



FEBBRAIO 2023 NEWSLETTER

Tony Marmo, President

Editor, Joanne Locke

COMMITTEES

Committees and volunteers are the backbones of our foundation. If you are interested in being a part of any committee, contact the chairperson.

Dinner- Marjorie Fucilo

Community Care- Mary Tuma

Festival- Anthony Tampone

By Laws - Anthony Tampone

Calendar- Suzanne Sottile

Cultural- Linda Saccoman & Gina Sottile

Membership- Suzanne Sottile

Social- Al Scilla

Current Events

UCIAF is looking for walkers for the St. Patrick's Day parade held on Sunday, March 19th. If interested, please contact Tony Marmo by email tony@normannstaffing.com or cell phone 845-702-4778.

UCIAF is planning a St. Joseph's Day table for Sunday, March 19th - more to follow.

There are still openings available for the March 12-19 Ravello, Italy trip. Visit the UCIAF website for more information. If interested in the trip, contact Linda Saccoman at 845-339-5330.

Committee News

The membership committee is in the process of updating the member database on Member Planet. Members should verify that their birthday information is correct. If not, please contact either Gina or Suzanne Sottile at 845-334-8551.

The Bylaws committee is currently reviewing and updating our bylaws. There will be a vote to accept the revision by the membership this coming November at our election meeting. You can see the current bylaws on our website by typing UCIAF.org. Click on "about us" and then click on UCIAF by-laws. If you have any comments, you can forward them to Anthony Tampone at UCIAFinfo@gmail.com.

COMMUNITY CARE PROGRAM

The UCIAF Community Care Program continues to be active providing immediate need assistance to our local non-profit organizations with our Fund, Outreach, and Wish Programs. Our Fund Program provides gift cards to the elderly and veterans in immediate need of assistance. Our food drives help replenish our local food pantries at Community Action, People's Place, and the Salvation Army. We teach fitness classes for the UC Office for the Aging, People's Place, and the Salvation Army. We grocery shop for seniors and veterans that can't do it themselves, and our Wish program has provided a TV and vacuums to seniors and home furnishings to the Hudson Valley National Center for Veteran Reintegration. We have taken part in People's Place Project Santa and cooked over 150 Thanksgiving dinners at the Salvation Army. These are just a few of the contributions we make to our community.

We would love to have you join us! Give as much or as little as you can. Please contact me at mtuma@hvc.rr.com if you are interested or have questions.

Grazie Mille,
Mary Tuma
Community Care Program
Coordinator



Mary Tuma



**An Italian-American Basement Kitchen
Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, New York - Circa 1955**

by Hildegard N. Pleva

Aunt Millie's real kitchen was not the immaculately kept and austere uncluttered one on the first floor of her West 11th Street house. The endlessly productive working kitchen from which could waft aromas of simmering *braciole*, Sicilian style *ragu* ("gravy" in American), or chicken roasting in lemon and garlic, the real kitchen, was in the basement. Emanating from its dark environs was the promise of exquisite flavors and taste experiences. One followed the aroma, descending an open wooden staircase into Aunt Millie's domestic laboratory.

The basement was as long as the narrow semi-attached house headed by a furnace and tool room festooned with yards of clothesline for drying laundry indoors during the winter. The center section of the basement was dedicated to eating, the relaxation of newspaper reading and listening to the radio. Culinary magic performed in the basement kitchen was observed through windows set high in a wall separating the kitchen from this space. Atop its linoleum covered floor a stove and refrigerator, cast offs from the remodeled upstairs kitchen, furnished a workspace shared with a double tub sink, its extra deep basin used in partnership with a wringer washing machine. The semi-dark ambiance of gray concrete painted floor and faux wood paneling beyond the kitchen was eased by a bit of sunlight wandering in through casement windows. A large 1930s floor model radio console seemed to be permanently tuned to an Italian station playing the melodies of *bella Italia* always sung by famed tenor Carlo Buti.

Meals were eaten at a table with a metal top finished in brown speckled enamel. Every meal began with pasta or macaroni served properly as a separate course unlike the "*Americani*" who, having no appreciation for real food, mixed all sorts of things together on one plate. Another necessary element, even for ten-year olds, was some bitter Chianti wine poured into squat clear glass tumblers. Just as she did each time she made the first scissor cut of fabric for a dress, Aunt Millie silently made a quick the Sign of the Cross with her nimble and creative fingers before cradling the necessary fork and spoon in her hands.

On occasional Saturday mornings Aunt Millie would call on the phone and say, "Send the girls. I'm making macaroni." My sister and I would obediently walk a few short blocks to serve as runners in the process of macaroni production. No handy-dandy fettucini-making pasta machine used here. Macaroni was pasta of the hearty Sicilian peasant variety requiring the touch of expert hands.

