Jenny's Story

Giovanna "Jenny" Taormina

with Anthony Taormina


1902-1999
A Portrait of Jenny by her daughter Juanita, March 1992

Jenny's Story by Anthony Taormina

Written in March, 1992

First published by Anthony Taormina

Designed by Adam Robinson for Good Book Developers

Produced and edited by Leah Dobkin
Legacy Letters
www.legacyletter.org

JENNY'S STORY

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Jenny's Story: A Synopsis

Jenny's Story is primarily a recollection of the uniquely exciting, adventurous lives of two proud and competent women; Jenny and her mother, Nida, along with the men who shaped their lives. Some folks might consider them old-fashioned because they did not question their traditional roles in life to be faithful wives, skilled homemakers, and dedicated mothers, while remaining subservient to parents, husband, and church (God) no matter what trials and tribulations they suffered. However, like the millions of other hardworking, competent women everywhere, they stuck by tradition while it suited them, but cast it aside when they felt it to be contrary to the best interests of family and self.

Jenny and Nida's recall of their real-life family dramas rival any fictional ones created for TV soap operas. The tale is woven within contemporary historical events and begins during the Risorgimento, when Italian speaking people were fighting to rid themselves of centuries of foreign and papal domination to become reunited for the first time since the Roman Era. Ironically, it occurred during the same period Americans were fighting a vicious Civil War that was tearing them apart.

During the last year of Jenny's life, as she was suffering with what proved to be an incurable form of cancer, she puts on paper, with her son's encouragement, a record of the intricate social and environmental dynamics that shaped the lives of her loved ones, some of which caused her mother to leave family and beloved Sicily to begin a very different and difficult way of life in America.

Jenny begins with her mother's recall of her adventurous life as a farm girl in Santa Ninfa, Sicily. Later, Nida's husband took a fateful journey to Tunis in North Africa, which led to her crossing the Atlantic to live in the crowded tenements of Brooklyn until she could reunite her family. But, as Nida's health failed, the family returned to the farming business in New Jersey, then the Catskills, before settling on a beautiful productive fruit and dairy farm in Claverack, New York, in the lush Hudson Valley. There, Jenny marries, raises her family, relives the torment of World War I with her sons in World War II; ultimately, retiring to Florida. Finally, after a relatively long and fascinating life she rests in perpetuity near her daughter's mountain home in Roanoke, Virginia.

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JENNY'S STORY

Introduction

I, Giovanna Martino Taormina (Jenny), in the 75th year of my life would like to write for the benefit of my children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, and all others who may have been near and dear to me, some of our family background that should be of interest to them. Much of this information was passed on to me by my mother, Liboria Giacalone Martino, who although she could not read or write, had excellent knowledge of the past, which she told to us over and over during the many years of her life. Also, I would like to make my own feelings known about certain things that were especially important to me.

Last week my oldest son, Anthony, spent a week with us in sunny Florida and during that time I would mention some old-time memories. The day he was leaving for his home on Long Island he said, "Mother, I want to talk to you." He had $3.00 in his hand and said, "Mother, I want you to buy a loose-leaf writing book and start to write your life stories. Please do, we all want to know as far back as you can remember."

I only had five years of schooling, but I always did lots of corresponding with my relatives and sons while they were at college and in the service during the second world war. I also had lots of time on my hands, so here I am writing. The day he left we drove straight to the store after leaving him at the airport and bought the book, which was $3.20. As I was paying for the book, I found $0.25 that went toward the book with $0.05 left over for good measure. That was it. when I got home that same afternoon I started and feel wonderful doing it so far, February 15, 1978.

It has taken me, her son, Anthony S. Taormina, 13 years to finally edit and arrange her 167 pages of stories and essays into a chronological text. Moreover, I have added historical reference and maps, so that our family members may develop a better understanding and appreciation of the Sicilian aspect of our complex heritage, since Jenny's story traces her family origins from the early 19th century in Sicily through much of the 20th century. There is no record from her mother and father, who were gifted storytellers. In the evenings before bedtime, and before there was radio and television, her mother would gather the children before her and tell them about her experiences and what she knew of her parents and grandparents. Both women lived fascinating lives. In fact, the real-life drama of their experiences can rival the fictional ones created for many soap operas.

Jenny enjoyed re-telling the trials and tribulations of her family as much as her mother did. But, as the family members grow older and one by one pass on with their special knowledge, I realized that our unique family history would be lost forever if not soon transferred from memory to paper. Thus, in 1977, as my mother's health began to fail, I urged her to start putting her priceless thoughts and memories on paper, a task she was able to accomplish prior to her death on October 4, 1979, in Roanoke, Virginia.

Jenny's Story is also the life story of its main characters, two very proud and competent women, Jenny and her mother, and the men and events that shaped their lives. They lived at a time when women were expected to be skilled homemakers, dedicated mothers and traditionally subservient to parents, husband and church. However, like millions of proud and competent women everywhere, they stuck by tradition when it suited them; but, swept it aside when they believed it necessary for the best interests of the family and themselves. Since they sincerely believed that providing for the family welfare was the most important function of their lives, their grateful descendants dedicate this book to their courage and wisdom for having done such a good job.

I want to thank the many relatives who provided some of the information gaps, especially Aunt Nora Chiaro and cousin Bette Weaver and Lillian Cuccinotta; and a special thanks to sister, Joanita, for the beautiful sketches and help with the editing.

A.S. Taormina
March1992

CHAPTER I

THE YEARS BEFORE 1870

Jenny's story begins in 1869, the year her mother, Liboria Giacalone Martino, my grandmother, was born on a farm along the southwestern coast of Sicily near the village of Santa Ninfa. She entered the world the same year that the Suez Canal was completed, and at a time when Sicilians were undergoing yet another significant period of political and social adjustment so typical of their long and turbulent history.

Sicily, an island less than 10,000 square miles in area, is rather centrally located in the Mediterranean Sea. It lies along sea lanes that have been well-traveled for centuries by the many seafaring cultures that have bartered and battled along the borders of this nearly enclosed sea. As a consequence of countless explorations and invasions, the citizens of this small island have been subjected to and molded by many of their aggressive and inquisitive neighbors. Foremost among them were the Phoenicians and later their "offspring" the Carthaginians, then Greeks, Romans, Saracens, Normans, Austrians, Spaniards, and in the 20th century Americans.

In the 19th century, at a time when Americans were engaged in a deadly divisive debate to determine whether or not:

"a new nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal can long endure" and if "government of the people, by the people and for the people shall not perish from this earth."

There were people in and about the Italian peninsula who were desperately trying to create such a "new nation."

The Italian speaking people, who had not been politically integrated since the days of the Roman Empire, were being inspired by a dynamic patriot, G. Mazzini, to free themselves from non-Italian

rulers and to form their own nation; ideally, a republic. To achieve this goal of nationalism, Mazzini organized an emotional and militaristic force, the "Risorgimento."

Emotional sparks flared from many sources, including colorful music ones generated through a number of powerful arias that the intensely patriotic and especially talented composer G. Verdi subtly incorporated in several of his operas. Obviously, such emotional thrusts towards nationalism were regarded with great distrust and displeasure by the ruling Austrian Hapsburgs.

During this same period, Verdi had been commissioned by the Egyptian people to compose an opera to commemorate the completion of the Suez Canal. The Canal, an awesome engineering achievement for that era, at long last provided navigators of the Mediterranean eastern access to the Indian Ocean to complement access to the Atlantic by way of the Straits of Gibraltar. For the justifiably proud Egyptians, Verdi produced a fitting tribute; the dramatic and enduring opera Aida.

In 1860, after northern Italy was freed from Austrian rule, another dynamic patriot—and follower of Mazzini, G. Garibaldi, landed at Marsala, Sicily, with 1,000 volunteers; the "Redshirts." Quickly, they won control of the island from the non-resident Spanish Bourbon kings. Thus in 1861, Sicily became free to become incorporated into the newly created and rapidly emerging kingdom of Italy under King Victor Emanuel II, who came from the sister island of Sardinia.

Thus, at a time when Americans were in the throes of tearing themselves apart the Italians were working hard to pull themselves together. However, it was not until 1870, one year after Grandma's birth, that the basic objective of the "Risorgimento" was culminated with freedom and nationhood for most of the Italian speaking people. Not till then was the papal state of Rome "Freed" from the Pope and annexed to the new Italian nation.

However, a secondary goal of Mazzini had been to create a democratic republican nation—not a monarchy. As a final attempt to achieve this objective, he tried to organize a republican revolt in Palermo, Sicily, in 1870; but, to his great disappointment, he failed. Italians were temporarily satisfied with their newly won nationhood as a monarchy. The democratic republic would evolve later.

Meanwhile, back in the United States, the government that A. Lincoln feared might perish managed to survive. U.S. Grant, who had been the Commander of the Union forces that successfully persevered, had become a national hero to most Americans and had been elected President.

It was during this volatile historic era that Jenny's Story begins.

Grandma was born in 1869 to Vito Augello and his 17-year-old "wife," Francesca Giacalone, in a small cottage located on a large farm in the vicinity of Santa Ninfa. The farm was owned by an aging childless widow, who had become very fond of the young, hardworking Vito and had designated him as her farm manager after her husband's death. Furthermore, while in her 70s, the widow decided that in planning for her future, as well as Vito's, that she would technically marry the 22-year-old so that he could legally inherit her farm; provided, however, that Vito would assume the responsibility of caring for her on the farm as long as she lived. Moreover, the farsighted and practical widow agreed that during this period, Vito could live with her young maid, Francesca, as "husband and wife" in a separate cottage on the property. Although the arrangement was considered most sensible and beneficial to all parties, it was nevertheless morally very bothersome to both Vito and Francesca.

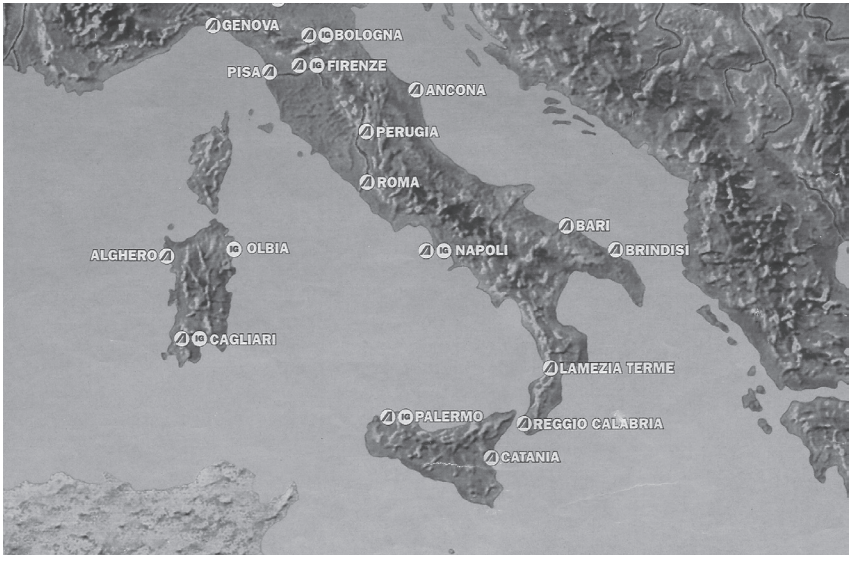
To quote Jenny:

> *"My mother always talked about her father—how wonderful he was, so loved and respected by all his friends, relatives and neighbors—but rarely mentioned her mother. When I asked her why, here is what she said: "My mother's life as a little girl with no brothers or sisters was a very unhappy one. She rarely smiled and never laughed or sang. Her mother died when she was only 6 years old and her father married a widow with a family of her own. The stepmother disliked Francesca, for she reminded her of her husband's former beautiful wife. She had Francesca work like a maid and beat her for any poor excuse. One day, because Francesca did not immediately respond to a command, her stepmother threw a pair of scissors at her that stuck in her leg. The frightened child ran to their nearest neighbor, whom she occasionally helped and who liked her. The old neighbor lady, with no children of her own, took care of Francesca's hurt. The*

child fearful of returning home stayed with the old lady, who welcomed her into her home."

That is how it happened that my grandfather, Vito Augello, who became the manager of the lady's estate met Francesca and then lived with her. My grandmother's worst unhappiness was that because the dear old lady who befriended her lived on and on for more than 20 years, that she could not legally marry Vito during the period that their four sons and two daughters were born. Vito prayed and prayed that he would live long enough to marry Francesca and make his children legitimate. In time, they did marry, but not until Grandma left home to get married.

Nevertheless, under Vito's guidance the farm prospered so that he was able to supply others who might run short and also sell their surplus to the nearby villages. Of course, operating such a large farm was difficult and kept everyone very busy seven days a week. The owners of such large farms—who by necessity had others working for them—were known as "Borghese" and were highly regarded in Sicilian society, a status which Vito merited. The farm operation, so basic to our family history, is described as best I can in the next chapter.



CHAPTER II

THE BORGHESE FARM OPERATION IN THE 1870s

Agriculture has been the backbone of the Sicilian economy and lifestyle for thousands of years. Much of the beautiful countryside of hills and valleys, green with wheat in winter has been tilled by men from many nations, who on occasion brought some particular expertise, as well as new plant or animal that could become adapted to the Sicilian environment.

The self-sufficient farm and housekeeping technology that the family practiced was typical for the times. Surprisingly, it had changed very little from that developed during the Roman era, as spelled out in the classic writings of the Roman, Columella, in "De Re Rustica." (See A.S. Taormina's essay on Columella: "Journey Down a Roman Road" in the Appendix).

Sicily is about the size of New Hampshire and at the same latitude as northern California with a comparable climatic pattern; namely, it is cool and rainy in the winter, but hot and dry during the summer. Moreover, Sicilian farmers must contend with the occasional very hot and dust laden winds, which blow over from the African Libyan desert. The Sirocco, as these winds are called, can be especially damaging to the southern coastal farms, which often become devastatingly drought stricken. It was normal for Sicilian farms to suffer from lack of water during the late summer months. By that time, stream beds were mostly dry and the ground water table even in the stream valleys could drop below the level of many wells. Irrigation systems, designed to capture and store the winter rains, were originally developed by the Arabs during their occupation. But, they

were often insufficient to supply the thirsty farms and villages. Consequently, the Sirocco could at times become the "straw to break the camel's back" and, in fact, it did become such a "straw" to cause a major change in Grandma's life.

Vito's farm was organized to produce a wide variety of plant and animal crops. Among the livestock raised were the traditional oxen (as draft animals for the heaviest work), donkeys (hauling loads on their backs), horses (for riding and pulling carriages), goats (meat, cheese and milk for babies—goat's milk, unlike cows milk, being naturally homogenized), sheep (wool, which was spun and wove, and cheese), cattle (meat), rabbits and guinea pigs (meat) and various fowl (for meat, eggs and feathers). With so many animals to feed appropriate forage crops and pasture also had to be grown.

There were many kinds of fruits on the farm, especially grapes and olives. Most of the grapes were pressed into wine. The olives had many uses. They were processed into oil, which was classified into three grades—the best was used for salads and vegetables, the medium grade used in cooking, and the poorest grade was burned for illumination. The versatile oil was also used for medicinal purposes and skin care. The oil and wine were stored in wooden kegs in the cool, dry cellar.

Within the complex orchard there were apricots and figs, most of which were split in half and sundried to be stored for winter use. Also grown were almonds, pears, pomegranates, cherries, oranges, lemons, and the ubiquitous prickly pear cactus for its spiny, but succulent, fruits.

Many vegetables were grown. Probably most important were tomatoes, which along with potatoes were unknown to the Romans since they originated in the America's and were not introduced to Europe until after the voyages of Columbus. Most tomatoes were split and dried into a paste, which could be stored in earthen jars and kept from one season to the next. There was, after all, some value in the dry hot summer climate, which allowed the drying and storing of certain produce to be a very valuable asset. Also grown were lentils, asparagus, cabbage, escarole, dandelion, cucumbers, broccoli, onions, garlic and potatoes. From the best of the plants appropriate

seed and tubers were selected and carefully treated and stored for the following year's planting season.

Wheat and oats were the basic grains planted for both human and animal food. Wheat had been a primary crop of Sicilian farms from the early days of Greek and Carthaginian colonization. While most of the wheat was milled locally and ground into flour to be used to bake bread, pasty and macaroni, some of the whole kernels were cooked and eaten without any other processing.

Adding much more work and complexity to the system was flax, which was grown and processed into linen for bedding and other items. Goat wool was used for mattress stuffing, sheepskin for carrying oil and wine, and the bladders used to store fat. An essential ingredient for the making of cheese was rennet. It was obtained from the stomach contents of a nursing goat, lamb or calf, which needed to be butchered a few hours after birth. No such animal sacrifice is needed today since we can buy "junket" to serve the same purpose.

The very necessary potable water supply came from stone lined dug wells, many of them centuries old. Much of the cooking fuel consisted of charcoal, which was processed from scarce wood taken from the farm woodlot, which along with orchard prunings and grape trimmings provided firewood. The resulting ashes contributed to soap making. Needless to say, a variety of skills and much energy was required under the guidance of a strong cohesive family to provide such continuous self-sufficiency.

By the age of six, Grandma was being taught how to spin, weave, sew and knit—and to start preparing her "hope chest" for the hopeful eventual wedding day. Jenny wrote the following on this subject.

> *"In the 1800s in Sicily a girl's hope chest was started while she was still in diapers, for it took many years to complete it. At that time, the Borghese families could grow the many things they needed, including flax. Flax fibers (linen) were used to make bedsheets, undergarments, towels, bedspreads, etc. The flax seed was planted, the growing plants cultivated until they were ready to be harvested with a scythe. Then they were tied into bundles and soaked. Vito had a brook on his farm and the flax was planted next to it and the mature bundles of flax soaked in*

the stream. After a thorough soaking, they were taken out of the water and put in a sunny spot to bleach. It was then beaten with a big wooden "mazza" (club). The process, which took many days, was repeated over and over until the stems were bleached white and broken into fibrous threads. The fibers were then spun into threads on a spinning wheel. The coarsest threads were used to make bedspreads, the medium for towels and the finest "linens" were woven into bedsheets, pillowcases and undergarments. After the linen fibers were all spun and done up into different skeins, there came the weaving, followed by the cutting of each pattern and sewing all the necessary pieces by hand since there were no sewing machines then. If lace was wanted the women would crochet it and sew it on. by the time a girl was 15 her hope chest had to be done, for at that age she was considered old enough to get married and that was one part of her dowry that she had to have. My mother went through it all and was married at 16."

Throughout her life, Grandma enjoyed to knit. One of her favorite items of clothing which she knitted well into her senior years were gray socks with white heels and white toes. Also, she had to master the many other household chores, including food preparation, garment making, caring for the younger children, and laundering. Shoe repair was usually a chore left to the men. It is no wonder that children growing up at that time in such a lifestyle could hardly be spared to go to school. In fact, often the older children, especially the girls, were not allowed the "luxury" of going to school. Moreover, to grandma's family, a formal education to become literate not only was difficult to obtain, but also it was considered to be less important to achieving family security than learning and doing all the necessary survival skills that had to be painstakingly transferred from one generation to the next over the centuries.

Over the years, many "educated" people have regarded such rural people as "simple peasants" of lesser value to society at large than those folks educated in a different manner with other skills, who usually lived in cities. It is more likely that such "simple peasants" were hardly simple at all. Rather, more often than not, they were more sophisticated and skilled in providing basic human needs than

their critics. Moreover, they usually have been of more value to the well-being and stability of their communities, as well as themselves, than their non-agrarian counterparts. Also, "simple farmers" are not as likely to consider waging war as a method for solving problems.

As a consequence of her family's lifestyle, Grandma never learned to read or write, but she was a superb storyteller in the earthy Sicilian dialect she knew so well and, consequently, was an excellent communicator in her own fashion.

CHAPTER III

THE 1880s—SICKNESS, LOVE, MARRIAGE

As Grandma was growing up on the busy farm there were many health hazards to overcome. As a rule, few children survived through puberty. For example, the famous operatio tenor, Enrico Caruso, born in 1874, was the last of more than a dozen brothers and sisters to be born to his parents and the only one to reach adulthood. At age 11, Grandma contracted one of the many dreaded diseases of the time; smallpox. Apparently, she became infected after kissing a dying girlfriend. For 11 days she remained in bed doctored by her mother, who methodically caressed her lips with a moistened feather to ease her sufferings. However, all the love and attention seemed to be in vain. Francesca, heartbroken that her firstborn might not be saved and about to die, called her priest to the cottage to deliver the "last rites." With the priest and family sobbing at the bedside, the young girl went into spasms; but, to everyone's astonishment she suddenly lurched out of bed and crashed to the floor. The shock and pain of the fall burst many of the small pox pustules that covered so much of her body and shocked the dying girl out of her comatose condition. Miraculously, she awakened fully conscious and alert, and from that moment moved on a pathway to total recovery. Throughout the rest of her life, Grandma told about the dream that caused her to fall out of bed and painfully awaken on the floor.

In her dream, the wells on the farm had gone dry. Consequently, her brother, Frank, decided to dig a new well in order to find another supply of the precious water. Frank was sure that the best place to dig the new well was under her bed. In the dream, she pleaded with Frank not to dig the well under her bed because she feared she might

fall in it and get hurt or drown. When in spite of her concerns Frank continued to dig under the bed she angrily struck out at him. It was at that moment that she flung herself from the bed and fell on the floor to be shocked awake from the disturbing dream and to begin a joyful road to recovery—a recovery that most victims of the disease, at that time, were not fortunate enough to enjoy. One special consequence of the attack was that Grandma lost all her hair. As she gradually regained her health and hair, she was noted as the only girl in the vicinity of Santa Ninfa with bobbed hair. She became quite a striking figure whenever she galloped her horse bareback through the countryside. To her adoring father she seemed like a bird and he affectionally called her "Nida," implying in Sicilian a graceful small bird, as I will refer to her from now on.

There were a number of other folks who took notice of the spirited Nida, especially the young men. One was Marco, the son of a neighboring farmer, also Borghese, whose parents were on excellent terms with Nida's parents. They regularly confided in each other and gave assistance as needed. Both sets of parents believed that Marco would be an excellent match for Nida and that in time they would be married and the two families joined in a welcome bond. However, there was also another younger admirer, Saverio, "Sam," five years older and the son of widower Vicenzo Martino, who was also a farmer, but on a much smaller acreage. When Sam was 9 years old his father, Vicenzo, married one of Francesca's sisters, who had been a nun in a nearby convent. She, unlike another sister who remained a nun, decided to leave the convent in order to marry the widower and at the same time gain instant motherhood to young Sam. Consequently, whenever the sisters visited, their Nida or Sam would often tag along to visit the new "cousin." Unlike Nida, Sam regularly attended school while also helping his father with the endless farm work. Gradually, the "cousins" became quite fond of each other.

Growing up with two aunts who were so close to the church it was not surprising that Nida would develop rather strong religious feelings. There was a small church nearby and Nida would go there regularly, usually the first thing in the morning. Apparently, Sam

did not share her strong religious feelings for he did not join her on those occasions.

Sam was quite aware that Nida's parents were considering Marco as their future son-in-law, but he did not let that feeling deter him from pursuing their daughter. Moreover, he felt encouraged to do so since the daughter was doing a bit of pursuing on her own, as she regularly rode her horse to Sam's place when she was alone. From Nida's perspective, Sam was a good match. He was sociable, farm-oriented, reasonably well educated, he could read and write, and very likeable. She was also fond of Sam's grandmother, Leonora Accardi, who caused quite a stir when she moved from Mazara to Santa Ninfa in a horse drawn carriage when she married Sam's grandfather, Saverio Martino. Leonora was the first woman in the community to wear a hat rather than a shawl. In the 1820s that was regarded as quite a fashion statement. Leonora had one son, Vicenzo, who married Sam's mother, Giovanna, who died very young, as noted earlier. Vicenzo's second wife, Francesca's sister, only lived a few years after the marriage, by the time Sam was 20, Vicenzo was a widower for the second time.

It was at that time that Sam broke his leg in a farm accident. The situation became quite critical for Vicenzo, who was struggling not only to maintain the farm, but also to handle all the household chores, as well as care for his crippled son. Nida decided to come to the rescue by going to Vicenzo's household to help with the duties as housekeeper and nurse. It was not surprising then that she and Sam would fall in love—so much so in fact that after a few weeks she completely took over the household and no longer returned "home" to Vito and Francesca and her brothers and sisters. In 1886, Nida, not quite 17, and Sam, at 21, were married in a quiet ceremony. They were now permanent residents in Vicenzo's home, which as far as he was concerned was theirs as well.

