

Return of the Native

'You are not seeing where your ancestors lived, You yourself are in reality returning home'

Editor Carmen Viglucci and his wife Patricia recently led a tour of Italy. He did not plan to foist this personal experience off on Courier readers but two members of the tour, Angeline DiLaura and Rose DeJoseph, felt the account would be of useful information to anyone considering a search for his or her family roots. It should be pointed out that the name Viglucci was originally Vigliucci; the other i lost somewhere along the way.

By Carmen J. Viglucci

As the tour bus made its way southward along the Autostrada di Sole toward Sorrento, our Italian guide Antonio Parisi announced as we were passing Naples that he had gone to the university there and knew the area well. This sparked an idea which was to grow into an unforgettable event.

As background, my father, Carmine Vigliucci, though born in Italy was definitely no Italophile. He downgraded his homeland often, even forbidding his four children to learn the language. Thus, I had very little information as to the family background although I had heard somewhere along the way that he had been born in a town called Bellona near Naples.

I talked about this to Antonio at lunchbreak. No, he said, he had never heard of Bellona. I then enquired if

when we reached Sorrento it would be possible to hire a guide to help me find out first if there was a Bellona at all and second if we could go there. Antonio, a peerless guide, knew of just the man for such a job.

So it came to be that on a raining evening on the Piazza Tasso in downtown Sorrento five of us met to discuss the possibilities -- Antonio, my wife Patricia, the cab driver, my father-in-law Sam Costa of Pennsylvania and I. The cab driver had some disconcerting news -- "There is a Belloni (with an i) but no Bellona (with an a)." Furthermore it was not near Naples -- about 25 miles away, and was instead in the province of Caserta. But he could take us there.

I looked to Antonio for advice and he said since I had already gone through the expense of going to Italy it would be worth a gamble. My wife was more adamant: "You'll regret it, if you go back home without finding out one way or the other."

We agreed upon a price and the next morning at 8:45, the cabdriver, auspiciously also named Carmine, met Pat and me at the hotel.

"You were right," he proclaimed happily. "I checked another guidebook and it is Bellona, not Belloni! However, it is still in the province of Caserta and not Naples!"

We set out north, again along the autostrada, past Castellamare, Naples, the city of Caserta and got off at the exit for Capua. I don't know what they call the boonies in Italy but this was it. Huge fields of tobacco, peach orchards, olive trees, the ubiquitous vineyards and some corn, for silage. In short, farmland.

Carmine stopped and asked a road crew about Bellona. They directed us toward the mountains. Coming to a fork in the road, he asked another man and he pointed us one way. Soon there was a road sign indicating Bellona and not much later we drove into an old town with narrow streets and small houses huddled together. It was bigger than I had been led to believe, thus increasing my doubt.

Carmine stopped at the church office, which along with the town hall constitute the most important stops for anyone making such a search. While he was in there, I spotted a memorial to the town's war dead, my eye automatically skimmed to the bottom, where the Vs always are located. There it was under the listing for those killed in the first world war: "Vigliucci Michele, fu Andrea." This was the place!

As we were to learn later, this Michele was the nephew of my grandfather, also Michele, and first cousin to my father. The "fu" meant loosely "son of."

We visited a surprisingly big and beautiful church, Maria SS. di Gerusalemmi, which is being restored following damage by the 1981 earthquake. There, listed among contributors, was another Vigliucci -- Ambrogio e la moglie Antonietta (and his wife Antonietta).

At the town hall, we found my father's actual handwritten birth record, listing his father Michele as "farmer" with his mother's name, Carmela Aurilio. It was noted that he was born at 6:10 in the afternoon of July 19, 1902. The street address was also there and soon we were standing in front of a little house on a small square wherein my father was born 82 years ago. I thought, "Like it or not, Daddy, here we are."

Along the way we had attracted an entourage and



Vigliucci stands in courtyard outside house where his father was born in 1902.



At the ground-breaking ceremonies are (left to right) Don Roder, Bob Hillis, Herb Spiegel, Father Dillon, Deacon Ed Sergeant and Mike Walker, all members of the parish center building committee.

Epiphany, St. Rose Have Two Reasons to Celebrate

Sodus -- The parishioners at the Church of the Epiphany and St. Rose Mission in Sodus Point have a dual reason for celebration. The parish has been sent a new administrator in the person of Father John Dillon, and ground has been broken for the long-awaited parish center.

