowledge of her father's first marriage, since 1959, we would learn. The circumstances leading to this revelation were accidental, or maybe pre-destined. Joyce was pregnant with her third child in the autumn of that year. Hoping for a boy after having two daughters, Joyce wanted to name the boy Jesse, after Jesse James, a favorite Western outlaw/hero of her husband Richard and, even if the newborn had turned out to be a girl, she liked the name Jesse, as it was in keeping with her two daughters' names, Jeanne and Jacqueline. When her mother Eva learned of this, she exploded in anger, and told her daughter that she could not give her granddaughter the name Jesse. Joyce was told for the first time that

her father had a first marriage, to a woman named Jessie . . . but she was *not* told about him having a son.

When Dylan explained to Joyce that my father's parents were Leone Parenti and Jessie Jones, it was the link, the proof, that we were indeed family. From that moment, we were connected, and that led to their celebration of Thanksgiving together.

Leone had two children; a daughter whose name begins with the letter *J* and a son whose name began with the letter *D*. The naming of the Marble and Parent children is ironic. Joyce named her three daughters with names beginning with the letter *J*, as does her name. David, my father (her half-brother she never knew) named his five sons beginning with the letter *D*, as did his name. Coincidentally, my daughter is also a *J* and my son is also a *D*.

Joyce settled on the name Jessica for her third daughter, to ease the tension between her and her mother, but she was always known as "Jesse." Apparently, her father was not willing to share the whole story.

But Joyce did share stories, and those wondrous photographs, with us. They were the perfect complement to the documents, photographs, and stories which Dylan, Priscilla, and I had discovered and experienced during our ancestral research and journey over those six months. It was time for us to share all of these with the entire Parenti family, the one we knew and the one we were just getting to know.

Dylan put together a marvelous PowerPoint presentation of the photos, ship manifest, vital documents from Carraia and Capannori, maps of the Lucca area, photos of the ancestral home, the *chiesa*, the *cimiteri* of Lucca and of Carraia, and of the gravesites. He also charted on a four- by six-foot poster, the Parenti Family Tree dating from the time of Columbus to the most recent birth in our family. It was incredible. Hundreds of Parentis.

We arranged a date to make our presentation to the family, and then, nervously, made one more call—to Joyce. Would she fly to San Diego to be with us, and be introduced to her new family? Without hesitation, her answer was yes. How courageous! Was she being thrown into the Leone (Lion's) Den? What would be the reaction of our family to her, and vice versa? The members of my entire family, each and every one of them, are good, generous, and loving people, but this is an entirely new life experience. She is the

tangible existence of a life which would not have been if her father had not abandoned my father so long ago.

I decided not to tell the family of her arrival, and let the drama play out. Dylan and I picked her up at the airport and took her to her hotel. Over lunch, I was able to have some time with her and get to know more about her. I studied her carefully, but saw no resemblance to my father. The day, the hour, and the family members arrived for the presentation. Once everyone was seated, Joyce was brought into the room and introduced. After a few moments of stunned silence, everyone in the family came up to her and graciously introduced themselves and welcomed her into the family. It was a remarkable moment in our family history.

The presentation was a success! Each person present saw their name and place on that family tree and learned about their ancestors and their homeland—right down to the very farmhouse in Tuscany. It was everything I had hoped for.

Joyce described her father as her best friend. It was difficult for her to understand his actions as a young man, but she believed that he was a good man and a very loving father. A week after the presentation, Priscilla and I visited Joyce at her home up the California coast, and we had the opportunity to meet her daughter Jesse, who was very receptive to us. As the story unfolded, it was difficult for her also to accept and understand her grandfather's actions, but we hugged and said our good-byes as new-found cousins.

I believe that Leone became a good and loving father and grandfather who made a decision as a very young immigrant which followed him all of his days. With each passing year, it became more difficult to reveal his past with those he loved. The redeeming aspects of his past actions are Joyce, her four children, ten grandchildren, and many great-grandchildren.

As Leone was more Joyce's father than my grandfather, it was difficult to understand the rules of engagement, what questions were fair game, which perhaps too personal to ask at this time. I knew only a little of his early history, she knew the man for fifty years, but he did not share his early history with his daughter. On rare occasions he would say something about his past—like how much he hated Chicago and the Midwest because the weather reminded him of Carraia—but nothing of his life there. She remembered that her father wanted to take her to Carraia, but she was not interested in leaving

home. Paolino never came to America to see his sons and there is no record that Leone ever returned home to see his father.

During the 1930's and 40's, Leone drove a "jitney," a vehicle which taxied tourists in San Francisco along specific routes. One of his cars was a Duesenberg limousine which was once owned by Max Baer, the former heavyweight champion boxer. Built by the Cord Company back home in Indiana, Duesenbergs were touted as "the finest thing on four wheels" and no two were alike. They were built for the likes of Gary Cooper, Mae West, William Randolph Hearst, Clark Gable, and the King of Italy. One of the Max Baer's "Doozies" was sold at auction in Auburn, Indiana for $888,400 on September 10, 2001, the day before 9/11. I don't know if that was Leone's "jitney" or not.

For me, it was interesting to learn that from 1950 until his retirement, he was involved with gardening, a passion of mine. Maybe he reminisced about his days on the farm in Carraia so long ago.

Along with the photographs and a few memories of her father, Joyce was able to provide information regarding two of Leone's brothers. Giorgio had become Uncle George, and Evaristo had become Uncle Everest, but she knew nothing of Armando who died six years before she was born.

Later, Dylan's research uncovered more. Aurelio Giorgio died November 30, 1979 as Joseph George Parenti. He was married to Pia Bandoni who followed him in death in 1983. They had five sons: Armando (who died as a baby), a second Armando, Paolo Luigi (Gino), Tito (Paul Leo), and Steve. We knew nothing more about them, their families or their whereabouts.

Leone's brother Evaristo Angelo died May 31, 1987. His wife preceded him in death in 1983. They had a daughter, Diane, who was born in June of 1926. Dylan contacted Diane on two occasions, but she was not at all receptive to our interest in our mutual family history. At least not now.

As with Remo in Italy, there would be no sharing of stories with their new-found family in America. Maybe Remo's sister Tecla, who we learned was living in Florida, would be forthcoming with her recollections, or perhaps from her two sons. Someone who lived in Carraia, who knew Paolino, his family, and about life at *Corte Pardino* must certainly want to share stories with us. Nowhere in the world is the family more important than in Italy.

But then, as we were learning, the generation who left their homeland and family in Italy, no longer honored or embraced that tradition—or at least as it applied to their new-found American family.

THE PARENTI FAMILY TREES

Gio. Leone Quinto Parenti

2/20/1897 – 6/17/1981

m.9/1/1919
sp. Jessie Marie Jones
2/14/1901-8/17/1979

|

David Paul Parenti
12/9/1919 - 5/30/1985
sp. Elline Grace Wiseman
10/19/1919- 5/5/1966

|

I. Dale Lee Parent
7/28/1938
II. David Paul Parent
4/24/1940
III. Diane Kay Parent
10/7/1942
IV. Dino Parenti
1/28/1947
V. Darryl Craig Parenti
7/27/1948
VI. Drew Scott Parenti
6/9/1960

m.3/15/1931
sp. Eva Maria Catenacci
2/24/1905- 7/30/1976

|

Joyce Audrey Parenti
11/19/1933
sp. Richard Carter Marble
12/14/ 1932 - 6/20/2004

|

I. Jeanne Marie Marble
5/6/1956
II. Jacqueline Ann Marble
7/25/1957
III. Jessica Lynn Marble
9/12/1959
IV. Richard Cory Marble
12/28/1960

THE PARENTI FAMILY TREES

Pietro Paolino Parenti

3/23/1863 – 1/30/1941

m.10/5/1889

sp. Clementina Genovina Michelotti

4/28/1867 – 5/17/1897

I. Aurelio Giorgio Parenti

4/22/1890 – 11/30/1979

sp. Pia Bondoni

Armando Parenti
1922–1923

Armando Parenti
1/8/1925–1/24/1980

Paolo Luigi (Gino) Parenti
1925 –

Paul Leo (Tito) Parenti
6/24/1929 - 6/2/1994

Steve Parenti
5/4/1930 -

II. Lisandro Armando Parenti

3/11/1892 - 12 / /1927

III. Isola Zelmira Parenti

12/19/1893 – 9/14/1967

sp. Pietro Paolo Sebastiano Michelotti
6/30/1894 - 6/17/1958

Giuseppina Tecla Michelotti
3/18/1923- 10/28/2006

Eugenio Remo Giovanni Michelotti
6/16/1927-

IV. Evaristo Angelo Parenti

8/31/1895 – 5/31/1987

sp. Angelina DaVeggio
5/19/1904 - 3/13/1983

Diane Parenti
6/3/1926 -

V. Gio. Leone Quinto Parenti

2/20/1897 – 6/17/1981

sp. Jessie Marie Jones
2/14/1901-8/17/1979

David Paul Parenti

sp. Eva Maria Catenacci
2/24/1905-7/30/1976

Joyce Audrey Parenti

m.10/14/1899

sp. Erminia Sabina Bucchianieri

4/1/1862 – 10/1/1950

I. Giuseppe Paolino Parenti

3/17/1900 – 8/22/1907

II. Angela Nicolina Parenti

11/8/1903 – 1/03/1904

III. Angelina Adarcisa Parenti*

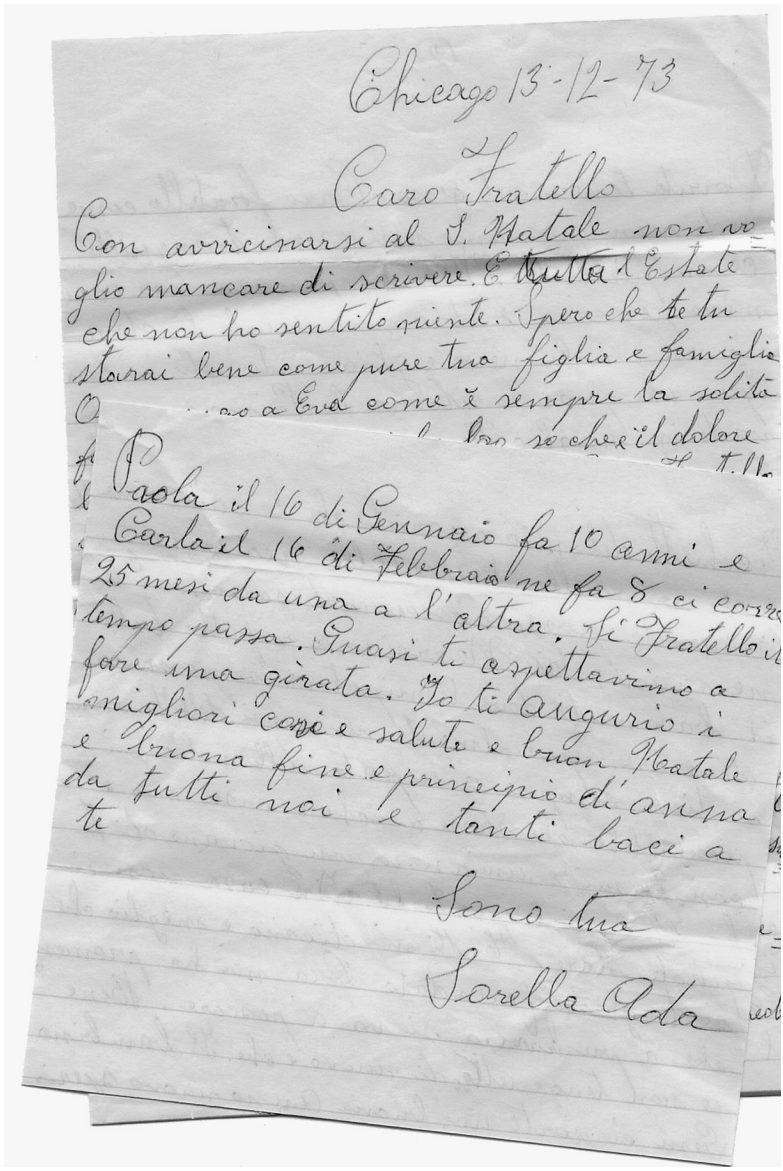
3/30/1906 – 3/17/1996

sp. Narciso Francesco Parenti
7/18/1898 – 11/11/1992

Gemma Maria Parenti
3/13/1930 -

sp. Fabio Fabbri
7/20/1929 -

* also known as Ada, Adalgisa and Darcisa



Chicago 13-12-73

Caro Fratello

Con avvicinarsi al S. Natale non vo-
glio mancare di scrivere. E tutta l'Estate
che non ho sentito niente. Spero che te tu
starai bene come pure tua figlia e famiglia
...o a Eva come è sempre la solita
... lo so che il dolore

Paola il 16 di Gennaio fa 10 anni e
Carla il 16 di Febbraio ne fa 8 ci corre
25 mesi da una a l'altra. Fi Fratello il
tempo passa. Quasi ti aspettavimo a
fare una girata. Io ti auguro i
migliori cose e salute e buon Natale
e buona fine e principio di anno
da tutti noi e tanti baci a
te

Sono tua
Sorella Ada

Caro Fratello,….Sorella Ada.. Letter from Ada to Leon, Chicago, December 13, 1973. Her letter opens with consoling him about the health of his wife, Eva, and closes with a discussion of her granddaughters Paula and Carla, and best wishes for the holidays.

XXX.

A GEM

From Joyce we learned of a remarkable coincidence. Her father and mother, in the mid-1960's, actually lived in Santa Barbara, California, a few blocks from my son's then-current residence on State Street. Their home was a Spanish-style bungalow at 15 W. Junipero for several years. Eva suffered a debilitating stroke there, which required Leone's constant care of her. In the early '70s, they moved to Milpitas to be near their daughter, where they remained until their deaths.

In addition to the photographs, Joyce shared a letter from a relative, which was sent to her father in 1973 at Christmas-time. As it was written in Italian, Joyce did not know its contents, but it was among the few personal effects that Leone left upon his death on June 17, 1981. It opened with *Caro Fratello* (Dear Brother) and closed with *Sorella Ada* (Sister Ada).

Dylan and I were puzzled. Leone had only one sister, Zelmira, who had died years before in Lucca. This letter came from Chicago. As we were walking down State Street in Santa Barbara on Christmas Day to a movie matinee, it hit me!

I remembered that Paolino and his second wife Erminia Sabina had a daughter (their only child who survived childhood), whose name was Adalgisa . . . Ada. I had seen her name as the final entry in the family *foglio* in Capannori with her marriage to her third-cousin Narciso Parenti in 1929. We also had discovered her birth and marriage acts recorded in the church books in Carraia, but we knew nothing more. Except a recollection of the day when Fedora pointed across the field to Corte Pardino and told us of her cousin Adalgisa

who left for America along with her daughter. As Fedora was telling her story, a neighbor lady repeatedly interjected the name, "Gemma, Gemma, Gemma."

We did not understand then, but with an introduction from Aunt Joyce, we were about to discover a real Gem.

Gemma Maria Parenti was born in Carraia at Corte Pardino in her parents' home literally next door to Paolino Parenti. Her father, Narciso Francesco Parenti was a distant cousin who married the not-so-distant "girl next door" Maria Angelina Adalgisa Parenti, the daughter of Paolino and Erminia Sabina Parenti. Gemma was born on March 13, 1930, and was my father's half-cousin that, regrettably, he never knew.

Corte Pardino, Carraia, Italy, c. 1929. Adalgisa is sitting at right in front of Narciso's house, next to his aunt Domenica. Standing behind them are a former boyfriend of Ada's, named Guido, Narciso's sister Agnese, and his mother, Clementina who was the widow of Eugenio Parenti. Paolino is in the background in front of his house.

Sometime after Leone's arrival in 1914, the Parenti brothers sent money to *cugino* (cousin) Narciso for passage, so that he could join his cousins in Nebraska for work on the railroads. For many years they were inseparable, always together, traveling wherever there was work on the rails. In Omaha, Lincoln, Havelock, and Ashland. And around Chicago, the hub of it all, where for a time they worked in Kankakee, Illinois, just down river from my boyhood home in Indiana.

When the brothers moved west, Narciso stayed in the Midwest and in 1929 returned home to Carraia. He married Ada and fathered his daughter Gemma. Narciso wished to return to America with his new family, but Ada was hesitant to join him until he was established in their new country, so he returned alone. It was over six years before they were reunited and Gemma met her father for the first time, at the train station in Glenwood, Iowa.

Cugini. Leone Parenti and Narciso Parenti. Recent immigrants in America. c.1915.

Gemma graciously and eloquently provided me with her recollections of her grandparents, parents, and her life at Corte Pardino. In her own words:

"The only thing I remember about my *nonna* (grandmother), Erminia Sabina, is that she was a loving grandmother who wore a long black dress. I would hide behind her skirt when I was in trouble with my mother Adalgisa. My *nonno* (grandfather) Paolino, to the best of my recollection, was a strong-willed, fair, industrious individual. He was respected in the town of Carraia. We lived next door to him and he was my father-image, as my father was in the U.S. awaiting my mother, who was hesitant to leave her family to come to America. He spoiled me, and I loved him very much. He left a standing order with the ice cream lady to give me a cone of *gelato* daily when she made her rounds. It still pains me to think of when my mother and I left Corte Pardino to come to the U.S. It was early in the morning when we were picked up in this fancy little horse and buggy (taxi, Italian style). I looked toward the house and saw my grandfather Paolino, sadly looking out the window. Having lost all of his children to the U.S., except Zelmira, and now his other daughter and beloved grandchild were also leaving him. In those days it was really good-bye because you never knew if you would see each other again. Then World War II broke out and we were never reunited.

"Life in Corte Pardino, as I remember it, was very tranquil. It was a meeting place for neighbors, family-time in the evenings and my playground. It was securely enclosed with a fence and gate. We would sit out there in the summer evenings and catch fireflies. We would put them in a bottle and in the morning they were gone, and in their place there would be pennies! The *corte* was also used as the "weekly clothes dryer," as well as drying the wheat and corn after the harvest. The laundry was done on a weekly basis in a small river called Rogio. I can remember my mom going down to the Rogio with all the laundry. All the ladies of the community would get together and do the laundry on the same day and socialize while working. And believe me, it was hard work! Then everything was brought home and put on lines in the *corte* to dry. In the *corte* there was an oven where all the bread was baked. Several loaves were baked at a time to last a few weeks; also *focaccia* with raisins, or with oil and cheese.

"My mother, Adalgisa, was a very hard worker. She pruned the grapes as well as harvested them. Paolino had an acreage near the Rogio which she looked after in addition to what they had at the two houses. In the fall they had the harvesting of the grapes. They were placed in a large vat in the stall where they were crushed with large mallets, and sometimes my mother and I would wash our feet and do some grape "stomping." Adalgisa was a hard worker. I remember asking her, "Mamma, why do you do all this hard work, other mothers don't do it?" She explained that there was no man to do the work, and *nonno* Paolino was too old to do it himself, and she had to help him. We had a waterwheel used for irrigating the land on which we planted corn and wheat. This waterwheel had no motor, as there was no electricity, so it was run by human energy—my mother's and mine. It was play for me, but work

Sabina, Ada, Paolino, and Zelmira. Carraia, Italy, c. 1916.

for her. Again, some of the neighbors would chip in. Then came the harvesting of the wheat and corn. The wheat was laid on the *corte* pavement to dry and turned occasionally. The same was done with the corn. After the corn was dried, it was husked. That meant "party time." Several of the neighbors would come and help and a great time was had by all. Then our family would reciprocate. It was an evening spent working and telling tall-tales, singing and much camaraderie.

"In my life at Corte Pardino, our "deluxe" bathroom was the outhouse located about fifty feet or so from the house. At night the "chamber pot" was used and the next morning emptied into the outhouse. The deposit of the human waste was used to fertilize our small farms. A long handled container which held about 3 or 4 gallons called a *bigongino* was lowered into the pit of the outhouse to hoist out the waste and dump into a larger container called a *bigongio*. When that was full, my mother would put it across her shoulders and take it to the fields where it would be distributed. This was repeated several times until all the crops had been fertilized.

Tecla and brother Remo with their mother Zelmira, Baby Gemma with her mother, Ada Parenti Parenti. Carraia, Italy, c.1932.

"Life was hard and simple, not so complicated as we have it nowadays. Family life was very important in preserving family ties."

—Gemma Parenti Fabbri

Gemma recalled sailing into New York Harbor on September 20, 1937 on the S.S. Roma, seeing Lady Liberty in the mist from the deck of the ship, and taking a train to Iowa to meet her father for the

very first time. The family stayed in Malvern, Iowa for many years, operating a popular coffee shop until Gemma graduated from high school. Ada and Narciso (who came to be known as Nick) moved to Chicago at that time, and Gemma moved to Lincoln, Nebraska where she graduated as a radiological technologist from St. Elizabeth Hospital. After working for the government for a year, she decided to join her parents in Chicago, where she worked at St. Anne's Hospital and also for doctors in private practice for several years. She met Fabio Fabbri at an Italian Social Club. They married and have lived happily ever after, raising two beautiful daughters, Paula and Carla.

Narciso, who Gemma describes as having been "a very patient man," died in 1992 at the ripe old age of 94. Ada, who was one of the hardest-working women I have ever heard of, passed away in 1996 just thirteen days before her 90th birthday. Gemma remembers them as wonderful, loving parents.

Gemma and Fabio also shared their recollections about the Parenti boys. Gemma believed that Armando died of osteomyelitis (a bone infection) following an accident. Evaristo was a stable, good brother. Giorgio, they weren't so certain about. The brothers all stuck together, though they were very different from each other. Fabio's personal knowledge of Leone was that he was a good man. Gemma loved her Uncle Leon very much, and knew him as "an interesting and interested man," but adds, "he died with a question mark," alluding to the unspoken, the secret, the *"why?"* that I've been seeking.

"Off to California!" Gemma, Ada, Leon, and Nick Parenti.
Riverview, Chicago, c. 1953.

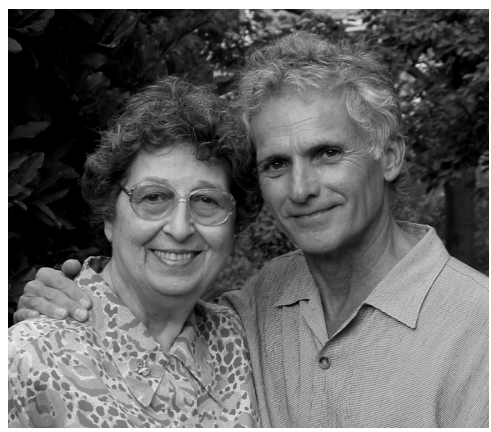
Through Gemma's words, Paolino and Corte Pardino came to life. She and Fabio provided interesting perspectives on Leone and his brothers, along with the wonderful story of her parents' long life

together. She has been very supportive of my pursuit and a most valuable contributor to our family story. She has contacted Remo and Tecla, my father's cousins, and her sons with the hope that they would provide their stories. She has also spoken with my father's cousin Diane to encourage her participation, but none of them have been receptive to us. The door is locked and they aren't letting us in. Not yet anyway. Gemma and I vow to get a foot, or two, in that door.

I would revisit Gemma's ancestral home at Corte Pardino and drive to Fabio's village near Montecatini on our return to Tuscany in a couple of months. And I made a commitment to come to Chicago to meet them and their family on my trip home from Italy before I returned to the West Coast in the summer, to at long last get to know them.

Funny, but I feel like I've known them my entire life . . . like family.

Thank you, Gemma. *Mille grazie.*



Cugini. Gemma and Me. Chicago 2005.

CAPPUCCINO BISCOTTI DI GEMMA
(GEMMA'S CAPPUCCINO BISCOTTI)

Gemma Parenti Fabbri was born at Corte Pardino and spent the first years of her life there with her mother Ada, her grandmother Sabina, and her grandfather Paolino. She and her mother came to America at age six to join her father, Narciso Parenti, who she saw for the first time. She has shared so many stories and photos of our family history, and here she shares a delicious, traditional treat that she makes when visiting friends and family stop by during the holidays.

Buon appetito!

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F

1 cup sugar
½ tsp. baking soda **2 cups flour**
½ tsp. baking powder **1 tsp. vanilla**
½ cup semi-sweet chocolate chips **½ tsp. salt**
½ tsp. ground cloves **1 tsp. cinnamon**
2 Tbsp. unsweetened cocoa powder **1 large egg yolk**
¾ cup coarsely chopped hazelnuts, walnuts or pecans
¼ cup plus 1 Tbsp. espresso or strong brewed coffee, cooled
2 Tbsp. milk

Blend together flour, sugar, baking soda, baking powder, salt, cinnamon, cloves and cocoa powder in a large bowl. Combine the dry ingredients well, using an electric mixer.

