

Vincenzo Vecchio & Maria (Cavallaro) Vecchio



My name is Don Balsam. I grew up in South Rockford in the home of my grandparents Vincenzo and Maria (Cavallaro) Vecchio. We used the Sicilian dialect addressing them as Nannu and Nanna. They built the house at 724 Linden Ave. moving in by the start of 1920. Vincenzo and Maria had 7 children, Rosario (Roy), Venera (Woody) Balsam, Nunziatta (Nancy) Perkins, Giuseppe (Joe), Francesco (Frank), Salvatore (Sam), and Egidio (Gege) Vecchio. Before moving to Linden Ave, the family resided at 1235 S. Court St. I grew up in the upstairs flat of the Vecchio home. My mom and dad, Venera and Chris Balsam moved there when they were married in 1940. My dad's family was originally from an area north of Venice. He lived in Arkansas before coming to Rockford. As a family, we helped take care of my Nonno Vecchio who stopped working as a machinist at Green Brothers Box Company in 1945 due to having Parkinson's Disease. At Green Brothers Box Co. he made wooden crates for the many industries in Rockford. Both Vincenzo and Maria were from Linguaglossa, Sicily. Linguaglossa gets its name from both the Italian and Greek words for tongue. It is situated in the lava flows from Mount Etna on the far eastern side of Sicily in the province of Catania. St. Egidio, the patron saint, is said to have saved Linguaglossa, from the volcano. My youngest uncle was named after St. Egidio.

Vincenzo arrived in the US at Ellis Island aboard the Indiana in 1907 at the age of 21 with \$24 in his pocket. He was born in Linguaglossa in 1885, the son of Rosario and Venera (Fazio) Vecchio. Nonna Maria Cavallaro, born to Joseph and Nunziatta Cavallaro in 1892, came over on the Louisiana along with her sister in 1911. Vincenzo and Maria were married Feb 1, 1914, in New Jersey before moving to Rockford. Both Maria and Vincenzo were members of St. Anthony Church as well as active in several church activities. Vincenzo was a member of the St. Anthony Society and Maria belonged to the St. Mary Society. They brought several traditions with them from Sicily. One is making homemade macaroni by rolling the dough out on wires. That tradition is still going around the globe with my many cousins.

During the depression, all of the family members helped raise money for the family. My uncles sold and delivered newspapers. Nonna Maria and my Aunt Nancy cleaned houses and helped with daycare for families in North Rockford. My mother Venera would leave high school early each day to work the evening shift as a secretary. We had a large yard with grape vines, several fruit trees, a vegetable garden and even a fig tree we had to bury in the winter. The family was able to sell some of the vegetables to help with expenses. Of course we made our own wine. Nonno had a separate room in the basement full of wine aging in wooden barrels. The room next to it had all the jars of vegetables and fruits that the family would can for our winter nourishment.

The photographs above are of my grandparents, mother, aunt and uncles. In the photograph taken in the 1920s pictured are: Nancy, Maria, Frank, Venera, Vincenzo holding Sam, Joe and Roy Vecchio (left to right). In the photograph taken in the 1940s pictured are: Front row – Nancy, Vincenzo, Maria and Venera; back row – Joe, Gege, Roy, Frank and Sam Vecchio (left to right).

Submitted on January 6, 2016, by Don Balsam for the Genealogy Project for Culture and Education Committee of GRIAA “Immigration Histories of Rockford Italian Families”.