Aunt Millie and her mother-in-law sat facing each other knee to knee with a stout wooden board straddling their laps. From a velvety slab of semolina flour blended with countless eggs a bit of dough was taken and then placed against the middle of a dried wheat stalk coated with olive oil. It was rolled back and forth on the board stretching out the dough and encasing the reed to a length of about ten or twelve inches. It looked like the snakes we made out of rubbery clay in school. Once the proper length and thickness, the macaroni noodle was deftly made to slide off the stalk and pushed to the side of the board. My sister and I picked up the macaroni and, being careful not to disturb the opening running through the center, carried them to a table covered with spotless linen to lay them out in neat rows for drying. Once slightly crusty to the touch, a dozen noodles at a time would be picked up by the long handle of a wooden spoon for a gentle slide into boiling salted water.

The reward of our labor – a steaming plate of perfectly cooked *al dente* noodles topped by a perfection of marinara sauce often enriched by Aunt Millie's home-made *stratu*, naturally sun baked tomato paste. The garnish – finely chopped *basilico*, green basil fresh from the postage stamp sized backyard garden, and then a sprinkling of hand-grated Romano cheese.

Aunt Millie's basement kitchen was our point of entry into the old country, a place of home-made flavors, slow cooking, fresh and imported ingredients in a time when most Americans equated such things with primitive immigrant tastes. In my lifetime her techniques and preferences would become the culinary norm – Italian basement kitchen food available in the finest of restaurants.

ITALIAN IMMIGRATION PATTERNS

- New York Times, September 17, 2002

What Sal Calabrese has always loved about Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, the city's largest Italian neighborhood, is that it provides the intimacies of a village.

"If I walk out," he said, "I will say hello to 15 or 20 people and they to me. 'Hi, Sal. How are you? How's your father?' Like the old days. We're from different places in Italy, but we live in the same town."

But these days, Mr. Calabrese worries that Bensonhurst may soon lose the congenial feeling that comes from a place of common habits and pleasures.

Bensonhurst is losing its Italians. According to the 2000 census, the number of residents of Italian descent is down to 59,112, little more than half that of two decades ago, and the departed Italians have been replaced by Chinese and Russian families.



Salavatore Alba

Mr. Calabrese volunteers that he is part of that movement. His parents still live in the neighborhood and he runs a thriving real estate agency there, but three years ago he moved to Bedminster, N.J., to a 34-acre farm where he breeds Arabian horses.

Italian-Americans, who have given New York City much of its charm in emblems as telltale as Fiorello La Guardia and fuhgeddaboutit, are declining sharply in numbers in all the boroughs except Staten Island. Many New Yorkers worry not only that they will lose the Italian neighborhoods but that the Italian influence on the city's personality will fade away.

The census shows that the number of New Yorkers of Italian descent has fallen below 700,000, compared with more than one million in 1980 and 839,000 in 1990.

Despite the reputation of immigrant groups for die-hard allegiance to old neighborhoods, what is happening, sociologists say, is the continuation of a trend that has been going on for several decades now: the children who grew up in the working-class and middle-class homes of immigrant neighborhoods are, like Mr. Calabrese, now professionals, managers and business people who want suburban homes with backyards of grass, not concrete.

In Bensonhurst, the Italian-American residents, who once passed houses on to their own relatives or those of their neighbors, are selling them to the highest bidders: Chinese moving up from nearby Sunset Park and Russians moving up from Brighton Beach.

And so they are adapting. Mr. Calabrese employs five Chinese-speaking and six Russian-speaking brokers among his staff of 40. Salvatore Alba, whose bakery has drawn long lines for its cannoli and cheesecake since his Sicilian parents opened it in 1932, has hired a Chinese-American woman to sell Italian ices.

"I figure if they can't speak English, we'll get someone to speak to them in Chinese," Mr. Alba said of his newer customers.

Still, there are many New Yorkers who lament the impact that the decline in Italians could have on the city's character. In politics, for example, Italian enclaves have been a seedbed for some of the city's most prominent leaders, lately with names like Giuliani, Cuomo, Ferraro and Vallone.

But Richard Alba, a distinguished professor of sociology at the State University at Albany, predicts that Italian politicians will become less common in the five boroughs.

Professor Alba thinks it is telling that Andrew M. Cuomo did so poorly in his Democratic primary campaign for governor. He pointed out that with Italians increasingly assimilated and dispersed and more often voting on issues than on ethnicity, Mr. Cuomo was unable to ignite a collective ethnic outpouring.

There is, however, a wide difference of opinion on whether a shrinking Italian population will change the city's characteristic New Yorkness, Italians having left such a strong imprint on the city's dialect and gestures, its food and music (think the "New York, New York" anthem sung by that Italian fellow who grew up just across the Hudson River), and such stereotypical New York attitudes as a wariness of authority.