In a small bowl, mix coffee, milk, egg, and vanilla.

Add into a bowl of dry ingredients and beat until a dough is formed. Stir in nuts and chocolate chips. The dough will be very stiff.

Place dough onto a floured board, kneed several times with floured hands, and divide the dough into two equal portions. Form each portion into a flatted loaf, approximately 12 inches long and 2 inches wide.

Place the shaped dough onto a greased cookie sheet 3 inches apart.

Bake for 35 minutes.

Remove from oven and allow to cool for 10 minutes.

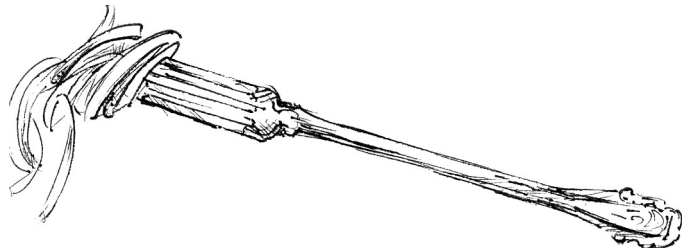
Reduce oven temperature to 300 degrees F.

Slice loaves cross-wise diagonally into ¾ inch slices. Place the slices flat on the cookie sheet.

Bake 6 minutes per side.

Cool on wire rack.

Recipe and illustrations by Priscilla Parenti.



SUGO DI POMODORO DI ADALGISA
(ADA'S SPAGHETTI SAUCE)

Adalgisa Parenti, Gemma's mother, was born at Corte Pardino, and married "the boy next door," Narciso Parenti, a distant cousin. She lived in the farmhouse in Carraia for over thirty years. She grew her own vegetables and spices, prepared tomato paste from homegrown tomatoes, and made pasta from grain dried on the *corte*. When she came to America in the 1930's, she brought her secret family recipe along and served it in their restaurant in Malvern, Iowa. Without a garden to duplicate the homegrown ingredients, Gemma believes this comes very close to the taste and spirit of Ada's sauce.

2 tsp. salt
1 lb. ground beef
3-6 oz. cans tomato paste
1 chopped brown or yellow onion
1 Tbsp. each of chopped fresh sage, basil, and oregano
1-7oz. can chopped mushrooms drained with broth reserved

In a medium-large bowl, mix tomato paste with 6 cans of water, blend together, and set aside.

In a large heavy-bottom pot, lightly sauté the onions. Add ground beef, breaking into small pieces. Sauté until meat begins to brown and then add spices and mushrooms. Continue cooking, stirring occasionally, until all liquid is absorbed. Add tomato mixture and mushroom broth.

Simmer gently 45 minutes uncovered, stirring occasionally, and adjust spices to taste as needed.

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Recipe and illustration by Priscilla Parenti

XXXI.

CONSOLATO

In the beginning of this journey, I was interested in being granted dual citizenship, but maybe for reasons which were different than those which were now evolving. I now had found my grandfather, my great-grandparents, their home, village, and church. I now knew something about them and about their lives in Italy, and I understood the reasons why they left their homeland and renounced their Italian citizenship. Now, I felt rooted, I felt connected, and I didn't want to lose our family's ancestral tie to Italy. Just as I felt as a teenage boy back in Indiana, I wanted to be formally recognized as being part-Italian. Like my father and my grandfather, I was a Tuscan son.

The process of gathering the documents for recognition of dual citizenship for my children and me was slow, frustrating, and confusing. Interpretation of the Italian Consulate requirements from their websites can be challenging. The rules change, by directive from Rome, and over time those changes may or may not be posted on the various websites of their offices around the U.S. The sites, rules, and interpretations by their offices vary, and making contact by telephone or getting a call returned from a message left may take weeks. Or it may not happen, or be clearly understood if it does. The consulates are under-staffed, under-funded, and most definitely overwhelmed.

Dylan and I had put together the file of the seventy (that's *70*!) documents we believed to be required. Those are in the form of certified originals and *apostilled* documents as they relate to the births, marriages, deaths, petitions for naturalization, name changes, etc., from the four states, the U.S. Government and the Comune di

Capannori where the various events occurred. Each of them, with the exception of Leone's birth certificate (which is in Italian), also requires translation. It is a month before my departure and I was anxious to submit the documents to the Consulate.

So I called to schedule an appointment, or to receive instructions for submittal. No answer, no returned call. Three days passed and I made another call. No answer, no returned call. Three more days passed and I made my third call. Finally, a returned call. The very pleasant lady who handles citizenship issues informed me that there were no appointment openings until March, possibly one in February. As it is now March, I don't understand . . . until she added, *"2006."* That's twelve long months from this call! And that's just to submit the 70 documents! After that we'll learn if all the documents are in order and wonder what the requirements and interpretations might be a year from now!

I'm devastated. For me, and also for Dylan who has worked so diligently, it's definitely a downer. We were aware of the possibility of bureaucratic entanglements and delays along the way, but we were not prepared for such a setback before the process even began. In desperation, I inquired about submitting the documents in Italy, as I would be there in a few weeks. But I soon realized that I would be in over my head and fearful that if I surrendered them over there, I may never see all of these documents ever again. The officer who handles citizenship issues apologizes, but there is nothing she can do. And I know that there is nothing I can do. Cajoling and consoling the *Consolato* officer (and me), I tell her that I'll talk to Mr. Berlusconi when I'm in Rome and get her some help.

So we'll wait. Leone waited two and a half years after applying for his U.S. citizenship. Maybe for our Italian citizenship we'll have to do the same. We just want to get the applications moving, from California across the continent and across the ocean to Italy where it all began.

XXXII.

ON THE ROAD

The time between our return to California in the fall and the return to Tuscany in the spring was filled with many wondrous things. Visiting our families, cats, friends, and meeting our new family could have filled our four months, but we're the "*Vagabondi."* We need to move around and see things. Besides, we're homeless and must keep moving, so that we don't wear out our welcome, so to speak.

After two months of visiting in Cuyahoga Falls, San Diego, and Santa Barbara, we were ready for a road trip. Priscilla and I decided on a month-long journey up the Pacific Coast from San Diego to Washington State and to the mouth of the Columbia River, where Lewis and Clark and their Corps of Discovery reached the end of their epic journey exactly two hundred years before us, in 1805.

We also were exploring new territory. We both had been living in Southern California for half of our respective lives and we were seeking a change of scene. San Diego was no longer the place which beckoned me, back in 1973. It had become too big and too congested—too many people and cars. The open roads had become clogged freeways. The demographics and the culture of the city had changed. Its city government was broke, broken, corrupt, and downright embarrassing. Its priorities were on building baseball parks and subsidizing a football team which was holding it hostage. Meanwhile, its infrastructure of roads, water and sewer lines was eroding, schools and libraries were not being built, teachers weren't being hired, and the pension fund for the city's employees was bust from mismanagement. It was a mess—and a shame.

Once again the "*Vagabondi"* needed a place to call home, this time in America, for their return in the summer. Priscilla was ready. She was yearning for her cats and desperately wanted her clothes, purses, and shoes back in her life, and she was looking forward to her own kitchen, art studio, and our own bed and pillows. But we weren't leaving for Italy for another couple of months, and we wouldn't be returning for another three and a half months beyond that! She, like the explorers of the Corps of Discovery, had left family and belongings behind, traveled with a small bag of essentials for many months, slept in countless places and heroically faced each day, its challenges and experiences. We're talking twenty-first century, not nineteenth, but nonetheless she was making tremendous sacrifices and being a good camper.

Priscilla's best friend, and maid of honor, Lisa, had purchased a loft in Portland, Oregon while we were in Tuscany, and encouraged us to check it out. Neither of us, nor Lisa before that autumn, had been in Portland before. I did have some recollections of Oregon from vacations as a youth. My mother's parents, Ben and Etta, moved to Oregon around 1942 along with their four sons. In 1949, our family made its first trip across the country from Indiana to the Pacific Northwest, where we visited them in Klamath Falls. We traveled in the family's Studebaker; my parents, my two older brothers, my sister, and their stinky baby brother (me). All six of us (in that classic of Raymond Loewy automotive design) made the trip along the northern route over the Great Plains and the Rocky Mountains. Another trip, years later, we traveled the southern route, Route 66, in our big Chrysler pulling a travel trailer. Route 66 headed south from Chicago to St. Louis and Joplin, Missouri, then, just as the song says, Oklahoma City, Amarillo and Gallup, New Mexico. Then, Flagstaff,

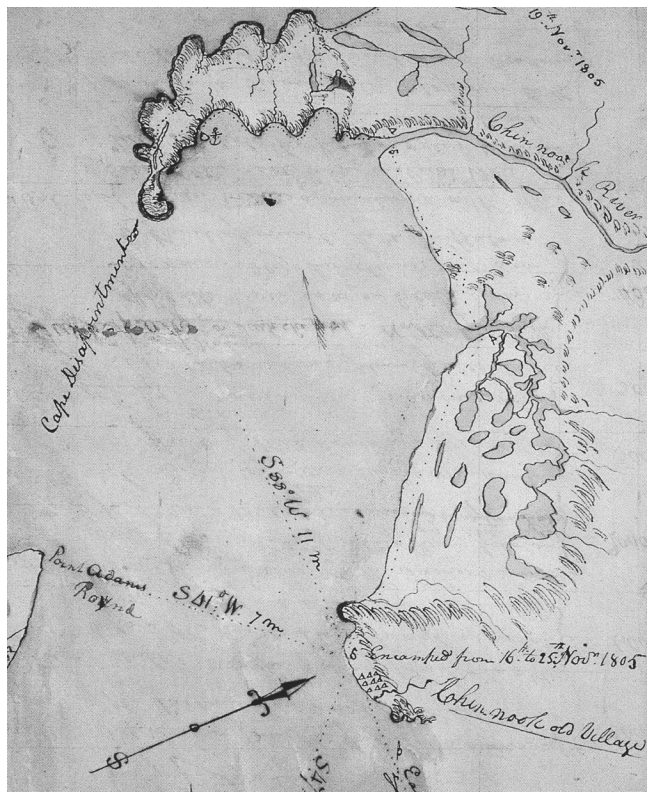
Stinky Author with Mother, Dave, Dale, Diane and Studebaker. Lakeview, Oregon, 1949.

Arizona *("don't forget Winona")*, Kingman, Barstow, and San Bernardino, before an exciting adventure to Disneyland south of Los Angeles. U.S. Route 66 was the first entirely-paved transcontinental highway, from the southern shore of Lake Michigan to Southern California. We then traveled north to San Francisco, over the Golden Gate Bridge and on to grandmother's house we went. Those family vacations of a few weeks, which we took every few years, are special memories of my childhood.

Priscilla and I traveled up U.S. Route 101 (known as "El Camino Real") along the trail of the missions from San Diego to Sonoma. Miles and miles of urban Southern California "sprawl and crawl" yielded to miles and miles of fertile farmland before our passage through San Francisco. As we crossed over the Golden Gate and headed for the coast road, California Route 1, we began to slow down. Not just the car, which we slowed to take in the magnificent vistas and to negotiate the winding road as it snakes up the rocky coastline, but we slowed down as we felt more relaxed and carefree. We paused at Bodega Bay for a couple of gorgeous days, visiting the old schoolhouse from Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds.* And we made a day trip to Sonoma for lunch in the wine country. Coincidently, Sonoma is the sister city of Greve in Chianti, the *comune* in the Provincia di Firenze, where our farmhouse, "Casa Parenti," is awaiting our return in the *frazione* of Strada in Chianti. The sights, sounds, and smells of the surf, the spectacular pastures and woodlands, the tall trees, the spring flowers, and the abundance of wildlife—it was stupendous. The record winter rains made the landscape scream every shade of green. The threat of more rain kept travelers off the coast road that month of February, but miraculously, for these travelers, the rains never came. We drove for miles and miles, on what seemed like a private drive, without sight of another car, SUV, or monster motorhome. It was dreamlike. It reminded me of the entry in the journal of Meriwether Lewis, "As we passed on, it seemed as if those Seens (his spelling) of visionary inchantment (his spelling) would never have an end." Like magic, we had the road and all of the beauty around us, all to ourselves. Quaint (that's what they call them) fishing villages, lighthouses and outcroppings of rock around every bend were punctuated by primeval forests of giant redwoods and woodlands heavy with moss and tangles of dead and fallen trunks and limbs. We experienced Northern California at its most magnificent—the other California.

We resisted the temptation to drive our car through a tunneled-out giant redwood and I fought off the desire to carry my bride across the threshold of a hollowed-out redwood log-house. Admittedly, we paused to ponder the meaning of the colossal roadside attraction, Paul Bunyan and his faithful companion, Babe the Blue Ox. Only in America.

The Oregon coastline is maybe more magnificent, if that's fathomable. We drifted up its rocky, wooded and panoramic shoreline with stops and stays in Brookings, Cannon Beach, Bandon, and Florence. That's Florence, Oregon, where we sent picture postcards to our friends in the *other* Florence. In Brookings, a t-shirt was sighted which proclaimed, "Brookings, a quaint little drinking village, with a big fishing problem." I liked that one.



Land's end. Wm. Clark's map of Cape Disappointment and the mouth of the Columbia River. November 1805. American Philosophical Society.

We crossed over the big bridge at Astoria to the site in present-day Washington where the Corps of Discovery camped along the Columbia. From there, the captains led parties of men to explore

"Capt. P. Clark" at the reconstruction of Fort Clatsop. Oregon spring 2005. Destroyed by fire, fall 2005.

the Pacific Coast and Cape Disappointment, where we explored the Lewis and Clark Interpretative Center. Before crossing the river, Wm. Clark carved an inscription on a tall pine;

Wm. Clark December 3d 1805
By land from the U. States
In 1804 & 5

In the afternoon, we returned to Oregon to tramp about Fort Clatsop, the recreated campsite where the Corps wintered two centuries before our arrival in the Northwest.

The next day, we were in the Willamette Valley, where Howard Hughes' Spruce Goose had migrated north from Southern California some years before. We had recently seen *The Aviator*, a film about those two strange birds, and we wanted to gaze upon the wood winged-wonder—a gander at the gander. Afterward, it was lunch in the Oregon wine country, before traveling up to Portland. So much wine, so little time.

We had read and heard that Portland was "our kind of town." Priscilla, without ever setting her sights on the place, was pre-disposed to making it our next nest. I'm a "show-me" sort. The natural beauty in and around the town is spectacular. The architecture, restoration and preservation of the downtown buildings on the tree-lined streets is remarkable. The parks, gardens and arboretums are magnificent. It's a walker-, runner-, and rider-friendly place with lots of booksellers,

shops, bars, restaurants, galleries, parks, and, of course, coffee on every corner. It's people-friendly, and what we found were friendly people.

After owning, maintaining, and babysitting large homes and gardens, we wanted a change of lifestyle. We wanted the freedom to live and to leave. We wanted to not be held hostage by mortgages and plants to feed, and never-ending household chores and repairs. We wanted to travel, to paint, to write, to stroll, to take it "nice and easy." The town was big enough for Priscilla and small enough for me. The opportunity to walk or take the extensive light-rail system to almost anything we'd want or need, would allow us to be car-free if we really wanted to be carefree.

We decided to make our nest here. We focused our search in the Pearl District, fifty or so blocks which was once a warehouse area of Portland. It has been transformed into lofts and penthouses for easy urban living. Now we had to make it happen, and very quickly, as we had places to go and things to do. But how?

From the heavens over Portland came Judi, Our Lady of Realty. As an agent here she knew what was going on, she just needed to get to know us and to understand our very particular needs. With the patience of a saint, she found us a penthouse perch with a view of the town, the trees, and the hills. By phone, fax, and e-mail, we made offers and counter-offers from hotel lobbies and luncheon-counters along our return route to Southern California. The deal got done. We were no longer homeless. We made a dear friend in Judi, our first friend, our Welcome Wagon, in Portland. I affectionately added a new credential to her business card, L.H.M.A. (Like Having Mother Around).

We had to get back for a few reasons; to prepare for the upcoming trip to Tuscany, to wrap up our affairs, and now, just for fun, we had to move everything out of storage in San Diego and send it 1,100 miles up the road to set up our new house in our new town. That was crazy enough, but just to ensure that there would be no dull moments over the next six weeks, we were looking forward to a very special and long anticipated day the Saturday before our departure to Rome.

My daughter, Joslyn Elline, was getting married in Santa Barbara.

XXXIII.

FATHERHOOD

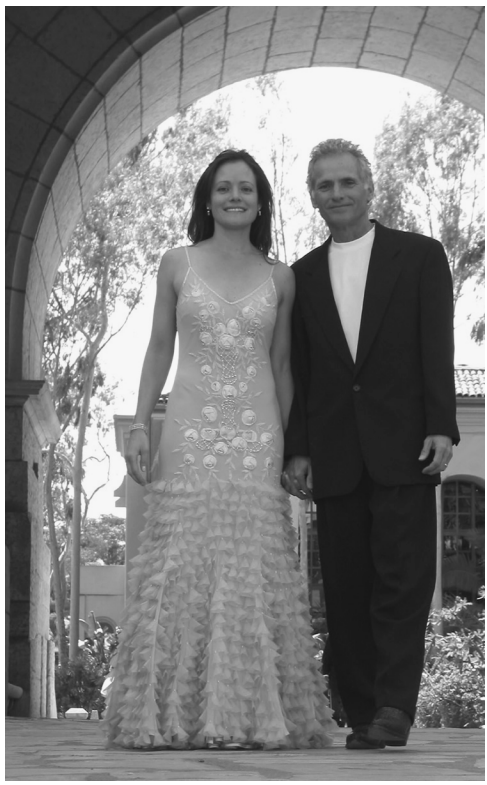
Over the past eight months, I had learned about my father's father Leone, about his father Paolino, and the names and lifelines of all the fathers of our ancestral Parenti males for nearly five hundred years. And through these discoveries, I had come to understand my father David more in this time, than in the thirty-eight years that I knew him.

The experience of sharing the discovery of our family history with my son Dylan has been especially meaningful to me. He has been a good son, and his contribution to making our past become present, the unknown become known, is something for which our entire family should be proud and grateful. His father certainly is.

The marriage of my daughter, Joslyn, daddy's little girl, would be a big day, a day that I had dreamed about for a very long time. Cameron Gray made a six-hour round-trip drive from Santa Barbara to San Diego one sunny summer day, to ask for my daughter's hand in marriage. I knew that she loved him and wanted to share her life with him. I respected him for the respect that he showed me, and I told him that I could not be more pleased. I accepted his request and gave him my blessing. Later, when he and Joslyn were adopting my cat-daughter Solavino, as we were leaving for our Italian travels, he hugged me and assured me, by telling a tearful papa, "Don't worry, I'll take care of your girls." It meant everything to me.

The ceremony in the beautiful gardens of the Santa Barbara County Courthouse was my dream come true. The sun was shining, the birds were singing, and Joslyn was resplendent in the gorgeous dress that her proud father found for this magical day. I walked her

through the massive Spanish arch and down the steps to the garden and the awaiting families and friends. And later, at the reception, I had the honor to lead the toast to the new bride and groom. It was an incredible day. I was the happiest father on the face of the Earth, and it was a day of passage in her life and in mine.



Father and Daughter.
Santa Barbara, California. April 9, 2005.

On the Parenti Family Tree, that four-by six-foot poster Dylan has compiled, almost five hundred years of fathers, mothers, and their children are posted with the dates of their time on that same Earth; connected by lines to the generation before them and to that which followed them. Lines that are mere lineal connections and dates that are cold, hard reminders of high infant mortality, of loved ones who died young, and of those who lived long lives. The joy of the birth of a son or daughter, or the pain of the loss of them is not reflected here. Neither is the elation of their marriage or the hopes and dreams of a new generation. That chart only marks time, nothing more. As Priscilla's grandmother "Gum" preached, "Be an ancestor, not just a name between two dates" and "just knowing a relative's name and date is not enough, you must learn all you can about them."

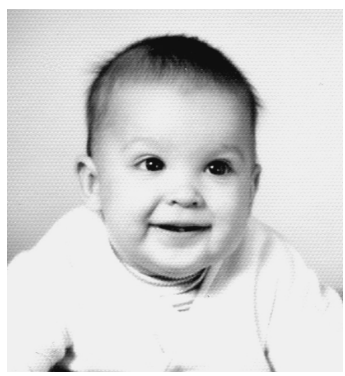
The Parenti fathers of past generations in Carraia, if they were so fortunate, witnessed their children being born in the farmhouse, baptized in Pieve San Paolo, and married in the parish church of SS. Donato e Biagio. That was not a given, but a gift in their lives. Our

lives in the second half of the twentieth century, and now in the beginning of the twenty-first century in America, have almost nothing in common with our ancestors in Italy, other than this basic familial relationship of parent and child. Economic, scientific, technological, and political developments have given us lives filled with so much more promise and opportunity than those *contadini* of Carraia could have ever imagined. We live longer and healthier lives, we don't work so hard, and we have not known poverty and the kind of hardships that defined their everyday existence. We have not experienced invasions, famines and plagues; and we have had endless opportunities for education and freedom unknown to our ancestors. We have been blessed.

Like father, like son. Just as my father did his best with what his life experiences taught him about being a father, I believe that I have tried to do the same. I have some regrets and I've certainly made some mistakes along the way. No one is taught how to be a father . . . you just learn as you go and do your best. Hopefully, through the years together, we have made each other better people and have grown to understand that each day together is a gift—that each day we never take our lives, our family relationships, and our short-lived time together for granted.

For me, in my time on that family tree, learning all that I can about our family history and sharing what I learn is one of the most meaningful things I can do during the rest of my life. I believe that to be my responsibility to my children and to all of my ancestors.

My life has been blessed with two loving, healthy, happy, caring, and intelligent children; and they have made me a proud, loving father.



Baby Dylan. Indiana 1968.

Baby Joslyn. Indiana 1969.

Return to Me

Return to me
Oh my dear I'm so lonely
Hurry back, hurry back
Oh my love, hurry back, I am yours.

Return to me
For my heart wants you only
Hurry home, hurry home
Won't you please hurry home to my heart.

Return to me
Please come back, *bella mia*
Hurry back, hurry home to my arms,
To my lips, and my heart.

Retorna me
Cara mia ti amo
Solo tu, solo tu, solo tu, solo tu
Mio cuore.

Danny DiMinno / Carmen Lombardo
Recorded by Dean Martin, 1958.

Wildflowers surround the old grapevines planted between olive trees which were severely damaged by the freeze of 1985. Poggio alla Sala.

XXXIV.

*"RETORNA ME" **

** IT'S BAD ITALIAN, BUT ONE GREAT LYRIC*

"Return to me. Hurry back, hurry back, I am yours." Dean Martin (Dino Crocetti) sang it so beautifully. It was spring, time to return to Tuscany. We had experienced *autunno* (autumn), the *vendemmia* (the harvest of the grapes) in September, and the picking of the olives in November. Now it was *primavera* (spring); fields of mustard, Marguerite daisies, poppies, lavender, enormous arbors of wisteria, spectacular roses, and hillsides green from the spring rains. The pruned vines are sprouting bright, tender leaves and buds, the olive trees have been cut back, and the smoke of the burning cuttings fills the air. The bugs and tourists are just beginning to swarm, and the days are growing longer and warmer as the fabled Tuscan sun, *il solleone* (the lion sun), is about to roar.

Just days before our arrival in Rome, there were the services for Pope John Paul II. Millions and millions of Catholics, the largest gathering of humankind in history, came to St. Peter's to pay homage. But now they were gone. Tomorrow the Cardinals would sequester to elect a new Pope and then send up the white smoke.

As we drove from Rome to our farmhouse in Chianti, Priscilla and I realized that we shared the same feeling. It was if we had not been away. The four and a half months we had been away in America were filled with so many experiences; family reunions, travel, filing taxes, buying a home, moving, Italian bureaucracy, my daughter's marriage, and more. But somehow it all seemed to be a blink of the eyes—Italy was ours.