Vito and Francesca were disappointed at the turn of events. In their eyes, Sam with his small farm was not as good a match as Marco, heir to a large estate; but, if that was what their daughter wanted they would accept the marriage. However, there would be no big wedding party nor would a major dowry, other than Nida's personal things,

be offered to the impetuous couple and to Vicenzo. Marco was probably in a state of shock as well to be denied the wedding that he may have taken for granted.

CHAPTER IV

1890s—TRADITIONS AND TRAGEDIES

Nida's rush from childhood to marriage was taken in stride. Now, as the woman in charge of the household she eagerly accepted the responsibility for which she had been well-trained. The 10-acre Martino farm, while small compared to her father's large estate, was intensively managed for a variety of crops. There was acreage devoted to the all-important wheat to be rendered into flour for bread and pasta, a big garden, an orchard of figs, almonds, olives and other fruits. There were enough olives to provide the family with enough oil to meet their needs. Within the extensive vineyard grew a variety of grapes that made excellent raisins; other varieties were pressed into wine, both for family use and for sale. A donkey provided modest transportation, as well as a carrier for produce and water. The family loved the farm, it provided security and stability. It was the workplace and home except for the winter months when the family moved into Santa Ninfa to live in a large house, which was also a roadside inn that they helped operate until after Easter, at which time they would gather their chickens, rabbits and piglets to return to their country home.

Easter was also special for the religious Nida and most other Sicilians in other ways. One particular tradition that took place on Good Friday was to bake a large round loaf of bread representative of the crown of thorns on Jesus' head. Added to the "crown" was an egg representing each member of the family and the renewal of life. An alternative was to bake small round loaves for each family member and place a single egg on top—the eggs were then colored after baking.

Another major holy day (holiday) centered around the 15th of August, a day for feasting and enjoying a fair. Also, it was a time to go to the beach and enjoy bathing in the salty Mediterranean, which became reasonably warm by mid-summer. Those with skin problems or other body sores would bathe in the sea and pray that the salty solution would heal their sores and itches. Best of all, it was the time when Vito would take the family on a short vacation to the shore. He would hitch his pair of white oxen to the wagon and pack his family for three carefree days at the beach. The trip took half a day to go and half a day to return. It was the most happy occasion of the year, as the family—with the possible exception of Francesca—would laugh and sing as at no other time. Yet, Christmas was the major holiday to be celebrated in many traditional ways. Jenny wrote:

> *"My mother would tell how Christmas was celebrated in Sicily. They would plan months ahead for the big treat of fig cookies. The best and finest flour made from their own wheat was selected. Lard was rendered from the pig butchered just before Christmas. Honey taken from their beehives, orange juice and orange skins chopped fine from their trees mixed with their own figs and almonds, which were finely chopped, made up the cookie filling, which on Christmas Eve was ready to be placed in the fig cakes. At that time, the family would gather with their closest relatives to make the dough for the fig cakes. Each of the women and girls would cut the cookies into their favorite designs, usually birds or flowers, while talking and singing and being merry. After the cookies were baked, usually not until after midnight, they would sample the cookies with a glass of wine and thank Baby Jesus for their blessings. Finally, each would take their share home to be stored and eaten during the following year (the fig cookies made as described had excellent keeping qualities and would last for months).*
>
> *As an additional treat, Vito would hire a violin player to play Sicilian Christmas carols during the Christmas Eve celebration. It was one of the rare occasions when the family was privileged to*

enjoy music and they made the best of the occasion as they sang to the violin accompaniment."

Such were the traditions that Nida would follow to the best of her ability. She would continue to go to the nearby church in the early morning. Church was also the best way to keep track of religious holidays and other events that the priest would report to the assembled parishioners.

Nida's transition from childhood to marriage offered her little chance to enjoy much of a relatively carefree life as a teenager. Just nine months after the marriage she gave birth to a beautiful blue-eyed daughter, Giovanna. Then, two years later in 1888 a son was born to be named Vicenzo (Jimmy) after her father-in-law. But, the joys of parenthood and the comfortable life on the farm with Sam were to be shot-lived. Tragedy struck in 1890 when the cherished firstborn died from an attack of diphtheria. Two-year-old Jimmy was also stricken. He survived the ravages of the disease, but he was to remain somewhat handicapped.

While death was claiming one daughter in 1890, another was born to Nida that year and named after her mother, Francesca. Frances was strong and sturdy with many of her mother's characteristics. She was to become a mainstay in the forthcoming trials and tribulations of the growing Martino family.

Nida and Sam were a fertile couple and in spite of long periods of nursing, conception reoccurred on a nearly every other year schedule. However, daughters named, or to be named Giovanna, seemed to be jinxed.

In 1892, a daughter died prematurely from a miscarriage that resulted when a heavy bag of grain Nida was unloading from their donkey slipped from her grasp and landed on her stomach as she fell to the ground. Then, in 1893 another girl died prematurely. This time, as a consequence of Nida falling down while being angrily pursued by Sam's father, who was determined that she claim a dowry from her father. The accident only made Vito more reluctant than ever to provide one. Keep in mind that in 19th century Sicily dowries were of great importance in establishing new families. Undoubtedly,

Vicenzo was troubled that wealthy Vito did not consider his son a worthy husband. Jenny wrote about "dowry:"

> *"The dowry or "dote" was of great importance for both men and women who came from 'Borghese' families. The man was supposed to have land, house, as well as a horse, mule or donkey to work the land and for transportation. So, parents had to plan early in their children's lives, especially when there were a number of children, to get their children off to a good start. Marriage age was considered 15 for daughters and 20 for sons.*
>
> *When a man began to seriously court a girl the first question usually asked of the girl was 'what is your father giving you?' The girl's parents, in turn, would ask the same question of the man. If the man should say 'I have some land, a house, but no horse or donkey' the marriage was off until he got a horse or donkey. Dowries were the center of many stories:*
>
> *One day a young man was much in love, but his bride-to-be would not marry him because he had neither horse nor donkey. In desperation, he went to various relatives to seek help in buying a donkey. Finally, when he did get one the wedding took place right away. On the night of the wedding he took his bride by the hand to take her home. Instead of home, he took her to the barn and said: 'tonight, you sleep with the donkey because he is the one you wanted before me!'*
>
> *Today, parents do not worry about planning dowries for their children because they go off to live together any old way; but, in Sicily the dowry was very important, especially for the Borghese families."*

Those were not happy times for Nida in the last decade of the 19th century, and greater unhappiness was yet to follow. On the other hand, nearby a more cheerful event occurred. In 1894 an immensely talented, diminutive operatic tenor, Enrico Caruso, made his debut in Naples—once the northern part of "the Two Sicily's"—singing "L'Amico Francesco."

Then came 1895, a most traumatic year. It started quite tragically when father-in-law, Vicenzo, fell from a fig tree and died from the resulting injuries. But, worse grief was soon to follow when her devoted father, Vito, died from complications with kidney stones. A disposition to this body malfunction was to be inherited by most of Nida's children.

As tragic as 1895 was for the family, it was also the year that the second Martino son, Vito (Bill), was born, as one Vito replaced the other. It was also the year that the Italian physicist Guillermo Marconi was making his initial discoveries with wireless means of transmitting messages.

Adjusting to managing the farm without Vicenzo kept Nida and Sam quite busy. But, busy as they were a third son, Francesco (Frank), was born in 1897. Meanwhile, Nida's home farm was being operated by her brothers under Francesca's watchful eye. The old widow had died a few years before Vito's untimely death, so that Vito did finally marry Francesca and give his children his name, although Nida never used it since she had gone from Giacalone to Martino before the widow died. The sons, who would inherit Vito's farm, were not as hardworking or as dedicated as their father and were having difficulty making ends meet.

The next several years were especially troublesome to Nida in a different way. She had noticed the from time to time certain household goods and supplies would disappear at a rate that could not be accounted for. To make matters worse, she was beginning to suspect that Sam, during his frequent business trips to town, was having an affair with a former girlfriend. She knew that Sam was something of a Don Juan and that women seemed easily won over by his charming and aggressive manner, but she was not yet 30 and felt that Sam had no good reason to be with other women, even if she did seem to be pregnant half the time that was his doing.

Ultimately, her suspicions came to a head when she noticed that some precious jewelry and heirlooms were missing. She knew that she never misplaced them, which meant that they have been stolen. But, by whom? Could it have been Sam, who was "paying off" his girlfriend? She suspected as much and confronted her husband.

Although he denied any responsibility for her accusations, their relationship cooled.

To make matters worse, she was pregnant again. Throughout the pregnancy she was depressed and uneasy, factors which may have contributed to the poor health of her next son, Antonio (Tony). He was born in 1899 and never developed mentally and was never able to become a productive member of the family. Eventually, he had to be hospitalized.

Meanwhile, 1899 was the year that Marconi impressed the "world" by transmitting a wireless message from France to England across the English Channel.

CHAPTER V

1900-1901—THE SIROCCO AND TUNIS

Throughout this period of depression Nida did not consider leaving Sam. By virtue of her strong Catholic upbringing, divorce separation was not an option. She simply rationalized that better a scoundrel for a husband than an emperor for a lover. She would remain faithful and dedicated to her husband and family. She also liked to say that "while from a rose a thorn is born so from thorns can a rose be born." She would become that rose.

But, there were other thorns as well for her to bear. At the turn of the century, the Sicilian farm economy was devastated by a series of drier than normal years reinforced by the dreaded Sirocco. The land became so parched that there was barely enough moisture to produce food for the family. No matter how hard they worked and conserved their entire wheat crop withered and died. Their very survival was at stake. There were no surplus crops that could be sold to obtain the cash necessary to pay the taxes and to acquire the necessary goods and services that could not be obtained from the farm. The family, along with most other Sicilian farmers, was faced with a crisis and cash was desperately needed.

To get the necessary money without having to sell off any of the land Sam decided to cross the Mediterranean to Tunis. Posted on tavern doors were notices that workers were needed to help build a major railroad that was in progress in Tunisia. Sam was sure he could get a job and make enough money to rescue the family and the farm. So, off he sailed to spend the winter on the north African coast.

The year was 1901. Coincidentally, Marconi was conducting a major overseas exercise of his own. With the cooperation of the

British he had erected a tall transmitting antenna on England's Atlantic coast and a receiving antenna on the coast of New Foundland. To the astonishment of scientists around the world the invisible radio waves tapped from England travelled across the curved surface of the earth's ocean and were received almost instantaneously in New Foundland. Keep in mind, wireless transmission, which we all take for granted today, was regarded as just about impossible only 90 years ago. On a sadder note, 1901 was also the year that the beloved composer Verdi died, but his music undoubtedly will live forever.

Meanwhile, back in Santa Ninfa Nida was managing the Travelers Inn, which she and Sam had previously managed during the winter months. Even without Sam at least the family would be secure for the winter.

Since Sam's trip to Tunis was to become the turning point in Nida's decision to go to America let me tell you something about the roots of this ancient area, inasmuch as the people who have lived on the North African peninsula only 90 miles from the Sicilian coast have been major players in Sicilian history and culture.

One of the earliest people there were the Phoenicians, a Semitic speaking culture from the eastern Mediterranean shores, who were known biblically as the Canaanites. It was the Greeks who called these people Phoenicians and the name has stayed with us. They were at the peak of their power about 3,000 years ago. About 800 B.C. Phoenicians from the city of Tyre (an area now part of southern Lebanon) founded the city of Carthage on the outskirts of present day Tunis. During that period they also settled in western Sicily and founded Panormus, now Palermo.

The Phoenicians influenced Mediterranean culture for hundreds of years, so much so, in fact, that in 64 B.C. the Roman Emperor, Pompey the Great, incorporated most of Phoenicia into the Roman Empire as the Province of Syria and established an outstanding law school there. Centuries later in the 600s A.D., as the Roman era declined, Phoenicia with Syria fell to Moslem forces. But, by that time they had left a powerful legacy to our Sicilian ancestors. Earlier, as the Phoenicians at Carthage prospered, they developed one of the finest harbors in the Mediterranean Sea.

The harbor was developed into two sections, an outer harbor reserved for trading vessel and a walled inner harbor for warships. As many as 220 war galleys were sheltered under sheds on the alert to protect the city of Carthage. The city had many buildings six stories high that were further protected by 22 miles of walls 40-feet high. For the most part, the Carthaginians hired mercenaries who were Libyans, Nubians, Greeks and Spaniards to do their fighting.

As the outstanding port city prospered its citizens became more adventurous and very militaristic, and developed an identity of their own as the Carthaginians. With Sicily so close by they repeatedly tried to take control of the island from the Greeks, who had become well-established on the island. For several centuries, the Greeks controlled most of Sicily to the displeasure of the Phoenician settlers in the western part, who eventually requested help from their "countrymen" in Carthage to battle the Greeks and drive them out of Sicily. At the same time, the Roman Empire was expanding and it was with considerable interest that Roman leaders noted the prolonged Greek-Phoenician confrontations for control of Sicily. The Romans were especially wary of the Carthaginian military prowess. The Carthaginians most likely felt the same way about the Romans. Moreover, the Romans and Greeks were quite bewildered that the Carthaginians continued the Phoenician ritual of child sacrifice, which they practiced in solemn religious ceremony. The Romans eventually settled the Greek-Carthaginian struggle by driving them both out of Sicily and annexing the island as part of the Roman Empire.

At that time, an outstanding military figure, Hannibal (247-183 B.C.), emerged from Carthage. For 15 years the Carthaginian general defeated the Romans in a number of battles. Ultimately, the Romans overpowered the Carthaginians and burned their city to the ground. One hundred years later the Romans began to rebuild the city and once more it rose to eminence to become one of the great cities of the Roman Empire.

When Roman power declined, Carthage was destroyed again. This time, in 698, A.D. by Arab conquerors who never rebuilt the city. About 100 years later in 827 the Arabs (Saracens) conquered Sicily and remained a dominant force until displaced by Norman

conquerors in 1091. Today, over those ancient ruins of Carthage wealthy Tunisians have built spacious villas and all is relatively peaceful.

Thus, for centuries Italians and North Africans have moved back and forth across the 90-mile expanse of sea. While many from the African coast have made their impact on Sicily, so have the Sicilians and other Italians settled along the African coast and made their impact there. Thus, Sam's voyage to Tunis was not considered very unusual, but rather it followed a pattern that had been established for centuries.

Winter passed and it was now almost spring. Throughout this time, now six months, not one word had been heard from Sam. Spring was planting time. There had been enough rain over the winter to soak the fields. Sam should have returned by this time to plan the crops, but his whereabouts were a mystery. Nida was becoming concerned and desperate for knowledge concerning the status of her long-departed husband. Possibly, he had met up with some misfortune and was either sick or hurt, or even worse, dead.

Coming to her assistance was lifelong friend and once suitor Marco, still a bachelor. Marco told Nida that he would do his best to trace Sam's probable route to Tunis and determine his fate. If, indeed, Sam had met some unfortunate demise he would return to marry the widow Nida and care for her children.

It did not take Marco long to locate Sam. He found him at an inn that he was helping a widow and her daughter manage, and Sam was in excellent health. The inn was located near the developing railroad and had established a prosperous business providing room and board to many workers. But, as Marco soon found out, Sam had not been one of those workers. He hadn't worked for the railroad at all. Instead, much to Marco's surprise the charming man-about-town had become "engaged" to the widow's daughter. There was talk about a wedding in the near future.

One can wonder at the mixed feelings that must have tormented Marco that day as he wondered what to do. Should he return to Santa Ninfa and report Sam as a lost cause or should he confront the widow and tell her the truth about Sam. Just as there was no

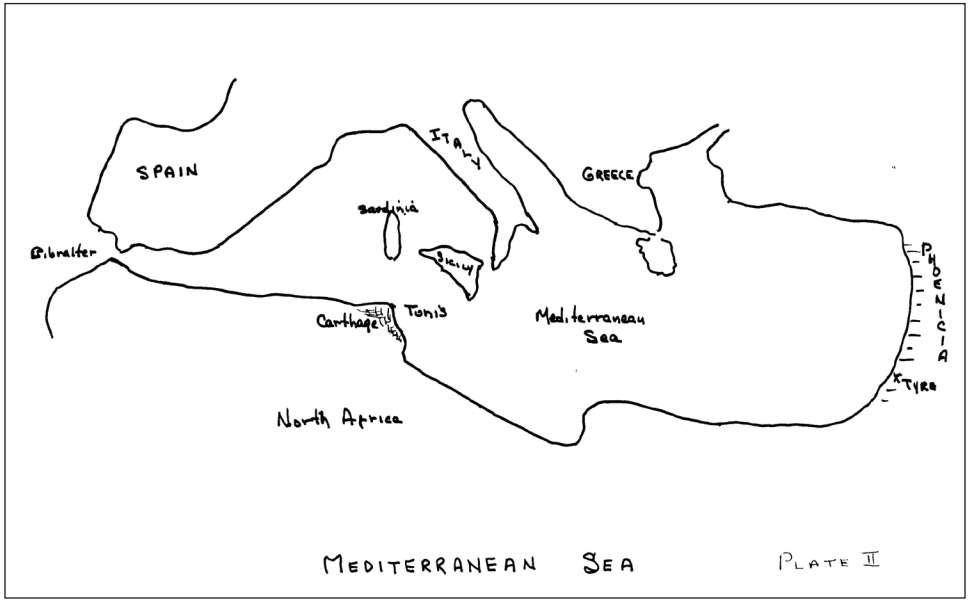
doubt in Nida's mind that she would remain faithful to Sam, in spite of her reservations about his loyalty to her, so did Marco decide that he could not deceive Nida. That night he met with the widow and told her about the wife and six children Sam had left behind in Santa Ninfa, including a son, John, who had been born while he was "seducing" the widow's daughter. Since Sam could not deny the truth in Marco's presence, the angry widow evicted him from the inn that night. Sam returned to Santa Ninfa broke and penitent. Nida was obviously shocked at the news. She knew her husband was something of a scoundrel, but never suspected he could be so foolish and deceptive. Sam argued that he had no intention of going through with the wedding, but was pretending to do so in order to get by during the winter and that he was already planning to return when Marco arrived; but, there was more to come.

Two weeks later, the widow and daughter drove to the inn at Santa Ninfa in a stagecoach and presented Nida with a bill for Sam's room and board for the nearly six months he stayed at her place of business in Tunis. The widow no longer found Sam the least bit charming. She was furious at the way Sam had fooled her and insisted that the assistance he gave her in managing the inn was insignificant compared to the charges he incurred for room and board. Moreover, the widow claimed that her daughter was pregnant with Sam's child and the money would help resolve that situation.

With not enough money to pay the large bill, and the widow and daughter threatening a lawsuit, there was only one way out to raise enough money to pay the bill and keep Sam out of jail. They would have to sell a portion of their precious farm, but that sacrifice seemed minor compared to Nida's sense of humiliation. She had always been a proud woman, but now she felt that everyone in Santa Ninfa would soon learn about Sam's "adventure" and that the tale would be told over and over at her expense. That thought coupled with her now certain feeling that Sam had been having an affair locally convinced her that she could not remain in Santa Ninfa any longer. But, what to do and where to go?

By fortunate coincidence her unmarried brother, Frank, had planned to immigrate and had booked passage from Palermo to

America. Why not, she thought, book passage with her brother for America and leave Sam, Santa Ninfa and Sicily for good. Start a new life in the United States. But, that was not such an easy thing to do, after all there were the children. She felt that it would be too difficult to begin a new life in a strange place with them. It made more sense to have them on the farm in the care of daughter Frances and mother Francesca. They, together with Sam, would have to cope as best they could until she was settled enough to send for them; but, there were to be more complications.



CHAPTER VI

1902-1907—FROM SICILY TO AMERICA

It seemed to Nida that her life was a continuous struggle to overcome one obstacle after another. Frank had booked passage on the steamship Lusitania that was scheduled to leave port on April 1st. She had much to do to get ready, including weaning baby John so that Frances and Francesca could take care of him more easily. Two days before she was to leave Santa Ninfa she got word that on board the ill-fated Lusitania there were people who had been stricken with smallpox. Consequently, the vessel was under quarantine for 40 days and could not leave from Palermo until May 1st.

When the day for departure came Nida was filled with conflicting emotions. Never before had she been away from her children and the thought of leaving them behind pained her with guilt. On the other hand, she was determined to leave Santa Ninfa and start a new life in America. She knew that it would be terribly difficult to do with the children, but God willing they would come later after she was settled.

Frank and Nida arrived in New York Harbor May 22nd. It was a Saturday and Nida's 33rd birthday. The 21-day voyage had not been pleasant. For most of the trip she was "sea sick" and uncomfortable in the smelly, crowded quarters aboard ship. Later, she learned that the nausea she suffered was also caused by the fact she was pregnant for the 10th time. Once more, she had mixed emotions. Getting established in her new home would be complicated enough without having to deal with the pregnancy and another child so soon. On the other hand, it would be her first child to be born in America and that was a good omen. Like so many other emotionally charged immigrants who had entered the United States by way of New York

Harbor, she was thrilled at the sight of Bartholdi's grand statue of the strong, proud, resolute woman holding up the torch and welcoming the newcomers to the New World. For the first time in many months Nida felt a sense of optimism and well-being. France's magnificent gift to America had welcomed yet another hardy soul into the "land of opportunity." Nida did not doubt that the opportunity was there, but she knew it would take a lot of hard work to take advantage of it. But first, she and Frank would have to go through the processing procedure required of all newly arrived immigrants.

Those passengers who could afford to travel first and second class cabin were processed aboard ship. However, those passengers who traveled steerage, as did Frank and Nida, were required to be processed at Ellis Island, which was several miles southwest of the Manhattan Pier where the Lusitania docked.

Nida was quite impressed by the size and grandeur of the bright and new brick and limestone main building that had opened for business only 18 months earlier. It was the biggest and grandest building she had ever seen. Upon entering the building under a metal and glass awning Nida and Frank checked their luggage in the Baggage Room. From there, they were ushered up a stairway where they were visually given a quick inspection to evaluate their health. Since they were both in their prime and could be expected to easily find employment they passed without question.

They were then lined up with their fellow passengers in the Registry Room for the legal inspection. For this equally important step in the processing procedure, each new arrival wore a tag with two numbers. The numbers referred to the page and line on the Lusitania's manifest where their names appeared. Nida and Frank passed the health and legal inspection that day, as did 80% of the newly arrived immigrants. However, for the 20% requiring further scrutiny, a delay in processing could stretch out to weeks. Remarkably, only 2% of those immigrants processed through Ellis Island were regarded as being unfit to become Americans and returned to their homeland.

Upon leaving Ellis Island, brother and sister found their way to an address in Brooklyn with the help of a former friend from Santa

Ninfa, who had already established residence and had arranged for living quarters, which though cramped were most welcome. It did not take the pair much time to unpack and settle in their new quarters. By Monday, only two days after their arrival, both found jobs—Frank in a lumberyard and Nida as a seamstress in a factory that made Palm Beach suits for the wealthy. She would work there for six years.

For the rest of that spring and summer they both worked 10-hour days at their jobs. Moreover, on most nights Nida brought back extra work that required fine hand stitching. Fortunately, her eyesight was still keen so that she could work until midnight in the poorly lit room. She was quickly capitalizing on the superior skills and work habits she learned on the farm, but there was little time to enjoy the simplest of pleasures other eating a modest meal and visiting for a few minutes a day with brother Frank. Each night she cried herself to sleep as she wondered about the welfare of the children left behind in Santa Ninfa. But, she knew that as long as she could keep working and save enough money the family would be with her in due time. That time came in October. Her loneliness and longing for her family made her decide that not only could she now send for the children—Jimmy, Frances, Bill, Frank and John, but also her husband, Sam, the scoundrel, who longed to be forgiven.

