

I was born on 19th Street in 1942 as were my younger siblings: Sandra, Joe and Frank. In 1949, when I was seven years old, my family moved to 280 Lower Terrace Street. Why there? Simple. Times were difficult, we needed a place to stay and that's where my father, Gus Licata's family lived. I don't recall much of my early childhood on 19th Street, but I do have vivid memories of the time on the Lower Terrace. I feel that was when my memories began and it was there that I learned to love.

My uncle, Andrew Sciandra, owned a four-story building at 280 Lower Terrace Street. On the first floor was his legendary Andy's Café. The three floors above it consisted of numerous railroad flats. My beautiful Aunt Lucy Di Leo, her husband, Uncle Frank and their children lived in cramped quarters on the fourth floor. We moved across from them in a two-room flat not quite suited for the six of us. My father quickly put up a partition that converted part of the kitchen into a tiny bedroom for us children. The flat, as were the others in that building was devoid of hot water. An unheated common bathroom was down the hall. The kitchen stove and a small portable heater was used to keep us warm in cold weather. Despite the lack of luxury, as a child, this neighborhood was my kingdom and the three floors above Andy's was my palace. Of course I considered our flat "the penthouse." I was so happy to be there.

You must understand that most of my father's family lived in that building. My grandparents, Santa and Joseph Licata lived on the third floor as did cousin Jimmy Alba and his wife, Lorraine. Uncle Andrew and wife, Aunt Jennie and cousin Eleanor lived in a huge second floor apartment. It was in that building that I learned the importance of "La Famiglia."

There were other tenants: A girl my age lived with her mother and grandmother on the floor below us. We

thought her to be different; not as fortunate as us because she was an "Americana." We felt sorry for her because she had no family, no father, but she did have many "uncles" that her mother met while sitting at Andy's bar.

In that building, dinner was always an adventure. On any given day, at the various kitchens, there could be six or twelve seated at their table. If I didn't like what my mom was preparing I'd check out Aunt Lucy's stove or Aunt Jenny's. My last resort was downstairs at Andy's for their wonderful meatball bomber. The best!

Aunt Lucy enjoyed telling us kids stories of family and their experiences living on the Terrace. I loved when she talked about Grandma and Grandpa. She told us how Grandma Santa rose early every morning and scurried down the stairs to Andy's kitchen to prepare sauce for the day. Then she went next door to her little grocery store to light the coal stove and prepare sandwiches for men going to work. If some couldn't pay, she would still make them something and say, "pray for me at Our Lady of Mount Carmel or at St. Anthony's."

After the early morning rush subsided, Grandma returned to Andy's kitchen to prepare for those who flocked



Santa Alba Licata (Grandma Santa)

A day at Crystal Beach

there for lunch. Aunt Lucy and Aunt Jenny helped with the cooking and serving food. Andy's was extremely popular and noted for its fine Italian food and was frequented by judges, lawyers, politicians, office and factory workers. You name it they were there. It was also a favorite dining spot for numerous entertainers who performed at various local nightclubs.

My grandfather, who we called "Grandpa Pepe" brought his family here from Sicily in 1906 at age thirty-four. Unlike my grandmother, he remained "old school." In the '20s and '30s, during Prohibition and the Great Depression, his self appointed job was to stand guard over the building. Every day he sat on a chair in front of Andy's, wearing the same three-piece suit and cap that was his trademark. Snuggled in his belt was a small pistol. His older grandchildren nicknamed him "Kit Carson." They said that he moved only when the sun moved.

Grandma would leave the kitchen with a checkered-cloth napkin and skillfully tuck it into his shirt. She then followed with his lunch. He never had to leave his post. He paid his dues toiling in the sulfur mines of Sicily and the coalmines of Pittston, Pennsylvania where he survived a mine explosion and ultimately contacted black lung disease. That was enough for him. The family came to Buffalo to work in area farm fields and canning factories.

As my grandparents aged they remained totally devoted to each other. They often shared their dinner in the same long, oval dish they called a "sperlungo." They cooked on a wood/coal burning stove that also kept them warm. No matter the adversity they never complained of their plight because they were surrounded by family. That comfort made up for any lack of material things. In the late 1940s both passed away.

Grandpa Pepe first and a year later Grandma Santa went to heaven. I remember my mom saying, "grandma died of a broken heart because grandpa died the year before."

Like other neighborhood kids, my cousin, Sandra Di Leo, now Panaro and I, would go down the street to the public bathhouse to take our showers.

For entertainment on those hot steamy nights, Sandra and I would lay a blanket on the fire escape and drop water balloons on unsuspecting pedestrians on the sidewalk below, quickly ducking behind the blanket to hide from our targets. In the early evening Aunt Lucy and Uncle Frank would take us for walks to McKinley Monument near City Hall. There we would stick our feet in the water. In those days the fountains were filled and



*Giuseppe Licata (Grandpa Pepe)
at his post*

water squirted out of the symbolic turtles.

During the month of August, St. Anthony's Church sponsored its annual lawn fete. We called it *The Carnival*. It was directly across from our building. The lawn fete opened on Wednesday evening and ran for twelve days of sheer delight. Not only did we enjoy the rides and the games of chance but also the food was the best: hot dogs, Italian sausage, pizza, clams, Italian ice etc. and spaghetti dinners in St. Anthony's school hall. Early in the morning of the first day we'd appear at the park to take advantage of the offer of free rides. We thought the men were being nice to us, never knowing we were stooges testing the rides for their safety.

The lawn fete was the highlight of our summer vacation. I cried because I wanted to go, and cried when I had to leave. I just loved those days. Once home, we would tie the balloons we won to our bed post and fall

asleep to the sound of music blaring from the merry-go-round. Sandra and I were inseparable - and still are. I refer to her as my sister-cousin.

Our building and our neighborhood offered us the best of both worlds. We were a few blocks from downtown and a stone throw from Lake Erie. On Sunday we'd walk to see a movie at one of the many down-

town theatres. During the week we crossed the railroad tracks behind our building and ventured through the open fields that separated the neighborhood from the lake. That area was slightly hilly and kids labeled it "The Mountains." What imaginations we had.

Now I think back to how important family life was to us and the simple things that made us happy: roasting chestnuts on the stove, walking through the downtown streets of old Buffalo, showers at the bathhouse and enjoying the church festivals in the summers of our youth.

Many, if not all of our first and second-generation relatives are gone. But the memories of the Lower Terrace linger. I still sense the fragrance of Uncle Andy's cologne. I visualize Aunt Lucy and others from the St. Anthony's Women Guild working the bingo games. I close my eyes and see Uncle Frank climbing the seventy-two stairs to his 4th floor flat and my siblings and cousins scurrying throughout the building. It truly was a different place and time! And now it's gone.

So, as to not lose these memories and images, I share them with my children and grandchildren so they know what it meant to grow up in a true '40s and '50s Italian neighborhood. I impress upon them survival, happiness without material things and the importance of good friends and education. Most of all I want them to realize the meaning of "La Famiglia." To me, That's Amore.



*Annette Licata
And
Sandra Di Leo Panaro*