Coming up the road to Poggio alla Sala and opening the door of "Casa Parenti" was like coming home. The Cianfanellis had prepared the farmhouse for our arrival, and Stefania had brought over a bottle of her favorite olive oil and a loaf of Tuscan bread, along with coffee, milk, jam and pastry for breakfast the following morning. We unpacked, opened a bottle of Chianti, and went for a walk around the farm. Roberto had planted 9,000 new vines; Sangiovese for Chianti,Cabernet Savignon, and Merlot. The olive trees were all trimmed and the soil beneath them was covered with a pointillistic canvas of spring flowers. We strolled out to the chicken coop to meet our fine-feathered, egg-making friends—the two pure white *Livornesi* chickens that the Cianfanellis brought onto the farm to join their four brown *Mugellesi* chickens. We were home!

Coming up the road to Poggio alla Sala.

"The Girls."
Dumb and Dumber.

Over the next few days we slept late, shopped for food and household goods, and stopped by the Bellavista for *cappuccini* and conversations with the Becucci family. We delivered some extra-delicious, pure-vanilla extract to our cooking friend Stefania and picked up her extra-delicious recipe for her *marquesa al ciocolato*. And we slept some more . . . gradually settling into our Tuscan nest, nine time-zones from our Pacific Northwest home.

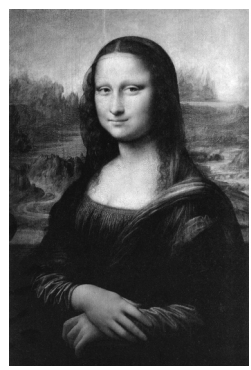
We were having guests at "Casa Parenti." First, Priscilla's parents were coming to visit and experience *Bella Toscana*. They had been caring for our cats, Sophie and Sweet Pea, over the past nine

months, and arranged for a cat-sitter to care for our fat, furry friends while they came to visit. They were our guests at Poggio alla Sala, arriving a day before Priscilla's birthday. We shared with them the discoveries of the previous autumn and the beauty of spring here. Because of their visit, today we share so many memories; of mother and daughter going to the markets and cooking in the farmhouse kitchen together, of the four of us sipping Chianti on the patio at sunset, and taking day trips to the wondrous places in Tuscany.

The honeymooners, Joslyn and Cameron, were next to call. After a couple of days in Portofino and a day at the races at the Gran Prix in Monte Carlo, they traveled south and we met them in Carraia. I shared with Joslyn the *chiesa, cimitero,* and *casa* of her ancestors, and then we drove together into Lucca for a walk upon the wall and through its streets, before bringing them to "Casa Parenti." We took them into Florence and into the hills of Chianti, introduced them to our friends, and shared wedding and cat pictures.

We thoroughly enjoyed their chaperoned honeymoon.

Priscilla's best friend Lisa visited our Tuscan home as the fresh days of spring turned into the crispy days of summer. After rigorous mornings and early afternoons at the *mercato* and the shops of Lucca and Firenze—desperately seeking the latest Italian styles of shoes and handbags—I'd find the girls lounging at poolside, lapping up the cooling waters and the house wine. Lisa wasn't the first Lisa around these parts. One lazy afternoon we traveled a few kilometers south past Greve in Chianti on the Chiantigiana to a wine tasting at the Villa Vignamaggio, the villa of the Gherardini family, whose daughter Lisa was the subject of the world's most famous painting, the *Mona Lisa* just 500 years ago. No one is certain how much time (if any) Leonardo spent here, but I hope he got a taste of the fruits of her father's vines. Another afternoon found us in the intoxicating and romantic village of Volpaia, where *our* Lisa, who had left her boyfriend behind in California, was overcome by the sensuousness of this place and was longing for her lover.*



*Take note: This is no place to be alone. If you come to the hills of Tuscany, and you are old enough to drink, don't forget to bring your companion.

MARCHESA AL CIOCCOLATO DI STEFANIA
(STEFANIA'S CHOCOLATE CAKE)

When invited for *cena* (dinner) at the home of Stefania and her husband Marco, we were told to "prepare our tummies." This is because we were guaranteed to enjoy a wonderful, lengthy, delicious and beautiful feast.

Stefania comes from Modena in the Emilia Romagna province of Italy and takes great pride in the typical foods from that region. Marco is from Florence, where they now live, and the conversation is always lively and quite entertaining when these two good cooks start to discuss the "correct way" of preparing a dish. This is the case in all of Italy where the dishes from one's own particular region are *superiore*, meaning "the best."

This rich and delicious chocolate cake inspired by a friend of Stefania's, Giuliana Fabris from Milan, had us begging for more. We think it's "*superiore!*"

Pre-heat oven to 350 degrees F

8 oz. bittersweet chocolate
2 sticks butter, room temperature
4 eggs, separated
¾ cup sugar
¾ cup flour
¼ cup plus 2 Tbs. milk

Melt the chocolate in a double boiler over simmering water, stirring occasionally. Allow to cool and remain lukewarm.

Separate the egg yolks from the whites, placing the yolks in a large bowl and the whites in a medium bowl for whipping. Gently

whisk the yolks, adding sugar gradually and mixing until soft and creamy. Whisk in milk. Stir in flour, gradually mixing until smooth.

In a separate bowl, whip butter until soft and fluffy. Add the lukewarm chocolate and mix together. Pour the chocolate mixture into the bowl with batter and combine.

Whip the egg whites just until soft peaks form. Fold and stir into batter just until blended and uniform in color.

Pour batter into a greased and lightly floured bundt pan, using a mixture of 1/3 part flour and 2/3 part cocoa powder sifted together. Cover the pan tightly with aluminum foil making a few small holes to allow steam to escape. Place the cake pan into another larger pan filled with water (a water bath or *bagnomaria*), and place onto middle rack of oven.

Bake 1 hour or until the cake pulls away from sides of the pan and the center is set but still slightly soft.

Cool the cake in the pan for 10 minutes, then carefully invert on a wire rack to cool completely. The center of the cake should be soft and creamy. Cake will be approximately 3 inches high.

Stefania often serves the cake with an orange sauce as a nice contrast to the chocolate cake.

½ cup orange marmalade **juice of 1 orange**
½ cup apricot jam **¼ cup Cointreau**

Melt all of the ingredients in a small saucepan. Strain and allow to cool. Serve with the cake.

Recipe and illustrations by Priscilla Parenti.

We returned to Italy to get to know more about the people, partake of *la dolce vita* (the sweet life), and learn about the history of this incredible place. Sharing all of this with our friends here and with our visiting family and friends made the experience especially memorable. We also returned to dig deeper into the history of the Parenti family of Carraia, hoping to uncover ancestors which predated those of 1500.

We were on to our next adventure.

XXXV.

NOT IN THE TOUR BOOKS

Researching my Italian ancestry—discovering the village, church, home, cemetery, and learning about the lives of those who preceded me—has been an incredibly rich and wondrous experience. From my American-born, -bred, and -fed perspective there are some things over here which are most definitely different. Some of the differences are very delicious, some are disagreeable (even disgusting), and some are downright dangerous and death-defying. Mostly, the whole Italian experience—its art, architecture, history, people, and traditions—is more than can be comprehended in six months, six years or six *lifetimes*. For anyone coming to Tuscany to do family research and to learn about their ancestors, as I was so fortunate to do, I would like to share my top travel tips and advisories, along with some of my very personal (though not to be taken too seriously) perspectives on Italian life, *la bella vita* (the beautiful life).

My "before you go, you ought to know" rumblings and ramblings:

Buon Appetito!

If you're going to be doing research for an extended period here, you must have your own kitchen. Eating out every meal would result in you leaving Italy the size of a *casa colonica*. The food is *sooooo* good! It's also fried and cooked with "lotsa butter and yummy oil." Each lunch and dinner can become *The Last Supper*. First, an *antipasto* (appetizer); then the *primi* (first) course of soup, pasta, or risotto; followed by the *secondo* (second) course of meat or fish, and maybe a

contorno (side dish) of veggies, probably *fagioli* (beans). Then comes the *dolce* (dessert) and an *espresso* for the road. All of this, along with *pane toscano* (Tuscan bread), luscious olive oil, delectable cheeses, and a liter of Chianti to wash it down, gets you ready for the next meal, provided it's not *your* last supper. We like our food clean and light, and without our own kitchen, I'd miss out on Priscilla's wonderful cooking, along with the daily experience of hunting and gathering our daily fix of meats, cheeses, pastas, bread, oil, fungi, fruits, veggies, and of course, wine. We're convinced it's all somehow better, tastier, fresher, and more soulful. It's probably more natural and most definitely it puts you, the consumer, closer to the food chain. Especially at the butcher, where you play "get to know your pig parts." Ears, snouts, hooves, tails, and all the innards in between. It got us thinking about becoming vegetarians for a moment . . . but not after a taste, or two.

An incredible place to experience all of this in one gastronomic extravaganza is the Mercato Centrale, whose vendors have been feeding Florentines for generations. In most towns and villages in Tuscany, the best shopping is an outing to the *macelleria* (butcher), *panetteria* (baker), *fruttivendolo* (greengrocer), *salumieria* (pig parts and deli), *enoteca* (wine cellar and seller), *latteria* (the cheese people) and other family-owned shops, some for many generations. Also, there are small grocery stores, the *alimentari*, and, in the larger towns, a *supermercato* to accomplish all of this more efficiently, though not so deliciously, and you'll miss some of the flavor and flavors of Italian life.

In the small towns, there is the *mercato,* the weekly outdoor-shopping experience which fills the *piazza* with vendors and villagers who get an opportunity to socialize, gossip, and show off their new babies. The men gather together to talk while the women move around the market going from stall to stall. For the uninitiated, this definitely requires patience and it can get a little aggressive in those stalls. Priscilla's mother picked up the perfect bunch of *fava* beans, only to have one of the local women pull it from her hands, as if to say, "Those beans are mine."

Don't expect to find any convenience stores or drive-thru franchises during your ancestral tour. Thankfully, they're not here. The fast food is at the coffee bars, where the locals pound down the *espresso* and *panini* (sandwiches), and at the *gelateria,* where you get a lick at the most memorable ice cream experience of your life!

When You Gotta Go……

Curiously, the Italians use a French word for the toilet facilities in all commercial establishments and public institutions. A visit to every *toilette* is a new experience. Where to find one, how to turn-on the lights, flush the bowl, or how to deliver water to the sink, are daily challenges. Upon entering, there are foot-pedals, pull-cords, levers and buttons to figure out, and always the hope that maybe there might also be toilet paper, paper towels, soap, a fixture for sitting upon (complete with a seat), and a dry floor below. Coffee bars and restaurants all have them, but opening the door to that little room in the back is like opening a box of chocolates . . . you never know what you are going to get! There doesn't seem to be any class distinction, as some of the finest restaurants serve up some of the most hideous facilities, making us wonder where the staff washes up before preparing and serving our meal.

The scariest and most disgusting adventures are in the municipal and parking facilities. Curiously, for these toilet facilities, the Italians use a British term, W.C. (water closet), to identify these lovely places. There should be a warning label on the door, if there happens to be one, like on cigarettes. Enter at your own risk, bring your own paper, roll up your pant legs, and don't forget to bring a fifty-cent coin for the ride!

As Alice said to the Mad Hatter at the tea party, it's getting "curiouser and curiouser."

We have been in the homes of many Italians, have used their bathroom facilities, and have found them to be clean and quite accommodating. In their homes, the bathroom is called *il bagno,* curiously, an Italian word.

I don't know what the Romans called the public facilities two thousand years ago, but there hasn't been a lot of progress (other than giving them foreign names) since those days. And ladies take note; there are lines out the door, just like back home.

The *Pisolino* and the Rhythm of Life.

The *pisolino* is the mid-day snooze (the Italian siesta) and its origins are centuries old. The *contadini* would rise before dawn from early spring to late autumn and make the most of the available

daylight. In the hot summer months, it was off to work the fields before the Tuscan sun would bake the landscape. By mid-day, the men and older boys would return from the fields and, along with the women and girls, take a rest (*riposo*) from their tasks of the day (or season) of washing clothes, cleaning the farmhouse, baking, chafing, husking (and as Gemma described), bucketing-out the outhouse pit and fertilizing the crops. They worked very hard, and after five or six hours, it was time to eat and to rest. The villager's routine was similar. Many of them were farmers as well, sharecroppers, but also they were artisans, masons, cobblers, tailors, millers, blacksmiths, butchers, and woodworkers providing goods and services to the *contadini*. So they, too, would rest—go to their houses, close the shutters, eat with their families and take a *pisolino* (a snooze).

For shopkeepers today, it translates to, "I opened my shop early, you should have come then. I've worked a couple of hours, now it's lunchtime. I'm going to my house, closing the shutters, eating with my family, watching some TV, and taking a *pisolino.* I'll re-open my shop in a few hours, you have a nice day." Or something like that. Don't plan your day around the posted return time. When a shopkeeper returns a half hour or so late, the locals think it's just fine, because they were probably "home with their family." When I inquired about the economic effect of closing the store for three hours when there were all of these tourists lurking about, looking through the gates and windows into their darkened shops, I was told "we have enough, we have our family."

All of this works just fine for the natives, it's in their blood. It's been going on for such a long time. Professionals and workers who don't have this luxury of leisure, seem to be accepting, if not a little envious. With each passing year and generation, this rhythm of life is slowly changing. Tourism, which fuels Italy's economy, has a lot to do with this evolution.

But for now, especially if you are in the villages and countryside with business or research to do, get out of bed and get it done early. Then take a nice three-hour lunch somewhere and maybe a nap, because the *piazza* and streets of the villages are still, the shops are dark. The townspeople have fluttered to their shuttered-nests. After the *pisolino,* the doors and windows fly open, and the village is a flurry of shopping and socializing for a few hours before the villagers go back home, close the shutters, have *cena* (supper), then watch some TV and settle in for a good night's rest. *Buona notte!* (Good night!)

La Mia Macchina.

The car. Unfortunately, you must have one to do research and experience the land of your ancestors in Tuscany. That means driving and racing about on streets, roads, and the *autostrada* with millions of Italian (and foreign) drivers of scooters, cars, trucks and buses, with license plates from countries throughout Europe. *Mamma Mia!* It can be terrifying, even traumatic. The first time we rented a car here, we ventured into an insane traffic circle with all kinds of vehicles flying at us, like bees from a hive. We made it around the circle and decided to park the car for a few days until we mustered up the *bravado* to do battle again. That was a five-minute outing! You'll see cars here like you've never seen before, and many of them are incredibly small. Old Fiat 500's and new Smart cars that would fit inside an SUV back home. And the gas we purchased was the equivalent of six U.S. dollars per gallon, making it over eighty dollars to fill the tank, so fuel economy is definitely a consideration here. There are also BMWs, Mercedes, Maseratis, Lamborghinis and Ferraris that go like hell. Then there are the pesky two-wheeled little bugs, the *Vespas* (Wasps) blaring everywhere, and the three-wheeled, underpowered, enclosed version, the *Ape* (Bee) which is driven (very slowly) by the *contadini,* or maybe by the dog that is always at their side. And let's not forget the farm tractors and wagons. There are droves of droning menacing motorcycles roaring everywhere, zipping in and out between the bigger beasts on the motorways. There are no pick-up trucks as we know them, just larger cabs with various sizes of beds and boxes. The city buses and tractor trailers are the standard giant-size, but the buses stuffed with tourists and inter-city commuters are super-sized. No monster SUVs here, only some Range Rovers and Jeeps, and there are only small motorhomes, none of the palatial home-on-wheels seen touring the U.S. Out in the country, there are packs of bicyclists in brightly-colored, logo-festooned spandex tights lurking in their oblivious mindset just around any curve or lugging up the next hill. If all of this activity wasn't enough, you must be aware of the two-legged types; old ladies with canes and shopping bags, and men pushing wheelbarrows down the middle of the road, as there are rarely sidewalks or roadside shoulders for moving humans from place to place on their own two feet. You won't see many joggers out there. If you do, they're foreigners, as Italians don't understand why anybody

would want to do such a thing. For added excitement, there are signs telling you to be aware of wildlife, like *cinghiale* (wild boar) wanting to come play on the road with you.

These swiftly moving two-, three-, four-, eighteen-, and twenty-six-wheeled vehicles, along with ambling bipeds and quadrupeds, are found moving around and between the centuries-old villages and once-fortified hilltowns on cobblestones and narrow paved roads. The very same roadbeds traveled by chariots and carts a couple of thousand years ago! Every town seems to have a "Via Roma" or a "Porta Romana." All roads seemingly do lead, eventually, to Rome, passing through villages where houses, shops, and barns now touch the road, as do the rows of pines and cypress trees planted hundreds of years ago, with their trunks badly scraped and scarred from today's chariots. Many of these roads are not wide enough for two cars, much less the occasional truck or bus, and there might be a stone wall or bridge abutment on either side, or maybe nothing but a freefall from the hillside. In the most beautiful regions of Italy, the roads are the steepest and most curvaceous and the panoramas are simply stupendous. So, "Oh my, look at that!" can become simply "Omigod!" in an instant.

Vehicles of all sizes will come at you from the front, where drivers feel most comfortable straddling the center line, especially on curves. It's as though there is an assumed guidance system or anti-magnetic force which is expected to repel your car to the side to avoid a head-on meeting. They also assault you from the side, from roads and driveways, from which those wanting to join in on the action pull into the roadway and "call your hand." The game of "when-to-hold and when-to-fold" ensues. Will you swerve or let them in? And finally, there is the motorized-menace from behind, "the bumper-sticker" pushing you down the road or through the villages at speeds unimaginable, just inches from your behind. As often as not, it is a little Fiat Panda, the disposable, tin-can excuse for an automobile, which is stuck to your bumper and rear-view mirror. But sometimes, it's a truck as big as a cathedral. It's all kind of a real-life video game. And they are playing with your life!

La macchina (the car) is the implement of empowerment for many, many Italian men and women, making driving here an extremely aggressive, stressful, and dangerous activity. Our genealogist, our dear Dr. Stefania, professes that, as an act of self-preservation, she "becomes another person" when she drives. Her

husband Marco, a gentle-giant of a man, likens a car in the hands of his countrymen (and women), to "having a gun" adding, "Italians don't like rules." Mussolini said it best, "Governing the Italian people is not impossible, merely useless." From our experience and perspective, there is a rudeness and recklessness in the collective driving psyche here that wears on the nerves and casts a pall on what is otherwise a joyful touring adventure. There is a strong sense of entitlement, a right to do whatever they want behind the wheel of *La Mia Macchina,* "My Car." There is an expression, *menefreghismo,* which is a combination of *me ne frego,* or "frankly, I don't give a damn," which pretty much says it all.

There is almost no regard for the posted speed limits and warning signs, and there is no yielding to their right of way. We met an expatriate here, from Boston, who offered this warning, "Just remember, you are NOT *Under the Tuscan Sun*!" It's a bloody jungle out there! There's also a lot of wine in the bloodstream and no minimum drinking-age for fueling those drivers. We do most of our driving by daylight and make every attempt to be properly-socialized visitors, not warring-, wheeled-, and invading-combatants. Don't bother with the hand gestures or menacing eye contact expressing your anger or disgust—keep your hands on the wheel and your eyes on the road!

I have driven in some pretty nutty places. Boston actually comes to mind with its roundabouts and maddening signage. I've driven in London at night, in the fog, and on the "wrong" side of the road, no less, looking for street signs to my destination. I've searched for addresses in mainland China, where there are no street signs, because there are no street names or numbers. But the road signs in Italy are the most challenging, and frustrating. There are so many of them, and only a few of them are for roads. Entering a traffic circle, one is inundated with an eyeful of colors, names, and directional arrows for commercial, municipal, and historical places, and (if you're having a good day) maybe for the village you wish to travel to . . . or maybe not. It all comes so fast, all of those signs and zooming vehicles from all directions. White arrows on blue circular signs direct you around the circle, down the street, around a corner through the labyrinth of a thousand-year-old city built for horse-drawn wagons. The signs for the one destination disappear, another town maybe further down the road now appears on the signs, then miraculously you are delivered to your destination . . . or not. I won't drive

anywhere alone on a first trip. Priscilla is my navigator, and the action (and sometimes the dialogue exchange), is fast and furious. The best road maps provide some of the needed information—road names, numbers, distances, that kind of thing. But on the road, the reality is "you are here, you're on this road, you must know its name or number and where it's headed, so keep going." And keep going very swiftly, because there's somebody six inches from your bumper traveling thirty or forty kilometers per hour over the posted limit.

Finally, there's the parking thing. In every city, town, and village there are lots of parking signs and designated spaces painted on pavement and cobblestones. For free, for fee, for the handicapped, for various time limits. Forget it! It's a free-for-all! Nobody seems to care where some public official told these folks to put their cars. In a country littered with so many cars, and no place to put them, it's a mess, a game played out on a real-life, real-sized game board where they play "time to park *La Mia Macchina.*" No need to park within the designated lines, wherever *La Mia Macchina* ends up is just right. Double-parking insures a spot up close, as does pulling the old Fiat up on the sidewalk, for those who are just too damn lazy to walk a little. And all of those designated no-parking areas really opens up a whole world of chaos and confusion for a nation of drivers who refuse to be regimented. Block an intersection, a driveway, a road, "*Noooo problem!"* The attitude is "I've got something to do, I've got to park, I don't want to walk, and it's "My Car," deal with it! Door dings, scratched bumpers and fenders, *"what's your problem?"* Parking in the opposite direction on the wrong side of the road is a convenient and disorienting proposition in the city, or in the country, where stopping in the middle of a road to dump refuse in the "dust bins" or just to talk with a neighbor, is an added adventure at sixty to ninety kilometers per hour. For all the mayhem and mad rush to get *La Mia Macchina* parked, there is an inverse ratio of time in which some of these folks actually decide to give up their hard-won spot once they have done their urgent and important business and have returned to their car. They see you waiting, they know there isn't another parking space for you, and they know they have the one you want. They may even know that you're not from around here. It's perverse, but it seems that it must make them feel pretty good, empowered, to make you wait another five minutes while they wile away their not-so-precious time, ignoring you. These are the "passive aggressors" as opposed to those "aggressive passers" who overtake you on a hill

going around a curve at forty kilometers per hour over the posted limit.

But those of you who go searching for your Tuscan roots, take heart. Native Tuscans say the driving in Rome is much, much crazier and further south in Napoli (Naples) and in Sicily it is something they won't do.

I don't know how it all works. All of these narrow, old roadways with the "guess where you are" signage. Roads filled with all of these vehicles going so fast between and through these beautiful, historic places. Driving back from Vinci, the birthplace of Leonardo and the site of a museum of his engineering marvels, we experienced all of this madness. He traveled by horse-drawn cart on some of these very roadbeds over five hundred years ago. Had he been able to foresee *la macchina,* I wondered, what would Leonardo have designed to bring order to this chaos?

Queuing.

It's a funny word and it's an English word. It means to get in line, wait your turn in that line, and tail behind the others who arrived before you. In Italian, *la coda* fits that description, but it also means *tail*, the little wiggly thing on the back end of the pig. But many Italians obviously don't know the first definition, or ignore it, especially those of the older generations. My friend Roberto, who is a perfect gentleman, assures me that the younger generations are better mannered, and his children most certainly are. But on buses and at the market, we've been shoved and elbowed by little old ladies; at service counters and bars we've had men of my generation step around us into the "Me First" position; and in parking lots we've been "swooped" by whoever is at the wheel of "My Car". If you have an adult-aged person patiently standing behind you in a line, chances are it's a foreigner or a pickpocket.

Seems as though this frenzy to get in and get out in a hurry has been going on for a long time in Italy. The Colosseum, built back in 80 (that's 0080), had 80 entrances around the perimeter to get those Romans inside in a hurry. Once inside there was a labyrinth of expansive corridors to get the 55,000 unruly fans to their seats before the gladiatorial "fun and games" commenced. After a few hours of "thumbs up and thumbs down" by the Emperor, it was time for the revelers to leave, in a less-than-orderly manner and, of course, in a big

hurry. For this, each seating section had its own exit to expel the citizenry. This exit had a funny name too, *vomitorium*.

I guess maybe I wouldn't have *queued* either.

Italian 101.

Before our great adventure, we were told that "everybody" over here spoke English and not to worry about learning the language. That was somebody who never lost sight of the tour guide when they got off the bus. Well, a funny thing happened on the way to the Forum…they learned to speak Italian! Make an effort and get familiar with the language, especially for your genealogical research. The Family History Library has prepared an informative little booklet which includes those Italian words which you are likely to find in genealogical resources. It also contains research outlines which are very informative and helpful in exploring your Italian ancestry. Maybe take a class, as we did. The Italians like to hear you trying to speak their language—and they also like to correct you.