At that time, the cheapest one-way fares were $14 for adults and $5 for children. The sickly Tony would remain in Santa Ninfa with Francesca. Reluctantly, Sam brought in a caretaker to manage the remainder of his farm, which he was not prepared to sell, but he was adventurous and eager to see what America would be like and hoped that Nida would give him a warm welcome. He was quite proud of what she had done. When the family arrived in Brooklyn there was a prolonged tearful reunion. They moved into an apartment on Johnson Avenue, which Nida had been able to comfortably furnish. The sudden emergence into the bustling Brooklyn metropolis was a source of awe and confusion to the children. Not only must they now learn how to cope with a completely different way of life, but also they had to learn a new and foreign language. The older boys were quickly enrolled in school while Sam joined his brother-in-law

at the lumberyard. Twelve-year-old Frances was to stay home to care for baby John and tend to household chores while her mother worked. She could not be spared to go to school, and as it turned out never did.

On Thanksgiving Day 1902 the following month there was a double cause for celebration when Giovanna (Jenny) was the first of six children to be born in America. In spite of Nida's heartache and hardship during the lonesome pregnancy Jenny was a vigorous, healthy baby. The midwife who assisted at the birth in the Johnson Avenue apartment charged $2 for her services. But, she graciously returned the money and advised Sam to spend the $2 on food to nourish his growing family. Moreover, the lumberyard gave each worker a basketful of food, including a chicken, so it was a joyful day for all.

Gradually the family adjusted to the Brooklyn tenement environment, so different from the farm life of Sicily except for the long hours of hard work. Sam, with his natural social and working skills, soon became a foreman. The family was developing a new measure of responsibility and stability in their new home. However, they really knew very little about the United States, what they saw of the country was pretty much restricted to where they could go on foot. Meanwhile, in Detroit Henry Ford was on his way to initiating a major change in transportation. In 1903 he made and sold his first automobile.

In 1904, Theodore Roosevelt was elected President, the sculptor Bartholdi died in Paris, and another son, Salvatore, was born to the Martino's, who were busier than ever with little time for any form of recreation. In contrast, just a few miles east of Brooklyn, Belmont Park opened. In 1905 it was described as the biggest race track in the world. It was hard for Nida to believe that there were people who had enough extra time and money to spend gambling on horses at a race track.

As time passed Nida became increasingly anxious to see her 52-year-old mother and invalid son, Tony, who she heard was being mistreated. Consequently, in the spring of 1906 she decided to return to Santa Ninfa for a short visit taking her two youngest, Sal

and Jenny, with her and leaving Frances and Sam responsible for the rest of the family.

As Nida was preparing to leave there came startling news. Everyone was soon talking about the monster earthquake that shattered San Francisco on April 18th. The newspapers were full of stories about the terrible devastation and human misery. Sicily has had a long history of earthquakes, so Sam and Nida felt great sympathy for the unfortunate victims. At one time they had talked about possibly going to California since the climate there was supposed to be more like that of Sicily than any other place in the U.S. Any regrets they may have had about not going west were now dismissed with news of the quake (Note: The reader is undoubtedly aware of the October 1989 quake that struck San Francisco; but, consider this, seismologists estimate that the 1906 quake unleashed 60 times more energy than the one in 1989).

The ocean voyages during that time, especially for those passengers paying the cheapest fares in steerage, were not very pleasant experiences. Today, Americans tend to think of ocean cruises as luxury vacations, not so then. Jenny wrote:

> *"Women and children were put in large dormitory type rooms. They would line up for their food and then look for a place to eat, usually on a folding chair they brought with them. Toilets were here and there and always a mess. Passengers often brought their own urine pot."*

Nida stayed in Santa Ninfa with her mother for six months, during which time Nida tried to persuade Francesca to come to America with her; but, Francesca refused. She feared the ocean crossing and the different city life in Brooklyn more than the loneliness she felt since the departure of her two daughters (Mary the other) and two sons. She would remain on the farm she loved with her two remaining sons until her death 10 years later.

Nida returned to Brooklyn after the fall harvest. Upon arrival with the sickly Tony she ran into difficulties with the immigration officials, who were reluctant to allow the developmentally disabled child to enter. Nida argued passionately for the need to bring him

ashore and after some intense "negotiations" her will prevailed; but, there were now three sick children needing care.

On the return voyage young Sal and Jenny had become ill with whooping cough and then pneumonia. Jenny recovered quickly, but Sal could not be cured and soon died in Brooklyn. As a result, Nida became very despondent and guilt-ridden. She realized that her concern for the sick, and now it appeared incurable son, Tony, had cost the life of once healthy young Sal. She had exchanged "good for bad" and vowed never to return to Sicily. A vow she kept. That December the loss of Sal was replaced by the birth of Mary.

The months sped by as the family continued to adjust to city life. There was plenty of work to keep them busy. Sam and the boys tried a bakery and worked on railroad and subway projects. When it snowed, they shoveled the city streets. Yet, there was something missing. In the evening when they were together for supper they would often talk about their former life on the farm. Somehow, even though it seemed they worked harder then (there were no days off) and there were occasional hardships (drought), there were so many events that generated intense feelings of pleasure, such as when each of the crops was harvested and secured, when the various animals had their young, even when the fall rains came after the dry summer and the streams started to flow again. There were even such simpler things as hearing the roosters crow at dawn, tasting the first sweet figs and apricots each season, gathering eggs each day from the henhouse (Nida had two soft boiled eggs for breakfast each day), contemplating the nature of the bright stars in the clear night sky. Such past pleasures could not be enjoyed in Brooklyn. They missed farm life and wondered what it might be like to farm in the U.S. Unfortunately, before farming could be considered seriously there were several handicaps to overcome.

The first was money. It seemed impossible to save enough for a down payment. The second was technology. Could the knowledge acquired operating the farm in Sicily be transferred to the very different climatic conditions in the U.S., especially in the northeast? So, where would they go? Anyway, it was fun talking about the possibilities and did give them something to look forward to someday.

The year 1908 was very special for many reasons. Henry Ford's first Model T came off the assembly line in Detroit. His two-seat roadster could be purchased for $850. In the air in Le Mans France, Wilbur Wright broke all flying records by staying aloft with a passenger for one hour. The French were so impressed with the achievement that a French syndicate ordered 50 planes. However, of most importance to the family it was the year that Frances, now 18, married Antonio Lazzara. Tony was very ambitious and hardworking and was most appreciative of the capable teenager. Frances, so much like her mother, had been such a mainstay to the household that the family she left behind wondered how they would get along without her. It meant Nida would have to work that much harder, but she was aware that she was having trouble coping with the tenement lifestyle of Brooklyn. She had become asthmatic and longed to return to country life more than ever, and her doctor advised Sam to do so or she might die. Sam panicked; but to finance such a venture seemed out of the question, but life without Nida also seemed out of the question.

The issue of finances was unexpectedly resolved when new son-in-law Tony Lazzara agreed to loan the family enough cash to place a down payment on a 40-cow dairy farm of 150 acres across the Hudson River in Sussex County, New Jersey. Emotions were mixed as they planned the move. At least in Brooklyn they could predict their weekly income, in terms of hours worked on their various jobs. But, as they knew, on the farm there would be no predictable relationship between hours worked and dollars of income. But, at least with the dairy herd they could expect a cash income on a regular basis from the sale of milk; then, there would always be food from the chickens, rabbits, pigs and a big garden. But, no matter how the farm might work out, the family looked forward to living in the country once more; of course, it would be quite different from what they enjoyed in Sicily, but now it was time to learn an American way of farming and they were eager to begin. Nida felt confident that once on the farm she would recover her health.

CHAPTER VII

1908-1917—EARTHQUAKES AND BACK TO FARMING

Between Christmas and New Years in 1908 one of the most severe earthquakes ever recorded in Europe centered in the Straits of Messina between Sicily and Italy. The quake devastated vast areas of southern Italy and Sicily. The city of Messina was leveled to the ground along with many other smaller communities. Estimates of the number of unfortunate souls trapped and killed in the rubble numbered close to 100,000. This was not the first time Messina had been leveled. A similar earthquake had demolished the city in 1783. It was not until 1909 that word began to filter back to the U.S. about the countless personal tragedies. In some of the communities hardest hit only the more substantial buildings, such as churches, remained standing. Much of the shoreline of Sicily is in the form of steep cliffs. Many shore side acres and homes tumbled into the sea. Sam wrote letters to friends and relatives inquiring about the status of the two farms. In time, he learned that damage was not so severe in southwestern Sicily and damaged structures could be repaired. Nevertheless, Sam was anxious to go back to personally check on the properties; but, he was so busy trying to make the New Jersey farm profitable and keeping the family comfortable that the trip would have to wait. It made more sense to concentrate on the Jersey farm and not be overly concerned about what happened in Santa Ninfa. Furthermore, there wasn't much he could accomplish even if he did go back since those living there were making the needed repairs.

For three years the family worked hard to make a decent living from the Jersey farm, but it gradually became apparent that the farm just could not measure up to their standards and that no matter how hard they worked it could never compare to what they had in Sicily. Their basic diet consisted of milk and potatoes from the farm, and pasta. Moreover, the hardest worker, Jimmy, married a neighboring farm girl, Sadie Spades, and moved in with her family to help operate their dairy farm. Then, 16-year-old Bill got itchy feet. One day he pocketed a $50 milk check and went back to the city to seek his fortune, perhaps at Belmont. The family was less two sons, but gained a daughter when Leonora (Nora) was born in 1910. With so much work and the departure of their two oldest sons, Sam and Nida decided in 1911 to sell the farm and return to Brooklyn for the winter. At that time, life was very difficult for most farm families in the U.S. There were many hardships to overcome that hardly exist today. Jenny wrote:

> *"It was hard in 1908. No cars for most people, only a wagon or horse and buggy to go anywhere. It took hours to go to the nearest store or to a doctor. That was when my mother would be our doctor whenever one of us got hurt or sick or when an animal got hurt or sick; she would operate on them, too. Our one-room school was one and a half miles away and going to school was hard in the winter when the snowdrifts were four-feet high. When I was 6 years old my feet got frostbitten and my teacher got a pan of snow and quickly rubbed my feet. That was the end of school for me that winter after she drove me home with her horse and sleigh."*
>
> *It was a bad time for my folks only a few years in the U.S. running a dairy farm with seven children, the oldest a teenager, miles away from the nearest village, a big house with only a kitchen stove to keep us warm in the winter, hard luck at every turn. If my father were to praise an animal, we would lose it one way or other. We had a big Holstein cow that had just freshened (gave birth) and gave 14 quarts of milk two times a day. A buyer offered my father $200 for it, but it was not for sale. Two*

days later, the cow hurt her back when she laid down and could not get up. We had to kill her 24 hours later, for she could not be helped. Such a big loss.

The rats were plentiful. My mother had set a hen with 12 eggs to hatch early in April. She had set it in our woodshed next to the kitchen. One day she counted one chick missing. The next day another one missing, so she set a trap and in the meanwhile she sat by the door waiting to see if she could catch the rat. Sure enough, she heard a chick cry. She went to see and saw a big rat carrying or say pulling the chick by one leg to a hole. The hole was too small to pull the chick through, so my mother saved it and had to sew the chick together with silk thread from one leg to the other. The chick lived and we closed up the hole.

My mother was the one who would look at the sky and tell my father and brothers what to do the next day—whether to plow or plant or to cut hay—for there were no weather reports then. Every spring during the third week in March she would make us bring up from the cellar the boxes of earth she had stored and then put them in a hot oven to kill any bugs and other things. She would then plant the seeds for the tomatoes and other vegetables we would need for our large family. Then, by late April, if the weather was okay, my father would transplant for our year's food. What a beautiful garden he would have. We would make many pounds of tomato paste for our spaghetti. Then, around November, we would butcher two pigs that were raised for ham, bacon, sausage, and lard. We had a large smokehouse to cure our hams and bacon using hickory wood. We put the meat in salt brine for a few weeks before smoking it. We used our cold spring water house to keep our milk and food cold, for we had no ice box. In our cold cellar we stored all our potatoes, onions, carrots, beets and the cabbages hung by their roots. Oh, what a blessing that cold cellar was. We kept two barrels of cider to drink, but not much wine. We made our own maple syrup in the spring from our trees by putting a bucket under the tapped trees to catch the syrup. When we had enough to fill large pots we put

the pots of sap over a large fire outdoors to boil and cook for days until 20 quarts of sap would boil down to one quart of syrup and brown sugar.

We had so many groundhogs or wood chucks that my mother would make summer sandals for us from their skins after they were cured with salt and dried. The meat of the groundhog was like eating rabbit. We made our own bread, macaroni, butter and cheese; so, in spite of it all we lived and prospered and my mother got back her health."

As soon as the farm was sold the family moved back to the city. Once there, they noticed that the Italian section they moved to in Brooklyn was more crowded than ever with newly arrived immigrants. The U.S. Immigration Office reported that more than 1 million immigrants entered the U.S. in 1910, of that number 192,000 were from the south of Italy and Sicily; a figure that concerned some Americans of north European origin, who felt smugly superior to the new arrivals, many of whom had lost nearly everything they owned in the monster earthquake. They were truly destitute and looked the part. Since they had to start all over again rebuilding their livelihood it made more sense to many of them to do so in the U.S. rather than in their devastated communities.

There were many passengers, other than immigrants, travelling across the Atlantic in 1912. Passenger service was improving rapidly with increasing emphasis on comfort and safety. Sam decided it was as good a time as any to check on the farm in Sicily, with the understanding that he would sell part or all of it. Sam made the easterly voyage in the old steamer that travelled regularly between New York and Palermo. He was as shocked as everyone else when news arrived that the magnificent brand new luxury ship Titanic had sunk with 1,595 of its mostly wealthy passengers after striking an iceberg. It may have been a factor in delaying his return trip until 14 months later, when he returned with baskets of raisins, dried figs, olive oil and wine—with much of it wrapped in the traditional red checkered tablecloth.

With the wine, he toasted the birth of his newest son, Salvatore, reported on conditions in Sicily—he did not sell the farm—and talked about farming again as soon as they could get enough money together.

Jenny wrote about the first dime she earned:

"I earned my first dime ironing four of my brother Bill's fancy shirts with a charcoal iron that my mother brought from Sicily. What a time I had to get it started and working. Then I had to worry about not to burn the shirt, for the iron would let spark fly out and if a spark were to fall on the shirt I was ironing it sure would cause me lots of trouble.

It was July 1912, my mother was going to have a baby and being in her eighth month and the weather so hot I had to help her all I could. So, my big brother Bill, the handsome prince of the family, told me to get started and do the fancy ironing, so I did. Thank God that the boat-styled iron with over 10 holes on each side behaved all day. I did as good a job as a 10-year-old skinny little girl could do. My brother was so pleased and I got my $0.10. But, now what to do—what to buy with my first $0.10? I could not sleep that night.

The next day my cousin took me for the first time in my life to the 5 and 10 cents store in Brooklyn. I looked and looked and finally decided to buy a gold chain and cross. I treasured it so for a long time."

During the winter of 1912-1913 Sam became serious about farming and talked to realtors until he found what appeared to be a decent farm that could be rented. Thus, in the spring of 1913 he moved the family to a grain and dairy farm near Stillwater, New Jersey, that was rented from a Mr. Slater, who had just lost his wife and wanted to live in the city for a while. Consequently, the rental agreement was most satisfactory to both parties.

There was a sense of optimism throughout the country as the Panama Canal opened that year and even though there was talk of war in Europe the family felt they could do better this time than

their last venture into dairy farming. Farm life there was to be comparable to the previous one, but they enjoyed some unique experiences as well. Jenny wrote:

> *"On the farm we learned to be thrifty, independent and to do without—and that would be with us all our lives. We did not waste a crumb or anything. There was no charity or relief of any kind. No sitting on your hind end and waiting for your government to feed and care for you. No canned goods on the shelves to just open and eat. Everything was to start from scratch. For instance, I have to tell you how I learned to make chicken soup. Oh, what a day to remember. I was only 10 years old. We had a bad storm that caused my mother to get a bad cold trying to bring in a mother hen and her dozen chicks or they have drowned. After one week of fever and not eating she called me to her bedside to say how she wished for a cup of soup. My father and brother were away at the far end of a large field, so I could not go to them to kill a chicken for me. My mother was so weak and feverish she had no strength to wring a chicken's neck so I was to do the job. I started to cry and said to my mother, who I loved dearly, 'How am I to start with it all?' She said, 'First, get some corn and call all the chickens in and look for a hen with a pale looking comb. Catch her and be sure she is not an egg laying hen. To find out, feel the two bones under the tail. If they are tight—two fingers wide—she is not laying eggs.' So, I did what she told me and brought the chicken to her. She looked at it and told me to go out to the wood chopping block and chop off her head. Now, that was a hard thing for a 10-year-old skinny girl to do, but the love for my mother and family was so strong that it gave me courage to do anything. What a time I had trying to keep the chicken head on the block. After a dozen times of hitting and missing I got it off. Then, I plucked it while it was still warm. Now, to gut it that was more than hard, but I did it. To make the soup and to wash out the hen I had to go to the well for a pail of water. After two hours of catching, killing and plucking I had to make a wood stove fire to get my soup going—first getting straw, small wood kindling and large wood on top.*

Then, I had to go to the garden to get the greens for the soup. It took all afternoon to get that soup started and made and ready for supper at 7:30; but, I did. I grew up five years that day, a day I have never forgotten. How lucky are the girls today, but I feel sorry for them in a way, too. For, in a disaster they would not know how to survive. My daughter, going to college and driving a car, having the best we could give her, said to me one day that she wished she had the same life as mine—a large family, the great outdoors with all those animals that taught me how great it was learning and living on the farm."

The owner of the farm, Mr. Slater, would return each summer during his vacation to hunt woodchucks and rattlesnakes with his dog, Bounce, which he had left at the farm. Jenny wrote:

"As soon as he arrived he would put a coffee pot on our woodstove that would remain there for the two weeks he stayed. Each day he would add water and coffee. He would also take his dog and gun and go woodchuck hunting as soon as he arrived. Within an hour or so he would have a woodchuck ready for the pot and that pot, too, would be on the side of my mother's stove for the two weeks. He would eat woodchuck for two weeks straight. Each day, he and his dog would also hunt rattlesnakes, for he knew where they were. No sooner would the dog smell one he would pounce on it, get it by the neck and kill it. Mr. Slater then brought it to the corn crib to skin it very carefully. He would never shoot a snake for it would make holes in its beautiful colored skin. The skin, soft like velvet and with such different designs. He would sell the skin in Washington D.C. where they were made into expensive belts. Bounce was the first dog I remember that was so intelligent; also, those were my first snakes. I can still see them hanging on the corn crib wriggling for hours after being skinned, the flesh pink and white, the rattles bunched on their tail ends. It sure made me afraid of snakes from then on."

Meanwhile, in 1915 another major earthquake shocked Sicily, killing 30,000 people and doing considerable damage to the countryside, so that once more Sam worried not only about the status of

his farm, which he learned suffered some damage, but also about the welfare of his friends and relatives who might be getting involved in the war. Even more shocking to the family was the news on May 17, 1915, that the passenger ship, Lusitania, which many of the family had sailed on, was torpedoed by a German submarine and sunk off the coast of Ireland. Of the 1,924 persons aboard, 1,198 lost their lives. The sinking aroused great anger in the U.S. and contributed to the later entry of the U.S. in the war, which we now call World War I.

After three years of hard work, as well as the birth of the last of their children, Joseph, in 1919, Sam and Nida decided that they would no longer rent the farm, but buy one. So, they planned to auction off all their produce and start another venture. Thus, in the fall of 1916 after the harvest of corn, rye, wheat, potatoes and pumpkins that were fed to the cows and pigs Jenny and Frank left for the city while their parents planned the auction. Jenny wrote:

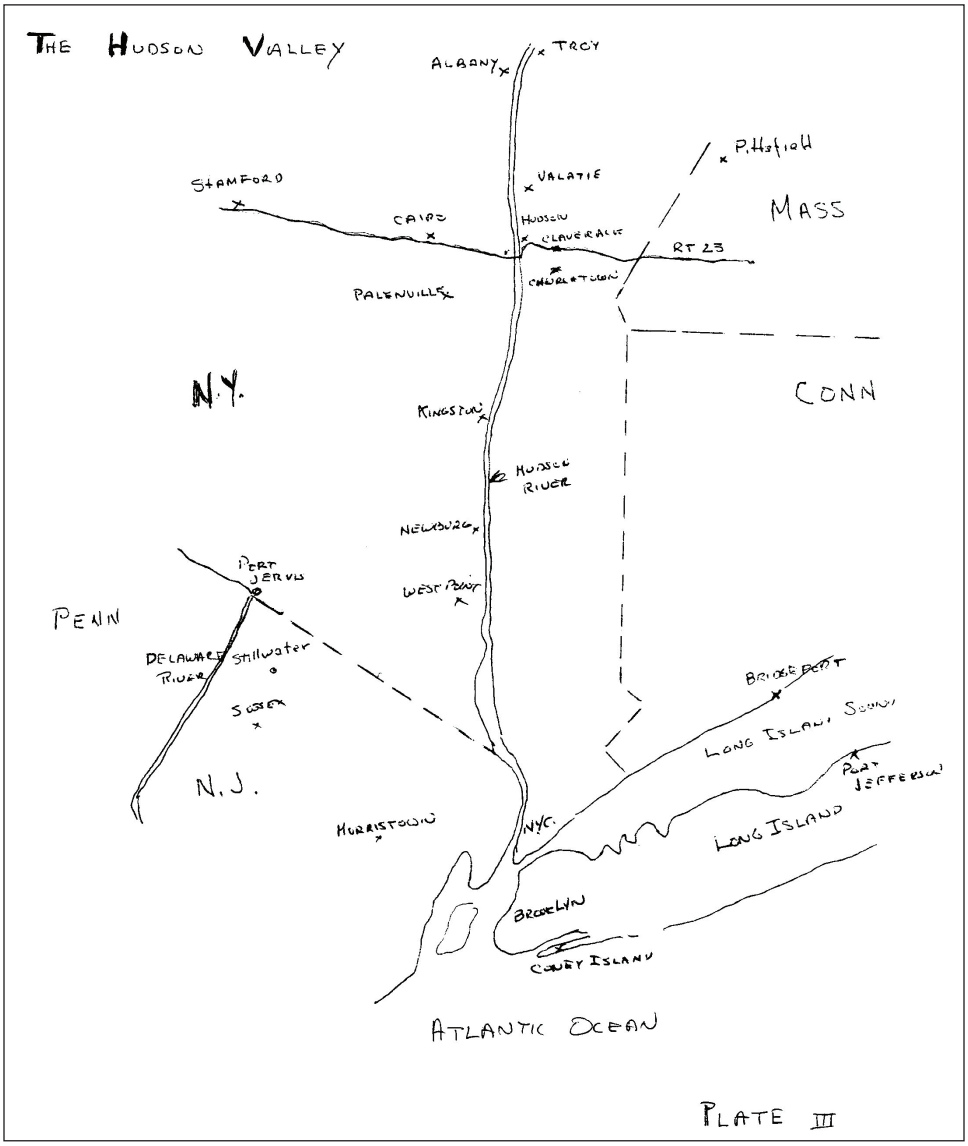
> *"We were dressed like two hicks and when I saw how the city people were dressed I wanted to go in a hole and stay there. The following Monday we both got jobs—Franks as a trolley car motorman and I in a factory sewing men's shirts for $2.50 a week. Two months later, my father contacted me and told me to take a train from Weshauken, New Jersey, to Stillwater, New Jersey, in order to help him with the auction by being his interpreter since he could not speak or write English. My brother took me to the train on a cold winter day. As the train entered New Jersey I could see snow drifts five-feet high and roads closed. No one was traveling. When I got off the train I was all alone. It was getting dark and there was no one at the station to meet me. Now what was I to do? I saw a man with a team of horses hitched to a sleigh loading feed for his cows. I asked him if he could take me to my father's place because I needed to be there for the auction the next day. Instead, the man took me to his wife and I stayed there overnight. The next morning he finished his chores and he and his wife took me to the auctioneer, who lived in the village and who was to auction off my father's things. That night, the roads were opened and the auctioneer took me home in his one-horse open sleigh. My mother cried with joy to see me. She had*

wondered and worried all day and night, and prayed for my safe return. The day turned out beautiful and sunny. Lots of people came to the auction and we sold everything—the cows, horses, chickens, grain, hay, etc. We then packed our furniture and shipped it to New York by freight that took one month to arrive.