But the writer Gay Talese is not lamenting some of that passing because many of the signature images of Italians hark back to a time when Italians, in the public eye, represented the urban underclass.

"It's not just coming to the port city and finding an address convenient to the job," Mr. Talese said. "They're carrying their brains with them to places far from where they work. They're more mobile because America is mobile."

Still, Mr. Talese, 70, the author of a memoir and chronicle of Italian immigration, "Unto the Sons" (Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), volunteers that he still retains much of what he called the Italian "village mentality." Although he lives in a Manhattan town house, is married to Nan A. Talese, a prominent book editor, and is a regular at Elaine's, he visits his 95-year-old mother twice a week in his hometown, Ocean City, N.J., and takes her to a small restaurant and then a casino so she can play the slot machines that give her pleasure.

It has a long way to go before it becomes what Jerome Krase, a sociology professor at Brooklyn College, calls an "ethnic theme park" like Little Italy, where few Italians actually reside. But its fate seems unavoidable. Its Italians are moving to New Jersey or Long Island or across the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge to Staten Island.

On 18th Avenue, the site of the annual Feast of Santa Rosalia, men still sip espresso in cafes, but there are fewer men and fewer cafes, and older people have to walk farther for the Italian products they need.

Chinese novelty stores and beauty parlors are replacing the cafes. Along the side streets, Chinese, who relish the neighborhood's orderliness, the schools with seasoned teachers and the easy subway ride to Chinatown, are buying up the two-family homes for \$400,000 and more.

Aldo Studio, the neighborhood's wedding photographer, famed for its collection of backdrops like a waterfall, a grand piano and a white Rolls-Royce, now displays a large photograph of a Chinese bride and groom standing in front of a maroon Harley-Davidson. Churches that were once heavily Italian are now offering Masses in Chinese.

In this ferment, many Italians have lost their "comfort zone," said Jerry Chiappetta, 52, executive director of the Italian-American Coalition of Organizations, who has lived in Bensonhurst for 40 years.

"When you have an influx of people who don't share similar traditions, it's not a question of disliking them, it's just there is less in common," he said. "And if you're on the border of should I move or not, it's one more reason to move."

Mr. Calabrese takes it all in stride, as another turn of the American immigration wheel.

"You go back to the early 1900's, Italians were moving near the Bowery and you'd have two or three families sharing a two-bedroom apartment in order to buy a house," he said. "Chinese are doing the same. They're no different than our people." "I'm still a hometown, small-town guy" he said.

Bensonhurst is a vintage Italian neighborhood, a place of tidy two-family brick homes adorned with Madonnas in the front yard and American flags snapping over the front doors. Its commercial spine, 18th Avenue, is chock-full of pork and pasta stores and the Italian colors of green, white and red.

Along with Bay Ridge, it was the setting of much of "Saturday Night Fever," a valentine to the 70's social styles of young Italians. It also won unwanted national attention when a black teenager, Yusuf K. Hawkins, was murdered by a group of local youths in 1991.

There have been few tensions, Italians and Chinese in the neighborhood said. "Italian people are friendly, easy to talk to," said Lisa Pan, a Chinese woman who works at her family-owned business, Wei's Gift Shop, which draws Italian youngsters who prize its "Yu-Gi-Oh!" Japanese trading cards.

Jeiyong Franco, a Chinese woman, who has taught physics in the neighborhood at Lafayette High School since 1984, has seen the proportion of Italian students dwindle. "I don't think Italian people have any resentment toward the Chinese," she said. "The Chinese are hard-working. They never bother their neighbors."

Mr. Calabrese said that 15 years ago when the Chinese began to move in, there were complaints from Italian residents. But with the realization that the Chinese were creating few problems, all that is left is rueful resignation.

"The feast of Santa Rosalia is still going on, but how much longer?" Mr. Calabrese said. "If you asked me 15 years ago, I would have said it was going on forever. Now I don't know, and that makes me sad because I am Italian."



rosso verde
 blu arancia
 giallo viola



il topo



il cane



il gatto



Mama Mia! ITALIAN FOOD

DIRECTIONS:
 Find and circle the words in the grid. Look for them in all directions including backwards and diagonally.



Antipasti
 Breadstick
 Bruschetta
 Calzone
 Carbonara
 Chianti
 Crostini
 Focaccia
 Gelato
 Lasagna
 Marinara
 Mascarpone

Minestrone
 Mozzarella
 Osso Buco
 Panettone
 Panna cotta
 Pasta
 Pecorino

Peperoni
 Pesto
 Pizza
 Prosciutto
 Ragu
 Risotto
 Tortellini

Zabaglione