The language is seemingly more complicated and very different from English in many ways. Most nouns are either masculine or feminine, and require a corresponding masculine or feminine article which precedes the noun. The plural form of a noun is also masculine or feminine, so you can't just add an *s* for more than one of something. And, just for fun, some nouns actually change gender (mind and gender-bending), like egg (*l'uovo*), which for some reason is masculine, but when we go to the chicken coop and find more than one of them, they become feminine, *le uova* (eggs)! Don't try to figure out some of the few hundred thousand exceptions to the rules. Adjectives also must agree in gender with the noun, with more exceptions, so you need to know the sexual orientation of which you speak. A car, (*la macchina*) is feminine, which is curious for such a *macho* place. An olive tree, *olivo,* is masculine; its fruit, the olive (*oliva*) is feminine; yet its oil (*olio*) is masculine. Don't try to figure it out. There are two forms of address in Italian, the formal and the informal, depending on the age or status of the person you are about to unknowingly insult. Verbs come in all the usual tenses plus a few from some other time and place. There are regular verb endings but, seemingly, a lot more irregular verb endings which require memorization. Diacritical marks over the vowels indicate a change in pronunciation, which is very critical; as is memorization of whether

the accent is stressed on the second, third, or fourth syllable from the *end* of the word (if you're clever enough to be able to count backward as you're speaking forward). And don't forget to roll those *r*'s, especially the double ones. If you actually reach the level of understanding at which you believe you are ready for some conversation over here (which I am not), I'd like to impart some advice:

First, don't say it if you don't know for certain what you're saying. Our friend Jill from Seattle, who was a guest for dinner in a home outside Cortona, said to the host, *"mi dispiace il pollo,"* thinking she was complimenting her on the chicken dish. That would be *"mi piace il pollo,"* or "I'm pleased with the chicken." Mistakenly, Jill had *"dissed"* the dish, expressing her *dis*pleasure for the host's dish. And, second, be certain you know how to pronounce what you are saying, and enunciate all letters clearly. Especially those double consonants. That delicious *penne* pasta, if mispronounced, becomes *pene,* which happens to be the dangling male participle (or penis), so to speak.

So be careful what you ask for.

Heaven Sent.

Galileo looked into the skies over Tuscany, and so should you. Especially when you're walking through the narrow cobblestone streets with five hundred-year-old buildings with five stories of overhanging balconies, window sills, and crumbling pediments shadowing you on both sides.

Big, fat, well-fed pigeons love to perch on the roof gutters, watch all the better-fed tourists, and wait for their next meal in the *piazza* compliments of all those less-than-fastidious people who leave a trail of *pizza, panini,* and maybe a couple of pecks of *gelato* for dessert. To move up in the food chain, these birds need to get rid of what they've been processing. So they offer up payment on the pavement, and sometimes on the heads of those hands that fed them. The worst I've seen was in Siena. Some poor guy with a white shirt got plastered. He looked like he was wearing a freshly-gessoed canvas, and worse, his face and hair looked as if he just won a meringue pie-eating contest. Except he wasn't smiling, just stumbling about as if shell-shocked. I think he must have taken a multiple hit.

From overhanging balconies beware of water coming down from plant watering, or worse, a plant in its terracotta pot. Thank

your lucky stars that you weren't strolling down these same streets just a few generations ago, before indoor plumbing came to town. Rinse water and even chamber pots would be dumped out of the upper windows, so looking up was as important as looking down . . . with all those horses around.

The marble cornice and pediment carvings crowning these buildings are awesome. But they're also awfully old and are crumbling from the effects of acid rain, pollution, and the rumblings of scooters, cars, buses, and millions of tourists. As one of those gawking invaders in Firenze, I paused at the corner where Borgo San Lorenzo meets Via dei Cerretani at the Piazza di San Giovanni and waited, if only for a few moments, for some of that rumbling to pass me by. I was marveling at the sights of the *piazza*; the Baptistry, the *Duomo* with Brunelleschi's dome, and Giotto's *Campanile*. Priscilla was boutiquing on the corner at Pinko for the latest Italian style, while I was transfixed on the more timeless styles there in the *piazza* clad in white, green, and pink marble. After viewing from one vantage point, I stepped slightly to my left for a different perspective of this incredible sight. Within seconds, there was an explosive sound to my right, like gunshot, and a cloud of dust and bits of shrapnel at my feet. A few steps away lay a fist-size chunk of marble, which after centuries of crowning the Renaissance building behind me, had been on its way to crowning me.

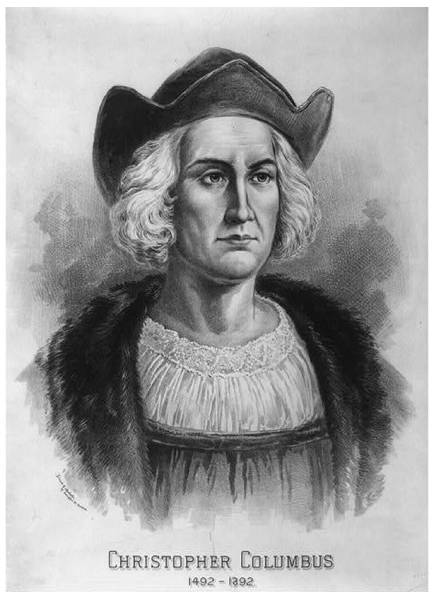
Since those experiences, I've tried to keep an eye on what's above me. As for Galileo, he climbed the Leaning Tower in Pisa, so that we would know from his studies of the laws of falling bodies and uniformly accelerating motion, that pigeon poop and marble carvings dropped from the heavens onto your head hits you at the same velocity. But maybe with somewhat different results.

While one eye is to the sky, keep one to the earth beneath your feet. Those ancient, historic, cobblestone walkways and flagstone roads which have been ravaged by the weather, horse-drawn chariots and carts for centuries are also crumbling, uneven obstacle courses which will put you on your nose. While touring the Roman Forum and walking on the Via Sacra (the same flagstones over which Julius Caesar trod) I watched a lady misstep while gawking and walking around the House of the Vestal Virgins. She fell harder than the Roman Empire and had to be carried away—just like Caesar.

The Italians are coming! The Italians are coming!

History. It's the big story here. Italy has almost 3,000 years of it. America has just 500 years of recorded, mostly European-influenced history. Understanding not only the history of Italy and of your ancestral roots here is not enough. I believe it's essential to gain some perspective on the role of Italy's people in the New World.

The Italians were the first to come. Columbus, from Genova, landed in the Americas in 1492 on his first of four voyages sailing west. In 1497, Giovanni Caboto (aka John Cabot) made it to North America, and Amerigo Vespucci, from Firenze, made it to South America around 1507. Vespucci, not only a navigator, but also a cartographer, was the first to realize that Columbus had not discovered the eastern shore of the Indies (as Columbus to his dying day believed and that's why native-Americans were called Indians) but, in fact, a new continent. Florentine mapmakers honored their own by naming the New World after Amerigo, even though Columbus was the first to come. Vespucci is the only man to have not just one, but *two* continents named after him—North *and* South America. Verazzano, from Greve in Chianti, sailed into what became New York Harbor in 1524. These navigators sailed for other countries—Spain, France, Portugal and England—but they were all Italians.



By 1650, the first Italian immigrants were settling in what is present-day New York City. But their influx and influence was slow in coming, such that by the time of the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and the subsequent American Revolution, there were only a few

hundred merchants and artisans in the colonies. Most of these would come from northern Italy, where Jefferson recruited musicians, along with craftsmen and stonemasons to work on Monticello. Thomas spoke Italian, played an Italian violin, and revered the architect Palladio, designing Monticello after his works. He later adopted the Neoclassical architecture of the Roman Empire for the nation's new capital in Washington, D.C. Jefferson and the founding fathers were devotees of Machiavelli's writings on government. On a culinary note, Jefferson introduced spaghetti to the New World as well.

One of those early Italian immigrants was Jefferson's friend Philip Mazzei, a Florentine writer, physician, merchant and horticulturalist, who arrived in 1773. He was not only a political confidant of Jefferson's, but also his neighbor at Monticello where the two of them were the first to produce quality wine in the New World. English settlers, going back to Jamestown in 1607 had not been successful in their cultivation attempts. Mazzei brought olive stones, Sangiovese root stock, and a great one-liner from his writings, which influenced his friend, "All men are by nature equally free and independent." In time, the vineyards declined because of hard frosts, soil diseases, and most importantly, because Mazzei returned to Italy.

Two Italians were signers of the Declaration of Independence, Caesar Rodney and William Paca. But it would be a hundred years before Italians, in significant numbers, would leave their native land. In the War Between the States, even though there were only a few thousand Italians living in America, their presence was made known. Fighting for the Union in the Civil War, the New York 93rd was known as "Garibaldi's Guard," named for one of the heroes of Italian Unification, Giuseppe Garibaldi, who had been offered the rank of general by President Lincoln but decided to return to Italy to unite his countrymen.

Unification of Italy had occurred in the 1860's, but after a decade, the country was anything but unified. While a Civil War between north and south in America was trying this nation, Italy, too, was a country divided. The new centralized government created economic imbalance and resentment by the south toward their "countrymen" to the north. Social chaos, widespread poverty, and diseases gave them little hope of a better life in Italy, especially in the south, the *Mezzogiorno*. Most of them were peasants, sharecroppers and laborers, unskilled in any trade, and almost all were illiterate. They weren't "Italians." They were Sicilians, Calabrians, and Neapolitans in

spirit and loyalty. The dreams of Cavour, Garibaldi, and Mazzini and the promise of Unification was not the reality. It had been fifteen hundred years since the fall of the Roman Empire. The Renaissance was a central and northern Italian occurrence; southern Italy was really Medieval, a place stuck in time. They would leave their timeless, ancestral homes and pursue the promise of America as their new home, their "new Rome." By 1880 there were only 50,000 Italians in the U.S.; by 1890 that number had grown to almost 500,000; by 1900 over 1,000,000; by 1910 over 3,000,000; by 1920 the flow of immigration from Italy had slowed, but not before over 4,000,000 Italians were living in the U.S., including those four Parenti brothers from Carraia who came between 1912 and 1914. In 1921, and again in 1924, the U.S. Congress passed laws that set quotas on Italians coming into the U.S.

Today, Italy is dealing with troubling issues related to the influx and integration of immigrants into its own country. They come from Romania, Morocco, Albania, and other Eastern European countries. There are also the Senegalese street vendors and the bands of Gypsies (*Zingari*) who call themselves *Roma*. Many Italians want the government to set new quotas on immigrants coming into *their* country.

It has been said that the Unification of Italy, occurred not in Italy, but in America. Ironically, they became "Italians" by leaving their country and coming to a new land of opportunity. For most of these immigrants their lives were very difficult; living in tenements, working in the most undesirable and dangerous jobs, earning low wages, and subject to discrimination. The subsequent generations of these Italians in America are a testament to the long journey from their ancestral roots, to their assimilation into and their contribution to the American culture.

A son of one of these immigrant families who had settled in Hoboken, New Jersey made an impact on the culture like no other. And late one cold winter's night in 1982 at P.J. Clarke's saloon in New York, I found myself in the presence of the most famous of them all, Francis Albert Sinatra. He had come into the back room of the nearly empty bar along with his wife, a bodyguard and another associate and proceeded to his customary table, #20. "Ol' Blue Eyes" sat against the wall which, of course, faced the entry to the small room. Because my back was to the entry, we were eye-to-eye just a table away. Respecting his privacy and his temperament (not to

mention his bodyguard), I was mindful not to make eye contact, much less approach him. Instead, over the next two hours, I raptly listened to the man's music from his albums which were softly playing on the old jukebox. *September of My Years*, a 33 1/3 rpm album of his, was one of my first record purchases in 1965 and I knew the lyrics of this contemplative collection of songs from playing the album hundreds and hundreds of times. They're stories of the seasons of one's life and loves, and though they were recorded when Frank was just 49, they became more poignant that night as he sat across from me in the saloon. He was 67, in the "autumn" of his years. I was 35, and in the "summer" of my years. When the jukebox played the eighth song of that album, *It Was a Very Good Year,* I knew what was coming and could not contain myself. As he crooned *"When I was 35, it was a very good year,"* a smile broke across my otherwise feigned, disinterested countenance and I looked into his eyes. "The Chairman of the Board" caught this and first smiled slightly, then broadly, with a twinkle of those blues eyes. I had connected with Sinatra, and though the world lost him in 1998, my moment with him has never left me.

Words about the Wars

Idyllic. That's how I would describe the peaceful scene of the countryside of Tuscany. It's a truly bucolic setting with rolling hills, a patchwork of vineyards and olive groves, majestic pines and stately cypress along its ancient roads, and stands of oak and chestnut trees atop its hills. Preserved stone farmhouses, villas, castles with towers, and walled hilltowns seem timeless and eternally still. It's magnificent, but it's really an illusion concealing what has been going on here for most of Tuscany's history.

The peaceful calm belies the centuries of chaos and devastation from invasions and calamities, from wars from within and outside of the region. It's a history of Etruscans and conquering Romans; of Goths and Lombards; of invasions by the kings of France, Spain, and Germany; of Holy Roman Emperors and Papal armies; of the rise and fall and rise of the Medici; of Guelfs and Ghibellines; of wars between the city-states; of the Black Plague of 1348 which killed half the population; of the rule of Napoleon Bonaparte; of Unification; of famines; of the rise of the Fascist Party and *Il Duce*; of the occupation by Hitler and the Nazis; of the collapse of the agrarian economy; and of the bombing of its cities by the Allies

in World War II. It's unimaginable (incomprehensible, actually) how much conflict and upheaval this land and its people have endured.

The measure of their conflicts is notable. The U.S. Civil War, from the time that the Confederacy seceded from the Union in January 1861 until General Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox in April of 1865, was just over four years. By contrast, the "civil" war in Tuscany, between the city-states of Firenze and Siena, was just over four *centuries*—and that was just *one* of the skirmishes going on at the time. Grudges are eternal here. The *Lucchese* have not forgiven Pisa, even though Pisan rule of Lucca ended in 1369!

Before 1500 most of these battles were fought by armed combatants on foot or on horseback. The greatest damage was inflicted by burning a stronghold after outflanking the foe. But the cannon changed all of that. Protecting the towns and citizenry was so vital after that development in warfare, that none other than Michelangelo Buonarroti, was called upon to save his besieged Florence. Giorgio Vasari, in his *Lives of the Artists,* recorded that Michelangelo (although more than a little busy sculpting the Medici tombs in the church of San Lorenzo) was appointed Commissary General in charge of re-building the city's fortifications and encircling the hill of San Miniato with bastions. Securing this promontory was critical to the defense of Florence as it has a commanding perch above the city. "If this point is captured, the city is lost," Vasari wrote. The two pieces of artillery mounted in the *campanile* of San Miniato inflicted such damage on the enemy forces, that the enemy retaliated by bombarding it with their heavy cannon. But to no avail. Michelangelo had protected it all too well with bales of wool and thick mattresses suspended with ropes from the top of the bell tower. The tower was saved. And you thought Michelangelo only knew a little something about sculpting, painting, architecture and poetry!

There are all sorts of reasons for the commencement of these conflicts. Political, territorial, religious, and economic come to mind. But sometimes it was about family. One of these conflicts involved the family whose fiefdom had included the hills around Impruneta. After their castle was burned, the Buondelmonti were forced to flee to Firenze. In 1215, it seems that one of the Buondelmonti got into a drunken quarrel with Oddo Arrighi, a brother-in-law of the Amidei, another powerful Florentine family. After the dust settled, friends of the two families arranged a reconciliation, whereby a young Buondelmonti son would marry a young Amidei daughter, forming

one big, happy and powerful alliance. But this was not acceptable to a third family, the Donati, as it would upset the balance of power of the ruling parties of Florence. So a widow of the Donati family invited young Buondelmonti to her *palazzo* and offered her beautiful daughter in marriage. He was smitten. He called off the marriage to the Amidei girl, and without further consideration or delay, married the Donati girl. The Amidei, outraged and embarrassed, assembled with their kinsmen to determine "the vengeance commensurate with the enormity of the offense," as Machiavelli wrote. Instead of cutting his face and leaving him a *marked* man (and perhaps allowing Buondelmonti to seek revenge), the clan was guided by the proverbial adage *"cosa fatta capo ha,"* meaning "the deed that is done has a head!" So on the morning of Easter, Buondelmonti, resplendent in his white suit atop his white steed, was jumped while passing the house of the Amidei. He attempted to gallop across the Ponte Vecchio, but was pulled from his horse and brutally stabbed to death by Arrighi. Now the Donati were enraged and needed to show all of Firenze what the Amidei had done. So they placed the young bride on a funeral bier with her husband's bloody body beside her, cradled his head in her lap, and then proceeded to parade through the streets of the city. The intrigue and spectacle of all this divided the city and came to be seen as the origin of the factional violence between the Guelfs and the Ghibellines which would plague Florence for the next century and beyond.

Today it's more about *calcio* (soccer) rivalries!

The Genius of Tuscany

So with all of this madness and mayhem going on, how did so much creativity come out of Tuscany from so many contributors to the Renaissance? How did all of this come about? When you are in the presence of these divine creations, it seems they must have come about as a calling from Heaven, commissioned by benevolent patrons and beatific popes, and carried out in a state of tranquility and grace by some of the greatest sons of humanity.

Not really. The reality is these works came to be (or in many cases came *not* to be) mostly for more temporal reasons. Because of the machinations of power of the ruling politicos and prelates, and their need to aggrandize and memorialize themselves and their families, there would be commissions or commandments to do these

works. The endless wars and their economic toll, along with the deaths and power struggles of those who were in charge of things, would make most of these commissions ever-changing as to what got done and what did not. But who got the assignment and how they got it, is really a lot more interesting to me. It's the story inside the story; of artistic geniuses who were suspicious and surreptitious sorts, with fierce and fragile egos to match the temperaments of those they served. And the most intriguing of these characters is the greatest of them all, Michelangelo, who pretty much had two lives. First, the life and art *he wanted* to do and was the master of his own destiny. And second, the life and art *he didn't want* to do, and his destiny was at the mercy of his masters. Little of what he did was what *he wanted* to do.

Mostly (and morosely), Michelangelo could be found galloping around Italy at the behest of eight Popes (two of whom were Medici); bouncing on horseback between Rome, Florence, and the quarries in Carrara in a perpetual tug-of-war between whose family's tomb to sculpt, whose chapel ceilings or walls to paint, or who needed an architect for a church or palace. And on a couple of occasions, who needed a secretary of defense. He really only ever wanted to be a sculptor, but was pressed into the service of powerful men who believed there was nothing he could not do. He was coerced into doing things *he didn't want* to do; like the Sistine Chapel frescoes, the dome of St. Peter's, and the Farnese Palace in Rome. Much of what *he wanted* to do never was completed (or even begun) because of the over-commitment of his time and energies and the comings and goings of these Popes.

Michelangelo Buonarroti, 1475-1564.

Michelangelo's friends and biographers, Vasari and Ascanio Condivi, are accused by myth-busters (art historians of the past 450 years) of not painting a realistic portrait of this colorful and complex

subject. But through their writings, there is enough character definition and historical background of the man; that by reading between the lines and by reading the accounts of others, you come to know his story and the stories behind the masterpieces you see (and don't see) today. Michelangelo, besides being the greatest artistic-genius ever (just my humble opinion), was also a very devout God-fearing Christian. He also was superstitious, suspicious, self-righteous, self-pitying, stubborn, surly, and sharp-tongued. As if that wasn't enough, he was also moody, melancholic, and melodramatic. Just to finish the picture; he was slovenly, a hypochondriac and a real whiner. And his sexual orientation—if he had one—is really up for grabs!

With that, I give you this chronology of his first life, just 30 years of his almost 90-year life—and I didn't make up this stuff!

The house of Buonarroti was an old Florentine family, somewhat noble at one time, but because of financial mismanagement had become minor gentry at the time of Michelangelo's birth on the 6th of March in 1475. His father, Ludovico, man-handled his son to discourage him from his interest in the arts, as it was not a manly thing to do. Besides, he wanted his son to become a wool merchant to recover the family's lost fortune. True to his indestructible determination, Michelangelo persisted, and his father apprenticed (sold) his son's services to the studio of Ghirlandaio when he was thirteen. There he caught the eye of the noblest of the nobility, Lorenzo "*il Magnifico"* Medici, who had heard that Ludovico was not happy with his son's vocation and prospects. Lorenzo summoned him and asked if he "could have the boy" and "keep him as one of his own sons." Ludovico finally realized that he might have something in this kid, and "offered" Lorenzo his son's services. Lorenzo got Ludovico a job and Michelangelo got a new home, moving into the palace of the Medici family, where he ate at the table of his new family and was schooled by philosophers in Humanism and Neo-Platonism. But in spite of this good fortune, Michelangelo would be burdened by the financial failings of his father and four brothers for the rest of his life.

There in the art academy of the Medici, the sharp-tongued and precocious Michelangelo managed to arouse the anger and jealousy of a fellow student, Piero Torrigiano, who struck Michelangelo in the face and crushed his nose, disfiguring him for life. Michelangelo's self-portrait and his almighty self-pity are preserved in

the distorted face of draped skin which flails hideously before The Almighty in his *Last Judgement* in the Sistine Chapel.

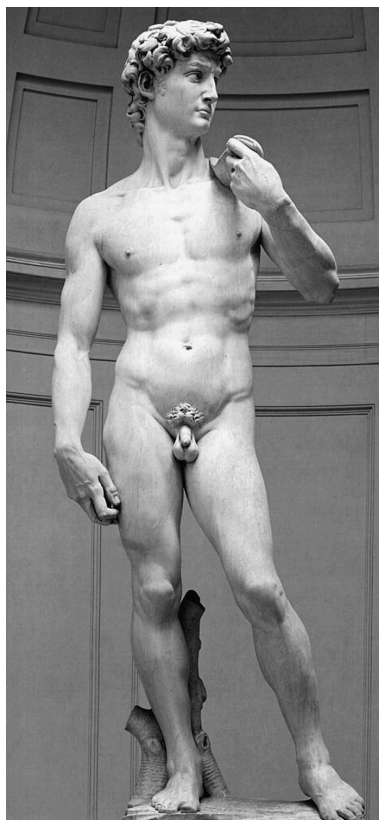
Michelangelo's self-portrait
The Last Judgement.
Sistine Chapel, the Vatican.

With the death of Lorenzo, Michelangelo (and all of Florence) fell under the rule and spell of the Domenican friar and firebrand, Savonarola. His sermons at the *Duomo* called for his flock to reform and to burn, not just the young Florentine Sodomites, but all trappings of luxury, learning, and leisure in "bonfires of the vanities." For Michelangelo this probably caused his sexual gyroscope to wobble, and most definitely affected his *Other*-Worldly views, later manifested in the apocalyptic scenes of a wrathful God in the Sistine Chapel frescoes and his message that man's evils bring doom and suffering. As for Savonarola, his railings against the Church brought about his own apocalypse. The Pope had him executed and burned like a bad book in the Piazza della Signoria just outside of the Palazzo Vecchio, where today a bronze plaque commemorates his very own bonfire.

Incredibly, Michelangelo was just 25 when he finished his first commission in Rome, the *Pieta.* Its excellence led to rumors that the masterpiece was the work of an older sculptor. Indignantly, he locked himself in the chapel one night and with hammer and chisel emblazoned his name on the sash across the breast of Our Lady, marking his territory. Vasari describes Michelangelo wearing a very fashionable thick molded-paper hat with a candle on top (of his own design) that he wore when sculpting at night. Almost five hundred years later, in 1972, some wacko took a hammer into St. Peter's and took his own whacks at Our Lady and she's been behind protective glass ever since.

One of Michelangelo's most well-known commissions (and one of the very few commissions he actually ever completed in Florence) came about when Soderini, the leader of the new republic,

granted him an eighteen-foot block of Carrara marble which had been originally designated for the cathedral, but was discarded as "unworkable" by other sculptors. When the marble came to life in 1504, the statue of *David* became the symbol of liberty for the Palace, signifying that just as David had protected his people by slaying Goliath, and then governed them justly, so whoever ruled Florence should vigorously defend the city and govern it with justice. Here, Vasari again provides an entertaining story of hammer and chisel, though this is more about sleight of hand. While Michelangelo, now 29, was putting the finishing touches on the statue after it had been moved to the Piazza della Signoria, *Gonfalonier* Soderini came by and told Michelangelo that he thought the nose was too thick. Not one to suffer critics gladly, but knowing he must satisfy the ruler of Florence, Michelangelo climbed the scaffolding and grabbed a hammer and chisel in his left hand, along with some marble dust lying on the planks. As he tapped ever so slightly (and "sleightly"), without changing anything, Michelangelo slowly released the dust little by little, then called down to his critic to look at it now. "Ah that's much better," was Soderini's reply, "now you've really brought it to life!" The scaffolding came down and *David* stayed there in the *piazza* for 369 years of hot, Tuscan summers and cold, icy winters, even surviving a few stone-hurling mobs and a broken left arm before being moved to the Accademia in 1873.