The next day a friend promised to take all of us to the train station in his big sleigh. Can you ever imagine my family of seven dressed so out of style carrying bundles of clothing, for we only had one suitcase? But, the most embarrassing thing was my father carrying a big goose in a cage, the goose squawking every time it was moved around. Then, we had to take a trolley for Brooklyn on a cold winter night at eight o'clock and me, at 14, the oldest of five children, who had never taken a trolley before to see that everyone got on with bundles and packages and everyone in a hurry. So, after asking many motormen if we had the right trolley for Jefferson Street in Brooklyn, we all got on. One man, who heard me telling my father that it was the right trolley said: 'No, it is not, you must take the next one.' My little brothers, Sal and Joe, so sleepy and confused. We got on the right one and arrived at midnight to my married brother Bill's apartment that had only one bedroom."

Bill, or Vito, had left the first New Jersey farm as a teenager to go on his own. His first venture was to try his luck at the race track gambling on the horses, but he lost. From there, he went to Brooklyn and got a job as a milkman with a horse and wagon delivering milk, cheese, butter, etc. Later, he found a better job driving a truck for the first time, for the Tip Top, delivering bread in Brooklyn for $15 a week. By then, in 1916, he felt secure enough to marry his childhood sweetheart, Rosa Falcetta. Rosa's mother, Gaetana, had been a close friend and neighbor to Nida in Santa Ninfa. They were on such good terms with each other that they occasionally nursed each other's children during emergencies. Moreover, when in 1902 Nida sent money to her family for the trip to America, the Falcetta family was on the same voyage, including the 2-year-old Rosa. So, to Nida and Sam, Rosa was regarded as much as a daughter as a daughter-in-law.

As the winter waned and the war in Europe raged Sam returned to Sicily for the last time. He stayed there for six months being unable to or unwilling to sell his farm, which was to remain in the hands of his caretaker. He returned to Brooklyn just as the U.S. was to enter the conflict. It was then that 15-year-old Jenny met 22-year-old Leo Taormina.



CHAPTER VIII

LEO

Maurillo (Leo) Taormina had immigrated to Brooklyn in 1910 from Menfi, where he was born in 1895. Menfi is located near the Sicilian coast southeast of Santa Ninfa. It is a beautiful city, in spite of periodic earthquakes which tend to tear it apart. Menfi and Palermo were among the major cultural and commercial centers respectively during the era of Arab influence.

Leo was the oldest of five children, which included one sister, Ninetta. His father, Antonio, was a very authoritarian, Victorian type of person who with his family were skilled tailors. Leo's mother, the former Margherita Mosquitta, managed a family-owned department store. Leo, when reminiscing about his childhood, which he did often in his senior years, would speak most fondly about his grandfather, Mosquitta, who he apparently loved more than anyone else. Among his fondest memories were the times when he, riding a donkey, would go with his grandfather to their nearby country acreage to manage and harvest the crops of various fruits and grapes. Thee were also the many trips to the nearby seashore at Porto Palo. There he and his family and friends would enjoy the beach and sea, and especially the "sardi," fresh sardines caught by the local fishermen, that would be grilled and eaten on the beach. Leo was also something of a scholar, who enjoyed the best of all worlds at Menfi—a secure and comfortable city life, access to the nearby small farm with its fruits and vegetables, the seashore, the many friends at school, and above all a loving family. But, when he was 15 the lifestyle he thoroughly enjoyed came to an abrupt end.

His father, perhaps carried away by the lavish tales he had been hearing about America from his brother, Giovanni, where people were so rich that they did not bother to pick up loose money on the streets and where good paying jobs were plentiful, decided to send his oldest son to America. There he could earn good wages, which he would be expected to send back to Menfi to add to the family income—a practice adhered to by many young immigrants.

Antonio was not too concerned about his young son's welfare because in 1905 his brother, Giovanni (John) Tavormina, had gone to America with his four beautiful young daughters and two sons—Ninetta, Christina, Annette and Bertha, and sons Maurileo and Jerome (Jerry). For a reason never made clear to me, Giovanni spelled his name Tavormina while Antonio did not include the "v."

John ultimately persuaded his brother to send young Leo to America where life was wonderful, where anyone could get a job and make good money, especially barbers—the profession that John and some of his family were entering. Moreover, John told his somewhat reluctant brother that the money Leo could make barbering would be sent back "home," so that Antonio, among other things, could finish building his house. Even more important, John would be responsible for his nephew's welfare and treat him like his own son.

Perhaps, John was a bit dramatic about extolling life in America to his brother, but it was worth mentioning that John also loved to act. He came from a long line of theatrical people on his father's side and at every opportunity he would participate in plays at the theatre in Menfi. When John Settled in Brooklyn he started and directed a drama club, in which he also participated. His favorite role being that of a lover.

Young Leo, of course, felt that life had been pretty wonderful in Menfi and could not imagine how it could be any better in some strange far-off land. But, not able to challenge his father's authority, he had no choice in the decision.

He sailed from Palermo on his 15th birthday, June 1, 1910, on the busy passenger ship Lusitania and arrived at Ellis Island 18 days later. There, his Uncle John, true to his word, met him and immediately took him under his wing. For a shot time Leo lived with

his uncle's family in an Italian neighborhood on Central Avenue in Brooklyn, but he was not happy. He felt that his father had done him a great injustice. Jenny wrote:

> *"Many a night he would feel so lonesome missing his three brothers and sister, missing the town and all his relatives and friends, missing especially his grandparents, who loved him for he was their first grandson, that he would cry himself to sleep."*

Leo stayed with his uncle for about a year as he gradually adjusted to American ways and learned the new language. Then, when he turned 16 it was decided that he should start working as a barber's apprentice for his cousin's husband, Joe Triola, who lived in Morristown, New Jersey. He worked and lived with Joe for over a year earning $1 a week and room and board. Each month he faithfully sent his earnings to his father in Menfi. At the time, $1 was equal to one Italian Lira and was not to be taken lightly in Sicily. But, it was hardly a wonderful life for Leo and he hoped to make it better.

He had heard, now that he was getting to be a pretty good barber, that through an employment agency he probably could get a better job. So, for the fee of $0.25 he took another job at $3.50 a week plus room and board—quite an improvement. Later, as his skills improved, he changed again for $6 a week plus room and board. But, after several years of work, he became bored with the profession and decided to try other work. He moved back with his uncle and worked for a while in an ice cream store and then in a munitions factory, faithfully sending money "home" each month.

He next went to work for his cousin Ninetta's enterprising husband, Leonard Pavia, delivering barber supplies by horse and wagon to the scattered barber shops in western Long Island. Much of Queens and most of Nassau County was still quite rural and Leo enjoyed the outside activity of driving through the rapidly developing countryside. As part of his pay he lived with the Pavias and their 8-year-old daughter, who was to become the mother of actress Brenda Vaccaro. Leo would also help the Pavias in the operation of their grocery store. When he was 21 he changed jobs once more to

earn twice as much money by becoming a trolley car conductor on the Brooklyn run to Coney Island, a job he thoroughly enjoyed.

At this time, the winter of early 1917, Jenny had helped her father auction off their produce on the New Jersey farm and returned to Brooklyn with her family for the winter. The Martino's lived in an apartment upstairs from the Pavia grocery store. Jenny wrote:

> *"The first time I saw him (Leo) he was dressed in his blue conductor uniform at the doorway that I was about to enter and it left me such an impression that I asked who he was. He was living with relatives who had a small store and every time my mother would ask me to buy bread or different food stuff if he was home he would wait on me and tease me. The more he would see me, the more he would tease. I would blush so and got so in love with him."*

Jenny, at 15, was very impressed by the fact that Leo, although in America only seven years, could speak English with no accent. Her parents, having been in America 10 years longer than Leo, got by with the help of their family and learned only a few English words. Leo had not gone to school in the U.S., but had learned to read and speak English on his own—not only through interaction with his relatives, but also by reading the comic strips in the newspapers and talking to his many customers from all walks of life. But, Jenny could hardly have chosen a more inappropriate time to initiate and conduct a love affair.

The family was preparing to buy another farm. During the winter they had accumulated enough savings to place a down payment for a dairy farm on a mountain road near Stamford in the Catskill Mountains of New York State. Moreover, while her family was in the process of moving there in April 1917 the U.S. Congress voted to enter the war in Europe, and in May passed a Selective Service Act to draft the necessary recruits. Jenny wrote:

> *"When my folks moved to the new farm it broke my heart to leave him, but he asked my father if he could write to me and my father said "yes."*

However, Leo as a recent immigrant was soon drafted in the U.S. Army. He tried to enlist in the submarine service of the U.S. Navy, but the Navy said that a 5'1.5" tall he was too short. Yet, he, along with many other young immigrant men, who were also "selected," was tall enough to be sent to Camp Upton, Long Island (now the location of the Brookhaven National Laboratory) for basic training. A month later he was shipped to the trenches of France with Company H of the 31st Infantry as a poorly trained doughboy. Leo insisted later that he was never given a chance to fire his rifle before landing in France. Jenny wrote:

> *"I did not see him for two years, but kept my love strong by writing and praying for him. We had only met and seen each other for four months, but that was enough for me to know that he would make a wonderful husband. Some would say 'puppy love or love at first sight, it won't last,' but it did. I never went out with any other man. Later in my story I will write about 58 years with my first love and only love of my life."*

CHAPTER IX

1917-1920—THE CATSKILL PERIOD

On April 1, 1917, the Martino's left Brooklyn (for the final time) for their new farm near Stamford. At that time, Stamford was a major resort community that in summer catered especially to wealthy Cubans. One of the major hotels, Churchill Hall, was the center of much of the summer activity as the tourists from the hot and sticky "tropics" enjoyed the delightful summer climates of the Catskill Mountains.

The farmhouse was quite new, but had no indoor toilets. The barn was equipped with milking machines and wood. Wood, which was plentiful, was used for fuel. Farm production in the cool Catskill climate with its relatively short growing season was mostly hay, rye, buckwheat, oats and potatoes. There 18-year-old John met schoolteacher Edna McGregor, whom he later married and then moved to Hudson, New York, to start a new lifestyle; but, before that he quarreled with his parents and left the farm and all the work to 20-year-old brother Frank and 15-year-old Jenny. Jenny had become quite adapted to farm life—getting up at 4:30 to start milking at 5:00, a quick breakfast and the long walk to school then, back home from school in time to start the evening milking, finally, supper and bed. Jenny at 16 considered herself an accomplished farmhand. She could hitch the horse to the buggy and drive to town, drive a hay wagon with the team of horses at haying time and with brother Frank, whom she loved very much, help with all the chores that had to be done seven days a week, winter and summer, with no time off even for Sundays and holidays. Jenny wrote:

"On Sundays, my mother would be the barber and father the shoemaker. Every time he would hit his fingers with the hammer the shoe would fly at the wall and he would scream out in pain."

Jenny described her father as:

"A very handsome man with black wavy hair, gray eyes, medium light complex. He was a very sociable man, who liked women very much. He would get in conversation and forget to go to work. He would curse and holler whenever he got mad or things would go wrong, but never raise his hands to hit anyone.

He brought from the old country a one-quart clay jug for himself to drink from. Noon and night the jug was to be put on his side of the table where he ate. Every time he emptied the jug, he would remind me to wash it good and fill it up with whatever he had—either wine or apple cider. As time went on, the jug started to bother his younger children, who thought it was too old-fashioned and ugly to have around, though it never bothered the older children. So, one day the little clay jug disappeared and war started. My dad could not understand why they took it away after 20 years of drinking from it. No one ever drank from it but him. It never bothered me any. Every day after the jug disappeared he would miss it so and it would get him so mad, upset and aggravated until the day he died."

My father never forgot the beloved farm he left in Sicily. He said many times that he wanted to die in the land of his birth. But, he never did. Instead he died in 1936 at the age of 74 in Claverack, New York. His death was attributed to diabetes, which, apparently, he developed in his senior years.

The never-ending farm work continued summer and winter and Jenny, very pretty and energetic, was noticed and admired by a number of the local young men, but she would not date any of them. She had made up her mind to marry Leo, who was somewhere in the hellholes of France, and she was desperately trying to keep in touch with him. Jenny wrote:

"He came to see me before he left for Fort Dix and I did not see him again until July 1919. I did nothing but pray for him, write once a week and start saving my hope chest. Also, I learned to keep house, cook and everything else a woman should know to get married. No going out with other young men. One day after weeks from not hearing from him I got a scribbled note saying: "Just leaving for over-the-top." It had been written one and a half months before. Getting the note scared me so. I wrote to the War Department in Washington. Within a week I got news he was well now, had just gotten over a bad case of Spanish Influenza, (which Jenny also contracted later)."

During the war, Leo was in two campaigns with his regiment. Going over-the-top twice (climbing out of the trenches to advance toward the enemy lines, usually under heavy gun fire). He survived mostly by luck, as he saw his buddies killed and wounded around him, and also by lying low in a shell hole during the worst of the shelling. But, he was shell-shocked by the concussions and lost the hearing in one ear, thereby qualifying as a disabled war veteran. Moreover, during the vicious closing weeks of the war he spent several weeks in the hospital recovering from the effects of the flu, as well as the concussions. The only brother of Vito's wife, Rosa, was not so lucky. He was killed the very last day of the war. Although the war ended November 1918, Leo's regiment did not return to the U.S. until June 1919. Jenny wrote:

"The joy that he would soon come to see me was unbelievable. I started to live again. The day he was to come my brother Frank hitched our beautiful carriage to his team of horses and off to the railroad station in Stamford we went to get him. My mother's brother, Tony, was coming too that afternoon to bring my mother news from Italy, for he had just come from there. Finally, the train came. My uncle was there, but no Leo, my beloved sweetheart. What happened? My world stood still. I could not eat or sleep for days. Finally, I got a telegram: 'something happened, cannot come.' 'Oh my god," I said, 'what could have happened?' My mother, so kind and understanding, assured me that all will

be okay, 'maybe he did not have money yet to bring the ring.' So, quickly I wrote 'come, don't worry about any ring. I just want to see you so bad. Are you alright? Do you need money, if you do I'll send it to you, just come, please.'"

Again, he wrote, saying he was very sick and could not marry me: 'Farewell. Wish you lots of luck. Goodbye.' That was the biggest blow of my life. I could not believe it. My world tumbled down. I wanted to die, but I could not give him up; loving and worrying and praying and planning for it all to go down the drain. So, again, I sent a special delivery letter (Jenny did not want her folks to know about the letter, so she gave it to her 7-year-old sister, Nora, to carry to the village mailbox. Nora remembers how fearful she was going through the woods to get it there). This time telling him to go see a special doctor my folks knew in New York to try to get well. That I would wait for him for years if necessary. That did it. that made him come to his senses.

My mother forbid me to write him anymore, that if I wanted to get married I could anytime, for I had three other young farmers that had asked my father for me; but, no, I wanted my first man, my first love. I had a suspicion that someone was trying to marry him off to a girl from their neighborhood and that he should forget me being they had not seen me in two years and a green country girl no match for a city fellow. So, after the letter he came to his senses to have me. I was so in love with him that I wrote such a letter telling him I would wait until he got well, never thinking he could have V.D., which he said he had. In those times, I did not know of such a thing."

Note: At that time, Leo's cousin, possibly his favorite, who also served as a doughboy in France was doctoring from syphilis, but he could not be cured and died a miserable death shortly thereafter. Leo did not have V.D.

"He wrote back saying he had bought a gold locket for me in France and would like to send it to me as a gift. Again, I wrote

to him, but could not tell my mother. She would not consent to me to ever again write to him—that I had written to him more than enough and that she would kill me if I did, though I knew she would not kill me. She was not that kind of mother. She never even slapped anyone. But, she meant it when she said: 'No more have anything to do with him.'

I wrote to him on the sneak, telling him to come—that he would be welcome. So, he did; but, this time there was no big dinner waiting for him, no carriage to get him at the station for what he had done he got punished. He took the taxi and surprised my folks. He arrived at 5 P.M. just when my sister Mary and I had to start milking our 20 cows with the milking machines. My little sister, Leonora, then 8 years old, was told by me to look out for Leo and come right away to tell me when he arrived, which she did. Was my mother surprised to see him and he was surprised that she did not know. But, she, lady that she was, welcomed him in and started asking questions. That evening after my chores were done I went to the house, washed and changed my clothes, still not seeing him until after I set the table for supper. We shook hands and ate dinner. After dinner we went for a walk and sat under the apple tree to talk all about our two years not seeing each other. After talking, Forgiving him for all he had done, he showed me the pretty diamond ring he bought me. It fit beautifully and we got engaged. We then went in the house to tell my mother about our engagement. She got so upset. The first time my mother ever got so mad at me. Thinking he made a fool of her not asking her consent before he gave me the ring she gave me such a slap in the face that I can still feel it. She demanded I give back the ring right away, believing that I was too young to make such a decision at 16 and that Leo did not show enough respect towards them after all he had done.

Leo was supposed to leave for home the next morning and I was to give him back the ring for sure—no fooling; but, no, I did not give him the ring. My brother, Frank, took him to the railroad

station on the way when he went to deliver the eight 40-quart cans of milk to the creamery. I did not go.

At noon, my father commanded that I send the ring back by the two o'clock mailman, who came by with a one-horse buggy. God, I did not know what to do. I went to my bedroom to start getting the ring wrapped, but no, I could not. My heart was breaking. What am I going to do? So, now comes my great faith. I kneeled down by my Virgin Mary statue to beg her to tell me what to do. I cried and prayed for an hour. My heart breaking, all of a sudden my head cleared. Something inside me told me not to send the ring, that I loved the man so that I should marry him. That he was a good man and would make a wonderful husband. I dried my eyes, composed myself and went downstairs. My mother and my oldest sister, Frances, were waiting for me at the landing and asked me if I had the ring ready for the mailman, who was coming. I raised up my head to look at them. They could see how I had cried. Looking straight at my mother's eyes I said: 'No, mother. Sorry to disobey you, but I am not going to send the ring back.' 'What made you make the decision she asked and I told her how I had been praying to my dear blessed Mother to make me send or not to send the ring. And, I felt a joy in my heart like her telling 'don't *let him go. Marry him. He loves you, too. Otherwise, he would not have come back.' I knew then and there he was my man."*

Nida accepted the explanation with its deeply religious overtone and began to plan for the wedding. Jenny continued to work on the farm for almost another year before the family moved once more. She spent less time in school because she was badly needed to help with the family household and farm chores. Her fifth year in school was the last, but by then she became very knowledgeable about the dairy business and skeptical about how it was managed. She wrote:

"How lucky we are today to know that the milk we drink is fit to be drunk, but, one could not say that in the early 1900s. Milk then could be poison, especially for babies, so many would die in the hot weather of summer. The farmers were often so stupid and

careless. The milk was treated by all who sold it with no concern. They would keep a 40-quart can (the conventional storage and handling unit) in the store without refrigeration and if the milk was short, the storekeeper would add water. The farmers would add water, too, if the 40-quart milk can needed a few quarts to fill it up. The water the farmers added to the milk would usually come from the spring where the cans of milk were kept to get cooled before taken to the creamery. Milk was then sold by the quart and not by the butterfat content. Milk was sold for about $0.05 a quart and sometimes less.

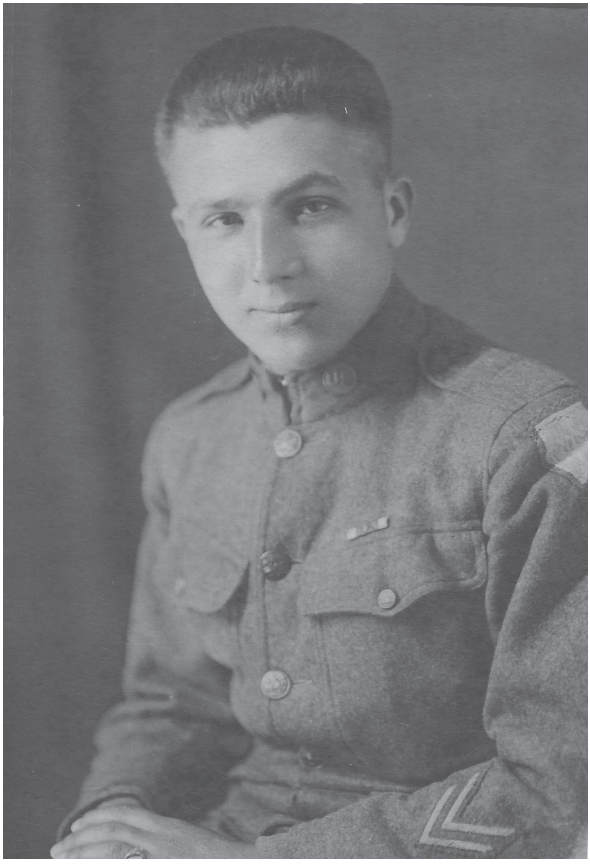
I knew of a farmer who put water in his milk that came from a spring that had pollywogs in it. A man from the milk station saw the little pollywogs in the milk and it was then that they found out for sure what some farmers were doing. The dear babies were getting more water than milk and got so sick and weak.

The cows were then kept in unsanitary cold and dirty barns. In time the cows would get tuberculosis. When I was 10, a mother in our apartment building lost her baby and all the small children got sick to their stomachs, including my baby brother (Sal). A nurse came by to tell my mother not to give us children store milk, but to send me to the baby milk station for then they started to pasteurize the milk. Thank God for Dr. Pasteur, for he was the one who found out the cause of what unpasteurized milk was doing to our dear babies and all our young ones. My mother almost lost four of her own children from it in the times we lived in the city. From then on, every mother was advised to boil the milk and not let it sit around without putting on ice. Babies began to get well and stay well in the summer at last. Then, it became law the farmers had to have their barns inspected every year. Cows were also inspected for tuberculosis and it took years to clean out the infected cows. Another important change is when milk was sold by its butterfat content, no more by the quart. Farmers started to add Jersey cows to their herds of Holstein cows, for Holsteins are big producers of milk,

but little butterfat. Jersey cows make less milk, but with lots more butterfat. So, no more water was added to the milk by the farmers. And, the stores had to keep their milk in a cooler and not exposed. Also, the farmer's barns on the inside had to be whitewashed every spring. Also, the cow's udders had to be washed before milking. The cans of milk were inspected every few months to see if they were washed good and kept from flies. Thank God for that."

In the spring of 1920, Sam sold the Catskill farm and bought a farm in Claverack. It would be the last of his farms. He died there in 1936 at the age of 74.

Back Row, left to right: Tony, Saverio, Jimmy, Frances
Front Row, left to right: William, Jennie, Frank, Mary, Liboria, John
Photo taken in 1906



Leo in the infantry in France, 1919

Jenny and Leo's wedding day, June 13, 1920

Jenny and Leo's 25th Wedding Anniversary, June 1945
at brother Frank's Resort in Palenville, near Catskill

Participants, Left to Right, from Jenny's Relationship

STANDING
Lily, wife of brother Frank Martino
Bertha, *niece, daughter of brother James (died 1940)*
Joe Chiaro, husband of sister Nora
Lorraine, daughter of brother Joe and wife Rose
Mother Nida
Jenny, sister-in-law Lena wife of brother Sal
Leo
Sister Mary Merrifield, son Floyd Jr, and husband Floyd

SITTING
Son Joseph (sons Anthony & Sam in Europe)
Niece Marie, daughter of Nora & Joe Chiaro
Bertha Elling's daughter
Mary Jane Merrifield, niece
Nephews Sal Martino Jr.
Peter Chiaro
Walter Merrifield
Frank Martino Jr.

Leo, Jenny, and Frank

Top: Nora, Jenny, Mary, Francis
Seated: Joe, Grandma (Nida)

Annietta (Leo's sister), Joanita, and Jenny in Sicily, 1961

Nino, Joe, Leo, and John in Sicily, 1961

CHAPTER X

THE 1920s—CLAVERACK TO BROOKLYN AND BACK

The 160-acre fruit and dairy farm one mile south of Claverack in the Hudson Valley was beautiful. By far, it was the best farm the family could imagine calling their own. It had a ten room house heated by a big wood stove in the kitchen, an attached woodshed, but no electricity. There were large interconnected wooden barns and attached stable for the cows, a chicken coop, smokehouse, ice house, and a four-holer outhouse; also, a blacksmith shop, carriage shed, guest house and tenant house. The land supported two large apple orchards, within which were other fruit trees, including various pears, plums, cherries and peaches, and a fine vineyard of concord grapes just behind the house. It was in the fertile limestone country of the valley four miles from the city of Hudson where two large cement plants—Atlas and Lone Star—converted the vast limestone resource to cement. It was one of the earliest communities settled by the Dutch in the 1600s, who for many years farmed the Valley under their "patroon" system. Hudson, on the river 100 miles from the ocean, had been a major whaling port.

