

It's Great to be an American!!

(My grandmother's immigration story)



My grandmother (left)
My mother (middle)
My great-grandmother (right)

By: Haley Sasbon

My maternal grandmother's name is Francesca Stancati. Perhaps, what makes her story interesting, is the fact that she is an immigrant to two countries. She immigrated from Italy, first to Canada, and years later to the United States.

My grandmother's birth name is Francesca Alda Maria Pellegrino. She was born on January 23, 1947 in Belmonte Calabro; a small, provincial, Italian hamlet. This tiny village is in the province of Cosenza, a region of Calabria in Southern Italy. This province is situated on the west side on the southern-most point of the boot. To its west is the Tyrrhenian Sea; to its east is the Adriatic Sea; to its south is the Mediterranean Sea.

My grandmother spends many hours telling me and my sister colorful stories of her life in Belmonte. She says that her childhood was the most carefree time; filled with indelible memories any child could experience. I am very proud to realize that the name Pellegrino is a very noble name with its own family crest. I truly enjoy listening to my grandmother recount her sun-drenched days at the Marina, every summer, where her grandparents had a summer home on the beach. She also tells me how much she enjoyed singing. At the end of every school year the nuns would organize a recital, in which my grandmother took part.

In 1957, my grandmother (her mother and her two sisters) joined her father in Toronto, Canada. She did have family in New York City; however, because the United States closed its borders at this time (the 50's), my great-grandfather could not join his brother in New York City. Therefore the next best thing was to immigrate to Canada.

My grandmother loved the voyage on the ship, "La Saturnia"; from Naples to Halifax, Canada. She remembers being sea sick, but for the most part she enjoyed the ten-day trip.

When they arrived in Halifax, my great-grandfather was there to greet them and together they drove to Toronto.

As my grandmother describes it, Toronto was a very overwhelming city. Having lived in a small town with basically no cars, no factories, no large supermarkets or sidewalks, she found everything strange, intimidating and immense. Her first school in Toronto was St. Francis, where she found the English language to be weird. Yet, within six months, she, more or less, mastered the language.

My grandmother graduated from Madonna Secondary School For Girls in Downsview Ontario. She went on to attend York University/Lakeshore Teachers' College in Toronto. While still in college she met my grandfather, Saverio

Stancati on one of her visits with family to the Bronx in 1969. My grandparents found that they had a lot in common since their families knew each other from Italy. They fell in love and married within two years, after my grandmother completed her education.

In 1971, my grandmother immigrated into the United States through Buffalo, New York on a Greyhound bus. Two weeks later, she and my grandfather were married in St. Teresa Church in the Bronx. My grandmother had no job when she arrived in New York. However, she soon found employment in Manhattan, as a teller with Bankers Trust.

When my uncle was three and my grandmother was expecting my mother, my grandparents moved to Connecticut due to my grandfathers occupation. A few months after my mother was born, my grandmother applied for a license to tutor English, Italian and French in Connecticut.

The Italian Culture is rich with wonders such as, music (Vivaldi), film (Sophia Loren), architecture (Andrea Palladio, Aldo Rossi), art (Michelangelo), science (Galileo), writing (Dante), government (Roman Triumvirate) etcetera. But, most important for me is Italian food! The custom I love best is having pasta with tasty meatballs drenched in tomato sauce which is simmered for hours. This is the main meal every Sunday for lunch. I also love the outstanding Christmas celebration. So traditionally Italian!! The delicious smell of pastry, the baked lasagne, the fish and meats cooked to finger licking perfection permeate the air. Additionally, I love the traditional Calabrese treats called "turdilli" which my Super Nanna (great-grandmother) makes.

Although many immigrants faced hardships once they came to the new country, my grandmother was lucky enough not to have endured any. She actually came full circle since first immigrating to New York. She and my grandfather moved back to New York from Connecticut to live closer me and my family.

In conclusion, I must admit that there was so much that I did not know about my Italian heritage. I am very thankful for this project which propelled me to learn and understand my ancestral background.



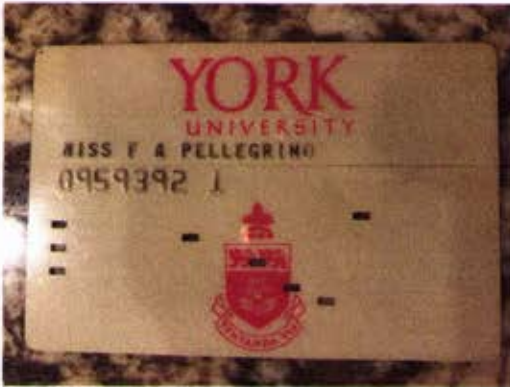
My grandmother's recital at 9 years old (last recital before leaving Italy)



The Beach at the Marina, in Belmonte



Town of Belmonte, Calabro



Francesca's York University school identification card



Artifact from Belmonte that my great-grandmother brought with her



Graduation pictures from Lakeshore



High school editorial staff



Religion Club



First job in United States (teller with Bankers Trust)



My grandparents wedding picture



My grandparents most recent home in Connecticut