David by Michelangelo.
Florence, Italy 1504.

Over the past 500 years many sons of Tuscany have been named after that statue, including my father David Parenti.

XXXVI.

OUR LIFE IN THE COUNTRY

We had returned to Italy and to our farmhouse, "Casa Parenti," for more family research and for a three-month immersion into this country's history and into the daily life of Tuscany. We also came to experience *la bella vita.* Our backyard was the hills of Chianti and the Chiantigiana, the old road, was just outside our gate.

There wasn't much that was routine or predictable about our days. Except, that is, strong coffee to get us out of bed, after which it was time to feed the chickens and hopefully gather some eggs. Some mornings we would take long walks on the country roads beside the olive groves and vineyards, gathering wildflowers along the way and stopping to study the progress of the many farmhouses being restored, stone by stone. Other mornings it was off to the *mercato* in one of the nearby villages. Some days we'd wander over the incomparable countryside to a nearby hilltown or maybe stroll through a magnificent villa. And then, on other days, we would rise early and travel to the historic centers of Florence, Fiesole, Siena, Lucca, San Gimignano, Pisa, or Arezzo for lessons in art and architecture. Everyday and everywhere there was so much history, so much to experience and to learn. It was our "Magical History Tour."

And then there were days when the Tuscan sun kept us at poolside, where under clear and mighty blue skies, we (seemingly) watched and (seemingly) heard the grapes and olives grow on the surrounding vines and trees in the intense mid–day heat. From our hilltop farm there was an incredible panorama of hills and valleys, of distant villages and farmhouses, and of the green patchwork quilt of vineyards and groves. Floating on that cool, sparkling pool and

Piscine in Chianti. Poggio alla Sala, Chianti, 2005.

perched above all of that beauty below and beyond was heavenly. Alive, breathtaking and heavenly.

Late afternoons found us back at the farmhouse where, on the patio or under a shady tree, with a glass (or two) of local wine, we read, sketched, and wrote about the bounty of memories and images of the day. As the sun dropped over the western hills and the fabled *tramonto rosso Fiorentino* (the red sunset of Florence) silhouetted the majestic pines and cypress trees around Impruneta, the bugs came out to play, chasing us indoors to prepare the evening meal. Served in the kitchen at an old farmhouse table, the meals were memorable servings of Chianti from the Sangiovese grapes of our *podere*, *pane toscano,* home-grown olive oil, cheeses, pasta and the freshest, tastiest vegetables and fruit imaginable. Sitting at that table with a view to the hills beyond, we were under the spell of ever-changing, incredibly spectacular sunsets. On other evenings, we went out with family and friends to a favorite *ristorante, trattoria,* or *pizzeria* and mixed it up with the locals.

Chianti in Chianti. *Al Fresco.* Poggio alla Sala, 2005.

The bedtime routine, however, was *never*-changing. Living on a farm in the summer means "living with nature," which is really a euphemism for "the bugs and mosquitoes love the good life here too!" The nightly bed check had two important operations. First, strip the covers, inspect the sheets, pound the pillowcases, and look under the mattress for scorpions the size of small lobsters. Then make the bed, but don't crawl in just yet (no matter how much wine or *grappa* you had after dinner), as the second operation can be equally sobering.

The Cianfanellis have lived with aggressive, blood-thirsty mosquitoes here on the farm for years and are pretty much immune, or at least co-exist, with these guys. But the visiting Parentis were literally "fresh blood," especially Priscilla. So we slept under a canopy of netting, a *zanzariera*, but we'd never put our heads to the pillows before a meticulous inspection of that nighttime armor. During the day, while we were at play, the enemy schemed to penetrate our defense, to find a way inside the walls of that netting, and, if allowed to spend the night with us, they too would have their own luscious and memorable meal.

At dawn, as the sun's rays streamed through the bedroom window and onto the terracotta floor, it was the beginning of another day in our Tuscan farmhouse, promising to be filled with new experiences and old routines.

Like checking your shoes for scorpions before going to the kitchen for coffee!

Palazzo Vecchio, Firenze, built 1299-1314, with *David* guarding the old palace.

There is something fine in the old piazza being still true to the popular and even plebian use. In narrow and crowded Florence, one might have supposed that fashion would have tried to possess itself of the place, after the public place became the residence of the Medici: but it seems not to have changed its ancient character . . . and best of all, is the great, bold, irregular mass of the old palace itself, beautiful as some rugged natural object is beautiful, and with the kindness of nature in it. Plenty of men have been hung from its windows, plenty dashed from its turrets, slain at its base, torn in pieces, cruelly martyred before it; the wild passions of the human heart have beaten against it like billows; it has faced every violent crime and outbreak. And yet it is sacred, and the scene is sacred, to all who hope for their kind; for there, in some sort, century after century, the purpose of popular sovereignty—the rule of all by the most—struggled to fulfill itself, purblindly, bloodily, ruthlessly, but never ignobly, and inspired by an instinct only less strong than the love of life. — W.D. Howells. *A Florentine Mosaic,* The Century Illustrated Monthly, June 1885.

XXXVII.

FIRENZE AND THE FRENZY

"Bella Firenze" is the soul of Tuscany, the birthplace of the Renaissance—of the literature, philosophy, science, art, and architecture of Western civilization being born anew. It is the home of Vespucci, Giotto, Dante, Machiavelli, the Medici, Galileo, Leonardo, Ghiberti, Brunelleschi, of Michelangelo, and many, many more who defined much of the "civilized" world we know. It's a history of Tuscan genius in the quest of beauty and knowledge.

It wasn't always so high-falutin'. Mostly, it was very down-to-earth, a history of conflicts and invasions. Romans established the settlement Florentia in 59 B.C. just down the hill from Fiesole along the river, for their retired soldiers. With the fall of the Empire, Florentia was ruled for centuries by invading foreigners; the Goths, the Lombards, and the Franks (most notably Charlemagne). And as for the advance of civilization, the period is appropriately dubbed the Dark Ages. With the ensuing Medieval Period there were more centuries of conflict in Firenze: between the Holy Roman Empire and the Papacy; wars between Guelfi Firenze and their neighboring Ghibellini *comuni*; bitter rivalries between the powerful families within the city (like the Buondelmonti and Amedei); and (before all this played out in Florence after the defeat of the Ghibellines) even between the high-minded, independence-seeking White Guelfs (like Dante) and the Black Guelfs, who supported the Church. Don't try to understand any of this. It's not possible. And, just for distraction from all of these power plays, Mother Nature offered up the Great Flood of 1333 which ravaged the city and destroyed its bridges (including the Ponte Vecchio), and then the Black Death in 1348 which wiped out one-half of the population.

While all of this mayhem was going on to determine who should rule Tuscany, Firenze and their rival comunes somehow (for me, inexplicably) experienced something of an economic and artistic awakening in the 13th and early 14th centuries. Tuscany grew rich on textile manufacturing and trade, and Florence became its largest and most powerful city. A merchant class developed, along with very wealthy and powerful banking families. The most important of these, the "Godfathers" of the Renaissance, was the Medici family. And in the history of Florence, two Medici rulers in particular, defined the city and the Renaissance. First, Cosimo the Elder; statesman and patron of the arts and architecture, who also encouraged Humanist study and established the Platonic Academy and several libraries. And second (the most famous), his grandson Lorenzo the Magnificent, who as a diplomat negotiated peace among the warring *comuni* of Tuscany and kept the Papacy placated. But he was also a man with tremendous artistic and humanistic sensitivity, a supreme model of the Renaissance man. And, remember, he also "adopted" Michelangelo as a son. There were occasional interruptions of the Medici influence here (as with Savonarola's tent revivals) and even upheaval from within because of assassination by the other branch of the family (Alessandro was murdered by his not-so-dear cousin Lorenzino). But for over three centuries, the Medici continually returned to prominence through the generations (wearing different hats) as Popes, Dukes and finally as Grand Dukes of Tuscany. Without the Medici, Firenze and Tuscany wouldn't be the same, and I just might not be here today, as a tourist or as a "Tuscan son."

Pilgrims had been coming here to the city's countless churches since the Middle Ages in the hope of everlasting salvation. But with the rise of unimaginable wealth and the decline in the power of the Church, the pilgrimages became more of a secular visit to see the new churches, palaces, paintings and sculptures. Humanism had encouraged a new view of mankind in *This* World. It was no longer all about God and the *Other* World. Individual artists, architects, scholars, writers, explorers, and scientists were recognized and patronized. It was also the birth of "art for art's sake." Florentine academies and schools fostered knowledge and a refinement of manners and civility unknown throughout the rest of Europe. It became imperative for foreigners to come here to see what the Italians were up to and get a little culture. And they are still coming.

From our adopted farmhouse, "Casa Parenti," we pilgrims, the *"Vagabondi,"* journeyed over the winding roads, through the countryside and villages and into Firenze. With each trip we were mindful of discovering something new and "taking things off of our list of essential things to see and do." We never got to the end of the list. Not even close. I have a list of the Top 1,001 Things to "See and Do" in Florence, but don't get me started. The world doesn't need another travel guide-book of Florence (though mine would be a bit different than anything you've ever seen) only a voice shouting, "spend more days here, don't go to too many other places during your brief time in Italy, and study up before you come!" And, oh yeah, "Don't all of you come at one time!" That is to say, avoid the "high" season, especially June, July, and August. "High" as in high temperatures, high density of humanity and traffic congestion, and high rates for just about everything for the tourist. Just heed my advice.

The Florentines don't mind you being here. Well, actually they do, but they have no choice in the matter. As invasive as all of the millions of tourists who flood this city each year might be, Florentines have endured much, much worse. In the twentieth century alone, they survived Mussolini and the Fascists, World War II bombings, the Nazi occupation, demolition of all the bridges over the Arno (except the Ponte Vecchio), the collapse of the surrounding agricultural economy at the end of the war, and the poverty in the city that followed. And these events were just a prelude to the flood in November of 1966 which buried the city in mud, oil and debris, damaging or destroying so many of its treasures. The recovery and sustaining economic reality here in Firenze *was*, *is,* and *will forever be* tourism. So come and spend all the time you can, and gladly spend the ten-Euro note for admission fees with the knowledge and good feeling that these paintings, sculptures, churches, and palaces wouldn't be around here for very long without you. Tourists are the new patrons, the "new Medici" in town.

So they come from every continent, speaking in tongues which sometimes cannot be discerned, in all sorts of dress and undress, shepherded about from *piazza* to *piazza* by guides whose flocks follow makeshift flags raised high above these cobblestone fields filled with herds of bleating tourists. The commotion and confusion surrounding all of this, along with the cacophony of

languages, creates a din of Babel occasionally punctuated by the familiar *"Michelangelo"* or *"Medici"* utterances by the guides.

So clamber up Brunelleschi's *Duomo* and Giotto's *Campanile*; queue-up at the Uffizi and at the Accademia to see *David*; battle the armies of invaders crossing the Piazza di San Giovanni and the Ponte Vecchio; and gawk in awe of the Palazzo Vecchio as you straddle the spot where the firebrand Savonarola went up in flames. It's all homage to a city of such wondrous things and the genius that created such a place, so many centuries ago.

XXXVIII.

FOLON

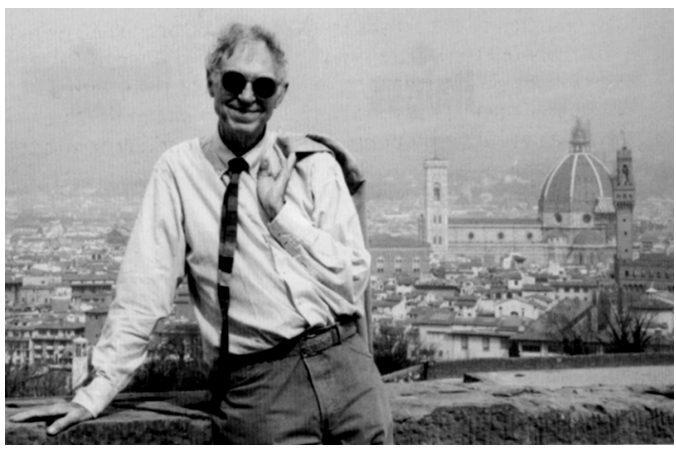
Jean-Michel Folon was born in Brussels in 1934 and was the first, and only, artist whose work I have collected, dating back to my first purchase in 1975. It was artwork with a message that spoke to me, that had a direct graphic and emotional impact on me, that made me feel that I knew him and he knew me . . . like a friend. Over thirty years I had gathered hundreds of his artworks, posters, postcards, books, stamps, and articles during my travels about the U.S., France, and Italy, but I never had an opportunity to meet him and to express to him my appreciation of his art and my kinship with his spirit. But my wish was miraculously about to come true.

Folon was coming to Florence! He was having a monumental, grand retrospective of his work at the Palazzo Vecchio and Forte Belvedere, titled *Folon Firenze,* the most significant event in his career. Hundreds of his artworks; serigraphs, engravings, watercolors, collages, and sculptures in a variety of media and materials representing his array of talents as a new-Renaissance artistic-visionary would be presented in the old Medici palace and in the fort with its surrounding terraces high above the city with its extraordinary views of Florence and all its history below. Magical, a once in a lifetime present, and we were going to be here for the experience. And the gift kept on giving, because concurrent to these venues was a show titled *Folon Ceramiche*, featuring terracotta works by the artist from the kilns of Impruneta, our adopted village. There in the *biblioteca* on the Piazza Buondelmonti, below our beloved Bellavista, we would meet Folon.

It was a hot Tuscan summer day. The surrounding landscape of Impruneta is right out of a Folon landscape with its rolling hills and endless sky. The artist seemed tired from a day of being adored and accommodating and was probably exhausted from the oppressive heat of the day. He looked much older than any photograph I had seen of him, but he was charismatic and commanding in his appearance. I could see evidence that he was a real character and that he had a love for everything Italian, a true Italophile. I watched him graciously receive all of those Italians who had come to meet him and then, after a reprieve from this adulation, I approached him. Speaking to him through his wife as my interpreter, I expressed what his art meant to me, how long I had been following his work, and mentioned specific pieces from my collection. He smiled broadly, shook my hand gently for an extended period and, looking through his large circular sunglasses, he nodded and then expressed his gratitude in return.

After thirty years, I had met my favorite artist in a place we called home. Jean-Michel went upstairs to the Ristorante Bellavista where our friends, the Becuccis, prepared his evening meal, and he held court with his admirers. As we were leaving, I saw him sitting at our favorite table by the window there in the small dining room, being toasted, laughing, and enjoying lively conversation and everything about this beautiful place and its people. It's an image, like so many that he has given to me, which I will never forget.

It was his last show. Jean-Michel Folon died just five months later at age 71.



Jean-Michel Folon in Firenze, 2005. Photo: *Folon Firenze*

XXXIX.

IN PROUD MEMORY OF A FALLEN HERO

Our Tuscan adventure was coming to an end. On the day before our departure for Rome, we decided to visit a place that we had seen many times from a distance, yet had not experienced.

Whenever we traveled over the hills between Impruneta and Florence, we were intrigued by the American Cemetery and Memorial a few kilometers below, along the Greve River. It is one of many

American Cemetery and Memorial. Florence.

hallowed places around the world which honors those who died on foreign soil during World War II. Its seventy-acre site features a gleaming green field with crisp rows of white marble crosses and a commanding memorial as a background, all of which is surrounded by wooded hills. The 4,402 U.S. servicemen and women interred here are commemorated by those endless rows of crosses and another 1,409 Missing in Action are listed on tablets on the long wall of the Memorial which overlooks the graves area. All of them died in Italy, most of these deaths occurring after the capture of Rome in June 1944. Their final resting place is an austere, serene, meticulously-maintained place of reverence and reflection.

As a boy back in Hebron, Indiana in the 1950's, I knew my father had served in World War II and I learned that a soldier from our little town had died in that war. The young man's father owned the garage and filling station across the street from our clapboard house on Main Street and I overheard some grown-ups say that he refused service to people of German descent because they "killed his son." Except for some glorified war movies and watching veterans march in a few parades, that's all I knew about the war as a boy.

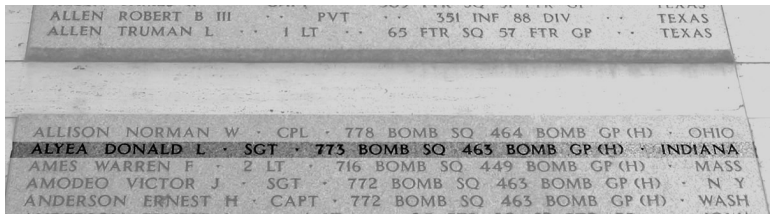
In the months before visiting the cemetery, I read a very engaging book, titled *Trapped in Tuscany*, by Tullio Bertini. It tells of his Italian-American family's experiences in a small village north of Lucca in the Garfagnana where the Nazis established the Gothic Line, their last line of defense in Italy after the Allies crossed the Arno River in the summer of 1944. In the autumn, the Allies drove the Nazis into the mountains and northward. But harsh winter conditions and shortages of supplies and personnel forced the British and U.S. forces to halt until spring. In April 1945, the British 8th Army and the U.S. 5th Army resumed the offensive, and the heaviest air assault of the war in Italy was launched. The massive air and artillery bombardment pushed the enemy further northward. Within a few weeks, resistance collapsed across the entire breadth of Northern Italy and the Nazis surrendered its enemy troops on May 2, 1945. Mr. Bertini's story is a very insightful account of the Nazi occupation, of the eroding Fascist Party of Mussolini, of the heroic effort of the Resistance, and of the Liberation by the Allies. We visited his village of Diecimo, viewed the fortifications of the Gothic Line, and walked across the twelfth-century Devil's Bridge in nearby Borgo a Mozzano. It was the only bridge in the region crossing the Serchio River which was not destroyed by the retreating Nazis.

The 5,811 Americans who gave their lives in battle during that ten-month period in Italy are memorialized here, representing just 1½% of the 405,399 Americans who died in World War II. So many lives lost and so much pain and suffering for so many families.

The cemetery is a study in symmetry. It is absolute, sublime perfection. We walked slowly and silently over the lush green lawn surrounding the pristine, understated crosses, pausing to reflect on a name, or to study the perfect geometry of the rows in all directions. We wandered from side to side of this field of honor without a course of direction. Over time we arrived at the travertine memorial at the rear of the field, whose north and south atriums are connected by the

wall displaying those tablets of the Missing in Action. There is an inscription engraved across the top of the long wall which reads, "Here are recorded the names of Americans who gave their lives in the service of their country and who sleep in unknown graves." Thinking that perhaps my father had cousins who served here, I began to scan the tablets for anyone named Parenti. Thankfully, that was not the case. But as I continued to randomly focus in and out of names on the immense wall, my gaze stopped on a name of a missing soldier from Indiana;

Alyea, Donald L. Sgt 773 Bomb Sq 463 Bomb Gp(H) Indiana



Tablet of the Missing

My mind flashed back to that day of my youth in Hebron when I heard that Louis Alyea, still suffering from the loss of his son years before, bitterly denied service to people of German descent traveling through our little town. I had somehow, incredibly and inexplicably, discovered the final resting place of the only American of which I had any personal knowledge of being killed in World War II. Without any knowledge of how or where he was killed, I had found . . . no, I was somehow delivered to . . . his memorial in Florence, Italy far from our Indiana home.

That's 1, *one*, soldier out of the 405,399 soldiers who are memorialized around the world! And, as if this wasn't incredible and improbable enough, the story would become even more incredible and personally meaningful to me.

Excited to share this experience, I called my brother Dave, who, as a teenager, worked at the Alyea family business across from our home. Dave confirmed my recollection and added something more.

After our family left Hebron, Mr. Alyea purchased our former home and gifted it to the town for use as a historical museum, and he dedicated the museum to his son, Donald L. Alyea, the fallen hero.

The Stagecoach Inn Museum. Our family home 1950-1954. Hebron, Indiana.

XL.

LA FAMIGLIA PARENTI *DI* LUCCA

In the Biblioteca Statale di Lucca (the State Library of Lucca), while researching *notizie genealogiche delle famiglie delle Lucchesi* (genealogical records of Lucca's families), Stefania came upon a notary record which quite possibly was the beginning of the Parenti family in Carraia. The previous autumn, she had traced our ancestors back to the mid-1500's, but this act records a Parenti presence there almost three hundred years earlier. The document dates to November 13, 1296 from the Archives of Santa Croce, parchment number 349. It records that Luporo Megliorati "sells to Bartolomeo, son of the late Mese Parenti of the Contrada di Borghicciolo, Porta S. Gervasio, who buys for himself and for his brother Parente, some fields in the Comune di Carraia for the price of 148 denari." The father of these Parenti brothers is referred to as the "late" Mese Parenti, so that places the family in Lucca sometime before the middle of the thirteenth century.

Stefania found another document dated March 11, 1324 which states that Parente (also known as Parentuccio) along with a different brother named Biagio, sons of the late Mese from Borghicciolo, once from Carraia, "perpetually rented fields at S. Donato di Carraia in a place called *in foscione*." San Donato today is SS. Donato e Biagio, the parish church of the Parenti family. *In foscione* is an old word for *fossone,* or big ditch. The rental price for these fields back in 1324 was 22 *staia* of wheat and millet, the equivalent of 35 kilograms or 77 pounds of grain. I have been to the fields in the area of Carraia and those south of the ditch near Pieve San Paolo and by mentally erasing the twentieth-century changes to the surrounding

landscape, it's not difficult to be transported back in time over 680 years. It's a timeless place and, from my personal perspective, it's a humbling viewpoint.

The family of the elder Mese Parenti (who for clarity will also be referred to as Mese I) lived in the Borghicciolo *contrada* (district) of Lucca near the Porta San Gervasio, which at that time was one of the four gates of the outer wall, the second, or Medieval wall of the city. The first, or Roman wall, was a quadrangular plan surrounding the grid of roads which dated to the Roman period beginning around 100 B.C. and ending with the fall of the Empire in 476. As the city grew, the Medieval wall was built between 1000 and 1265 and was defended by many towers. Two of these towers remain standing at the San Gervasio Gate which also served to provide support for the huge hinged gates. Only these gates and those of Porte dei Borghi, of the original four gates to the city, survive. Of all the towers which defined the city of this period, only one *torre* (tower) of the original four of the Palazzo Guinigi exists today, and is notable for the oak trees which crown its top. Most of the Medieval wall was torn down by the end of the 17th century after the Renaissance wall (the magnificent wall you see today) was built between 1545 and 1645. I have walked those old streets and climbed the Torre Guinigi and seen Carraia beyond those walls just a few kilometers to the southeast. And I've passed through the Porta S. Gervasio countless times there in the *contrada* of these Parentis.


Torre Guinigi, Lucca.

Stefania found another notary act which would lead her to the discovery of their family crest. The entry stated, "in the hall of the Sacristy of the Church of S. Alessandro Maggiore there are some tombstones that were brought from the church, and on one of these is a crest with a *drago* , a cross, and the following words;

+ tomb of Mese Parenti."

From this information she was able to obtain a copy of the recorded illustration of the crest. The dragon described on Mese's tomb, and as depicted in the sketch by a history scholar centuries later, was a curious beast, a type of two-legged heraldic dragon known as a wyvern. It was a creature symbolic of valor and protection, of power and strength in battle. The description of the crest by the scholar states that the beast is red, the upper field of the shield is silver and the lower field is purple. Though dragons are seldom found in medieval Italian heraldry, they are one of the symbols used by families of the *Ghibellini* faction. In that Lucca was granted *comune* privileges from Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa in 1162, I believe the crest and symbol date from that era.

Parenti Family Crest. A historical scholar's sketch as it appears on the tomb of Mese Parenti. Lucca.

Heraldic Wyvern.

Below the illustration it was stated that Parenti was an old family name and that it had an *anziano*, whose name was Mese. The *anziani* governed the city, and this Mese (who for clarity will be referred to as Mese II) was one of those public officials. He was the son of Parente (who for clarity will be referred to as Parente I) and was the grandson of the aforementioned Mese I. It indicates

that Mese II was appointed nine times as an *anziano* to various electoral colleges between the years 1371 and 1387. The terms were for two-month periods. Lucca's government had been restructured in 1370, when the five old *porte* or *contrade* districts (like the Porta S. Gervasio of the Parentis) were re-aligned into three *terzieri.* Mese served the Terziere S. Martino, named for the city's cathedral which was within the *terziere*.