At that time, most of the family names were of Dutch Origin with some English, such as Van Tassel, Van Deusen, Van de Carr, Van Vloeck, and Van Alstyne. There were Cook, Shook, Duntz, and Coons, Hamm, Schramm, and many Millers. The Hallenbeck's, Merrifield's, Benson's, and Baker's were adjoining neighbors. The only family name ending in a vowel was Crego. To some of the folks, the name Martino seemed terribly foreign, especially when it belonged to Catholics and Italians. The main church in Claverack

was Dutch Reformed. Sam was given a hard time when he tried to close on the farm. Many of the established Dutch and English families regarded the encroaching Martino's in much the same way that the established Mohican Indians had regarded the encroaching Dutch patroons many years earlier. Both felt that the neighborhood would never be the same, and they were right. The apprehension felt by the anxious seller dissipated when Sam came up with more than enough cash for a substantial down payment.

While most of the family was planning how to operate the farm Jenny was planning to get married and leave it. Frank, who had been the backbone of the previous farm operations, had left to marry Lillian Lamposona, who he had met at the Stillwater farm, and to buy a fruit and dairy farm of his own in the Catskill foothills near Palenville. Schoolboys Sal and Joe were far too young to be of much help. They had to go to the one-room schoolhouse one mile away with sisters Nora and Mary, who were capable workers, but were not to be kept home. But, there was Jimmy, helping his in-laws in New Jersey. By offering Jimmy the tenant house as his home, he was enticed to come to Claverack to raise his family of three—Bertha, Mary and Saverio. He lived and worked there until his untimely death in 1940.

On June 13, 1920, Jenny and Leo were married. The newlyweds received no wedding gifts, neither had Jenny been honored with a shower of any kind; but then, at that time none was expected. There was much irony in the fact that at one time her parents had forbidden Jenny to marry the vacillating Leo. Jenny wrote:

> *"If I was then living in Sicily, I would not have been allowed to marry Leo, for he was a tailor's son and I a Borghese daughter. Yet, in Sicilian society he was so much above me, even though Borghese had an abundance of food the year around, where the tailor, who might not get paid for a suit in more than a year and men could not afford to buy many, sometimes had bread alone with a small piece of bread to make believe it was cheese."*

Note: According to Leo, it would have been different if Jenny had been the daughter of the more wealthy "cavalacci." They were landowners who did not work their farm, but supervised their help

from horseback and never rode the less distinguished mules or donkeys. It is the nature of man that prejudice can be found in all places and in many forms.

After the modest ceremony, Frank drove the newlyweds by horse and buggy to the train station in Hudson. From there, their destination was Brooklyn, but their first night together would be delayed when the excited couple mistakenly took the northbound train to Albany. Jenny wrote:

> *"When Leo and I got married we did not have any money, but we took a chance. We lived in an upstairs cold flat apartment in my oldest sister Frances's house at 1639 83rd Street in Brooklyn. It had no heat and no hot water, but it was near Leo's work and cost only $27 a month rent. We did not have a car. For $0.05 one could take the subway to anyplace in Brooklyn and New York and Coney Island. We paid for our furnishings on weekly payments. We just trusted in God to give us good health. We lived with my sister for one year. The best one year of my life, for I learned from my sister so many things. I got pregnant the first month married and sure needed my dear sister's help and advice. My first son, Anthony, was born there and when he was 3-months-old we moved to a bigger apartment nearer to where my husband worked making over $35 a week barbering. Every week after his pay I would go to the bank putting away $5-$10. We hurried to save all we could to buy a small farm, which we did six years after we were married.*
>
> *When Anthony was 6-months-old I got appendicitis and had to go to the hospital for the operation. The doctor botched the job when he left something in my stomach that got infected. I was so sick and dying leaving behind my baby that had only nursed and did not know a bottle. There were no baby foods then at the store. Leo did not know what to do with him. When I got back from three and a half weeks at the hospital I did not recognize him so weak and thin. 'Oh God, I'll die if he does.' The baby wanted to be nursed, so I did. After he nursed, he threw up. 'Oh God, I killed him,' I said. We both fell asleep crying."*

After two hours we both woke up. The baby wanted to nurse so I decided to nurse him again. I was sure he had cleaned out my breast when he threw up and that if the milk would come again it would save my baby. Like a miracle, milk came again. The next day I told the doctor what happened. He could not believe that milk would come again for I had not nursed for three and a half weeks while I was sick in the hospital with a drain tube in my stomach. 'No,' the doctor said, 'you are too weak to nurse again, you will die if you do.' I said, 'I cannot hold food of any kind.' The doctor said, 'If you must nurse drink tea, beer, milk, liquid every two hours. You will have to nurse him as if he were just born to help him heal his sick stomach. Don't give him any other food for at least four months.' He was so surprised that my milk came back the way it did that he said he would put me in the medical book.

"After my second son (Saverio—now Savern) was born, December 26, 1922, my husband bought me a whole outfit for Christmas, a beautiful black coat, dress, shoes, hat, gloves and handbag. I was then 21 and having a second baby at that age improved my looks and body, made me full up from 98 pounds to 110. My husband used to say, 'You are perfect.' We could not afford babysitters then nor could we trust them for we had a bad experience the first time we got one. So, Leo always took care of the babies on Sunday when he got through work at 1 P.M. if I wanted to see a movie or vaudeville. One Sunday, he told me to be ready when he got home at one o'clock to get the elevated train that would take me to the theatre by two o'clock. He put in my hand the train and theatre money, and as I ran to take the train I could hear coming. I had taken my new handbag and in my hurry had forgot to check it for money…the show started and during intermission I thought I would buy a candy bar. When I went for a nickel in my bag I found out I did not have a penny. That upset me so, all dressed up so grand with not a penny. Oh, how am I going to get home? I only needed one nickel for the train. I lost all interest in the show and went to

the ladies room to start thinking. How was I going to get home? My baby needed to nurse. I could start walking, but it was too far and I did not know my way, so I started crying. 'Oh God, what am I going to do?' A woman in the waiting room heard my crying and asked why. I told her. She looked at me with such disgust, saying 'I have seen it all—all dressed up to kill and not a nickel for the train. I know you want the nickel for candy.' She said 'Go see a cop on the corner.' She left me crying more than ever, feeling so hurt. Every time I saw a cop some men were with him talking—I felt so ashamed I did not ask and kept on walking. All of a sudden I remembered a relative of my husband's lived eight blocks away. Quickly, I walked to their house, but no one was home. Again, I cried. Time was going fast and it would soon be dark. What is my husband going to think if I am not home when I am supposed to be? A lady next door heard me knocking and opened the door to see who it was. My heart was breaking. I could not go home. All I needed was five cents for the train. The dear lady felt so bad, my crying myself sick all for one nickel. She quickly made me a cup of coffee and offered me a dollar. 'Oh no, ' I said, 'all I want is one nickel.' 'No,' she said, 'take at least 25 cents in change, you might lose one nickel in the state that you are in.' So, off I went holding tight to the nickel, got home on time, missed half the show and never went alone again to that theater."

By this time, Jenny had convinced Leo to stop sending part of his wages to Menfi where five Lira were still equivalent to $5. Over 10 years Leo's monthly "pledge" had enabled his father to complete the house. More important, it had helped his sister, Ninetta, who had won a scholarship, to complete college and go to Firenze (Florence) to teach. There she met and married Domenico Bulgarini, a writer, lawyer and book publisher.

In 1923, Tony Lazzara, Frances' husband of only 13 years, was killed in a traffic accident near home. Her oldest son, Jimmy, only 12, had to quickly assume the role of head of the family, which included Joe, Sam, Vince, Mae and Bertha. Frances never remarried and remained in the 83rd Street house until her death at 66. My

earliest memory at two is that of the wake for my Uncle Tony in the house where I was born.

In contrast to the sadness suffered by Frances and her family, her brother Bill and wife Rose tired of the city, were thrilled to purchase a strawberry and dairy farm in the Catskill foothills near Cairo. Bill was able to convince the owner, a widower named Rivenburgh, who was anxious to leave, to sell the farm on credit until the crops came in. Later, Bill and Rose, and their growing family of Lillian, Anna, Frances, Sydney and Rose Marie, converted the farm to a very profitable summer boarding house and they had no problem paying for it. Brother Frank would do equally as well in the same business in nearby Palenville.

Meanwhile, hardworking Leo and thrifty Jenny had saved enough money by 1926 to buy from Azro Miller for $6,900 a 16-acre fruit farm that adjoined her parent's farm. Jenny had admired the neighboring farm each summer while she and the boys visited with her family. The boys loved the summer visits and pleaded to leave the city and move to the country next to their grandparents. Though reluctant to leave his good paying barber business in Brooklyn, Leo agreed to please Jenny and his sons; but, he knew the farm was too small to support them so he opened a barbershop in the center of Claverack. Jenny wrote:

> *"What a time my two sons had when we first moved to our 16-acre farm. We got them six baby ducks that had such fun playing games with one another in the small brook by the house. We also got a pair of geese, but a car killed the female goose and the male died of lonesomeness a few months later. We also got them rabbits and the most wonderful thing was getting them a baby lamb for Easter. The boys and lamb were always together. The lamb would sleep near our kitchen window, so she could see the light and hear us. When school started she insisted to go to school too and we had a hard time going after her to bring her back. She missed them so when they went to school and she would follow them along the dirt road. One day, she beat them to school and it all went like the story of 'Mary had a little lamb'*

that went to school and made the children laugh and play to see the lamb at school."

It was a big thrill for all of us. My two sons loved to go fishing in a nearby pond (headwater storage for a water driven sawmill owned and operated by Charles Schwartz) and loved to go to their grandparents' big farm next door. We started to fix our small house (coal stove, hand pump in the kitchen for water, outhouse and no electricity). We had three acres of concord grapes that made 10 tones the first two years. Then, fruit went cheaper each year from $90 a ton to $40. Peaches from $13 a bushel to $1 pick-your-own. What a time we started to have. (Note: It was the beginning of the Great Depression of the 1930s).

Meanwhile, five-year-old Anthony had began school at the one-room Stone Mill schoolhouse one mile away on dirt roads. Jenny, writing about son, Savern:

"Every morning when his brother started to leave for school he would run ahead and when I had to carry him home, he would cry and stamp his feet for hours. One morning after days of this carrying on I decided to make him go ahead and see if after he saw where his brother went he would be satisfied and come home. So, the darling teacher (Miss Loomis) with no kiddy garden class made him stay for the day. That did it, he liked school so much that the next morning he was so far ahead of his brother, Anthony, going to school again. I asked the teacher what to do. She said, 'Let him finish the week. He is such a dear boy, no trouble at all.' So, he finished the week and never left, he would rather die. There was no law then for a child to have to be 6 years old to go to school."

Mary, too, had enjoyed walking to a one-room schoolhouse, although not the same one. As sister Jenny wrote:

"She would have to walk by the next dairy farm of neighbor Merrifield, who lived there with his 20-year-old son, Floyd, who was very handsome and always out to smile at her and say good morning. It was love at first sight for her and he, too liked her. It took a while for him to say: 'Mary, I love you so much and

want to marry you, but it would not be fair to take you into my house to care for my invalid mother.' But, she convinced him she would do anything for him, but his English mother was against his marrying an Italian girl—an Italian daughter-in-law was not her cup of tea, though she liked her for being pretty, smart, clean and thrifty. They went to his minister (Lutheran) one night and got married. Floyd took her to his mother sitting in a wheel-chair and said: 'Mother, meet my bride, Mary. I love her. Learn to love her for she is just the woman for me. She did learn to love her, but only lived 9 months, long enough for Mary to learn her English ways of cooking, too. She would get up to help him milk cows and help all she could. She borne him a son a year later (Floyd, Jr.) and another son (Walter) six years later. Each time they had a son he would plant apple trees, a young orchard to grow with each one that they could help care for as they came of age. Later, came two daughters, Mary Jane and Carol Ann.

They lived in a red brick house built by his grandparents. It still stands so beautiful up on the hill after 150 years of being built with bricks from England."

With the early success of the farm and with their savings from Brooklyn, Leo was able to buy a brand new Model T Ford sedan for $900. Owning our own car for the first time was a major event for the family. What a thrill to drive over the dusty dirt roads, to the barbershop in Claverack, where Leo worked in the afternoons, to the creek for a swim at Spook Rock, to go shopping and see a movie in Hudson, to visit the relatives. We even tried to see the former family farm in Stamford, but the Model T could not make it up the steep mountain road, even in reverse. So, while there were definite advantage in Fords over horses, nevertheless a horse would have gotten up the mountain road.

Meanwhile, Sal Martino was trying to convince his father that it was time to sell the horses and buy a tractor. Tractors could do some things a horse couldn't, especially when the power takeoff pulley was rigged up to saw the cords of firewood needed each winter to heat the kitchen stove and keep at least that part of the house warm; but,

Sam was not so sure. He knew what to expect from horses, but he knew very little about tractors. But, tractors were being built and sold all over the country as farmers, especially in the Midwest, recognized their advantages. By the late 1920s, as many as 800 companies had become involved with their manufacture and development.

Tractors, in those days, were still something of a problem to get started and kept running, especially in cold weather. Back then, tractors had to be cranked by hand to get started and in cold weather they were often real troublesome, as Floyd Merrifield learned much to his sorrow. Floyd turned the sluggish crank as hard and fast as he could when suddenly the engine caught and the crank handle whipped against his jaw and shattered all of his teeth. It was a painful and terrifying experience, worse than being kicked by a cranky horse.

Nevertheless, as marvelous technological achievements in the development of machinery, modes of transportation and especially sources of energy were becoming more available and affordable, many of the hardships that had long been associated with rural lifestyles were fading away.

In the 1920s electrical transmission lines suspended from tall steel towers were for the first time crossing over the Columbia County countryside. To us children, the towers seemed like magnificent giants as they were erected one by one to support the cables that would conduct the marvels of electricity to our rural homes and barns. Hooking up the household to receive the more than welcome and hardworking "Freddy Kilowatt" the offspring of Edison, Steinmets, and many others, was as exciting as taking that first dusty ride in the Model T. What a pleasure to get light by simply turning on a switch rather than setting a lighted match against the wick of a smelly kerosene lamp or lantern.

Once connected to the power line, we could now have a radio. Leo could hardly wait to buy one. Who can forget the night he fussed for hours over the confusing assemblage of tubes, wires and speakers to get the primitive Atwater-Kent to work, to translate those reputedly magical radio waves that were streaming through the house into a sound we could understand. Suddenly, Jenny spoke to say that she was sure she heard something intelligible above the constant and

distracting static. To my 6-year-old ears, the noise sounded like barking dogs. Sure enough, my father was soon beaming excitedly. "hear that," he said. "Listen, I got it working." Very faintly we could hear a man's voice. As I remember it, we were listening to the Cliquot Club Eskimos and their barking Eskimo dogs. The 'Eskimos" were speaking about the virtues of Cliquot Club beverages.

Anyway, we were quite fascinated by our first experience with radio. Marconi had finally entered our household. What wonderful years, so many good things happening all at the same time. Life was never dull or static, especially on the farm.

But, neither was life dull in many of the cities, especially as a consequence of national legislation that was passed in 1920 prohibiting the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages. The law was not taken seriously by a vast number of people, who felt very strongly that the government was out of order in attempting to deny its citizens the right to buy alcoholic spirits, especially a glass of wine or mug of beer. Consequently, American society quickly separated into three distinct groups: 1) the "very nice people," who were strictly opposed to the consumption of alcohol in any form not only for themselves, but for everyone else; 2) the "not-so-nice people," who enjoyed a drink now and then, and who would seek out ways to get it; and, 3) the law-breaking, risk taking "bad people," who would agree to supply the "not-so-nice people" with a drink or two as long as their demand was strong enough to make the risk taking reasonably profitable. Obviously, it followed that the greater the risk (ending up in jail, getting fined or getting shot) the greater the profit should be. Naturally, as profits increased so did the competition. Thus, it was inevitable that society would create a new kind of "gangster."

During the 1920s many such entrepreneurs who survived became very rich and infamous in dealing with this hypocritical economic reality. One of the most infamous was Al Capone, who forcefully took over the Chicago "franchise" in 1925, and eventually ended up in jail.

Even Leo became involved in this duel between "good and bad" inasmuch as he, along with thousands of other Americans, made wine each year for family use. It so happened that he was asked to

share the wine with some of his neighbors, who were not skilled in wine making, but willing to share the cost. One such neighbor, hardworking field hand, Frank Hallenbeck, who was elderly and unmarried enjoyed Leo's wine very much. In fact, a drink of wine at the end of a long, hard day's work became his greatest pleasure and he cautiously asked Leo if on occasion he could share the wine at 20 cents a pint. Leo agreed, thus on many nights or evenings Frank would walk to our house, sit in a rocking chair by the oil stove in the kitchen and contentedly sip a pint of cool, red wine that came from Leo's barrel in the cellar.

He was interesting company and we talked easily about the day's events that seemed important at the time, such as how the weather was affecting the fruit crop, whether or not Route 9H would be built through our farm (it did go through the Hallenbeck farm, but just missed ours), or that someone saw a deer.

Pleasant and harmless as it all was Leo was, nevertheless, engaged in criminal behavior in the eyes of "the law" current at the time. Thus, Leo and Frank could be regarded as criminals; and, because there were some "very nice people," who might have considered them such if they knew, Leo, Jenny and Frank were very cautious. Thus, my brother and I were told not to tell anyone about Frank's occasional visits and what went on in the rocking chair behind our kitchen door. Such were the time, but not for long. Prohibition was to be repealed in the early 1930s. However, today we are witnessing similar national behavior in our debatable "war on drugs."

FOUR SONS AND A DAUGHTER

When I first told my husband two months after we were married that I was going to have a baby his face lit up with joy. What a thrill, our first son. So sure it was going to be a boy, and it was. Two years later again I told him I was going to have a second child; again, his face lit up, a brother for his first son. Then, it became a story. Every two years he would get the same news and he would say a "boy." Now, that happened four times and four sons. Now, "enough is enough." Not that I did not love my sons, it was that I wanted a girl. So, we stopped for a while.

Then it happened, my oldest son was 25 years old when one morning I told my husband I didn't think I am going through change of life (though I could for I was then 43 years old, and he was 51) I think I am going to have our fifth child. Then his face did ***not*** light up. Then, he got so upset to think at his age to get tied up in raising a baby again. The doctor told me ***too bad*** he feels that way now, he should have thought of it before. So then, the doctor said to me: "How are you going to have a daughter if you don't try again. Go home and have that daughter you have always wanted." So, I did go home and told my husband just what the doctor said. This time, he did not say neither a boy or a girl. For six months I waited to hear him say something. Then, one day, I said to him what do you want this time; and, to my joy he *said a girl*. Of course, that did it.

CHAPTER XI

THE 1940s—THE TROUBLED YEARS

From Jenny:

"My sister Nora was very healthy, ambitious and a hard worker. She was also very friendly and very, very smart. She lived with her folks till she was over 20 years old to help them run the summer resort till after she got married—after father's death in 1936. She married Joseph Chiaro, as hardworking and as ambitious as she was. They tried their best to make a go of it all. Joe was from 'the city' and did not know much about farming—but, was eager to learn and did so in a very short time. But, the way of life does not stand still, especially after our youngest brother, Joe, got married two years later (to Rose Tranchita—also from 'the city'). While her two brothers were single, the three could run the place together okay. But, when they married, sisters-in-law and brothers-in-law each wanted to be the boss and that would never do. So, in 1942, off the farm went Nora and her husband with daughter Marie (who had been born prematurely in 1937, weighing only three pounds). They started a house of their own in the orchard of the former Taormina farm (which the Martino's had bought earlier), but got in so much trouble with bad weather, shortage of materials (as American involvement in World War II heated up) and being pregnant Nora had lost a baby girl the year before from a stillbirth from all the aggravation and work. But, they managed to finish their pretty home when Peter was born later that year."

The next few years were very hectic for Nora and Joe as they tried different ways to earn a respectable living. As the war ended,

son David was born and they moved to another farm—the Inderkill Farm—near Poughkeepsie. Then, soon after, they bought and operated a gasoline station. Not satisfied with that they decided to go to Texas where Joe expected to be welcomed by some well-to-do relatives. Jenny wrote:

> *"They moved to Texas thinking a change of country would be good and help them forget the unhappiness in New York State, but a new state is no fun for a beginner. Even though they had money, there is always someone trying to make a fool of newcomers, which they did, and it cost them all the money they had worked so hard to get. Son Willy was born in Texas and the rich uncle never helped them at all—could not be bothered. So, back again they came to New York State to begin farming again with very little money."*

In 1950, Joe and Nora bought a fruit and dairy farm in Churchtown only one mile from where Jenny had lived 18 years earlier. Jenny wrote:

> *"Being such hard workers and ambitious, and their sons growing up, they started teaching their sons farming. Son Peter at 10, David at 8 would all dig in—sometimes driving their father's tractor. Such wonderful boys."*

Meanwhile, Jenny's brother Sal had also been having his ups and downs. He had not stayed with the family farm and boarding house very long. He quit high school in his sophomore year feeling that high school was too dull for his driving ambition and a waste of time. Soon thereafter he married beautiful city girl, Lena Ingrassia. He then went to work in the Metropolitan area with brother John in the wholesale fish business.

Previously, John had ventured in some of the many illicit operations that thrived in Hudson between World Wars I and II. At that time, Hudson was infamous throughout the northeast—along with Scranton, PA—as being wide open for drinking, gambling and prostitution. As a consequence, one of the titillating pastimes for young Hudson High boys—while the school was located in mid-city until 1937—was to speculate which of the young women walking

the streets or working in any one of the three Five and Dime stores might be a prostitute. Considering that probably 85% of the youthful voyeurs were virgins and had very little factual information to judge whether a smiling girl "was or wasn't." It was a rather unscientific enterprise. On the other hand, the brazenness with which many of the "working girls" conducted their business on some of the side streets—starting at 50 cents for the shabbiest—not only angered the local housewives, but also made them feel very uncomfortable and suspicious. Jenny, especially, would become very upset whenever she heard men whispering and laughing in Leo's downstairs barbershop. She was sure there were sexual overtones in the hushed laughter and she did not like it one bit.

John eventually left the questionable business operation thriving in Hudson, divorced wife Edna, and with the gained wisdom embarked on the more legitimate, though still questionable business centered around the Fulton Fish Market in New York City.

John soon developed a thriving business and invited Sal, as well as two of Frances' sons to join him. The days were long, usually starting well before dawn, and the working conditions mostly cool, damp and smelly—but there was money to be made.

Sal stayed with the fish business long enough to save enough money to buy his own Hudson Valley farm, Fay Land, in 1942 located just south of Hudson. John stayed with the business until after World War II; meanwhile, marrying second wife Betty and having a second son, Bob. He then also bought a farm in the lower Hudson Valley. The 1940s were most noteworthy because of World War II and Jenny's family was deeply involved. Jenny wrote:

> *"Before World War I was forgotten—of which one does never forget such unhappiness—World War II got started. Again, I was involved for I had two sons of age to go to war. Again, my heart started aching and fearing. "Oh God' I prayed, 'let the war end before my sons are called.' My prayers were not answered. My sons were to serve, too. My oldest son, then 22, was the same age as his father when he volunteered to be drafted (Anthony was blind in one eye) and was sent to Camp Upton, as was his father before him. My second son volunteered in the Air Force and I*

had two to pray and worry for. God only knows how a mother feels having sons go to war across the sea in foreign countries so far away (Anthony went to Europe and the Philippines—Sam went to North Africa and Italy). A mother has no more right over her dear and wonderful sons. My one thing to keep me from going crazy was to have faith in God and believe in all the power of the earth. At night I prayed to the moon to guide them for they could not light a light while crossing so no enemy could see them to shoot at. While going across the sea, I prayed for the powers of the ocean to guide them, for I love and fear the ocean too—the ships going across carrying our dear mother's boys being torpedoed and many boys being drowned. My husband saw it happen and so did my sons. But, God watched over them and all my prayers were answered—thank God a million times—they served three years, did their duty towards their country and came back safe and sound. Later came the Korean War and my third son, Joseph, had to go. He served in the Secret Service and was sent to Germany. Thank God again for coming back—but he got hepatitis of the liver and was near dying. First my husband, then his three sons all were to serve their country in three big wars and for what. I still wonder, but at least they came back. But, what of those mothers who never saw their beloved sons again? Some died of a heart attack, some went crazy, some lived through it all but would never forget. A relative lost her only son one day before World War I ended. She lived 50 years more and always dressed in black."