Parishioners formally wel-

comed Father Dillon July 15 with a brunch on the front porch of the rectory. More than 100 attended the event.

In addition, work has begun on the Father Cavanaugh Parish Center.

The facility is being built in memory of Father John Cavanaugh, former pastor, who died earlier this year.

Parishioners assert that it

was through Father Cavanaugh's efforts that the center was possible. Plans were drawn and a fund drive was underway at the time of the priest's death.

The building will house six classrooms for religious education, and a large meeting hall. Kitchen facilities are also being included.

Young Adults

The Commission on Young Adult Ministry will host a gathering for those involved in or considering involvement in planning activities for young adults at the parish or area level, 10 a.m.-1 p.m., Saturday, Oct. 20 at St. Patrick's School of Religion in Penn Yan. Further information is available from Karen Rinefield, coordinator, (716) 586-1919.

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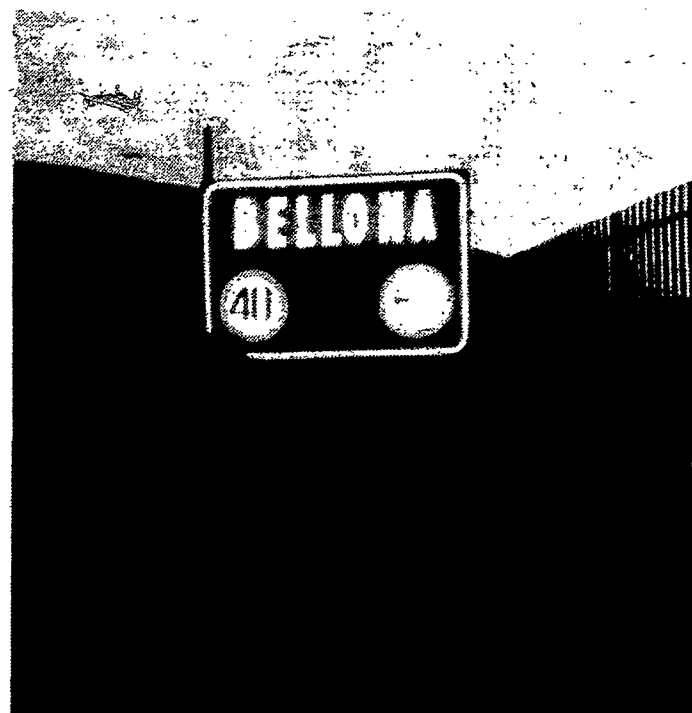
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Outskirts of "hometown."

following some discussion we were at the house of "a Vigliucci," whether it was family was unsure at first. But it turned out to be a rather close relative -- the grandson of my grandfather's brother. In fact his name is Andrew and he is the same age as my own brother Andrew. There is not space to recount all the coincidences but one other: Andrew's son came home from school where he plays soccer -- Giovanni (John), 17. We have a son John, 17, who plays soccer.

We were joined by Andrew's brother, Antonio, and soon the feast began.

The fatted calf in this instance turned out to be wine, cheese, bread and sausage, all homemade; steaks fit for such an occasion, eggplant, fresh melon, apples and lots of relatives.

In a while we were led to an upstairs room of another house. Andrew pointed proudly to a kingsized bed in a well kept-up room. "There is the bed in which your grandfather was born." I could feel the hair on the back of my neck move. "And my grandfather," he continued. And also his father and himself and his brothers. They wanted us to sleep in that bed at least one night but we had duties with the tour group and couldn't.

The brothers took us out on a small balcony and explained that we were looking out on the same scene that my grandfather had when he was a little boy.

Soon we were making emotional goodbyes, people who three hours ago had not known the others existed. Photos were exchanged, kisses, too.

Back in the taxi, Carmine, who had enjoyed the festivities as an ex-officio cousin, turned to us and deliberately understated, "Not a bad day, no?"

Ten years before, one year before, the day before, all of this would have seemed impossible. As it turned out, it is a comparatively easy job to search out one's roots despite the distance of time and place, if some basic information is known -- towns or areas, forbears, family occupations, etc.

It is an adventure I recommend. As the tour guide Antonio put it: "There is a reason why finding one's roots is such an emotional thing. Not so much because you are seeing where your ancestors lived but because they are a part of you yourself. They are in you. Thus in reality you yourself are returning home."

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