S. Alessandro Maggiore*,* where the elder Mese was buried, played an important role in the civil life of Lucca, as it was the host to the Curia dei Foretani, something of a small claims court appointed by the *comune* to settle disputes between the citizenry and the peasantry. The church, built around 1060, is the best preserved example of Lucchese-Romanesque architecture in the city, but has been closed for many years for extensive restoration. One day, I will return here to search for his tombstone and that family crest.

Mese's grandson Mese, like his grandfather, was probably a successful silk merchant and money lender, as there are numerous notary acts which record his purchases and rentals of lands and houses within and outside the walls of Lucca. One records a loan of 49 gold *fiorini*, another, from 1360, details his sale of silk and silkworms to his brother Francesco for 237.5 lire which was to be repaid in one year. In 1386, Mese II made his will and stated his desire to be buried in the church of S. Maria dei Servi with his appointed heir to be the Ospedale di San Luca. Though we knew that Mese II had no children, and he therefore was not our direct ancestor, his will was of great importance to us. First, it would direct Stefania's research to the Archivio di Stato di Lucca (the State Archives of Lucca) and specifically to the records of the Spedale di S. Luca. Second, it recorded the inheritance of certain "legacies" (in this case lands) to his nephew Parente (who for clarity will be referred to as Parente II), the son of his brother Francesco, who bought those silkworms from him back in 1360. As the administrator and beneficiary of the will of Mese II, the hospital would receive an annuity, a *rendita,* in payment of grain or money every year from nephew Parente II or from his male heirs who would farm those lands. Should there be no male heirs, the lands would remain the property of the Spedale di S. Luca. Without more recorded documentation of the Parenti family of Lucca in the archives, and no more descendants indicated beyond Parente Parenti II, she really had nothing to link them to the Parenti family of Carraia. In the spring, she would research the records of the hospital with the

hope of finding the ascendants of Paolo Parenti who lived in Carraia in 1550.

By the beginning of the 13th century, Lucca had become one of the most powerful financial centers for merchant banking and trading in all of Europe. It had been granted the privilege to mint coinage (the first *lira*) by Barbarossa and by the Pope in the previous century, and its currency was highly respected for exchanges and trade throughout Europe. Lucca also had become a great weaving center known for the finest silk goods. Sericulture (the raising of silkworms for making raw silk), required the incubation and hatching of silkworms, feeding them mulberry leaves gathered from the trees in the surrounding countryside and farming the cocoons spun by the satiated worms. Those Parentis were a thread in that history of Lucca.

Sericulture. Silk production in Lucca, c. 1400.

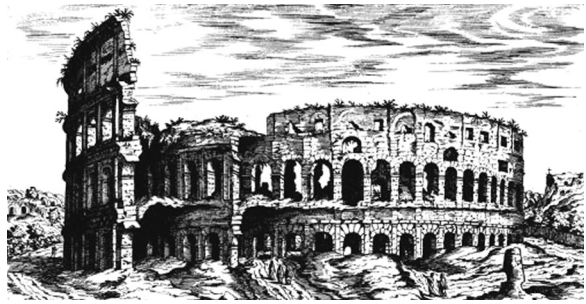
The sons and grandsons of the elder Mese may have been Lucchese soldiers serving beside the mercenaries under the *condottiero* Castruccio Castracani, Duke of Lucca, in the incessant wars with Florence and the *Guelfi* faction. Machiavelli's romanticized, fictionalized history of Lucca in the early 14th century in his *Life of Castruccio Castracani of Lucca* describes Castruccio's rise to power and the battles of his army throughout Tuscany. Reading about the thousands of horsemen and foot-soldiers leaving Lucca's gates and advancing east *en route* to routing the Florentines at Altopascio in 1325, I realized that they marched near (maybe through) those fields rented by Bartolomeo and his brother Parente Parenti I back in 1296 and also those rented by Parente I and another brother, Biagio, in 1324, just one year before that historic battle.

Castruccio Castracani.

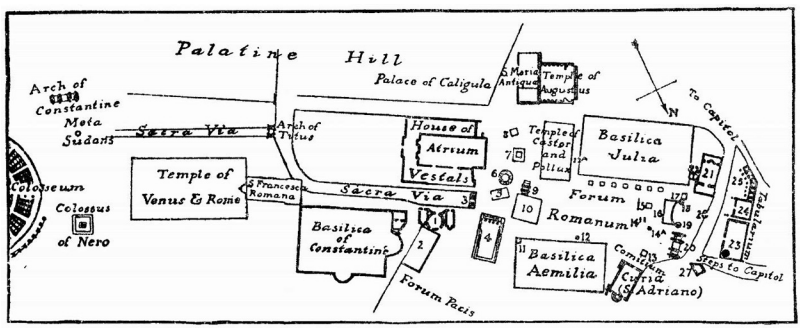
But are they my ancestors? Maybe we'll know more in the spring.


LVCA
LVCAM

Lucca c.1650 after the completion of the Renaissance Wall. Borghicciolo *contrada,* where Mese Parenti resided in the 13th Century, is at lower right inside the new wall. The remains of the Medieval Wall are seen running vertically, then sweeping to the left. The *Duomo* S.Martino is in the lower center area.



Colosseum, Rome, 88 A.D. An engraving from the 16th century.



Beautiful downtown Rome, c. 343 A.D. The Colosseum is at far left, Sacra Via leads to the Roman Forum and to the Capitol at far right.

The *"Vagabondi"* at the Roman Forum.

XLI.

TO ROME AND HOME

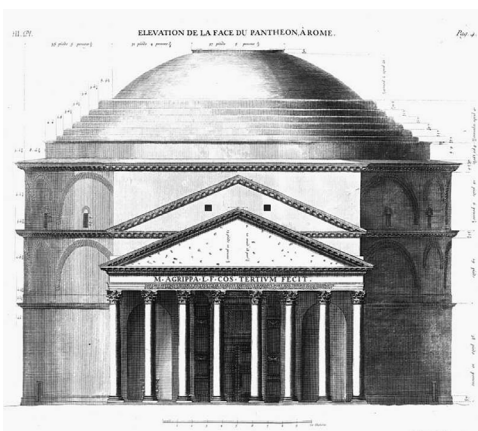
It was time to go. We had arranged for three days in Roma before saying *arrividerci* once again. Good-bye to good friends, our farmhouse, the chickens, and the good life. But we will hear Tuscany call, my namesake Dino singing "*retorna me,"* and we vow we will "hurry back, hurry back."

We made the most of our three nanoseconds in the Eternal City with its three thousand years of legend and history. Once we learned about the twins Romulus and Remus being sent from Mars and suckled by a she-wolf, we were on our way. Then, Romulus killed his brother because he crossed the line; his young Roman soldiers raped the neighboring Sabine wives and daughters, and he became the first king around 753 B.C.—setting an example of behavior for fellow Romans to follow for many centuries to come. Upon his death, Romulus was carried off to Mars, allowing many kings, dynasties, and a lot of wars to follow. And lots of nasty behavior, too . . . like gladiatorial circus-games and the murder of Emperors. Hard to imagine how all of this could come to an end after less than a thousand years, but it did in 343. And then there is a little history here regarding a passel of Popes and the Catholic Church, some Holier Roman Emperors, and a lot more wars!

But we came for the incomparable art and architecture, the ruins of the fallen Empire, to be in the presence of more of Michelangelo's genius and for a few licks at the best chocolate *tartufo* in the world. We both had visited Rome before, so this was something of a re-do. Being a Roman is much too complex, with too many layers of comings and goings and its sci-fi beginnings are well

outside my realm of imagination. It would consume another lifetime to begin to understand all of this. Besides, if I have another life to live, I'm living it as a Florentine.

Day One. The last years of Imperial Rome, beginning in 49 B.C. when Caesar crossed the Rubicon and took Rome, is as far back and *far out* as we need to go. Five years later, he became dictator for life—which lasted all of one month when he was murdered by Cassius and Brutus—immortalized by "*et tu Brute!"* By 27 B.C., Roman "democracy" came to an end when absolute power was bestowed upon Augustus, the first Emperor, marking the beginning of the Roman Empire. Most of what's left to see of this period is in ruins, but what remains is remarkable. If you go to Rome; walk slowly past Palazzo Venezia, look up at the balcony and imagine Mussolini making bombastic speeches up there. Be careful crossing the boulevard and proceed quickly past the hideous Victor Emmanuel II "Monstrosity" (Monument). Then climb the steps of Michelangelo's *Cordonata* to the Piazza del Campidoglio (Capitol) and gaze upon his designs of the *palazzi* facades and the geometric paving of the *piazza.* Michelangelo wanted no part of this, but the Farnese Pope made him do it. Walk to the back of the Capitol for an overview of the Forum before descending into the maze of ruins. Watch your step as you proceed past the House of the Vestal Virgins on the Via Sacra. Pause to pay your respects at the remains of Caesar before passing through the Arch of Titus on your way to the Colosseum, the memorial to unthinkable, blood-thirsty acts committed by Romans against mankind and the animal kingdom as entertainment. Once you've had your fill of these relics and ruins, stroll over to the Pantheon on the Piazza della Rotunda to see the best example of Imperial Roman architecture and one of the engineering marvels in all of history. Designed by Emperor Hadrian's architects in the year 118, it was the largest



Pantheon, Rome, 118 AD.

domed building in the world for an astounding 1,318 years before Brunelleschi put the finishing touches on the *Duomo* in Firenze in 1436. Take a table at one of the *ristoranti* on the *piazza* in view of the Pantheon and with a glass (or two) of wine, bask in the shadows of one of the wonders of the world.

Day Two. It's off to the Vatican at dawn to queue up for the museums and to be funneled into those long, long chutes (they call them galleries) stuffed with art and pressed with flesh. We bob-and-weave past guides frantically trying to keep their pack together while screaming out a little history in so many tongues; we duck under video cameras held on high above the throngs, panning the walls randomly, presumably to share a little culture when they get back home; and we squeeze sideways through gaps in the multitude as the herd jostles its way shoulder-to-shoulder and horn-to-horn in this Mecca of Madness pressing forward to the promise land of the Renaissance experience, the Sistine Chapel.

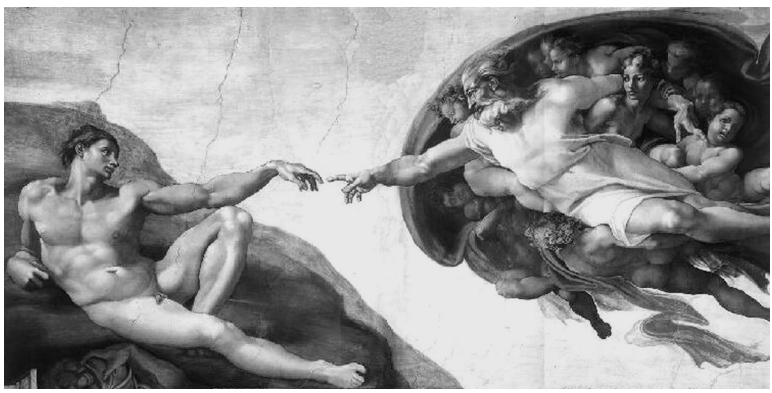
It made me think about my first trip to Italy, just twenty-five years before. It was a very different world then, not so many tourists and a lot less security. Up in Milan, I wandered into the refectory of

The Last Supper, Leonardo da Vinci, S. Maria della Grazie, Milan, 1979.

the Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie where the restoration of Leonardo's *The Last Supper* had just begun. There were no guards, no

workers, and no tourists. Just me, an electric fan sitting upon a wooden chair atop some makeshift scaffolding, the coffee pot of Pinin Brambilla Barcilon (the restorer) and a bucket of the artist's brushes and materials beside his chair. For fifteen minutes or so, I was alone in the refectory with the most famous painting in Christendom. I could have climbed up there, taken the bag of silver from Judas and painted horns on him—but the scaffolding didn't extend to that side of the fresco. I don't know if the Apostles were more surprised by what Jesus had just told them, or by my unexpected and uninvited presence at their table.

I also made the pilgrimage here to the Sistine Chapel in Rome back in 1979, just before the Chapel closed for the controversial



The Creation of Adam, Michelangelo, Sistine Ceiling, Rome.

cleaning of the ceiling. It was completely different, like night and day. To me, it was not better or worse, just different. I wondered what Michelangelo would have thought about all of this. He didn't want to paint that ceiling in the first place, arguing that he was not experienced in fresco painting, but Pope Julius II made him do it. And twenty-four years later, he didn't want to paint that end wall either, but the Farnese Pope made him finish the job. Michelangelo adamantly refused to cover up the private parts on those nudes in *The Last Judgment*, so later they brought in one of his disciples to add some incongruously- (but very strategically-) placed swathes of drapery and diapers.

Before Popes started telling him what to do, Michelangelo had come here and sculpted the *Pieta* on his first trip to Rome. Pope Julius II summoned him to return here after finishing the *David* in Florence, with the promise of a sculpting commission much to

Michelangelo's liking—an enormous tomb for Julius with a lifetime of sculpting work. Julius was so taken with the design that before commencing on the work, he decided that he needed a new St. Peter's to house that tomb. Over the next sixty years, the tomb commission dwindled; the problems with the building of St. Peter's became monumental; and guess who was appointed to be the chief architect by the Pope of the day? It was a project he didn't want, and Michelangelo argued that he was not experienced in architecture. It would occupy him for the rest of his life, keeping him in Rome, away from Florence, his home. It also prevented him from finishing the façade of San Lorenzo and sculpting the magnificent tombs in the sublime Cappelle Medicee, most importantly, the tomb sculpture of Lorenzo the Magnificent, who had adopted this Tuscan son as a boy.

The Dome of St. Peter's, Michelangelo.

He didn't live to see the dome he designed and engineered for St. Peter's. But you can stand beneath it, look into its soaring cupola and experience the mature genius of Michelangelo at almost 90. Walk down the nave, back to the entrance, where in a chapel on the left, is a work known as the *Pieta*, sculpted by that same genius when he was not yet 25. And in between, he had done those frescoes over in the Sistine Chapel. There in the Vatican is his legacy, his mastery of all three disciplines—sculpture, painting and architecture—making Michelangelo the quintessential Renaissance artist.

There has never been anyone like him, and there probably never will be.

Pieta, Michelangelo, St. Peter's.

Michelangelo died in Rome, but he would come home to Florence. From the account of his biographer and friend, Vasari, "Michelangelo's body was smuggled out of Rome . . . concealed in a bale." His funeral was held in San Lorenzo, the family church of the Medici, and he is interred in Santa Croce along with many famous Florentines.

Day three. Enough genius! It's a day to go Baroque, throw some coins in the Trevi fountain, do some steppin' out at Trinita della Monti, stroll the Via Condotti, do a lap around Piazza Navona, and lap up some of that *gelato*. Tomorrow we are going home.

It's Sunday, it's a hot summer day, and it's High Season. It's our last day in Rome and there is no tomorrow. It's our version of *Roman Holiday* fifty years later. So we charge into the fray like gladiatorial combatants. The crush of humanity in the Piazza di Trevi rivals that of the Sistine Chapel. With Sinatra's refrain of "*Three coins in the fountain*" in mind (and some editing of the lyrics) I toss three European Union coins in the fountain (me playing the role of three hopeful lovers) with the hope of good fortune and a return to the Eternal City. Next we're off to that enormous stairway, the Spanish Steps, where, from the Church of Trinita dei Monti, we look down upon a sea of sun-worshipping, step-sitting, picture-snapping *turisti,* and beyond to an undulating wave of shoppers flooding Via Condotti, the former "conduit" or channel, whose banks are now lined with the designer showrooms of Valentino, Armani, and Prada. We navigated around shoppers toting big logo-laden bags of booty and past long lines of them queued up to get into the shops. All of them eagerly awaiting for those lucky shoppers inside to exit, and for the guard to allow them into these dens of treasures. And they weren't having a Sizzling Summer Sale. Surviving that venue, we struck out for the Piazza Navona and Bernini's *Fontana dei Quattro Fiumi* (Fountain of the Four Rivers). It really should have had a title something like "Fountain with Four Giant Naked River Gods with an Egyptian Obelisk on Top." It's very bizarre and is Baroque at its best, if you like that sort of thing. Mostly we're here for the 3,000 calorie ball of chocolate *gelato* from the shop a few steps across the *piazza,* the *tartufo* from the *gelateria* Tre Scalini. That's *gelato* at its best, and we like *that* sort of thing!

Arrividerci*, Roma and *Sweet Home Chicago. At dawn, we're off to Chicago where Priscilla and I part. She is off to Ohio to retrieve our cats, Sophie and Sweet Pea. I'm staying in Chicago to meet my new-found relatives, the Fabbris (the family of my father's half-cousin that he never knew) and to do some Parenti family archaeology while I'm here.

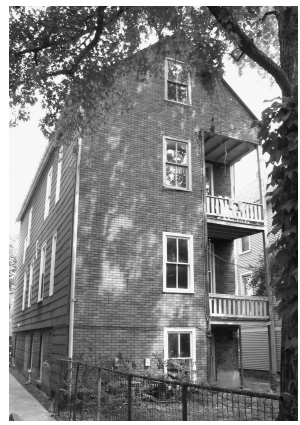
I felt as though I already knew Gemma and her husband Fabio from our telephone conversations; from the wonderful story she gave me regarding her life at Corte Pardino; and from her recollections of my great-grandfather Paolino and of my grandfather Leone. I was very anxious, but just a little apprehensive, to finally meet them. What if we just didn't connect? What if . . . *Forget it!* It was a very warm reception and we were all very eager to get to know one another better. I visited their home, met their two daughters and their families at a favorite Italian restaurant, and shared family photos and stories. They drove me to the site of the old Columbus Hospital, founded by St. Francis Cabrini, the first American canonized by the Catholic Church as the Patron Saint of Immigrants. This is the hospital where she died and where my father was born. Gemma and Fabio showed me their former home, the place where many of the family photographs, which Joyce shared with us, were taken back in 1966.

Old Columbus Hospital, Chicago.

Saint Francis Cabrini.

They took me to the house at 3116 Kenmore Avenue where Leone and Jessie rented a small apartment and where they brought their son home from the hospital back in December of 1919. I walked around the building and imagined the scene on that wintry night eighty-seven years before.

I felt I had in some ways culminated my journey of the past year. Beginning with just the birth certificate of my father, his parents' marriage license, and one photo of my grandfather, the journey had led me back to the place in America, to the hospital site and the home where my Italian-American ancestry began.



3116 Kenmore Avenue, Chicago.

The Fabbris and their new relative, their *parente,* kissed each other on the cheeks and said *arrividerci.* I was going to our new home and rejoining my wife and our kitties.

We settled into Portland as if we had always lived here. We had our own kitchen, our own pillows and all of our stuff. Priscilla was delighted to be painting in the studio and I savored my Internet connection for research. We joined the Portland Art Museum and we became members of the Oregon Historical Society where we experienced the Lewis and Clark National Bicentennial Exhibition. It was two hundred years ago that their journey of discovery reached its destination in the Pacific Northwest, and where they, too, settled in for the winter.

XLII.

NEW DISCOVERIES AND NEW-FOUND FAMILIES

While Stefania was searching the archives for documents linking the Parenti family of Lucca from the 13th century to our ancestors in Carraia from the 16th century, Dylan was also digging a little deeper. There were missing people and their histories here in America. Relatives who knew some of our family history just weren't forthcoming with what they did know.

Since the Parenti boys were all here at the time of World War I, Dylan determined that they must have had to register for the military draft. Here's what he found out about those brothers and their whereabouts around 1917-18:

Armando, the first to come, registered as a single man residing in Beardstown, Cass County, Illinois and was working as an assistant foreman for the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad.

Giorgio, registered as a single man residing in Cook County, Illinois and was working at the Kirk Soap Factory at Pine and North Water Street in Chicago. The record also states that he served in the Italian Army for 27 months, which explains why he, the oldest brother, was not the first to emigrate.

Evaristo was registered in California and was exempt from the draft because his parents in Italy were dependent on his financial support.

Leone (calling himself "Leo") also was single, resided at 2038 North Halsted Street in Chicago and was employed by the Goddart Tool Company. Curiously, it also recorded that he was from "*Carria*" ("rotting flesh") the same incorrect spelling recorded in the Ellis

Island information, and he stated that his father Paolino's name was "Paul" Parenti. In eighteen months, he would name his son David Paul Parenti.

This told us something more about where they were and a little about what they were doing around the time that my father was born in 1919. We still wanted to know their whereabouts and family situations after they left Chicago for California. So Dylan dug still deeper in the family garden and through Internet searches came upon Starla Elaine Parenti, the daughter of Steve Parenti, and the granddaughter of Giorgio Parenti, Leone's brother and my father's uncle. Through Starla we learned that her 75-year-old father and 80-year-old uncle Gino are the two surviving sons of Giorgio. Steve and Gino are cousins of my father, who they never knew. Steve remembers Leone, but doesn't know much about him other than he was the brother closest to Giorgio. He seems to think that his uncle Armando, for whom Giorgio's first two sons were named, was killed in an auto accident on Mt. Diablo outside Tracy, California in 1927, but maybe he was injured and later died of the bone infection that Gemma described. Curiously, he doesn't remember much of anything about Evaristo. Curious, because those brothers (Giorgio and Evaristo) were so close in age, lived close to each other, and because they were always together, along with Leone, when they first came to America.


Starla Elaine Parenti at age 2.

Starla wants to learn more about her grandmother, Giorgio's wife Pia Bandoni, but has had difficulty getting information from her family and from some of the same relatives that have frustrated us in our research. She, too, cannot

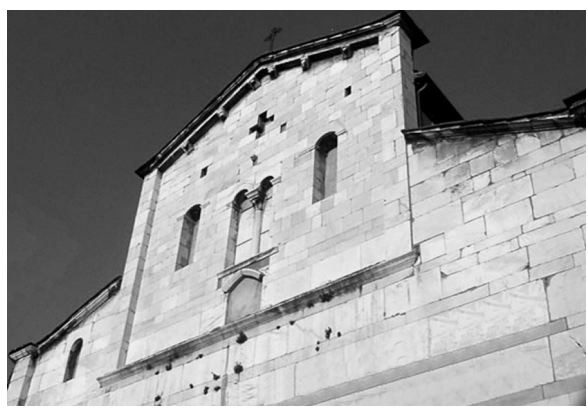

Steve and Patty Parenti, California, c. 1950.

understand why her father's cousins won't talk to us and why they are so stubborn. She wonders what they have to hide and why they won't help her. We have exchanged photographs and documents of our common ancestors, recommended various search methods, and have encouraged her to fight on. Maybe if enough of us take up the cause, this older generation will surrender. I spoke with Steve and, hopefully, established a good basis for the sharing of family history. It occurred to me while speaking with him, that he was the first (and only) of now five new-found cousins of my father who was sharing any family history. I learned that he, among other things, was a milkman just like his cousin. I'm beginning to think there is a milkman gene in the family DNA. He gave me his telephone number and his address and said he wanted to talk some more. He'd talk with his brother Gino and see what they can remember. I've learned to be a bit cautious with my enthusiasm and expectations on these matters.

As for the other new-found cousins of my father, Remo finally responded to a letter I sent requesting the vital statistics of his family along with a couple of questions about his childhood memories of his grandfather. He provided the dates, but reiterated that he could not remember anything about Corte Pardino from the first fourteen years of his life. He expressed his regret that he could not help anymore. He wished me, "all the best on the book" and signed the letter, "Your cousin, Remo." As the letter was in perfect English, someone wrote the letter for him, but I have to accept that the sentiment was his. I had hoped for much more. As for his sister Tecla, despite half-cousin Gemma's prodding, she just wasn't going to cooperate, as was the case for the other cousin, Diane.

Hopefully, their ancestors will be more interested in this story and our shared history. We'll see.

Spedale di S. Luca, Lucca, established 1297 and cornerstone plaque. The hospital was the beneficiary of the will of Mese Parenti II in 1386, and the administrator of the fields rented by many generations of Parenti *contadini* in Carraia.



S. Alessandro Maggiore, Lucca. built c. 1060. It was the church and burial site of Mese Parenti, and was the host of the Curia dei Foretani.

XLIII.