There were other events that were troublesome: Jenny wrote:

"During the war, we owned 12 lots on Long Island—all paid up, including taxes, for years. One day we got a letter saying our lots were needed to build La Guardia Airport and we were to bring our deeds to New York City to close the deal. We drove there and were offered $800 for the 12 lots and we had to wait till the end of the year to get paid. We felt so bad to be offered so little that did not even pay for the taxes we had been paying, but the City was buying them and one could not fight City Hall they said.

Besides, they said the lots were in a swamp and were not worth anything - so home we went heartbroken. On December 24th, we got a letter saying to come and get the money. Being it was the holidays I was expecting my son, any day, who was about to leave for overseas from the New York City Port of Embarkation to be sent abroad to fight—for who we did not know—I did not go until January 2nd. When I go there to collect—and it cost me $12 train fare—the man said I would not get the $800 they said I would. They had me crying and making a scene. So, the man told me to go home and they would straighten things out. A month later we got a check for $500. They took out $300 because we did not collect before New Year's. So, one can see what a bunch of crooks we have in this country and what fools we were not to get a lawyer. Of course, we had no money to fight.

After years of working hard to save some money to buy a farm—changing farm for a house in Brooklyn—changing house for 12 lots—costing all through these changes $7,000, we got $500. We lost faith in ever owning or buying property again. For 10 years we rented the house and barbershop in Claverack for $25 a month. Then, one day, our landlord (Loomis) died and left the house to a friend (Patrie). The friend did not want the house and he put it up for sale. By good luck, which we needed after 10 years of bad, we bought the house for $5,100; the house worth $20,000. We started to have good luck from then on and were compensated for all the other losses we had for years."

Their luck quickly changed for the better. The boys returned safely from the war and went off to Syracuse University to complete their education—Anthony in Forestry and Wildlife and Savern in Business Administration—and to the family there came a daughter. Jenny wrote:

"What would my husband's and my life have been if we did not have children of our own—A BIG BLANK—some say they did not make you laugh nor make you cry. But how can one ignore the sweetness of seeing that small precious baby grow—those first steps, first word, wanting your assurance—that you love him even though you had just spanked him for being naughty."

"We lived then in our beautiful house in Claverack. My husband had his own barbershop in the same building. All of his customers congratulated him for finally his wife got a girl on March 25, 1946. The people of the village sent pink gifts two months before she was born—kind of teasing in a way. We were put in the newspaper for it was big news—after four sons and in his fifties, the barber had a beautiful baby girl. We gave her an unusual name, Joanita Margaret, named after his mother, my mother and her mother. This loved and wanted baby had brothers that loved her. She was their beautiful doll and still is their beloved only sister—very smart and spoiled, but loved by all."

Joanita was most fortunate in another way. During that same period five girl cousins were born, who were to be loved by their families as much as she was. To the Merrifield's came Mary Jane and Carol Ann, and to the Joseph Martino's, Lorraine, Roseanne and later Gina.

Louise, Leo, and Joanita in Roanoke, 1988

CHAPTER XII

THE 1950s AND FLORIDA

In the 1950s Jenny's family was to go in many directions. In February 1950 Anthony married Mary Louise Beck in Claverack and moved to western New York State to work as a wildlife biologist building wildlife marsh ponds for the New York State Conservation Department. In August of that year Louise became a farm girl, too, when they bought a 40-acre farm near Canandaigua in the New York Finger Lakes region. It had five acres of black raspberries, two acres of grapes, a lovely house, main barn and 10 other outbuildings, and cost $9,000. Then veterans could buy a home with 10% down and a mortgage at 4%.

In December that year Savern married Moya Lagen from Dubuque, Iowa. They had met in 1948 when both worked at the lovely summer resort on Lake George—Hulett's Landing. Sam then moved to Livonia, Michigan, to work as a cost accountant for Ford Motor Company.

Joe completed military service and graduated from Michigan State University after previously spending two years at Paul Smith College. Later, he met and married Canadian Joan Wilkes. Both became teachers in the Detroit School System.

Joseph Martino continued to operate the family farm, but without the dairy—focusing instead on the fruit. Gradually he replaced most of the old outdated farm buildings.

In the meantime, he developed an interest in race horses and with friend Ray De Brino formed a partnership known as D&M Stables. Together they bought a strong beautiful horse, Inside Tract, from a claiming race. Although Inside Tract had never started a stakes race Joe immediately entered the powerful stallion in two

of the most prestigious races in the U.S.—the Belmont Stakes on Long Island and the Preakness. To the astonishment of the venerable established racing families, who had spent millions building up their stable over many years, Inside Tract in 1957 ran two outstanding races. He finished third in the Preakness, which was won by Bold Ruler, and second in the Belmont, which was won by Gallant Man, with third going to Bold Ruler. The Martino's could hardly believe their good fortune.

Soon, the Martino farm was changing from an emphasis on cows and apples to race horses. Joe built a training track and purchased other horses. Meanwhile, he was turning down a number of offers from other horsemen, who wanted to own the fugitive from the claiming race. It was soon decided that Inside Tract should become a breeding stallion. Possibly his exceptional gene could be transferred to his progeny. Shortly thereafter, the horse was shipped to a breeding farm in Kentucky, where Joe thought the overall atmosphere would be more suitable to the horse's future. Unfortunately, not long after its arrival the young horse died somewhat mysteriously. It was a terrible shock.

For many years later Joe tried his hand not only in acquiring other horses, but training them as well; but, he could never come up with another winner like Inside Tract, including some of the offspring he managed to sire before his untimely death. But, it was a lot of fun and excitement while it lasted.

The Merrifield's also got out of the 365 days a year routine of the dairy business and concentrated on growing high quality fruit, mostly apples.

Sal Martino eventually settled on a farm in Valatie next to brother John. Whereas John emphasized retailing farm produce from roadside stands on Route 9, a business to be improved upon by son Bob, Sal gradually developed an outstanding wholesale landscape nursery business, as well as engaging in building houses and apartments—assisted later by son Sal, Jr.

Frank Martino continued to operate his Catskill Mountain farm primarily as a summer boarding house with a declining emphasis on the fruit aspects. Daughter Bette had been a Marine and married

fellow Marine Bill Weaver, who became a paleontologist. They were to work in Cuba (before Castro took over), Venezuela and Iran while the Shaw was still in power.

Nora's family ran into hard luck as husband Joe Chiaro became despondent and had to be hospitalized. That pressured his young sons to assume greater responsibility managing the large fruit farm they had bought just east of Claverack near Mellenville. Jenny wrote:

> *"My dear sister Leonora had to run her large farm with her young sons while her husband was sick. They helping all they could while going to school too. She would gather her fruit in the daytime, load it on the truck at night to be ready early the next morning to go to the market 30 miles away (Albany). At home cook, bake, clean house, etc. She now and then would hire a man to do the heavy work. Her three sons learned to do everything a farmer has to do if he does not want to lose his farm. They became the best of the plumbers, electricians and mechanics. There are only a few in this world like them. When their father came home, not completely cured, he was amazed to see all his wife and three young sons had done during his sick leave. His farm was running fine, not setback—in better condition then when he left. The blessing of having a true and wonderful wife, good mother—a true leader."*

Brother Bill Martino was making some major changes while son Sydney joined the Merchant Marine and the daughters, Lillian, Anne, Frances and Rose Marie got married one by one. Jenny wrote:

> *"In the fall of 1935, at the close of the boarding house season, Bill and Rose took a vacation to Washington, D.C. then decided to continue on to Florida. When they got there it was love at first sight and they bought a lovely house in Orlando for $2,000 to spend the winter months. He loved the beautiful orange and grapefruit groves that grew in Orlando—and the beautiful lakes. Three years later he sold the resort-farm and moved to Orlando and began to buy orange and grapefruit groves. Brother Bill invited my family to visit him in 1939 for one week during Christmas vacation. We left snow and ice with below zero*

temperature and after two days on the road saw beautiful sunshine, flowers, palm trees. For us, too, it was love at first sight and we began to plan our retirement in Florida."

In 1954, the plan was complete. Leo and Jenny sold the Claverack house and moved to Florida. As they were about to leave Jenny wrote:

"My mother was taken to the hospital four days before we were to leave for Florida. I did not know what to do. We had to get out of our house because the new owners were moving in and we had to pack all our belongings and go. But, to leave my dear mother sick in the hospital was a terrible thing to do (Son Joseph and wife Rosie were primarily responsible for her care as part of an agreement to leave the family farm to Joe). The day before we were to leave we went to see her. But, before I could tell her we were leaving she said to me, knowing I could sometimes figure out the meaning of dreams, 'Oh dear—what a dream I had last night—I wonder if you can tell me what it means.' She dreamed of seeing a big frog in her well and liking frogs legs she decided to go into the well to get the frog. She caught the frog, but oh what a hard time she had getting out of the well. She did get out, but only after a hard struggle.

I figured it out right away; that after days in the hospital she would get over her sickness and go home. We both felt a lot better knowing what the dream meant and I moved to Florida more at ease."

She did get out of the hospital feeling much better as Jenny predicted, but her remarkable health slowly faded until she finally died in 1961 at the age of 91.

"My mother lived to see her sons and daughters have beautiful weddings except one; the son John that always was so unruly. He ran away with a pretty young school teacher (Edna McGregor), but had to have what one calls a shotgun wedding. Right after his first son, Donald, was born his 'father-in-law' called my brother, Frank, and me and asked us to be witnesses to his

daughter's wedding—with his shotgun by his side saying you either marry her or die; so, he married her. John, so happy used to sing 'My Wild Irish Rose.' She was pink and pretty like a rose. They had two daughters, Marion and Marjorie, but the marriage did not last. Within seven years she divorced him."

Tragically, by 1965 brother Bill had died, as had his dear wife Rose several years earlier. Meanwhile, Frank, who enjoyed the ocean more than Orlando, had bought a winter home in Hollywood, Florida, so Leo and Jenny bought a home on Monroe Street just three blocks away from Frank and Lilly on Van Buren Street. Before the move, Leo had gone to Florida several times to learn the procedure for obtaining a Florida barber license. Once settled in Hollywood he had no problem getting work and was soon earning more than he had in Claverack. Within two years they moved to a better home on Wiley Street just across the street from the school that Joanita was attending. Leo was never more content, but Jenny soon realized that:

"Summers in Florida, to me, are unbearable. So, my thoughts turn up north. To go back to the state where I was born and lived for 52 years. When the month of April comes, I start not feeling good. Then a pleasant thought comes—of going north to see my dear sons and families and my brothers and sisters and their families."

For many years, Jenny did just that, with Leo going along most of the time.

CHAPTER XIII

SICILY REVISITED

Jenny and Leo made five trips to Sicily in 1935, 1951, 1961, 1970, and 1975. Sicily changed a lot during those years and Jenny observed and made many comments:

"Most of the people in my husband's town of Menfi live in the Town and own land out-of-town that farmers take care of for half of what they harvest. Usually, they have a small house, 'macaseno,' on the land with a well. Friends and family get together now and then to feast and be merry and to help at harvest time, to make tomato sauce and to dry figs. Social life is very close in Italy and getting together is done on any kind of occasion.

In the town, everyone takes a walk at the square in the evening. The men dress up in their clean suits and polished shoes and go out first to meet at their clubs or at a coffee and ice cream store. After a couple of hours the wives and children follow with pretty baby carriages, all dressed up to meet with their husband to walk up and down the main street or at the square in the center of town. They walk for a couple of hours—no hurry—for they all take a siesta from 2-5 every afternoon. All the stores and businesses close up—even the banks. I think it is a great thing to do, they live in a 'dolce vita' (the sweet life). We now do it too, now that we are old and retired, but who could have done it before when work for us was from six in the morning till 10 at night…"

"Menfi is four miles from the beautiful seaport of Porto Palo. In 1936, it was a small fishing village with a few tents for people to

change their clothes (to go to the beach), and one store that sold a glass of wine or a cup of coffee. Years and years ago, wheat was taken to the port, stored in granaries and then shipped away. An old lookout tower, built in the 1600s, still stands on the hill. A relic of old times that is still in good condition.

Now Porto Palo has enlarged so—beautiful homes, restaurants, amusement parks, music and dancing till midnight. When Leo and I celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary we stayed in Porto Palo two months, August to October. But, the waters were too cold for me to bath in—not like Florida waters. There was no humidity—the air so clean—the nights so cool. You had to wear a shawl to go walking. The old houses with no sign of mildew—not like Florida. Yet, they grow the same things grown in Florida, like oranges and lemons. The fishermen would come early in the morning and people would buy for a day's meal. They would roast big sardines on an outside fire. They would be basted with garlic, olive oil, lemon juice, salt and pepper, and eaten with hot bread washed down with wine. What a treat.

"Our first time in Sicily, the owners of sheep, goats and cows would go from house to house every morning to deliver milk. The lady of the house would give the owner a bowl and he would milk the animal in front of her. You don't see that anymore. Now they go to the store and get the milk in bottles—still warm. They don't like cold milk."

"In 1969, Menfi had a big earthquake and many people started to build new homes in the country to live year around with money they got from the government or from relatives in America. The earthquake caused a big change in the style of living and the trouble now is that the people got so spoiled. While in 1936, there were only three cars in Menfi now, especially after the last earthquake, people put less money for building and more for cars and motorcycles. More want a college education to be doctors. Lawyers, teachers—easy work compared to being a

laborer. America is in the same trouble, all spoiled rotten—who wants to work hard anymore!"

When we celebrated our Golden Wedding anniversary, we got married for the second time in his family's church where they had been married and baptized their children. They gave us a big party and we received many gifts. We went to the beautiful resort city of Taormina up on the mountain for our 50th honeymoon. We honeymooned for five months in Italy altogether going to many different places—Naples, Rome, Venice, Firenze celebrating birthdays, holidays, feast days, of which there are so many."

"A special holiday is 'Carnevale' where all the young people go out nights to visit people's houses where they are invited to come in and dance to any music they want. After three dances, they go to another open house where they dance some more and to see if anyone can recognize them for they would all wear masks and different costumes. If anyone was recognized they would get a handful of confetti thrown at them.

After three days of 'Carnevale,' they would end up in a big hall in their theatre called 'Vaglione." All the young men and women would be there dressed in their best looking for someone free, not going with anyone yet. Parents would go too and look. In 1961, we took Joanita—and Boy! What a time she had. She was a beautiful young American girl of 15; the age Italian men look for a bride.

The first dance is called the dance of the carnations. Each young man would buy carnations—pink, white or rose—and bring one to a girl he would like to start a dance with. Now, if another man wants to dance with her too he would go behind and offer her his carnation. That would break the dance with the first one, so on they would go. That night Joanita won the most carnations. She had all the available young men wanting to dance with her—spending 20 cents for each carnation.

After a half-hour rest period the second dance started called the dance of the roses. Again, my daughter won the most roses. After another half-hour intermission came the last dance of the night called the dance of the hearts. The dance to prove what girl the dear young men of my husband's people in Menfi wanted to make the Queen of the Ball. That made my daughter uneasy for she did not live there and to take from the girls of the town what they had been looking forward to all year was not fair. So, when it came time to count the hearts she gave a pretty girl alongside of her some of her heart so that girl won. But, the young men knew who had won the most hearts and admired her for being so sweet and understanding.

The next day, all the young men brought Joanita their picture. It made big business for the photographer. She was asked by mail to be their springtime queen—but we said 'No;' It was for a Sicilian girl to be their springtime queen—though my girl is Sicilian-American.

CHAPTER XIV

MISCELLANEOUS ESSAYS & SOLILOQUIES

Jenny's thoughts about marriage:

"In this day and age, all one hears is that most marriages go on the rocks. It is too bad. One does not vow anymore at the marriage altar for better or for worse. They have no patience or even try to make a go of it. Years ago, a woman tried her best to hold on to her man—though sometimes the man needed to get his head broken. Today, I feel so sorry for the children not having both parents. I have been married to the same man 58 years—a good, hardworking man. But, as one says, none of us are perfect and no marriage runs smooth always. When I think back there were many times when I wanted to run away or even want to die. But, never thought once of divorce. I just had to forgive and try to forget—and for the sake of my children make the best of it."

Jenny about temptations:

"What makes some men or women think that the next man or woman is going to be better? And what fool would want a strange one lay hands on their children? During one's life, one is faced with temptations now and then. I think it is good for one's self to prove again and again a person's good character and self-respect. If one has a good and loving mate, and does all one can do to please and make the mate happy, the least one can do is be true and don't let any temptation disturb your mind, body and soul. My husband tells me of the same thoughts that go through his mind when he is tempted.

Of course, there are so many kinds of temptation. Today, I was tempted to buy a dress that was on sale—it was just what I like. But, I said 'do I need it?' "No, I don't' or say, I was tempted to go to the horse race today. A horse I like may win—but I resisted and did not go. The next day I found out the horse lost the race and by not going I won. Of course, one has to study all the temptations that come our way—study them very carefully—sometimes they are good ones."

Jenny on jealousy:

"My in-laws, living in Italy, wondered what kind of woman their oldest son married. One year, a cousin of my husband went to Italy to visit his folks and was asked about their American daughter-in-law. He told them that she is a wonderful woman, the only fault she has is that she is a jealous wife. When we went to see his parents 18 years after we were married, they studied me closely to see what Leo's cousin meant. My father-in-law took me by the hand and kissed me saying: 'I am glad you are jealous of my son, to me it means you love him and care for him with all your heart.'

Some people say jealousy is a bad disease. I say "no—it is love.' Jealousy has been in me since the day I met my man. I wanted him all for myself, fearing someone might take him from me. He has such good qualities that the girls just love. Of course, another reason for my jealousy was that my father had been unfaithful to my mother. That made me doubt men. Are men all alike? Are there some who could be true? Are there men who are strong and can fight temptation? Today's women have lost their morals—too bad the same sex cannot trust each other. Yes, one has to be very strong to resist temptation. I know for I have had my temptations and I resisted them. I would never cause my husband to get jealous of me. I don't think it would be such a great thing to do. I want him to trust me always. I always pray to be a faithful wife—a loving and understanding mother—a kind and friendly neighbor and a good citizen of my country. When one loves someone who is their whole life, they don't want anyone to take that

away from them. Fight for him. You bet I'll fight for him. I will have a war. It is my property and I will fight for it till I die. Is that 'jealousy'?"

Embarrassment:

"The most embarrassing moment of my life is never to be forgotten. One day I was invited to visit a friend nearby. I had to take a path along the side of the road to get there and I saw some pretty daisies. I love to pick one and pull out its petals one by one and say 'he loves me—he loves me not.' So, I bent down to pick a daisy, as I bent I felt the elastic in my panties break—now what am I to do? I tried to hold on them but in time I would have lost them. I looked for a spot behind a bush and also to see that no cars were coming—but did not look to see if anyone was watching from the house I was to visit. I quickly dashed by the bush, picked up my panties and rolled them up in my bag they went—thinking all went fine. But, as I got near the door of my friend I saw her looking out for me by her window with a big grin on her face. She opened the door and said: 'You sure had some time losing your panties—I saw it all.' And I thought no one did. Was I embarrassed? We both started to laugh and I still laugh whenever I think about it. But from then on, I always made sure that when I went out I had on a new pair of panties."

Jenny's thoughts on abortion:

"There has been so much pro and cons about abortions. The person that is against it is the one that never had a reason and fears it. Yes, abortion is not a pleasant thing regardless. But, to bring forth a child not wanted for different reasons and to mistreat it—to hate it—is more of a sin. I went through it once. I had been married three years and those three years went through 18 bad months of pregnancy and near death with appendicitis. Feeling so weak left me with no strength or desire to go through it again so soon after my second son was born. I had all I could do to take care of a 2-year-old and a baby. So, I decided to have an abortion at three months pregnancy. I went through hell and nearly died. I did not know better and abortions 50 years

ago were done mostly by amateurs. I know one thing, if I had not gone through it I would have gone crazy. I love my children very much. I am not a mean person, but feeling so weak and rundown was all I could bear. I understand what most women go through. So let one do what she thinks is best and let people mind their business. War is the bad thing that one must think of first—taking a nice healthy young man to be killed for greedy rich people, and in foreign countries—that is the biggest crime of all."

Jenny about doctors:

"In my 75 years I have met and seen quite a few doctors and am happy to say I have known some wonderful old-fashioned doctors; the kind of family doctors of years ago who were kind and understanding, who came to your home when you needed them and sometimes forgot what you owed if one was hard up. When I had a baby, the doctor would come three to four hours early and wait for the baby to come and visit with the ones waiting. When my 11-year-old son (Joseph) got so sick with acute appendicitis the doctor came, picked him up with his own car and together with his wife—who was his special nurse—took him to the hospital and operated on him at 10 P.M.—could not wait till morning and only charged me half the cost. That is what you call a doctor who ought to have his statue made of gold in his remembrance (Dr. John Mambert from Hudson).

When we first moved to Florida the first dentist I went to, to fix a cavity, said I had to get six teeth pulled out so he gave me two pills to take so he could start right away to pull them. I hesitated. The dentist got mad and said 'Hurry and take those pill—my time is valuable.' 'And my teeth are not,' I said. I got up, paid him for the x-rays he had taken and ran home. I then got a train ticket to New York and to my dear old dentist (Dr. Grant). The next day I told him to fix my bad tooth and to check the rest of my teeth. He said my teeth were all okay and to hold on to a tooth for as long as one can stand it. Twenty years later I still have four of those six teeth. One has to be so careful who to trust

anymore. Today I fear both doctors and dentists. And, I feel sorry for this generation that will never know that we did have at one time not so long ago doctors that were kind and not so concerned at what they could 'get out of you.' In this story, there is the one consolation that I knew such wonderful doctors and dentists. But, of course, I don't know the end of it all and thank God I don't know the end. Maybe I won't be unlucky again. God only knows."

Jenny about not going to Church on Sunday:

"I have been told by my daughter-in-law that I was not a Catholic but a Christian because I did not go to Church every Sunday. She was raised in a convent and I was raised on a farm where the Church was 10 miles away. In 1910, no cars then and I took a team of horses half a day to go back and forth to the Church.

My mother lived next door to the Church in Sicily and would go to the first mass in the morning while the children were still in bed. So one should understand how bad she felt that after coming to America, and living on a farm, she could not go to Church anymore. But, she loved God so and with all her love taught us that God was everywhere and that her home was her temple. So every night, we all sat down by her side after all the house chores were done and said the Holy Rosary."

Jenny on Faith and Belief:

"I am a person of great beliefs. I believe in God first—his dear son Jesus—our blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints and the power of Holy Water. I believe in the great powers of the ocean—the wonders of the moon and our beautiful stars—our wonder of wonders, Sun. I make wishes on them whenever I can, they have come true. My great beliefs have given me so much consolation in my life. Have made me love and appreciate many things. It sure would have been a blank and meaningless world without its wonders. And when I see the rainbow, it thrills me so."

Jenny about Old People:

"What happens to people when they get old. They are supposed to be smart and turn out stupid. Instead of appreciating one another they become resentful. Why? That is the big question. Today, April 5, 1978, I will write of two cases. One: My brother, 80 years old, and his wife, 81. They both worked hard all their lives to save for old age, but are now in a predicament. She bent down with spinal trouble cannot do anything anymore. He had a heart attack and cannot drive his car anymore. She now resents him for not driving and not doing the things he used to do. Always scolding him, making him feel so bad he wants to die. She wishing he would die—forgetting all he did for her 30 years she had him take her to so many doctors, do the housework and all he could do. She watches the money he spends on a few groceries every day or so—yet she gives money to their son and grandchildren in 10 and 20 dollar bills and can't stand him buying things. The more she scolds him and finds faults the more he gets so confused and won't eat and begins to hate the whole world. That is how it ends off. Oh God, help us all.

