

The LaRosa Family History



For many years in the twentieth century, Calvin Park Boulevard on Rockford's east side was thought to be the classiest and most desirable street on which to live. At the same time, South Rockford had its own version – Montague Street where it meets Victoria Avenue. In this neighborhood lived the St. Angel, Leggio, Castrogiovanni, LaRosa, Falzone and Callo families. And it was at 1502 Montague Street, where Salvatore and Giorlanda (Falzone) LaRosa raised 10 children – seven girls and three boys. They were married July 6, 1920, in Marion, Illinois. Salvatore, the second oldest of seven children born to Francesco and Gerlanda (Falzone) LaRosa, was born December 11, 1892, in Aragona, Provincia di Agregento, Sicily. He was 16-years-old when he arrived in New York City on the SS San Giovanni on May 25, 1909. Salvatore worked in the mines in Sicily, and after stopping for a short time in Fostoria, Ohio, he made his way to Ladd, Illinois, where he was a coal miner and a railroad worker. Giorlanda was born in Aragona, Sicily, on September 21, 1902, to Raimondo and Serafina (Galluzzo) Falzone. She was 10 days away from her sixth birthday when she arrived in New York aboard the SS Cretic. The Falzones settled in southern Illinois, and Giorlanda was 17-years-old when she married Salvatore LaRosa in Marion.

Salvatore and Giorlanda settled in Rockford, where their first home was at 214 Loomis Street, behind the Abruzzos' Three Trees restaurant. Salvatore found work as a laborer and worked in other trades before he operated grocery stores at the corner of West and Loomis streets and later Clifton and Lincoln avenues. After running the grocery store, he operated the Stop Inn Tap at the corner of Main Street and Island Avenue. By 1930, the LaRosa family had grown to six, following the birth of Frank on August 25, 1921; Mary on July 7, 1923; Serafina (Sara) on March 31, 1925; and Gerlanda (Gerrie) on December 3, 1928. Having managed wisely, Salvatore was able to build a house at the corner of Montague Street and Victoria Avenue in 1930. This was long before mechanical excavations, so the foundation was dug by teams of mules. The two-story, yellow brick house had four bedrooms, two baths, a large kitchen, dining room and living room, which would accommodate the family for two generations. The walls in the living and dining room were plastered by hand, featuring an attractive textured format. It was one of the first of its kind to have a clothes chute to the basement laundry room with openings on

the second and first floors. These little doors were a treat for the grandkids to play with. Like many Italian families in South Rockford at the time, it featured a second kitchen in the basement. Following the conversion from coal to gas heating, the coal room was converted into the wine room. Inside the wine room were full-sized wine barrels, the wooden wine press and dried sausage hanging from the rafters. A two-car garage fronted Victoria Avenue, and one of its most stunning features was an automatic garage door opener in the 1940s. Six more children followed – Margaret (Maggie) on December 3, 1928; Eleanor on February 21, 1931; Helen on May 1, 1933; Deloris (DeDe) on March 28, 1936; Raymond on July 3, 1938; and Sam on October 17, 1944. Those approaching the house from Montague or Victoria found themselves going up a hill, which led to the family's nickname for LaRosa home – Up the Hill.

Frank set a family tradition by graduating from high school. He was a member of the Class of 1940, the last class to graduate from Rockford High School. Barbara Hale, one of his classmates, went on to find fame in Hollywood. Frank entered the U.S. Navy in World War II, and, while in the navy, married Sibyle. (After Sibyle died, Frank married Penny). More marriages followed the war – Mary married Russell Doyle on February 2, 1947; Sara married Jasper Fiorenza on June 10, 1950; Gerrie married A.J. Spataro on July 25, 1953; Margaret married Stephen Cacciatore on July 4, 1951; Eleanor married Ronald Zimmerman on June 12, 1954; Helen married Dominic Messina on December 1, 1956; and Raymond married Inga on July 3, 1960. The eight families resulted in 27 grandchildren for Nano and Nana – Sam and Mark LaRosa; Mike and Julie Doyle; Tom, Natalie and Jay Fiorenza; Frank, David, Stephanie, Susan, and Kevin Spataro; Donna and Julie Cacciatore; Mary Beth, Michael, Richard, Kathy, Steven, John, and Ronald Zimmerman; Mary Ellen, Julie, and Donna Messina; and Raymond, John, and Lisa LaRosa. That made holidays and Sunday nights very loud, yet very special Up the Hill. Like other Italian immigrants in South Rockford, Nano had a large garden, featuring tomatoes that would make up the sauces for many plates of pasta. Nana and Nano maintained several Sicilian and Aragonian traditions, making *ta'ano* at Easter, *briullate* at Christmas, and other delicacies in season, such *babbaluci*, the live snails that would escape from the big white pan and climb all over the kitchen walls. Nano took pride in his garden and plum tree but had a special place for the peach tree that grew just outside the back porch. He made his own sausage, using his thumb to push the pork butt and spices into the meat grinder, and he always grilled the rings of sausage on Father's Day using as fuel small pieces of wood, never charcoal. Nana made the most delicious homemade pizza and bread and was always crocheting something it seemed.

Nana was active at St. Anthony of Padua Church as a member of the Sacred Heart Society. She also was a trustee of the Catholic Women's Order or Foresters and a charter member of the Aragona Club. She passed away on November 1, 1962. Nano passed away on June 15, 1971. DeDe passed away later in the year, on December 1, 1971. Since then, the family has lost five more of the original ten children – Frank, Sara, Eleanor, Helen, and Sam.

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