LA FAMIGLIA PARENTI *DI* CARRAIA

Over the winter I learned that the Spedale di S. Luca was founded in 1287, when Mese I was living in the Contrada di Borghicciolo of Lucca, just outside the Medieval wall, near the S. Gervasio gate. The nineteenth-century historian, Emanuele Repetti, writing about the hospital in his *Dizionario Geografico Fisico Storio della Toscana*, states that "the head doctor was probably nominated by the counsels (*anziani*) of the *curia* (Curia dei Foretani) or by the Merchant's Guild of Lucca, who administered the establishment." The connection of the last will and testament of his grandson, Mese II, one hundred years later in 1386, and his choice of benefactor was now understood. Mese I, who died sometime before 1296, was buried in S. Alessandro Maggiore, the church which was the host of the Curia. As a silk merchant and banker, he was probably a member of the Merchant's Guild and maybe had something to do with the establishment of the Spedale di S. Luca. And though no records were uncovered which preceded his death, he may have bequeathed some of his worldly possessions through his church and to the new *Spedale* as a respected citizen and parishioner. Another connection of the Parenti family to the Spedale di S. Luca occurs almost five hundred years later. Upon its founding in 1775, the *Spedale* was responsible for the administration of the Ospedale di Fregionaia in Santa Maria a Colle, the asylum where my great-grandmother Clementina died in 1897.

Stefania was ready to resume her research in Lucca. In the State Archives she methodically read through three hundred years of records in the *Libri dei Renditori* (Books of the Annuities) of the

Spedale di S. Luca. She was hoping to connect the Parenti family of Lucca lineage (based on the 1386 will of Mese Parenti) through the *rendita* (rental payment) of the farmlands of the Parenti *contadini* of Carraia she had traced to 1550. Because the fields they farmed belonged to the hospital, the *contadini* were required to pay an annual rent. The transactions between the hospital and the *renditore* (renter) were recorded in these documents, called *renditori.* The payment could also be semi-annual and it could be in money and/or in goods, animals, or crops. The contract between the *renditore* and the hospital is called a *livello* and lasted 29 years. Typical of these contracts is that the *renditore* paid something of a down payment and was obligated to improve the land and property. This contract could only be inherited by a son (*figlio*) or by a grandson or nephew (*nipote*). In these recordings you can find the name of the *renditore* and usually the name of his father and sometimes of the grandfather. They may also reveal the name of a brother, or a nephew or an uncle. There is generally a description of the property, and if you are fortunate, maybe a little history of the previous renter and perhaps a reference to who occupies the bordering lands.

The payment of rents by these farmers of Carraia to the hospital was generally in grain; usually corn, millet, and wheat. The amount of grain to be paid is stated in terms of a unit of measure of the time known as a *staio*. A *staiora* is the unit of measure for the size of the land that can be sown with a *staio* of grain. The equivalent measure today is about 1/5 hectare (*ettaro*) of land sown with about 25 litres of grain. Seems a bit complicated, but they did it like this for centuries and there is a story told with each recording. Not only are they interesting, but they were indispensable for researching our agrarian ancestors.

First, Stefania discovered a document from 1537 which listed Paolo, who was the last Parenti in our lineage from the church records of the Archdiosese of Lucca last fall, as the son of Mariano Parenti. Then in the *Libri dei Renditori* from 1492—the year that their countryman Cristoforo Colombo set sail for the Indies but discovered the New World— Mariano was recorded as being the son of Giusto, who was the son of Parente Parenti of Carraia (that's now Parente III). Mariano and his two sons yielded 14 *staiora* and the payment was made in two installments. These recordings had yielded three more generations! And in the *Libri dei Renditori* for the years 1463-1480, she unearthed a fourth when Parente III was revealed to be the son of

Michele, who was the son of Michelino Parenti and the farmer of a field yielding 6 *staiora* of wheat each year.

Through the civil records in Capannori just eighteen months before, we discovered my great-grandfather, Paolino. And just six months later, in the church records in Lucca, Stefania had identified my great (x10) grandfather, Paolo. Now, by working the fields of data in the *Libri dei Renditori* of the *Spedale*, and the discovery of an *estimo* in the Archivio di Stato di Lucca, she yielded my great (x15) grandfather, Michelino!

The *renditore* for the years 1442-1462 and the *estimo* from 1412 were vital in that two details of Michelino's life became known to us. Firstly, he was also known as *di S. Martino*, saying that he was from the *contrada* near the *Duomo* S. Martino, Lucca's incredible cathedral dating from the 11th century. Secondly, it was learned that he was the son of Parente Parenti II. With this knowledge, we were tantalizingly close to connecting the families of Lucca and Carraia with certainty.

The confirmation of the ancestral link came in the accounts for 1397, in volume 594. It was the missing link! Recorded under "income and consideration for lands owned by the Spedale di S. Luca in Lucca" on page 52, with reference to Carraia of Pieve S. Paolo, the entry read: "Michelino Parenti, called S. Martino, yields each year to the Spedale 2.5 *staia* wheat as rent for the under-mentioned fields, as stated on pages 96 and 85." It continues, "the *staiora* are two fields that once belonged to Mese Parenti and are in the place called Toringana." Toringana is today crossed by the road Via Chiesa Toringo and the Toringo area adjoins Corte Pardino and the western fields of Carraia. The record further states that one of the bordering fields is rented by his grandfather Francesco, "brother of the above mentioned Mese." Mese's grandfather Mese was my great (x19) grandfather!

That's my great-great-great-great-great-great-great-
great-great-great-great-great-great-
great-great-great-great-great-
great-grandfather.

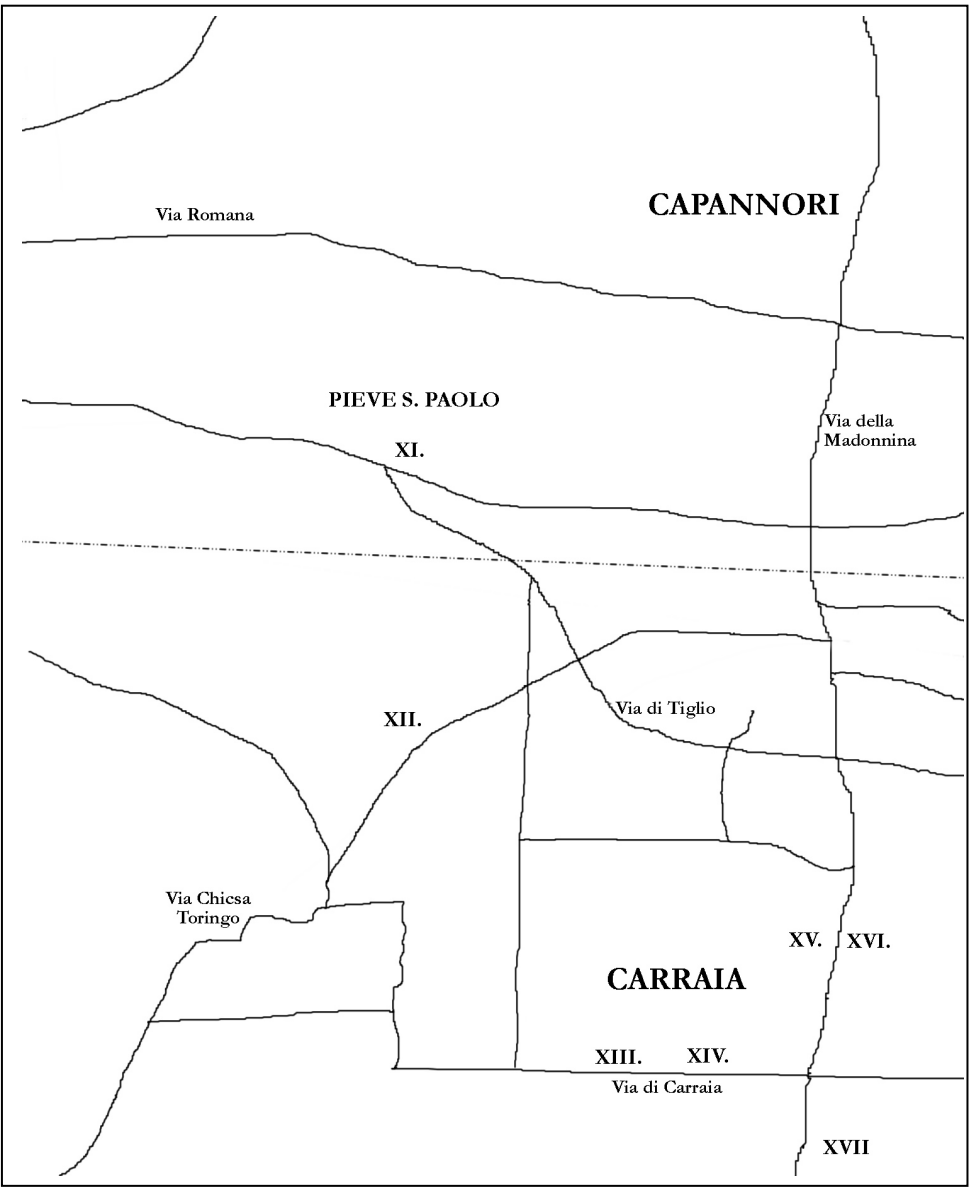
MESE PARENTI

THE PARENTI FAMILY TREES
THE AUTHOR'S ASCENDANTS

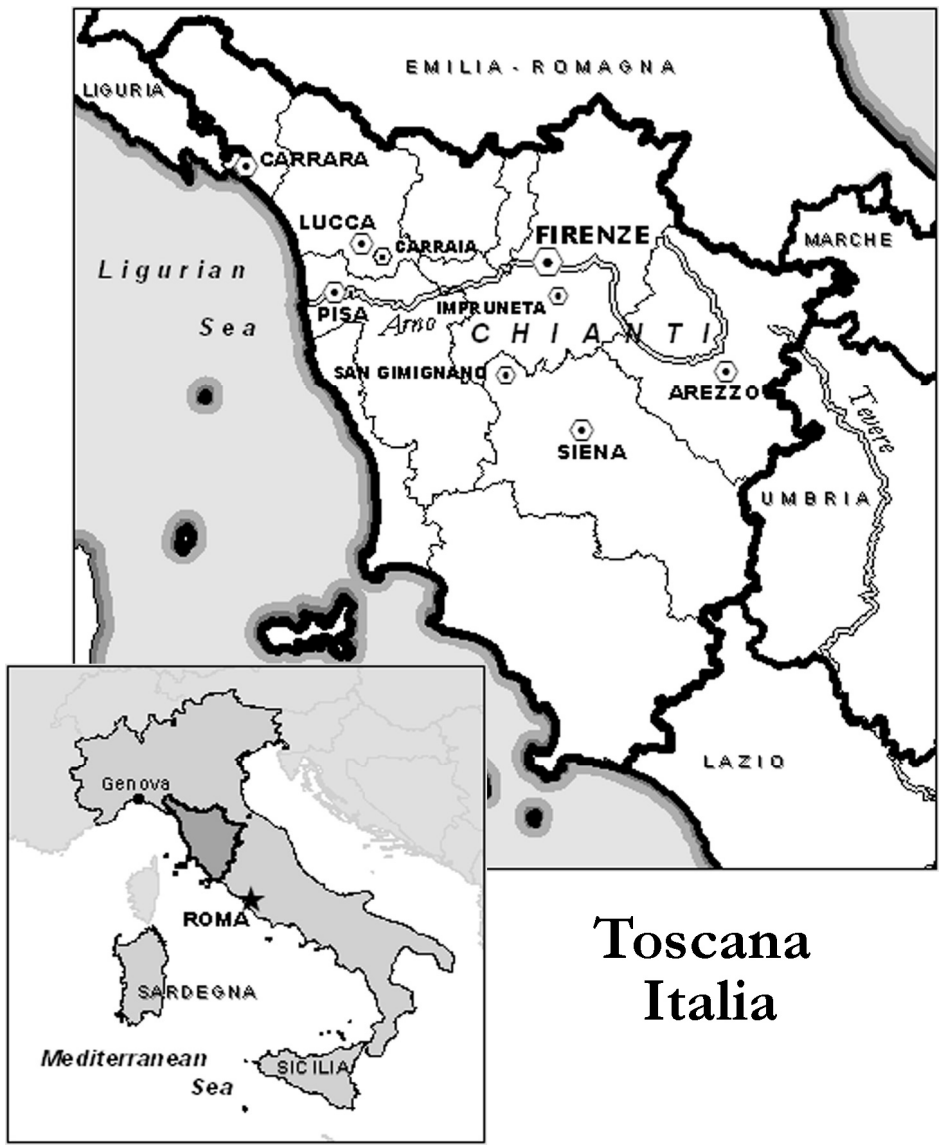
Year	Ascendant	Events in Italy
		Marco Polo born
1260	**Mese Parenti I**	**Siena defeats Florence at Montaperti**
	died 1297	**Medieval Walls of Lucca Completed**
	Contrada Borghicciolo,	
	Porta S. Gervasio, Lucca	**Spedale di S. Luca founded**
	|	**Work begins on Florence Cathedral**
1300	**Parente Parenti I**	
	sp. Donna Mattea Pilistri	**Work begins on Palazzo Vecchio**
	Purchased lands in Carraia in 1296	**Dante writes the *Divine Comedy***
	rented lands at S.Donato, Carraia in 1324	**Castruccio Castracani rules Lucca**
	|	**Arno River Floods**
1340	**Francesco Parenti**	**Re-building of the Ponte Vecchio**
	|	**Tower of Pisa Completed**
	Parente Parenti II	**Black Death kills half of Tuscany**
1380	|	**End of Pisan Rule of Lucca**
	Michelino Parenti	
	"di San Martino"	
	|	
	Michele Parenti	**Guinigi family rules Lucca**
	1384 – 1450	
	sp. Margherita	
1420	|	
	Parente Parenti III	
	|	**Brunelleschi completes *Duomo***
1460	**Giusto Parenti**	**Leonardo da Vinci born**
	|	**Michelangelo born**
	Mariano Parenti	**Columbus to the Americas**
1500	|	**Death of Lorenzo the Magnificent**
	Paolo Parenti	**Michelangelo sculpts *David***
	|	**Michelangelo paints Sistine Chapel**
1540	**Vincenti Parenti**	**Siege of Florence**
	sp. Lucrezia Malfatti	**Council of Trent**
	|	**Death of Michelangelo**
1580	**Domenico Parenti**	**Building of Lucca's Present Walls**
	sp. Maddalena Biancalana	
	|	
1620	**Domenico Parenti**	**St. Peter's Completed**
	4/12/1641-	**Galileo Excommunicated**
	sp. Zabetta Parenti	**Bernini re-designs *Piazza Navona***
	|	

Year	Ascendant	Events in Italy
1660	**Francesco Parenti**	
	- 7/28/1745	**Foreign Rule by Spain**
	sp. Domenica Michelotti	**Italy in Decline**
	- 6/24/1747	**End of Medici Dynasty**
	|	
1700	**Ranieri Parenti**	
	1/18/1703 – 3/26/1776	**Spanish Steps Designed**
	sp. Lucrezia Biagini	**Foreign rule by Austria**
1740	|	
	Andrea Parenti	**Trevi Fountain Completed**
	11/28/1738 – 4/7/1816	**Philip Mazzei travels to Virginia**
	sp. Elisabetta Biancalana	
1780	|	
	Luigi Ranieri Parenti	
	2/28/1780 – 8/15/1859	**Napoleonic Rule**
	sp. Domenica Pardini	**Civil Registration**
1820	|	
	Gio Domenico Parenti	**Revolts throughout Italy**
	7/8/1822 – 9/9/1895	
	sp. Angela Benetti	
	2/12/1838 – 8/20/1899	
1860	|	**Unification**
	Pietro Paolino Parenti	**The Kingdom of Italy**
	3/23/1863 – 1/30/1941	**Civil Registration Revived**
	sp. Clementina Genovina Michelotti	
	4/28/1867 – 5/17/1897	**Mass Emigration to U.S**
1900	|	
	Leone Quinto Parenti	
	2/20/1897 – 6/17/1981	**World War I**
	sp. Jessie Marie Jones	**Communist Party Founded**
	2/14/1901 – 8/17/1979	
1920	|	
	David Paul Parenti	**Mussolini and Fascism**
	12/09/1919 – 5/30/1985	**World War II**
	sp. Elline Grace Wiseman	**Allied and Nazi Bombings**
	10/19/1919 – 5/5/1966	
1940	|	
	Dino Parenti	**The Republic of Italy**
	1/28/1947 -	
1960		**Arno River Flood**
		European Union

I. The road to S. Maria a Colle and Ospedale di Fregionaia, where Clementina died in 1897.
II. The Cimitero di S. Anna, where Clementina was buried in grave 448.
III. The Renaissance Wall was built between 1545 and 1645.
IV. The Medieval Wall was built between 1000 and 1265.
V. The Palazzo Guinigi was the palace of the Guinigi family who ruled Lucca.
VI. The Porta S. Gervasio was the eastern gate of the Medieval Wall of Lucca.
VII. *Duomo* S. Martino, Lucca's cathedral, was first built in the 12th Century.
VIII. Borghicciolo *contrada*, where Mese Parenti resided in the 13th Century.
IX. *Stazione Ferroviaria* is the station from which the Parenti brothers departed for Genova.
X. *Acquedotto*. The old aqueduct brought water to Lucca from the surrounding hills.



XI. Pieve S. Paolo is the church where the Parentis were baptized for centuries.
XII. The area of the fields rented by the Parenti brothers in the 13th and 14th Centuries.
XIII. Corte Pardino, the Parenti ancestral farmhouse and lands for many generations.
XIV. The *Cappelle* and *Madonnina* on Via di Carraia is near Corte Pardino.
XV. The *Cimitero* where Paolino Parenti was buried in 1941.
XVI. SS. Donato e Biagio was the parish *chiesa* for many generations of Parentis.
XVII. The road to *Canale detto Rogio*, the canal which bordered other lands farmed by Paolino.



Toscana
Italia

XLIV.

REVELATIONS

Over the course of my search, I came to know and understand some things of which I had no previous knowledge. I didn't know that Italy's history was so filled with endless wars, calamities, and upheaval which shaped its history and sent its sons and daughters fleeing to a new world. And I didn't know that the wars in which America was involved, and the development of the railroads here, were so much a part of our twentieth-century family history—of our destinies and destinations. There were questions which troubled me, things I didn't understand, and things I had difficulty accepting in the beginning of our research. But over time, our discoveries, conversations, and experiences would provide me some lessons and understandings—some revelations—about our family history.

Why did the Parenti brothers leave their homeland, their father, and their lives behind them and not return?

I came to understand that life in Italy offered little promise at the beginning of the twentieth century. These farmers were dirt poor, life was hard, and living conditions were primitive. World War I was about to erupt in Europe. Stories from America, "where the streets were paved with gold" beckoned these boys to leave with dreams of a better life. In America there were opportunities, jobs, electricity, and indoor plumbing. I understood this, but struggled as to why they did not return to see their father or send for him. One of the reasons was economic. These men were laborers, wages were low and times were difficult in America. The political and social conditions in Italy were ever-changing between 1912 (when the first brother immigrated) and 1941 (when their father died) and there were two World Wars to keep them apart. Maybe if they had returned to Italy, they would not have

been able to re-enter the U.S. If he had been given the opportunity to join them in America, I believe that Paolino would have chosen to stay at Corte Pardino in Carraia. It was his home, his land, the only life he ever knew. He was a son of Tuscany. His four sons had left him one by one, and years later, his youngest daughter and granddaughter would say good-bye. After generations and generations, centuries upon centuries of being *contadini* in Carraia, it all came to an end with his death in 1941.

How did Clementina die and why was she not brought home from the asylum upon her death and not buried near her family, her home, and her church? Why was she taken to the Lucca cemetery for a nameless, unceremonious burial in grave number 448?

I came to understand that mental illness was considered a hideous and shameful condition and its stigma was more powerful than family, church, or tradition. I also learned that the Ospedale di Fregionaia was treating patients for manic-depression and schizophrenia at that time, but whatever the medication or treatment may have been in 1897, and whether those experimental cures may have been the cause of her death may never be known. The state may release these medical records when I petition for them on my next trip to Lucca. My great-grandmother may have had a mental condition, maybe incurred nerve damage from successive childbirths, or maybe she was just mentally and physically destroyed from giving birth and caring for five children. Her life was hard, with endless and arduous tasks. She died at age 30, just three months after my grandfather's birth. She had no more life in her and, sadly, her life ended "shamefully."

Why won't my father's new-found cousins talk to me? Why isn't this history as important to them as it is to me?

I have come to understand that I am not considered to be family by these relatives. There has been no interest in knowing me or sharing their knowledge of our ancestors. Whether they are suspicious of my intentions and being secretive (as if they have something to hide) or they simply don't care because there's nothing in it for them, I just don't know. They have their own particular (maybe peculiar) and personal reasons for not wanting to meet me or to respond to my interview questionnaires. I accept those decisions, but I don't respect those decisions. For me, those decisions are selfish, without regard to their descendants who may have an interest in their family history.

Their lack of cooperation in this endeavor is the single most disappointing lesson I learned doing family research. Maybe they think I'm after something, like some proceeds from the sale of the family home and lands decades ago. Maybe there is a stigma to the mental illness in our lineage. Maybe it's just that *menefreghismo* thing, that "I couldn't care less" attitude. But I also have come to consider that perhaps they don't want to remember the past . . . that perhaps they have memories which are too painful to relive and I maybe should be somewhat compassionate. If they won't tell me, I'll probably never know.

Who was my grandfather, why did he abandon his wife and baby son, and what sort of man was he?

These were fundamental questions to my four decades of interest in our family history. Leone came to America in 1914 as a poor, unskilled, seventeen-year-old boy who went to work with his older brothers on the railroad. They worked around the Midwest on various lines, always sticking together. At some time, probably in the spring of 1919, Leone met my grandmother in the big city, Chicago. Jessie became pregnant with my father, and on September 1st they married. He spoke very little English, she spoke no Italian, and they had nothing in their backgrounds that was common. Their attraction was of a physical nature, as he was very handsome and she was a young pretty girl. Maybe he married her because it was the right thing to do, or maybe he wanted an American-born wife. Whatever the reasons, within a few months the union became untenable and Leone disappeared within weeks of my father's birth on December 9, 1919. He didn't know anything about this girl, didn't care for her and he wasn't ready to be a father. His brothers were heading to California and he was going to be there with them. There are no divorce records and my grandmother never knew what became of him. Maybe he never contacted them because he could not, or chose not, to contribute to their support. Maybe he couldn't find them because they moved from Chicago to Indiana. Or maybe he just wanted to forget about them and his irresponsible action. He didn't share that chapter of his life with many people, perhaps because he felt shame. Leaving his first family in Chicago, he went to California, married an Italian-American woman, became a good father to their daughter, and was respected by his family. I have been assured that he was a good man whose actions as a young man followed him for the rest of his days. Because of this (and because I want to be somewhat, if not

completely forgiving of his abandonment of our family), I want to believe that he wondered about his son from time to time over all of those years, maybe wondering what sort of man he was, whether he, too, had children and grandchildren.

Mostly, I wish that he would have known his son.

Why did I find resolution to my relationship with my father in Tuscany, and why did it take so long?

The last time I spoke with my father, as he lay dying in the hospital, we apologized for the things that had come between us over the years. This was meaningful, but it didn't really bring closure for me. I wasn't completely forgiving, or understanding why it ever happened. For me, the father/son kinship connection was unresolved.

I'm not a spiritual person, but I've experienced my share of miracles and inexplicable occurrences, so I believe that there is something more going on "out there" than meets the eyes. One such unexplainable (for me, still today) occurrence was at a bookshop in Texas, ten years after my father's death. As I was standing alone in a corner of the shop, a man walked up beside me and began studying titles on the same shelf. Shifting a few steps to allow him access, I glanced over to acknowledge that we could share the same space. His countenance didn't register instantly, but within moments it did—it was Willie Nelson. Though I didn't want to disturb his private time, I felt compelled to tell him how much his music and storytelling meant to me—then give him his peace. But it didn't happen that way. Willie didn't take his intense, knowing gaze off of me, and for several minutes asked *me* questions about *me!* He wanted to know *my* story! That's just Willie being Willie—but here's the other-worldly thing. While I was transfixed by his questioning and piercing gaze, I was startled, then shaken from the trance, when I saw my father's image reflected in those penetrating eyes. I don't know why it happened, I just know that it did. Nothing like that had ever happened to me before and it has never happened again.

His song *Yesterday's Wine,* a meditation on growing older and wiser, begins with, *"Miracles appear in the strangest of places, fancy meeting you here."* I had finally made peace with the memory of my father, connecting with him in faraway Carraia, where his life story began.