Now comes Case #2, Me. I too worked hard in my 58 years with my husband. Did everything I was able to do and more. If I did not earn money I would save him money in all I could. We, too, are independent and need no one to care for us. Yet, my husband finds ways to hurt me so. Like, I get $125 a month Social Security. He gets over $300. Money is put in the bank for both. It happened we got an $83 rocking chair, which we had not planned for. The check is late in coming. He has over $100 yet in his wallet. Yet, he said this morning, 'I am keeping your check too because you did not pay for the rocker.' I got so upset hearing him say that. I pay for plane trips for me. I buy materials to sew my dresses. I keep the apartment (condominium) clean—wash clothes—do all I can to save money, of which I always thought was his and mine. One day he says, 'Let's spend some money, we are only going to leave it all!' The next day he turns and tells me another story. He knows my blood pressure is high still he upset

me so. I, too, think he wants me dead. That's the thanks one gets at the end for being good. Oh God—Help me, too."

* * *

"Yesterday, April 8, 1978, I finally went to get my high blood pressure taken—190/100, but the main thing is the lump I have had on the side of my neck one month now. It does not hurt—though the left side of my nose has a constant drip. After taking my pressure and finding it so high he gave me two prescriptions costing $18 and the doctor $20. He wants to see me again April 10th to see the results of the pills—pressure down some. Cost $20. Am to keep taking pills and go again Monday—another $20….

I have stopped taking pills for they make me so upset…I started the blood pressure pills again April 20th—I have not felt good—my heart seems to hurt and thumping hard…I dropped Dr. Coffey and went to Dr. Ward in Virginia with Joanita…been to Dr. Ward four times—now, he has ordered me to his hospital (in Roanoke) June 26, 1978. Was operated in two places on my neck. All went okay. Next day operated on my heart. Three weeks later still taking pills—feel little better. Cost already $1,500…

I still don't feel good—August 31, 1978."

CHAPTER XV

Virgina

"Now and then I would say to my daughter, Joanita, that one wish in my life still is to own a pretty house with a running brook by its side. I have owned a 16-acre fruit farm, a big five-apartment house in Claverack, two new homes in Hollywood, Florida, and now a five-room condominium in Florida but never a house with a delightful brook. My daughter would say: 'I would like a house like that, too, Mother.'

One day in November 1976 she called me on the phone all excited (Joanita had moved to Roanoke, Virginia, several years earlier to work as a store manager for Walden Books in Tanglewood Mall). She found a house with a beautiful brook by its side and surrounded by tall trees. She fell in love with it—but needed money to buy it. I got so excited too and gave her $5,000 to close the deal. My husband and I went to see the place before she got it and spent Thanksgiving Day—also, my 74th birthday there. Now the house of my dreams, and my daughter's too, is a reality. The brook is always running with its pretty waterfalls. It is a joy to cross its cute bridge. The dream house nestled on the side of the mountain (Blue Ridge). It may be 95 in Roanoke, but at her place it never gets hot. The big, shady trees keep it cool always. It is quiet and peaceful and the air is always fresh.

The inside of her house is also unique. Every day she thinks of some ideas of how to improve it and add to it, which it seems there is no end. May God bless her and let her enjoy this home for many, many years. I also pray that the good Lord will make

me well and to be able to come again next year with her Dad to see her ideas come true. This year, we have spent five months here already."

"Spring of 1978 is here. It won't be long before hot weather will be with us again. To me, but not to Leo, summers in Florida are unbearable, so when the month of April comes I start not feeling good. Then a pleasant thought comes to go back north to see my sons and their families and my only daughter. The change of air revives me so. To go back to the state where I was born, grew up and raised a family—and then after 52 years left it for Florida.

Oh, I like Florida, you bet. One cannot live in a better state for the winter months. But, if I had my way the best thing to do is to be in Florida during the winter and the rest of the year in New York State near my sisters, brothers, nieces, nephews and old friends. Although, Virginia with my daughter is nice, too. But, getting another home up north is not so easy, for our four children live in three different states. So, no matter where we might want to live we would still be far away from the others—and that is the main reason why every year we go to visit them. But there is one fly in the ointment, staying awhile often causes trouble. We also know that distance does not make hearts grow fonder.

Because we see our grandchildren only once a year we are more like strangers to them. If grandparents say something to them for their own good they and their parents resent you. Of course, what I could do is sit in the corner and be like the three monkeys—see nothing, hear nothing and say nothing. Otherwise, stay home. Why does my blood pressure rise? That is consolation to it all is that someday they too will be grandparents and in-laws and probably get the same kind of treatment in return.

But, I have made up my mind to try it again—but this time it will be different. First, since my daughter has invited us to Virginia and since we have given her lots of money for her place

we will go on the fifth of May and stay a couple of months. If all goes well and she wants us to stay we will stay. I do not want to go back to Florida before the first of October. It is too hot for me before then.

All our children have lovely homes, so we feel that for the few years left in our lives we should enjoy the coming of summer by going north to see all my dear ones. Also, to enjoy the change of weather. That does me so much good, even my blood pressure goes down. That is, if all goes well."

Summer 1978

"We had more visitors this summer than ever. First three days visit was my son Joseph and wife Joan. Later, my son Savern with wife Moya and 16-year-old Sharon and twins, Stephen and Sheila visited for three days. Enjoyed them with us so much. A month later, sister Leonora came with her daughter Marie and son-in-law Rodney for three days. It sure was a great pleasure having them. Two weeks later, my dear niece Carol and husband Tony came also. On August 26th my grandson Lee called to say he was stopping in for an overnight visit. He did stop in with a friend on his way to college—a 20-hour trip by car from Long Island to Alabama (Jacksonville State).

I don't know if I am going to get any more visitors, but so far it has been grand. I have had many get-well cards, though I am very slow getting well. I have my bad days. Today, I feel better. Also, many phone calls from my three sons and my sister Leonora and sister-in-law Lilly from Florida. Letters also from Florence, Italy, from my sister-in-law Ninetta, who is so concerned about me.

Got beautiful flowers, too. First ones from Joanita and Leo—another vase from all of Joanita's workers—and one from Field Jones and his sister. Also, a beautiful basket of silk flowers from Marie, Nora and Rodney. All so beautiful."

* * *

On October 4, 1979, Jenny died at Roanoke after a devastating illness, sarcoma of the lymph glands that slowly wasted her body away. Her family distributed her cremated remains under the pine alongside Joanita's house. By now, those physical remains have become incorporated into the heavenly natural beauty of the Blue Ridge where they will be recycled forever in the trees, the wildlife, the flowers and the mossy rocks in the brook.

A fitting memoriam to a memorable lady.

On July 7, 1991, almost 12 years after Jenny's death, Leo died at the U.S. Veterans' Hospital in Salem-Roanoke. There, his 96-year-old heart finally wore out. Some of his cremated remains have joined Jenny's along the brook. The remainder, according to his wishes, are scattered in the Atlantic Ocean near the beaches of Hollywood he enjoyed for so many years.

CHAPTER XVI

Jenny's Daughter Joanita and the Nephews and Nieces

Sam and Moya Taormina created eight wonderful children, including six girls and two boys.

Maura Catherine Taormina, the oldest, was born in 1951 and passed away in 1974 at the young age of 22 as a result of an automobile accident. Maura was a graduate of Michigan State University, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Spanish, and was a Phi Beta Kappa recipient. Maura was an accomplished violinist. After graduating college, Maura traveled to Europe and spent a year in Spain.

Susan Deirdre Taormina, known to all as "Sudee," is the second oldest. Sudee was born in 1953. She is married and living in Northfield Township, Michigan, where she and her husband, Tim Durrant, raised four beautiful children, including two girls, Ariel and Arjuna, and two boys, Skye and Loch. Sudee is an art teacher at a private high school in Ann Arbor, called Steiner. Tim owns a trucking business called Tiger Rose Trucking. Their home, built in the early 1800s, sits on ten (10) acres, and was once farmed for hops used in the production of beer.

Next is Paula Michelle Kanaley, or Pam for short. Pam met her husband Tony in the town she was born and raised, Livonia, Michigan. Shortly after getting married, Pam and Tony moved west and eventually settled in Boise, Idaho. Tony became an apprentice leather maker for a company named after its founder, Milt Sparks. A few years later, Pam and Tony bought the business, and continued Milt's reputation and legacy by creating a world-class holster manufacturer.

While Tony ran the holster-making business, Pam worked and retired for a local cable company.

Johnna Eileen (Jill) was born in 1957. She met her former husband, Robert (Bob) Stewart, in high school. Bob was part owner of a local pattern-making shop. Jill and Bob have two sons, Bradley and Brent, who both reside in Detroit, and are part of a growing art and music culture. Brent officially changed his name to Vaughn Taormina. Jill and her boyfriend, David Mamer, currently live in Florida.

Born in 1959, Mark Stephen was the first son born to Sam and Moya. Mark is the third Spartan sibling, graduating in 1982 from Michigan State University with a degree in Urban and Regional Planning. After graduating, Mark moved to Colorado for one year. Upon moving back to Michigan, his Uncle Pete (Anthony Taormina), helped land him a unique position with a waterfront design consulting firm called Natchez & Associates in Mamaroneck, New York. Mark moved back to Michigan in 1986 where he worked in Detroit for a couple of years. He now works for the community where he lives, Livonia, Michigan, and serves as the Planning and Economic Development Director. He has three children, Sean, Patricia and Mara.

Sharon Elizabeth is the next child, born in 1963. Sharon is married to David Holmes, and is raising two beautiful daughters, Sydney and Sierra. The family lives in Webster Township, Michigan, which is located just north of Ann Arbor. They also own a commercial building with three apartments in a little village in northern Michigan called Beulah. David is a hard working sales executive, and Sharon works for the Dexter Community Schools as a paraprofessional, involved with tutoring disabled children. The Holmes family loves to travel, including ski vacations every year.

Last but not least to the Sam and Moya clan are the twins, Steven and Sheila. They were born approximately six years after Sharon, in 1969, with Steven as the first followed by Sheila six minutes later. Steven is a graduate of the University of Michigan, whereas Sheila chose the University of Georgia, primarily because of the outstanding swimming program. Steven lives in Nederland, Colorado and

works in Boulder for a company that provides testing and certification services, called NSF. Steven's main area of expertise involves natural foods and vitamin supplements. He travels extensively for his job, including regular trips to China and Thailand. Sheila's love and dedication to the sport of swimming reached an apex in 1996 when she won a gold medal at the Atlanta Olympic Games as a member of the 4 x 200 meter freestyle relay team. Sheila continued her amazing athletic career by earning a spot on the women's U.S. Triathlon team at 2000 Sydney Olympics and then again in 2004 in Athens, Greece. She then switched to the sport of pentathlon, where she competed for the U.S. In Beijing, China at the 2008 Olympics. Sheila now has a successful and varied career as a motivational speaker, book writer, and swim instructor.

Joanita Margaret Taormina

Daughter of Jenny and Leo Taormina—Who Am I?

I am who I am because my mother and father have done more than any creed could have done to make me good; and, more than any fate could have done to make me loving, trustworthy and fun to be with. I was born "aware" or, as my dad used to say…"She is wide awake."

Because of my family…I am an artist. I am a loyal, honest friend, a hardworking, cooperative, resourceful employee and ally. I rescue, nurture and heal those critters and folks that arrive in my life. I love a good debate. I sing and dance and read and write. I hug trees and birds and all creatures that cross my path. I especially love all songbirds and cephalopods (octopuses), chickens and fruit bats, and the Virginia opossum. The list is endless of those I love, but I can sum it up with…I am in love with creation. Crop circles, UFOs, fairies and angels are as close to me as breathing. They fascinate and delight me, as do my closest friends – human, animal and mysterious.

I have never accepted abuse, misuse, disrespect, and/or neglect. When this has been in my life I do my best to transform the situation into something positive, good, meaningful or useful…then I let it go and move on without remorse or regret; however, I do not forget.

Sometimes, I choose to fight. I have set people on fire with inspiration, passion and argument. I have been foolishly defined by some as "She who failed at four marriages." My response to that is this: When the partner of a committed relationship dishonors his vows there is no point in staying in such a dishonorable union. That would be a failed marriage. I let them go to fix themselves. I am here to love, honor, nurture and inspire. I am not required to fix flawed humans. I have experienced

disappointment, betrayal, pain and loss…but my heart cannot be broken for I have experienced more joy and wonder and love than anything else. Love is the mysterious ultimate teacher and I have been taught well.

Giovanna Martino Taormina
My Mother, "Mom,"
1902-1979 "Jenny"
"Listen, Learn and Love"

I could not have chosen a better woman to become my Mom.

She showed me devout nurturing, unconditional love, raw emotional sensitivity, accountability, responsibility, and a deep personal quest to understand GOD. Mom would always say…"when seeking answers and resolution always go to the top." Ask God first, then listen, the answers will come when it is the right time. "Always respect other people's religions." "Listen to what is being spoken with an open yet discerning mind." "Treat everyone with respect and good manners no matter how awful, rude or stupid they may seem (for you have not walked in their shoes)." "Never, ever allow anyone to harm you or anyone that you can defend and protect (including animals and property)." "Never beg, borrow or steal."

"Manage your money carefully and you will always have just enough." Never lend money to anyone unless you can give it freely with no expectations. Lending money or anything is the fastest way to end relationships. Sing while washing dishes and doing chores. Dance whenever

you can. Make your own music and enjoyment. Get a good school education. Learn another language. Read, explore, travel. Instead of running to the store to buy something, make it yourself – you are resourceful, creative and clever. Create an original.

Keep your body, home and property clean and neat and it will last a long time.

Take good care of your pets, they depend on you.

Learn First Aid.

Instead of running to the doctor or vet – learn how to treat minor injury or illness yourself.

Be self-reliant. Fix it, repair it, treat it yourself.

Honor the Ten Commandments.

But, never agree with all of a church's "rules" because never forget that churches were established only by men – and that it is not fair.

The popes and priests never gave birth or nursed a handicapped child. They don't know everything nor have they experienced everything – therefore, the church has no absolute rule over you.

Before you judge something or someone get as much information as you can then decide where you stand regarding the situation.

If it is a life or death situation and you must respond quickly, rely on your instincts and intuition, they are rarely misguiding.

When someone you trust betrays you with lies or withholding valuable information have nothing more to do with them, they have showed their "cards." Let them play with their own Deck of Cards, not yours, for if you continue to play with them you will always lose.

Never trust anyone until they have earned it, and that takes years.

Your mind will never get stagnant if you search for answers to the great mysteries…life itself, death, the great beyond, dreams, UFO's, reincarnation, on and on. There is so much to learn and explore. Question and discern. You have a good mind and a big heart, honor them. You are loved.

JENNY'S MEMORY LACE

By Granddaughter Susan Taormina Durrant

As Jenny Taormina lay in bed with her smooth head and rosebud lips she became more dismayed. She wrote with an unsteady hand and was lonely for her past to come alive. Leo, the man she loved, walked outside of their daughter's home and all her sons were far away. Her daughter worked in a store during the day. The grandchildren had always been distant.

For days now the sun was shining and summer deepened. Few letters came, but the phone would ring on many mornings and she could hear her son's voices. In the afternoon her beautiful daughter would be home and Jenny could hear her laughter in the rooms. Sometimes Jenny would cry and her hands would reach up to her cheeks and be dampened and warmed with memory's tears. While the tears dried afterward on her face and

hands a lacey growth developed and whitened. At night while Jenny slept peacefully the tears would crystallize in the various combination which the wringing of her hands had left them, but during their crystallization each of Jenny's tears grew into the living memory for which it fell.

To Jenny's daughter's eyes the tears were like a finely layered white lace on her mother's dark skin. Neither she, nor Leo, could see the small memories, as true as life, connect and separate and repeat themselves endlessly on Jenny's face and throat and hands.

The memory lace would not stay long, for as Jenny brushed her face on the pillow or washed her hands in cool water the tiny living memories would float off on the air or down into the pipes.

Whether alone or intricately bound all the past events and dreams which Jenny recalled with love and tears drifted off her body and about the house. They would sift and fall and pick up again as Jenny's daughter walked through the rooms. They would drip and float and be strained in the water pipes. Jenny's memory of her father reaching into olive branches was washed from her throat into the sink, where it followed its prescribed course to a lake and eventually the Atlantic.

The memory of her first grandchild as a young woman walking across the lawn with a smile like the sunset rested a long time under Jenny's eye. There it had smeared to her memory of herself and Leo on the beach watching their son and his new bride walk beside the water. Now (the memories bound in crystallization) her son and his wife approach their grown daughter and her smile claims their hearts before they know of her conception. The memory slipped out the front door.

Jenny moved to the window and looking down saw her brown hands covered in a fine lace, which fell and

blew into the room and circled and left. She could catch glimpses of her memories shimmering and moving, but they were so small she did not know how true they were. She saw her husband, Leo, in his military uniform in a rolling meadow bound to her memory of her braid being loosened and wound in a knot behind her head. They looked at each other in surprise and love.

Jenny watched the memory crystals float and connect as they touched. They became random entanglements, some conglomerating to form a thick lace the size of a small bird.

Her latest Christmas at her son's house, her daughter as a child in her arms, her first time holding a needle and knotting the thread, the water around her as she traveled from peninsula to peninsula, the ink script of her stories on the waves, her grandson's blue-gray eyes, the bread dough on her hands. These memories combined and formed a small life that drifted past Jenny's eyes and out into the pines. She did not know where after that.

In October with the afternoon so much shorter and cooler Jenny was more gay and she would blow the memories out the windows and imagine where they went, and how they tangled. Maybe they would combine someday to one of her mother's memories or the Pope's.

Much north of Jenny a woman sat working at her desk when she noticed a small airy crystal turn slowly past her window. In it she thought she saw her grandmother standing by the ocean shore with dark skin, a black swimsuit, a net in her hair with colored glass stones and wonder on her face as she watched a man bob out in the waves.

Epilogue

It is now a far different time and a much different world than it was during the unique period covered by Jenny's Story, a world and time to which we can never return.

Then we cared for each other on a local and personal basis and did not expect or demand that others care for us through some impersonal national arrangement, which seems to be today's prevailing attitude.

It is significant that many of our adventurous immigrant ancestors arrived at a time when there were exceptional, as well as unique opportunities to share in the ownership and exploitation of millions of acres of relatively undeveloped lands. Consequently, those immigrants with an interest in farming were able to pick and choose from a multitude of family farms and undeveloped lands that were available throughout the east and Midwest at affordable prices—even for those with very little money. Although, it must be noted that many of the farms were located on poor soils and/or in areas of short growing seasons so that in spite of the best of intentions and efforts the land could not be made productive enough to support a family. Consequently, many were abandoned and often purchased by state governments for taxes to become part of state forest lands or fish and wildlife management areas. New York State purchased tens of thousands such acres often for as little as $3-$4 an acre as recently as World War II.

Moreover, for more than a century before then immigrants, as well as those farmers who had to abandon their unproductive lands, could choose whether or not to head west and took advantage of "homestead" opportunities on lands that were, for the most part, appropriated in one way or another from the many distinctive

groups of displaced "first Americans;" those pioneering migrants, who most likely wandered over to the American continents from Asia. They did not develop a legal system for the personal ownership of the lands they occupied, nevertheless, they had a powerful sense of family and community responsibility so that they fiercely defended and controlled as best they could those select areas they regarded as their own "tribal turf" critical to their survival.

Prior to the arrival in the "New World" of the Europeans and Africans the first citizens of this continent fought each other as fiercely and as bitterly for control of land with its resources as they would later do against the more technological and sophisticated land-hungry arrivals from Europe. The last battle for "tribal turf" was fought and lost at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, in 1891. From then on the descendants of the first arrivals would be no different from those who came later in becoming just another component of a unique and complex American society, each seeking and competing for a piece of the great and expansive "American Pie," while there was still plenty of pie to share.

Moreover, for those immigrants, as well as natives, there were unlimited opportunities to work for an emerging force of dynamic American entrepreneurs. There were railroads to build and coal to mine and steel to forge for the rails that were rapidly connecting centers of population to vast sparsely populated sections of the country that were still without major highways.

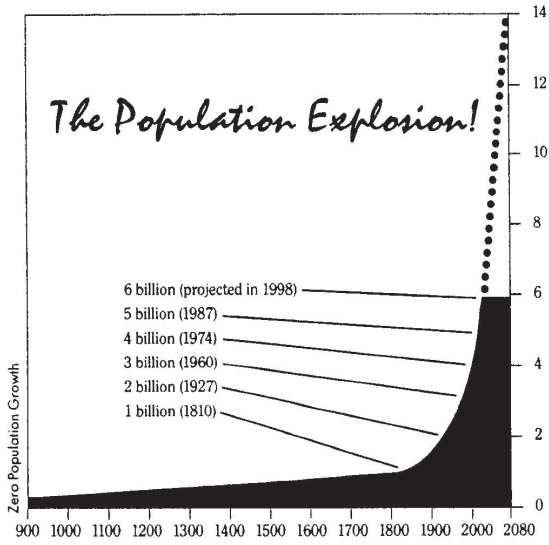
But, most important, the many farms which were so readily available then to families of even modest means are no longer affordable; neither to recent immigrants nor to the vast majority of second or third generation Americans who might wish to choose such a purchase. Thus, what had been a most common way of life for thousands of years, a lifestyle that Thomas Jefferson regarded as the optimal one for future Americans, is rapidly becoming unattainable for most of us and probably not to the benefit of our nation.

There are several very important reasons why this is so. To begin with, at the time of Nida's birth there were about 2,000,000 distinct units of land that could be considered farms in the U.S. Admittedly, the determination of exactly what constitutes a farm is somewhat

ambiguous, but not critical to the discussion. By the time the Martino's came to America at the turn of the century the number of farms had tripled to about 6,000,000. The numbers peaked at 8,000,000 when Sam and Nida were buying and renting in New Jersey and then the number of farms started to decline quickly, dropping back to 6,000,000 at the end of World War I. Today, in the last decade of the 1900s, the number of farm units has dropped back to 2,000,000, the same numbers that existed 130 years earlier. But, you wonder, what has happened to the number of acres being farmed to feed all the extra mouths?

Surprisingly, there are about as many acres being farmed now as there were when there were 6,000,000 farms. Obviously, the average size of each farm has increased significantly along with the average value. Also, agricultural technology coupled with relatively cheap fossil fuels have improved yields—at least till now.

To compound the complexity of this discussion it is no surprise that the number of people competing for this fixed acreage has been increasing dramatically. The following chart illustrates the rapid rise in population as compared to the rapid decline in farm units. The number have been extrapolated from many sources and should be considered as a guide rather than a precise historical document.



There are a number of inferences that can be interpreted from the chart. The most apparent is that the numbers of us on this earth and in the U.S. are increasing rapidly and one must wonder and be concerned about the consequences. Another is that as the competition for ownership of limited acreage increases the proportion of families who can compete for that acreage is declining rapidly. From now on, only a very few Americans will be able to afford to choose a farm lifestyle or even a rural one. That means that more of us will have to live in crowded cities and suburbia—an environment that is questionable in terms of the long-term welfare of our species since cities produce neither food nor water while degrading the land, water and air.

To further complicate matters the competition for ownership of rural lands is increasing dramatically for a reason rarely considered 100 years ago; namely, privacy. Whereas many of the original homesteaders and settlers were desperate for neighborly companionship, today many affluent Americans working out of crowded and restless metropolitan areas will pay almost any price to gain privacy at some readily accessible rural hideaway discretely removed from obtrusive neighbors stacked one on top of the other like so many hives of swarming bees.

The original and once reasonable American dream of one day owning and cultivating a piece of land has now become a fantasy for the vast majority of us. However, there is another side to the coin of land ownership.

Whether we Americans own a piece of land or not we have become shareholders in millions of acres of public lands, controlled and managed by a host of public agencies at the national, state, county and local levels. Also, there are many choice acres being purchased and preserved by such private agencies as The Nature Conservancy. Thus, even the poorest of us are rich in entitlement to a vast array of magnificent lakes, wetlands, seashores, mountains, meadows and deserts. Although most of the publicly owned acreage is in the western states with some states being nearly half in the public domain, much of it is scattered throughout the east so that most anyone can have access to one or another publicly owned parcel in

less than one hour of travel. The downside to owning and enjoying our magnificent public domain is that we must pay taxes to acquire and manage it; a price that most of us are willing to pay.

