

The year is 1998 and I am beginning to write some history and things that I remember of our family, the Nick Africano family. My father, Nicola Africano, was born December fourth of 1871 in Palermo, Sicily. His parents were unknown. He was picked up at the orphanage by foster parents from Cimmina, a village about 20 miles from Palermo.

My mother, Teresa Rasumi, was also born in Palermo in 1877. It was not known the month of her birth. We, her children, wanted her to have a birthday, so we decided on June 15. She also went to live with foster parents in Cimmina. "Spirito Santo" was the name of the orphanage, and both my parents were taken from there as infants. The names Africano and Rasumi were the names the birth mothers gave the orphanage.

The monthly income foster parents received was a necessity in these poverty stricken homes. I must say at this time that the government also had funds started for each foster child, for which there was a monthly contribution. At age 18, they were given their allotment.

Times were very hard. My mother's mother had a biological daughter named Angelina (Angelina is the mother of Jim Torina. Jim lived with our family for a short while, and, though he is now deceased, we still visit occasionally with the family.) After taking in my mother as a foster child, my mother's mother became pregnant again. But it was around this time that her husband abandoned his wife and children and went to Tunis, Africa, just across the Mediterranean Sea from Sicily. The baby did not live, and my mother's mother, badly needing money, went to the orphanage to select another child. After many visits, and noticing this one child who had all fingers missing on one hand was being passed over, she decided she was the one she wanted. My mother's mother still had breast nurse this child, who was named Minica (Minnie). The foster care girls were not treated any differently; there was a lot of love and they were truly three sisters.

At age eleven, my mother went to work as a servant's helper, coming home on weekends. She worked for the same family until her marriage to my father in 1895. My mother was 18 and my father 24. I don't know too much about my father's family except that he had two older brothers, Vincenzo and Francesco, and one sister, Mattea. My father was in the reserves (army) and was frequently called to serve in the many small wars. Their first son, Andrea, was born on July 12, 1897. Their second son, Vincenzo, was born April 4, 1900.

By this time, my father was beginning to be irritated by the frequent calls made to serve in the army and decided to apply to the immigration counsel to come to America. He became eligible in 1902. He was faced with the problem of having to decide whether to accept the opportunity he had been waiting for, or stay with his family, because now my mother was pregnant with their third child. My father decided to come to America because it might have been years before he would again be eligible. The third son, Francesco, was born later that year and died from cholera when he was 18 months of age. My father never got to know him. My father supported his family in Cimmina and also tried to save enough to bring his family to America.

It came to pass early in the year of 1909. My mother and the two boys set out on the two week voyage to America. At this time, the boys were nine and twelve years of age. It was a very bad experience for my mother because the sea voyage made her very ill, and she was confined to her bed most of the trip. Andrea (Henry) more or less took charge, and my mother recalled it was not an easy task. At one point, Vincenzo (Charlie) got lost, and there were many hours of anxiety spent trying to find him. When they arrived, they were taken to Ellis Island where they had another bad experience. The trunk they had brought along sprung open and they didn't know how to deal with it. My mother was weeping when a kind man offered his help. He went out and

brought rope to secure the trunk.

Not knowing the English language was a tremendous obstacle. My father had made his home in Harvard, Illinois. It was during the time that railroads were beginning to be constructed, and my father, like so many of the immigrants, found work laying tracks. Knowing that his family was coining, he rented and furnished a small house. He met them in Chicago and immediately took them to the 'Boston Store,' where he had mother and the boys outfitted with American clothes. Needless to say, Henry and Charlie (those were the names they were given by school authorities) had a very difficult time adjusting to the new culture and *language*. Going to school was not pleasant when they were faced with name calling and jeers from other children. Henry was placed in the fifth grade and Charlie in the second. I was born on October 16th of the same year (1909) and was named Domenica. The second Francesco came along on February 3rd of 1912 and was called Frank.

In the fall of 1912, the family decided to move to Kankakee. They had learned that Kankakee had a stocking factory (Bear Brand Hosiery) that hired boys at a young age, and my father knew he would be able to get the same kind of work he was doing. The Sparacio family (our cousins) had moved to Kankakee earlier at North Indiana Avenue near the "Big Four" tracks. We stayed with them a short time until my father bought a home at 667 N. Greenwood Avenue. My father went to work on the tracks, and Henry and Charlie were hired at the Bear Brand factory. At this time, Henry was sixteen and Charlie was thirteen. Charlie lied about his age, saying he was fourteen.

I started school in September of 1914 at under five years of age. The month before I started school Salvatore was born, he was called Sam and was born August 1, 1914. Antonio (Tony) was born September 21st of 1917.

The following year the First World War was in progress, and my mother was very worried about Henry being drafted. There were reports being circulated that anyone working in steel mills would get deferred. Henry, at this time, was 21 years old. Our friends, the Fiordelanos, had moved to East Chicago, Indiana and were influential in getting our family to move there, especially since my mother grieved over the fact that Henry would be drafted. We moved in October of 1918. We stayed with our friends until we rented an apartment on Wolcott street. My father, Henry, and Charlie found work at the Hubbell Steel Mill. It was all to no avail, as Henry was drafted anyway. He was saved from going into the service, though, by the ending of the war. It was very dramatic; he was at the railroad station waiting for the train when it was announced that Peace was signed, and the recruits would return home. We returned to Kankakee in 1920. My mother was pregnant and she wanted to get back to Kankakee. Our house had been rented while we were in East Chicago, and Mrs. Flowers, who took care of the renting, saw to it that the house was available for us to return to.

In January of 1921, Joseph was born. Unfortunately, he was born with Downs Syndrome, and it was a very sad time in our lives, especially for my mother. She was devastated. On October 19, 1923 Henry and Delia Riberto were married. The Riberto family were our neighbors; they lived next door to us. On July 3, 1924 the first grandchild was born-Theresa. Henry and Delia were very proud parents, and I became a proud aunt. Just five years later came

the first grandson. Nicolas Africano was born March 10, 1929.

Mom, Dad, Henry, Delia, their children. Theresa and Nick, Charlie and Annie, Bennie and Mamie, Frank, Sam, Tony, and Joe. We started having it at Butz's farm on Rt. 113 South. Transportation was a problem. There was only one car in the family, but we got around that by having Mr. Adams (Sparky's father) take us in his truck and come back or 'is at a designated time. It was not a hardship: it was fun. We all lived in the same neighborhood. We all piled in the truck with food and tubs of ice for watermelon and drinks. Needless to say, Henry had his accordion along and we all sang on the way up and back. We looked like a bunch of gypsies, but we really had fun. There was a strong sense of family togetherness. As the family grew, we started having our reunions at Bird's Park and Beckman Park. Times were getting better, and more of us had cars. We had to give up Beckman Park several years ago because of bad conditions. We now have it at the Kankakee Sportsman's Club on the fourth Sunday of June. Everyone seems to enjoy having it there.

We also have family Christmas parties. They originated as a family Christmas get-together at the grandparents house. As the family grew, changes had to be made. Each individual family naturally wanted their own Christmas Eve, and also, a home could no longer hold the large extended family. It was decided we would rent a place. We have had the Christmas togetherness at one of the Knights of Columbus halls. For a few years, we had it at the CYO (Catholic Youth Organization), where Tony and Pauline were directors. We have it every year on the third Sunday of December. These two events help keep the family together and the bond stronger. There are, as of 1998, four generations of Africano's, and except for several families, we are all here in the Kankakee-Chicago area.

God bless the Africano family, the deceased family members, and all future generations of the Family.