The song concludes with its poignant refrain, "*We're aging with time, like yesterday's wine."* After so many years, my bottled-up feelings had matured. I had finally come to know and understand my father.

I had aged with time, like yesterday's wine.

XLV.

THE REALIZATION OF A DREAM

When I embarked on this journey after forty-three years of wondering, I was really just hoping to find one man's history and I didn't know if that story would be found in America or Italy. I had no idea how all of this would develop, or that it would lead to finding hundreds of Parentis going back eight centuries and learning the history surrounding those ancestors. And I didn't know that I would come to better understand *my* father by finding *his* father, and also come to better understand myself. Maybe I subconsciously titled my first chapter, "Who am I, anyway?" when I wrote it over forty-three chapters ago, not knowing the depth, or all of the implications, of that question.

Here's how my dream came true. I was ready to retire and do something which I always wanted to do, and my wife supported that decision and wanted to share that quest with me. After a few weeks of exploring the Ellis Island website and reeling through miles of microfiche tapes in California at the Family History Center, we were off to the National Archives in Washington, D.C. where we discovered an immigrant whose first name, age, and village of origin were all slightly different than what we understood them to be, but "close enough for government work."

From that point, things began to happen. Within a fortnight of our first discovery in the manifest of the passenger ship S.S.Verona, and just forty-eight hours after my telephone introduction to Stefania in Firenze, I was actually holding the book in Capannori which held my family's lost history! And within a few weeks, my son Dylan found the gravesite of my grandfather in California and the

records of our lost-family in America. In Italy, Priscilla and I found the family home in Carraia and the gravesites of my great-grandparents. Meanwhile, Stefania was scouring over church and civil records in Carraia, Capannori, and Lucca and was able to trace our lineage to the early 16th century, and then, incredibly, to the 13th century.

How did all of this happen? Let me count the ways:

1. The Worldwide Web and all that it puts at your fingertips. Ellis Island was the site of my first entry just as it was for Leone ninety years before me.

2. The Family History Library of the Church of Latter-day Saints and all of that microfiche of civil and church records in Italy.

3. Dylan, my son, who shared in this mission and made so many discoveries in America with his research. It meant so much to me to have him with me on this journey, and I believe it brought us closer together, as father and son.

4. Stefania, my researcher in Italy. By providence, she was miraculously delivered unto me in my darkest and most clueless hour. Without her, there would have been little or no access to the records which told our story. Her knowledge of the workings of the government bureaucracy and its offices, and that of the Church (along with her engaging personality), insured us broad access to archives and the cooperation of civil and church officials.

5. The Civil Records. Thanks to Napoleon, the *Foglio di Famiglia* Parenti was in the Capannori offices with my ancestors recorded back to my great-great-great-grandfather Luigi. The State Library and Archive of Lucca then provided the notary acts which took us from the fields of Carraia back to the beginnings of the family in Lucca in the 1200's.

6. The Church Records. The parish records of SS. Donato e Biagio detailed the births, marriages, and deaths of these ancestors in Carraia, and the Archdiosese in Lucca documented our family back to the time of Columbus.

7. The *Libri dei Renditori* of the Spedale di S. Luca. The recordings of the land transactions administered by the hospital founded in 1287 by the Merchant Guild or Curia of which my great(x18) grandfather Mese was a likely participant. One hundred

years later, his grandson's will directed us to the fields of Carraia. Through their rental payments (*rendita*) we found the missing link in our family ancestry, which now spans eight centuries.

8. One place, one name, and no bombs. The Parentis were in Carraia for centuries, and they came from Lucca. Those who left Italy in the last century only changed their first names. Fortunately none of the civil and church records were lost in the wars.

9. Time and resources. Retirement worked for me. I'm too young to golf and I felt that there was no more fulfilling way to spend some of that hard-earned money. Besides, as Fabio told me, "Do it while you *can*, because you *can't* do it when you *can't!*"

10. Priscilla, my wife and co-captain on my journey of discovery. It would not have happened without her love, support, translations, and delicious cooking.

11. Purpose, passion, and persistence. I had a dream, the desire, and determination to reach my destination. Though not always knowing where it was taking me, I just stayed the course. And now there are other ancestral lines, and those histories to discover. More adventure ahead.

12. Providence. We had a guardian angel watching over us, leading us on our journey to all of those discoveries through all of those centuries. And there were rainbows and a few miracles along the way! *Mille grazie.*

As my son Dylan was charting the Parenti Family Tree, a story emerged. The Old World history and traditions of the Italian family disintegrated with the emigration to the homogenous "melting pot" of the New World. In just a few generations it all changed. Italian family names were Anglicized, Italian citizenship was renounced, and fewer Italian males married Italian females. Italians gave their children non-ethnic names and ensured that their unique cultural *connection* was *disconnected* by not passing onto their children the language, the customs, and the stories of their people and their homeland. So much has been irretrievably lost, but now for our family, so much has been found.

The *famiglia* Parenti of Carraia, Capannori, Lucca, Toscana, Italia were mostly *contadini* (farmers) for over seven centuries before leaving their eternal homeland in the twentieth century and becoming Americans. This long history came to an end in 1941 with the death of Pietro Paolino Parenti at Corte Pardino, our ancestral home.

Digging in the family garden and finding our roots has brought this forsaken heritage to life for me. It has fulfilled my forty-year quest of learning about my ancestors and a better understanding of who I am and how I came to be. It is my hope that our story will inspire others to discover their past, to better understand how they came to be, and to nourish the interest of succeeding generations to embrace and hold dear their family history.

For me, it was indeed, the experience of a lifetime.

XLVI.

SO, WHO ARE YOU, ANYWAY?

Maybe some ancestor has already done some of this for you. Maybe you know something about your people; their names and dates, what their lives were like, where they came from and when, some of the history of their homeland, and what brought these ancestors to the New World.

If this is important to you, wouldn't you like to know more? Wouldn't you want to share it with the family that you know today, and give it as a gift to the generations of your family to come? Wouldn't you like to encourage your children and grandchildren, your nieces and nephews, to become interested in a family history that is uniquely theirs?

The search may begin with just one or two documents or bits of your family's oral history, as it did for me. But each clue leads to a discovery, and each discovery to others, taking you to people, places, and times in your family history that you could not have imagined.

There may be one or two older relatives who know some things about that history. Interview them, ask specific questions, and encourage their participation. They may say that they don't know anything or can't remember anything . . . but most likely they do know something which would benefit your research. Maybe they don't want to remember their past, but then maybe it would help them find closure with that past if they shared it with you.

There must be one or two members of your family who would want to be a partner in this adventure with you. The process is an emotional roller coaster. To stay on track on this wild ride of terrible lows and indescribable highs, it's best not to go it alone. On

the bad days, it's frustrating, depressing, and seemingly hopeless, and you'll need the support and the companionship. On the good days, it's exhilarating, satisfying, and life-defining, and you'll want to share the joy of your discoveries with your family.

On this journey, you might wake up one morning and find that you are living and discovering a story—*Your Story*—within the larger story of your family story. Slow down, take a good look around, a good look inside yourself, and hold on for the ride.

And finally, keep your eyes on the prize. Stay the course and good things will happen, even if you're only able to trace your ancestors back a few generations and you learn that you are not a descendant of some famous or *infamous* character in history. Maybe your people were just *people*, like you. The excitement of seeing your family tree sprout new branches and its roots growing deeper in its native land is so fulfilling. Reviving long-lost generations, bringing them to life and into the light is emotionally enriching. It nurtures the soul and connects you to your people and your place in history.

So start digging.

EPILOGUE:
BECOMING AMERICAN-ITALIAN

The Parenti family was Italian for hundreds of years, for generation upon generation. In a single generation it became an Italian-American family, and now after just a couple of generations, has become purely an American family with little or no connection to the rich culture, heritage, and traditions of its ancestral roots. Though we were born and raised American, my children and I desire to reclaim our birthright, become reconnected to those beginnings, and become American-Italians.

Though my father was born half-Italian, the recipe for his descendants is very much like most Americans, more like a stew from the Great Melting Pot—a blending of Italian, Prussian, English, Swedish, a dash of French, maybe a splash of Scotch and other yet-to-be-determined ancestral ingredients. But it is our family's Italian heritage and our *cognome* (surname), which we wish to initially restore. On-going research and *future* journeys into our *past* will bring us closer to our other beginnings. The family tree of Dylan and Joslyn, their ancestral and geographic origins, has an even more complex branching structure, broader canopy, and roots which spread even further into the European continent.

The Italian government permits the recognition of dual citizenship for those who meet the established rules. But the interpretation of these rules and the workings of the bureaucracy make this endeavor a lengthy, grueling, frustrating, heart-breaking, and seemingly impossible task. The process has all of the disappointments and lows of doing family research, but none of the delights and highs along the way. It's a real test, a "gut check," of how much you really want the recognition of being a citizen of Italy.

In February of 2006, fourteen months after my first conversation with their offices, we submitted our applications to the Italian Consulate, along with those 70 documents. There have been twists and turns, bumps, delays, and detours along the way, and the map and directions to the destination have changed as we've traveled down this long and winding road. But we've driven in Italy and we know to expect the unexpected. Most of our documents were accepted, just three needed to be amended before our files can be submitted. Ironically, the Consulate is requiring that our birth certificates be amended from Parent to Parenti, restoring that missing vowel which kindled my forty-year quest to discover my ancestry. We're told that it will probably be a year or more before these amended documents are processed and forwarded.

The documents will then travel to Capannori where all of this began, and we will wait for notification that we have become citizens of Italy, complementing our life-long citizenship of the United States of America. Just as Leone waited two and a half years to attain his U.S. citizenship, we will likely do the same to regain the Parenti family's Italian citizenship.

. . . AND THEN IT HAPPENED

Today, September 21, 2007, we received notification from the Consolato Generale d' Italia that our applications for citizenship had been favorably accepted. We have joined our ancestors as citizens of Italy.

AFTERWORD:
GENES AND GENEALOGY
BY DYLAN PARENTI

If you are reading this, you are alive. But what exactly does it mean to be alive?

You are likely an adult, and have been that way for quite some time. You are a being made up of trillions of remarkable structures called cells. These cells vary in age, vitality, size, purpose, and shape to a remarkable degree. Nerve cells can extent a few feet, rod cells collect light in the back of your eyes, red blood cells carry oxygen throughout your body, and dead skin cells layer about your body protecting them all from the elements. Cells are the industry of your body, selfishly chugging away, keeping your heart beating, your sweat glands exuding extra water and salt wastes, fighting viral invaders, duplicating when needed, and renewing themselves constantly. Regenerating, in fact, more so than you were probably aware; it is hypothesized that there's not a single, natural, you-produced cell that you were carrying around a decade ago.

How does this happen, you might ask? Other than the task that they perform specifically for your body, cells are hard-wired to make exact copies of themselves. Awash with complex chemicals, these divisions occur nearly flawlessly in a matter of hours. In the center of a cell is the nucleus, a repository of an important, information-laden super-molecule, called deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA), contained in a specific number of chromosomes. The number of chromosomes varies for each plant and animal, but not uniquely so: Homo sapiens have 46, one species of ant has 1, and in one fern variety, it numbers a staggering 1,260. Chickens and dogs share the same number of chromosomes (78), but they cannot inter-

breed due to the layout of the genes along the DNA. A gene is simply a section of DNA that contains a useful blueprint of some biological function or structure. Surprisingly, only a small percentage of DNA can be considered "genetic"; the vast majority of DNA is comprised of code with no purpose at all, or at least of unknown role.

Nearly six feet of it in every nucleus, DNA is alarmingly simple in chemical terms, employing common building blocks called amino acids. These amino acids combine to form simple proteins, which in turn combine with each other to form four regular compounds called nucleotides (a fifth one can replace one of the four in certain situations). These four nucleotides make up the rungs of the double-helix ladder of each DNA structure (the "spines" of the DNA molecule are made up of an inert sugar molecule). Even more simply, each nucleotide only "combines" with one specific contemporary; guanine (G) only pairs with cytosine (C), and adenine (A) only with thymine (T). During the cell division, a chemical is emitted into the nucleus which breaks the loose connections of the nucleotide pairs within the parallel strands of the DNA, essentially "unzipping" the double-helix into two halves. The chromosomes containing these single chains migrate apart, becoming encapsulated in a fresh new break-away cell. When the chemical environment is again stabilized, the unzipped DNA strand rebuilds its lost half by adding the appropriate nucleotides (A with T, and G with C) from the plentiful soup within the newly-divided cell. Nearby, in the other newly-created cell, the exact situation occurs -- in other words, the original cell has made an exact copy of the blueprint it needs to build a carbon copy of itself at another time. One becomes two, two can become four, and so on. Cells -- and their corresponding DNA -- were built to propagate.

As mentioned above, sections of DNA that have a particular purpose or feature are called genes. It is these sections of DNA that give rise to an organism's design. It dictates whether you'll have a hard, chitinous shell, wide leaves, the ability to produce toxic venoms, have four legs or 500. Between two different life forms (for instance, an amoeba and a peccary), the genetic sequencing of the nucleotides along the DNA strand vary greatly by design. Within a genus, however, the sequences can be very subtle, evidence that slight mutations of one species successfully reproduced to form new offshoots of that genus, evolving new species. Even similar genus can be strikingly similar genetically; humans and chimpanzees are 98%

genetically inseparable. In fact, with recent genetic analysis, the similarity between humans and chimps has been shown to be so close, that chimps may even be reclassified within the Homo genus, that only basic mutations can be identified for causing the divergence between the two.

How do these mutations occur? Mutations are no more than copying errors along a DNA strand. Since the majority of DNA serves no apparent purpose, these mutations have absolutely no effect on an organism (they do, however, identify that you are unique, and this is the basis for DNA testing in criminal cases). If, however, such a copying error happens along a useful gene segment, the results are most often disastrous, in which the organism may have a shortened lifespan, unable to reproduce, or fails to form correctly in the first place. Conversely, a rare mutation may change a physical or biological feature with no impact on the viability of the organism (a "neutral mutation"), or in rarer cases, actually benefit an organism (a "positive mutation"). Over tens of thousands of years, slight, non-terminal genetic mutations have created a variety of human characteristics, for example the epicanthic eye fold shown in Asian populations. Not all neutral or positive mutations, of course, were ever passed on, but because the changes were not so radical overall, members of Homo sapiens can still breed. In regions around the world, visible traits persist to due constant regeneration of that mild, once-mutant characteristic. Nonetheless, replication between a genetically normal female and a male of the species is possible, no matter of height, weight, skin hue, or any other human trait.

In tucked-away corners of the world, local populations have been inbreeding for generations, keeping these phenological features evident. Whether it be the Australian outback, northern Siberia, Tierra del Fuego, or northern Tuscany, the range of human physical diversity has remained so largely due to the relative non-mixing of these populations. As the "global village" continues to interconnect, these unique identifiers may become diluted in the human melting pot over the course of future generations. If you can identify several ethnic lineages in your ancestry, you are already a part of this process.

In making you, the statistics can get staggering. For you to be alive today, two human beings - namely your parents – merged special cells (called gametes, containing 23 chromosomes) under seemly inconceivable chance. Not so much that the creation was so unlikely; rather, that you were the product. Out of billions of sperm

cells, each carrying a slightly variant set of genes passed down over the ages from a myriad of antecedents, yours somehow wriggled its way into the egg first. Of course, your parents went through the same numbers game, as did your four grandparents, eight great-grandparents, sixteen great2-grandparents, thirty-two great3-grandparents, and so on. Stretching back ten generations, over one thousand human beings had a genetic say in your DNA makeup. By twenty generations back, 1,048,576 people were responsible. At thirty generations, over 1 billion males and females could be considered your ancestors. Forty generations backward in time that number balloons to just short of 1.1 trillion people -- and we haven't even arrived within 500 years of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. Even more mind-blowing, is that if any of these people were of Mediterranean descent, they survived through a period thought to have suffered over a 50% loss of the Byzantine Empire population due to plagues. If any one of those 1.1 trillion people hadn't survived, you wouldn't be reading this now.

But wait. Some careful thought about this scenario leads to a head-scratching conundrum. A trillion is a ridiculously large number when speaking in terms of human beings. After all, according to estimates calculated by the Population Reference Bureau, it is thought that no more than 110 billion people have ever been born since the emergence of Homo sapiens (almost 40% of whom were brought into the world between 8000 B.C. and 1 A.D.). This number includes a very high, natural post-birth mortality rate, as well as prevalent infanticide. Even a gracious estimate of births living to child-bearing age may top 80 billion. Somehow, 93% of the 1.1 trillion ancestors we need from this calculation are missing. So how do we make sense of all this?

The answer is actually quite simple. You have two distinct parents, one male and female, and one couldn't possibly be the other. Up one generation, and you have two sets of male heirs, and two female, and it is highly likely that they are four different human beings. Ascend up 14 more generations, when many of your distant, village-dwelling relatives may have lived in central Germany, western Africa, south-east Asia, or Tenochtitlan, the likelihood that you had 16,384 distinct ancestors becomes far less likely. For instance, imagine a sample father (A) who had two sons (B and C), who in turn had one son each (D & E), who in time had one son and daughter each (F & G, and H & I). Since in many cultures marrying a second cousin

wasn't out of the ordinary – or, in the cases of keeping property or familial lineages intact, encouraged – a child, J, of couple F and I, could trace back a common ancestor on his or her tree not once, but twice; individual A would be J's great-great grandfather through the mother's lineage, and also that of the father. The net result of this, is that one individual slots twice on your family tree. Combine this effect 10-20 times back through time, in practically any region populated by human beings, and the further back you trace lineages, the more this overlapping occurs. If you were to chart out a generational chart like this, you'd find that, as you ascend up from your birth to the preceding generations, a doubling of ancestors would occur easily for the first several generations, until you'd discover distant ancestors showing up more than once. Then more and more. Until, theoretically, the number of actual distinct human ancestors begins to decrease as you go back in time. If it were possible to document, your chart would begin to "pinch" as you approach the top (with you at the bottom), by removing the duplicate entries. This "diamond effect" as I call it, would naturally culminate in the final entry upwards as the genetic Adam and Eve, the origin of us all.

In researching the Parenti family line, I suspected this effect would have manifested itself early on, since Carraia is a mere hamlet even to this day, where just a handful of family surnames dominated the little farming community for hundreds of years. Without a doubt the "diamond effect" in my tree will be noticed with more digging, but so far after 6 generations back, each slot is occupied by a unique individual. With more research on the Carraia families, even more of these multi-slot-filling ancestors should be uncovered.

For each and everyone alive today, the same "diamond effect" would affect their ancestral tree, and ultimately link them with a large number of people who share the same ancestors.

A phenomenal consequence of this effect is that all humans alive today would be able to route backwards through time to a common living being, even though other humans were alive at that time, and could very well be ancestors as well, if you went back even further. That one first person who satisfies all of humanity's lineages as we go back in time from today, is often called (to population statisticians) the "most recent common ancestor" (or MRCA). That definition could also be applied to any number of people (not just all humans). At its elemental scale, my sister and I share the same MRCA: our two parents. On a more grand scale, let's take the

Western Europeans as another example. Due to the nature of the comparatively small continental area, the political, technological, and financial fluxes over centuries facilitated travel, thus promoting a moderate dispersion of genetic material. As a result, it is thought that the MRCA for Western Europeans is as recent as 1200 A.D. – about the time of the signing of the Magna Carta. In other words, one lucky individual walking around Europe eight centuries ago could very well be considered a common ancestor to everyone on that continent today.

Thus, it isn't unreasonable to suggest that all European descendants are tangibly related, and this scenario can be likewise assumed for other regions of the world as well. However, at some distant point, these regional populations ultimately sprang from just one: in short, that all regional MRCAs themselves shared an older, mega-regional MRCA. Only with recent strides in the field of genetics has this been confirmed. By analyzing the genetic makeup of hundreds of people scattered throughout the globe, scientists have uncovered the migratory pattern of modern humans out of Africa, by tracking subtle changes (mutations) in the Y chromosome of males worldwide. Similar studies looking at the mitochondrial DNA in females have revealed some amazing conclusions, one being that 95% of European women are the descendants of just seven ancient regional mothers. It was long assumed that the European population was a direct offshoot of the African population that migrated to the Middle East first. Although some genetic influence came from this direction, it appears that this was not complete until after the majority of northern Europe was already populated from the east steppe-lands of central Asia. However, the area of modern-day Tuscany in Italy could very well have been the genetic intersection between the descendants of the central Asian migrants in northern Europe over the Alps, and the seafarers that came up along the coastline from the Levant.

Part of the fun of genealogical research on one's family is the contemplation of what your ancestors were like, how they worked, played, loved, and lived. If you were lucky enough, you knew your great-grandparents, who could tell you colorful stories of their young lives, their parents, or perhaps their journey to America. However, the individuals five generations back and beyond are likely barely chronicled, or even known at all by family members. Even with names and approximate birth dates of living relatives that were

recorded in the last-released U.S. Census, you can begin to fill out the unknown slots on your family tree, and work backward through preceding online Census records (amongst others) in uncovering a past which otherwise may have gone unrecognized forever. Although the details for achieving success in re-linking to your family's past are beyond the scope of this book, hopefully the story and insights into the journey of one family's quest can inspire you to strike out on a similar adventure. With a little effort, you have the chance to give those long-forgotten ancestors the regard and reflection they so vitally deserve. You owe it to them; after all, they all had a hand -- or a gene -- in creating you.

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RECOMMENDED GENEALOGICAL RESOURCES

National Archives and Records Admin.	www.archives.gov/genealogy
The Church of Latter-day Saints Family Search	www.familysearch.org
The Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation, Inc	www.ellisisland.org
Ancestry.com	www.ancestry.com
Cyndi's List of Genealogical Sites	www.cyndislist.com
Italian Surname mapping	www.gens.labo.net/it

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

I wrote a book and got it published and so can you. I composed it on my laptop (using my hunt-and-peck keyboard skill-set) utilizing Microsoft Word, a photo-editing program, Adobe Acrobat and a little help from my technical friends. Then, I published the book making use of revolutionary print-on-demand technology, which provides everyone the opportunity to self-publish. It is especially useful for writing a family history, as it allows the publisher (you) to print as many (or few) copies of your book as you need and it allows for you to easily update your story in subsequent printings as you learn new information. That's how it happened—all 323,981 characters (most of them typed a multitude of times) and all 67,337 of the final words in those 1,259 paragraphs—but who's counting? Plenty of opportunities for a goof or two—especially in a work of non-fiction peppered with a foreign (to me) language. That said, the copyediting and proofreading of grammar and punctuation; as well as the book's contents, selected graphics, and expressed opinions, are solely the responsibility of the author (me).

I hope I got it mostly right.

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My computer guy Christopher;
And to my Priscilla.

Mille Grazie.

TO ORDER THIS BOOK

To purchase a copy of TUSCAN SON and to learn more about the Parenti family history, please visit our website.

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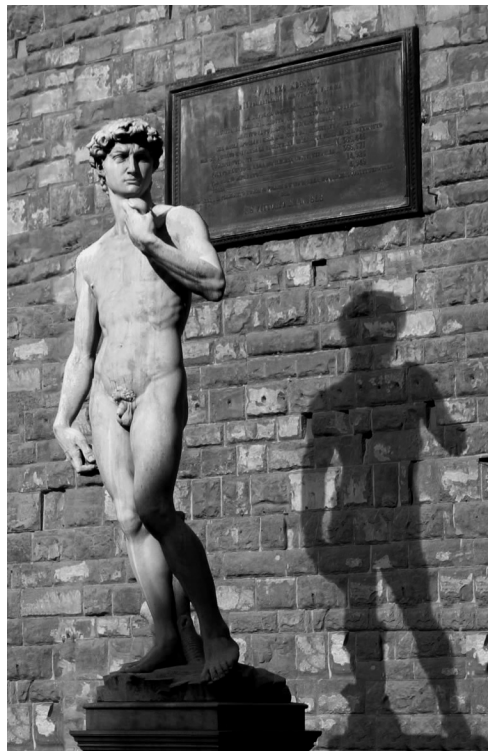
POSTSCRIPT



Just as the shadow of *David* appears each day on the old palace wall, then disappears with each setting sun, the families of the Parenti Tuscan sons rose at sunrise for over seven centuries in their eternal homeland, then vanished into history. Now, they have been brought back into the light and the family history of those Tuscan sons will live on through the generations of the Parenti family to come.

It's a story to be continued.

DINO PARENTI