We have reached the stage where many of us would rather see a neighborhood forest remain undeveloped—and become part of the public domain if need be—rather than developed into another shopping mall or housing complex. We increasingly argue about which is more important to our well-being—the undeveloped woodlot or another block of housing to shelter our constantly increasing numbers? The controversy invariably leads to the immediately personal concern: "which is more important—nature or people?" The argument is voiced as if the one were independent of the other, which, of course, it is not. On the other hand, everyone admits that developing a water and wildlife preserving woodlot or food producing potato field is going to change the community and impact it. The argument is determining whether or not the impact is more positive than negative. When there were lots of available acres and not many people the choices were relatively easy to make. But now, we have lots of people with lots more on the way and not much expendable land remaining, if any. What to do about it? That is the question, keeping in mind that once we are born we expect to be accommodated no matter how great the burden and no matter how tightly we get packed together even if we get crowded like so many sardines.

There has existed the long-held notion that a continuing and relatively unrestrained increase in human numbers is good for the economy. In other words, more people mean more consumers and more workers and more customers for the products to be produced by more businessmen and more farmers—or at least more efficient ones. Thus, presumably, this must be good for everyone even though it may not be good for the land or the water or the air. This simplistic notion needs to be seriously reexamined. There is growing evidence to indicate that it is not valid and may be more comparable to the mythical "perpetual motion machine." In fact, it appears to be the surest way for a nation to eventually self-destruct. Are we so naïve to believe that our limited resource base, especially of productive soils and clean water, can support unlimited numbers of people? Perhaps

we believe that improving technology will somehow provide the needs of both rich and poor while at the same time be able to properly dispose of the terrible burdens of wastes generated in the process. Should it not be increasingly apparent that ever increasing numbers of humans, each trying to achieve as comfortable and pleasurable a lifestyle that technology and resources might provide, are now seriously impacting every aspect of our global life-sustaining environment and that our insatiable demands for our finite resources are significantly diminishing those resources each day. At the same time, our frantic efforts to live the good life with minimal inconvenience invariably add to the pollutants and wastes that have no safe place to go—and certainly we will not tolerate them in our back yards or even 18 miles from our back yards. But, these noxious residues of our insatiable wants have to go someplace and back yards aren't spaced as far apart as they used to be.

For most of man's time on earth our numbers were severely limited by disease, accidents and lethal militaristic confrontations. Our simple technologies had a nearly imperceptible impact on earth's critical natural systems. Probably, there were only about five million of our ancestors moving about our planet 10,000 years ago and there is hardly any evidence of their having existed even with our very sophisticated archaeological expertise. They could not mess up the planet very much.

By 1650 AD our numbers increased to about 500 million and our impacts on Earth were becoming more apparent as we noticeably began to overwhelm other plant and animal species that have been sharing the Earth with us. Today, in 2017, we number 7.3 billion and in spite of the accelerated devastation we are causing our planet we are continuing to increase by nearly 100 million each year. For how much longer can these added numbers get enough food, as well as other necessities to live the good life as many of us have experienced, recognizing that others can't even now. As we make room for our increasing number, do we have any concern about the thousands of other species we are displacing and destroying? Do the religious really believe that "God" has no concern about his other magnificent creations? Where are the "animal rights" groups who worry about

the right of circus elephants and fur-farm mink? Are they so equally concerned about the welfare of wild elephants and wild mink when their habitats are destroyed to make room for more people?

One reason why our numbers are increasing so rapidly is our outstanding technical ability to reduce our vulnerability to diseases and old age so that more of us survive the hazards of infancy and then stretch out our lives longer than ever.

Smallpox has been one of the most dreaded diseases to afflict our ancestors, including the first Americans, who were so vulnerable to it. As a consequence of worldwide vaccination the World Health Organization declared in 1980 that the disease had become extinct; happily, the loss of a species that no one mourned. Thus, vaccination is no longer necessary to protect us from a terrible disease that was highly infectious, severely painful and very often fatal. Survivors were often left with scars caused by the rash. Today, smallpox viruses are believed to exist only in medical laboratories where they are carefully confined for research purposes.

Diphtheria has been a dangerous bacterial disease, which is now quite rare except in some of the less developed part of the world. Its demise is the result of a very effective immunization program that provides properly treated infants with lifelong protection from the symptoms of fever, rapid pulse, enlarged neck glands and sometimes a thick, yellowish nasal discharge. The most ravaging symptoms, now rarely seen, is a grayish membrane that forms on the throat and tonsils, which can become large enough to severely restrict breathing.

Infantile paralysis or polio, a dreaded virus that attacks and often permanently damages muscle controlling nerves, is another disease that is no longer the scourge that it was. The peak year for infection in the U.S. was 1950 when 33,300 children became infected. Some who survived have been confined to an iron lung ever since. Thanks to the vaccine introduced in 1955 by Dr. Jonas Salk, mothers in the U.S. no longer are fearful of the summer polio season when an infected child suffering from headaches, sore throat and fever followed by pain in the neck and back muscles could suffer permanent paralysis and often death.

Yes, we can be eternally grateful that these three terrible diseases that killed some of Nida's and Jenny's children are now under control so that thousands of us, who might otherwise have died young, can now live to a ripe old age, as well as an over-ripe one. Unfortunately, however, it is more difficult to prevent millions of children from death from malnutrition and despair as the number of human bellies to be filled increases rapidly; while at the same time, the number of acres of fertile, tillable, well-watered land necessary to grow efficiently the food needed to nurture those bellies is rapidly decreasing.

No animal population, including humans, can perpetually increase and sustain itself when it consumes and/or destroys resources faster than they can be replenished. Especially critical are the resources of clean air, clean water, productive soils, energy sources, forests and fisheries. They are all linked one with the other—and like dominos, as one falters so will the others.

Neither can a population sustain itself if it cannot properly dispose of the wastes that are generated through resource exploitation. It must be understood by everyone that every time we develop an acre of land by covering it with something unnatural, such as roads, building and paved parking lots, that acre is prevented from doing the critical tasks that it has always accomplished naturally and freely. What are those tasks performed by natural land?

The first is to serve as a medium for the growth of plants, the source of all our food and countless other products. Plants are the source of our oxygen and constitute the habitats of all wildlife. Also, plants recycle the organic wastes decomposing in the soil.

Another task of land is to collect, filter and store fresh water both on the surface, as well as underground.

A third basic task, and the least understood, is to serve as an arena for the orderly decomposition and recycling of those organic wastes deposited upon it.

Unfortunately, we cannot afford to pay the technological costs to achieve the same results that the natural undeveloped landscape has been freely doing for millions of years. Thus, our environments continue to rapidly degrade in spite of our good intentions.

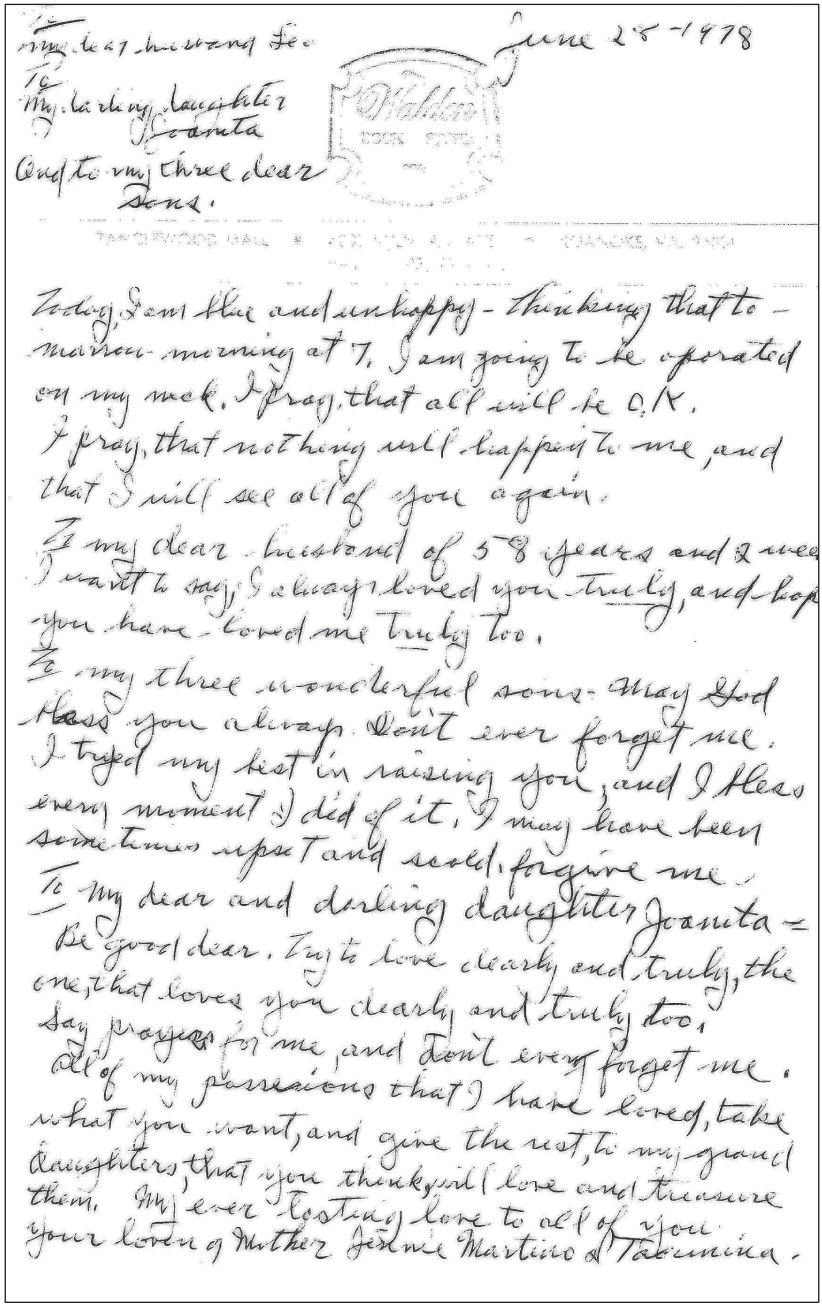
Since it is now a far different world than it was during the lifetimes of Nida and Jenny we must perceive the world differently. If

we continue with our notion that growth is good with no particular endpoint it becomes inevitable that the nations of the world must gradually self-destruct as burgeoning populations erode their resource base to the point where it can no longer sustain them. By that time, they will have very little left to trade with those nations who would still have some surplus. Thus, during this terminal process of environmental and national degradation, we can absolutely predict that widespread poverty and inevitable anarchy will become pervasive. The unwitting people suddenly caught up in their "catch-22" will regard their homeland as hopeless and will do their best to seek "political asylum" and refuge with other nations. It is already with the U.S. being the primary nation of refuge.

Old and new farms

APPENDIX A

So that the reader can get a better appreciation of the nature of Jenny through her handwriting I've inserted a letter in the appendix exactly as she wrote it in 1978.



June 28 - 1978

To my dear husband Fe.
To my darling daughter Joanita
And to my three dear Sons.

Today, I am blue and unhappy - thinking that to-
morrow morning at 7, I am going to be operated
on my neck. I pray, that all will be O.K.
I pray, that nothing will happen to me, and
that I will see all of you again.
To my dear husband of 38 years and 2 mos
I want to say, I always loved you truly, and hop
you have loved me truly too.
To my three wonderful sons - May God
bless you always. Don't ever forget me.
I tryed my best in raising you, and I bless
every moment I did of it. I may have been
sometimes upset and cruel, forgive me.
To my dear and darling daughter Joanita -
Be good dear. Try to love dearly and truly, the
one, that loves you dearly and truly too.
Say prayers for me, and don't ever forget me.
All of my possesions that I have loved, take
what you want, and give the rest, to my grand
daughters, that you think will love and treasure
them. My ever lasting love to all of you.
Your loven of Mother Jesusa Martino de Talamina.

APPENDIX B

INFORMATION LEAFLET
N. Y. STATE CONSERVATION DEPT.
DIVISION OF CONSERVATION EDUCATION

This material from the
Department's official magazine —
THE N. Y. STATE CONSERVATIONIST

Journey Down A Roman Road

A Conservationist Traces The Thinking Of The Early Romans On Agriculture And Applies Their Lessons To The Dangerous Loss Of Valuable Agricultural Land On Long Island

by Antonius ("Causticus") Taormina,
Regional Supervisor, Region 9,
N.Y.S. Conservation Department

"EVEN as Marcus Varro complained in the days of our grandfathers, all of us who are heads of families have quit the sickle and the plow and have crept within the city walls; and we ply our hands in the circuses and theatres rather than in the grainfields and vineyards . . . and account ourselves blessed by fortune that we behold neither the rising of the sun nor its setting."

So wrote Lucius Junius Columella in the First Century A.D. This perceptive Roman soldier-farmer noted with deep concern that men of means were becoming overly obsessed with pleasure seeking. They no longer cared to dirty their hands in the hard work of farming and seemed eager to disavow their land management responsibilities.

Columella, however, firmly believed that the scientific pursuit of agriculture was the noblest, as well as most necessary, of all professions; furthermore, those most proficient had a duty to teach others so that the Republic could benefit and prosper.

Consequently, he wrote twelve volumes on agriculture (*De Re Rustica*[1]), which remains a classic not only for the technology expounded on all aspects of contemporary agriculture and animal husbandry, but also for the sound philosophical attitudes expressed relative to man and the land. For centuries, *De Re Rustica* was a basic agricultural textbook. Even Milton, in his short treatise, "On Education," would have the students of his ideal school devote their thoughts "after evening repast 'til bedtime: First to the Scriptures and next to the authors of agriculture — Cato, Varro and Columella" — so that his students could . . . "improve the tillage of their country."

The Romans Valued Land

Few historians have recognized that the Roman Empire persisted for as long as it did because, perhaps of most importance, the Romans were excellent farmers and land managers. They had a keen appreciation of the agricultural potential of various lands, and wars, then as now, were often fought for control of productive soil.

[1] Translation by Harrison Boyd Ash, Ph.D. (Associate Professor of Latin, University of Pennsylvania) also, E. S. Forster and E. H. Heffner. Published in London, Wm. Heinemann, Ltd. From the Loeb Classical Library.

But there were pessimistic mumblings during the First Century that the land was finally wearing out after hundreds and in some cases thousands of years of intensive cultivation and could "no longer furnish sustenance to mortals with its old time benevolence." Columella strongly disagreed. He argued that if land became unproductive, it was because men failed to treat their land with the proper regard as had their more sensible hard working ancestors. In fact, one of his favorite heroes was the farmer-soldier, Cincinnatus, who, called from the plough to the dictatorship in 458 B.C., saved the Roman army, resigned and was back on his farm sixteen days later.

Columella was an ardent student as well as practitioner of agriculture and had studied the writings of many Greeks (who were considered ancient even then) as well as the earlier Romans. "The treatises of such writers instruct rather than create the craftsman . . . Hence, these precepts of our promise not to bring the science to perfection, but to lend a helping hand."

Columella described the necessity of farm to market roads, relationships of land to buildings, breeding and propagation techniques, the obvious values of good water supply and even the problems of difficult neighbors. One interesting concept was to "admire large farms, but yet a small one till." As far back as 367 B.C., Roman Law legislated that no man could own more than 300 acres of land.

The Romans, of course, knew the virtues of virgin soil and recognized that with intensive cultivation, productivity declined. However, Columella insisted that productivity need not decline: "For we may reap greater harvests if the earth is quickened again by frequent timely and moderate manuring." He described three basic kinds of manure: Bird, human and livestock and considered pigeon manure the best. Human excrement mixed with other farm refuse ranked second, while of the livestock, that from the donkey ranked highest, followed by sheep, with swine being the poorest. He also noted that ashes and cinders were helpful and composting trenches not only for manure, but for all other organic debris such as leaves and brambles were described and strongly recommended.

The Romans were well aware of the value of legumes in enriching the soil, and Columella considered cut lupine plants equivalent to the best manure. Lentils, peas, and beans were valued for human food, while lupine, vetch and alfalfa were highly regarded for livestock fodder. Alfalfa, known as Medic clover, was considered the outstanding fodder not only because one acre could provide nourishing and abundant food for five horses for one year, but also because it improved the land and one seeding would last from ten to thirty years. Keep in mind, horses then were not like the large draft animals of today.

Our generation is scarcely aware that for thousands of years oxen were the major beasts of burden in Europe. They provided the basic farm "horsepower" later supplied by horses and now by tractors. Columella noted that one plowman with a yoke of oxen and three laborers could efficiently manage 60 acres of land provided that one planned for a proper variety of crops not only to spread the workload over the year but also to provide the proper diversity necessary to sustain both people and livestock. So necessary were oxen, that Columella devoted over fifty pages to their care and management with lesser space given to cattle, horses, mules, donkeys, sheep, goats, pigs, and dogs.

The Grape was Valued

Perhaps of all agricultural pursuits, Columella enjoyed grape growing best, and he must have enjoyed writing: "The fostering earth each year, as if delighting in never ending parturition, extends to mortals her breasts distended with new wine."

Over forty varieties of grapes were described and for most their many qualities and site requirements were noted. He considered viniculture a most profitable profession, but required hard work and good sense. He described in some detail how to compute the capitalized value of a vineyard and that six per cent return on the investment could be earned easily even with costly help.

Columella appears to have been a very practical forthright man. He could not condone raising cocks for fighting or bantam fowl, which took a lot of care, yet produced comparatively little. But he approved the rearing of peafowl on the premise that: "It is not alien to the busi-

ness of the farmer, who aims at the acquisition from every source of pleasure with which he beguiles the loneliness of country-life."

In describing the management methods and values of numerous kinds of fowl, we learn that many of them had to be kept in pens covered with nets to protect them from hawks and eagles, which were undoubtedly quite numerous. Also, he said that white fowl were obviously more subject to predation than dark ones.

There were also Romans, necessarily quite wealthy, who kept herds of roebuck, chamois, antelope, deer, and boars within park-like stone or stockade enclosure. "Such wild creatures serve to enhance the splendour and pleasure of their owners and sometimes to bring profit and revenue."

The Romans were also industrious pond builders, not only for stock water and waterfowl, but also for fish in both fresh and salt waters. The character of Columella as an earthy dirt farmer emerges when he states reluctantly that one would be justified in building sea water ponds for fish and shellfish if the coastal lands he owned were so poor that he could not otherwise produce profitable crops. Yet he noted that the best salt water pond is one which is so situated that the incoming tide expels the stale water of the previous tide.

Cane sugar was then unknown, thus the raising of bees for honey was a profitable occupation and Columella wrote at length on the subject, including references to Virgil's classic poem. Travelers, who today note large signs along some of our roads advertising thyme honey, may be surprised to learn that Columella believed that thyme yielded honey of the best flavor, followed by that of savory.

Although the Julian calendar was established in 46 B.C., Columella possibly figured that such time reckoning was still somewhat unreliable. Consequently, he diligently associated the timing of all basic farm work not with calendar dates but with the long-established, predictable, annual movements of certain stars and constellations. Weather patterns were regularly associated with such celestial happenings and so farmers through centuries of experience learned to schedule their workload accordingly. Book II is a meticulously detailed farmers' almanac, but not of much use to farmers who didn't know their astronomy.

Roman Advice Survives

One of the most startling aspects of *De Re Rustica* is that 95 per cent of it still sounds logical today. There was, of course, considerable ignorance on disease causal agents and even the life history of the bee. There are occasional references to sacrificial customs to appease the gods and even to a biocidal potency attributed to menstruating maidens. Consider this reference in Book X in which Columella turns to verse (in emulation of Virgil) to discuss the joys and pains of gardening:

"But if no medicine can repel the pest,
Let the magician's arts be called to and,
A maiden then, who the first time obeys
Her youth's fixed laws, bare-footed and ashamed
of the foul blood which flows, with bosom bare
and hair dishevelled, thrice about the garden beds is led.
What wondrous sight . . . as there rains down
to earth in twisted shapes the caterpillars."

I suspect that here Columella enjoyed poetic license since the first mention of this enchanting method of pest control goes back to Democritus some 500 years earlier. Nevertheless, while the technique may sound impotent, don't knock it unless you have tried it.

The farm workers of the day included hired help as well as slaves, and Columella painstakingly analyzes many subtle aspects of labor-management relationships, thereby revealing himself as an able psychologist. Slaves were basic to the economy and were often obtained as booty from wars waged and won against barbarian tribes, especially during periods of Empire building. While slaves became personal property, they were also

regarded as individuals so that distinguished slaves were regularly freed, made citizens of the pagan Empire and cheerfully absorbed with dignity into the expanding melting pot.

And What of Us?

Our empire, too, expanded and evolved through wars waged and won against barbaric tribes whose productive lands were coveted by the civilized Christian colonists. Also, in time, as men of means expanded their holdings, often as a result of land grants given to them by conquering kings, a slave work force evolved from a different source of booty and the landed gentry who owned such property flourished.

Justice under Roman law was the finest and most equitable to that time. Yet the Justinian Code cut no ice with the barbarians who ultimately did the Romans in. At a later time, Americans believed that justice under their Constitution and Bill of Rights was the finest ever conceived, especially the concept that: "All men are created equal." Except that people, who were property, were really not regarded as men and, therefore, hardly created equal. It took the awesome Civil War, more bloodthirsty than any of the Roman civil disagreements, to forcefully and belatedly make a beginning to correct this simple oversight. However, because of it, our empire will never be the same and our melting pot will be bubbling over for sometime.

Unfortunately, we still have yet to correct another oversight concerning property: That relative to man's responsibility toward those exceptionally fertile acres which, except for clean air and pure water, are our greatest treasure. It is the hallowed ground over which men of all nations have shed torrents of blood over the millennia, and yet how hallowed are these lands?

The Legal View

Our legal view persists that a man has the right to do with his property whatever he wishes, within quite modest restraints. Land, no matter what may be its distinguishing attributes, is the sole property of the owner, no matter what his character. Thus, it may be sold at the market place to be used for any purpose.

We would call a man a fool if he used gold instead of lead for a fish line sinker. Yet, day after day, we foolishly sacrifice irreplaceable golden acres to the pagan gods of progress (shopping centers, superhighways, garden apartments, etc.). Long Island for instance, still has 100,000 acres of some of the most productive lands on earth. Yet practically every farmer who owns such lands, whether there or some other place, is in the real estate business. He and his realtor will be quite happy to sell every acre, when the price gets right, to the highest bidder, no matter what his objective. Then, the former landowner with lots of money in his pocket would hopefully retire to some Elysian fields. After all, farming is hard work and not as profitable as some professions, and men of means should not have to work so hard. Yet there are men with lesser means, perhaps, who would gladly work these fertile fields so that the earth can continue to sustain mortals — fools that they may be — with its inherent benevolence.

The Loss of Productive Land

Today we probably have the finest agricultural extension service in the world; a service that Columella pleaded for but couldn't get. Yet these agents, so capable in making land more productive are powerless to prevent productive land from being castrated. Columella with great wisdom noted that:

"For although knowledge is a great advantage, ignorance or carelessness does more harm than knowledge does good, especially in agriculture."

Our plebian society focuses with giddy fascination on heart and kidney transplants, but has little compassion for that benevolent earth which, scarred and bleeding, wearily extends to mortals her breasts distended with pollutants and incessantly ravished by savage indecencies.

Governor Rockefeller, three years ago, wisely established a New York State Commission on Preservation of Agricul-

tural Land. The Commission has met regularly, but has not yet achieved its objectives. It still has not preserved any land.

A recent report by the State Office of Planning Co-ordination entitled, "Demographic Projections for New York State Counties," estimates that the Nassau-Suffolk population, 2,300,000 in 1965, will be 6,740,000 by 2020. Apparently, it is anticipated that those 100,000 golden acres will not be preserved. Must planners be such crammers! I wonder what a bag of potatoes will cost in 2020, and from how far west and through what traffic jams they will have to be carted to feed those hungry and impatient throngs, upon whom the veneer of civilization lies very thin and is easily grated off?

Columella also remarked: "Who can doubt how irreparable is the flight of time as it slips away?" And long before him, Hesiod said: "He who delays must aye with ruin strive." We cannot delay another moment. Our most productive lands must be preserved and we must learn to recycle most of our organic wastes upon them. *Tempus fugit.*

Jenny's Story

JENNY'S STORY IS PRIMARILY A RECOLLECTION OF THE UNIQUELY EXCITING, adventurous lives of two proud and competent women; Jenny and her mother, Nida, along with the men who shaped their lives. Their real-life family dramas rival any fictional ones created for TV soap operas.

Jenny begins with her mother's recall of her adventurous life as a farm girl in Santa Ninfa, Sicily …